Communicating Transitional Justice and Peacebuilding: How does storytelling challenge the meta-conflict in Northern Ireland?

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Abstract

Research into the way that peacebuilding and transitional justice contribute to or challenge existing discourses in affected regions demonstrates a fragile relationship, whereby interventions may exacerbate existing cleavages in divided societies. Storytelling includes a range of approaches that allow people to express and listen to stories related to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. This can take various forms; it may involve community led oral history projects, intergroup talking circles, or exhibitions where artwork or objects are used to tell the story of the conflict's victims. Building on theoretical frameworks presented in both transitional justice and peacebuilding literature, this thesis is primarily concerned with issues related to post-conflict narratives. In Northern Ireland this is most notable in what is referred to as the meta-conflict; the conflict about the conflict itself, which persists today. In global peacebuilding and transitional justice efforts, the existence of this tension can result in initiatives that pointedly avoid questions around the causes and conduct of the conflict itself. I addressed this uneasy relationship through semi-structured interviews with storytelling experts and facilitators, to present a rich account of the methods of grassroots peace work in Northern Ireland. In addition to an account of local experts from across the spectrum of storytelling projects this thesis presents an alternative analytical framework, by considering the extent to which the meta-conflict is challenged by these projects. It is argued that storytelling projects challenge the meta-conflict in the process of story-gathering due to a commitment to core principles shared by storytelling facilitators, but that there is a far more varied approach to story-sharing, due to the difficulties of contextualisation and political or economic barriers.

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List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
BFA	The Belfast Agreement/Good Friday Agreement 1998
CGP	Consultative Group on the Past
CNR	Catholic, Nationalist, Republican
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
HIU	Historical Investigations Unit (within Stormont House Agreement)
HTR	Healing Through Remembering
ICIR	Independent Commission on Information Retrieval (within Stormont House Agreement)
ICTJ	International Centre for Transitional Justice
ICTR	International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRG	Implementation and Reconciliation Group (within Stormont House Agreement)
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
OHA	Oral History Archive (within Stormont House Agreement)
PMA	Prisons Memory Archive
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
PUL	Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
RECOM	Regional Commission Tasked with Establishing the Facts about All Victims of War Crimes and Other Serious Human Rights Violations Committed on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia from 1 January 1991 to 31 December 2001
RoLMA	Recovery of Living Memory Archive
SHA	Stormont House Agreement
TUH	Towards Understanding and Healing
UDR	Ulster Defence Regiment

Chapter 1 – Introduction

This thesis is about the power of stories. In any context, a story is incredibly powerful:

> All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. (Adichie, 2009)

While Adichie's speech relates to negative representations of Africa and of stereotyping more generally, it captures the essence of the area of enquiry explored in this thesis. The power of a single story resonates with questions of the place and power of story in a post-conflict landscape. It resonates with questions of who gets to tell their story, which story is more 'important' and how to ensure that people are not 'flattened' by single stories. This whole process is made more complex in a post-conflict society, where stories may become fiercely oppositional.

Although this exploration of stories is analogous of this research, it is not the starting point. Inspiration for this research came as a result of immersion in peacebuilding and transitional justice. A hunch formed that while transitional justice and peacebuilding had the power to unearth extraordinary stories, in the form of powerful testimonies and court judgements with far-reaching consequences, far less was being said about how these stories were communicated back to the communities devastated by violence and transition. In short, the communication of transitional justice and peacebuilding's stories seemed to be a particularly new and exciting area of research.

Research is emerging in terms of sharing the messages of peacebuilding and transitional justice projects. Research into the way that Outreach programs operate for international tribunals is one such example (cf. Clark, 2009; Mannergren Selimovic, 2015; Wu, 2013) as is a developing body concerned with contested narratives in a number of contexts, including examples as diverse as the enforcement of state narrative through education in Rwanda (Bentrovato, 2017) or tension between top-down narratives and local perspectives on victim rights in East Timor (Kent, 2011). While this research is emerging, it leaves many unanswered questions. The dynamics of peacebuilding and transitional justice communication across different contexts and mechanisms remains an area with many questions yet to be resolved, and likewise questions about specific contexts, and how these dynamics unfold in relation to their own circumstances are also valid areas of concern.

Northern Ireland was selected as an illuminative case study to add to this growing field of research. Firstly, the peacebuilding and transitional justice interventions attempted in the region are often-described as both piecemeal and decentralized (Bell, 2003; Aiken, 2010) which has resulted in a unique landscape in terms of myriad proposed answers to Northern Ireland's 'Legacy', for example the Consultative Group on the Past (CGP) (2009) report and the more recent Stormont House Agreement[1] (SHA) (NIO, 2014). Secondly, in the absence of any consistent top-down transitional justice or peacebuilding interventions, civil society has provided the answers with bottom-up organisations designed to address division and

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[1] The Stormont House Agreement is a set of proposals (agreed by the British and Irish governments and majority of Northern Irish political parties) that address the 'legacy' of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Crucially for this research, it contains proposals for a Historical Investigations Unit, an Independent Commission on Information Retrieval, an Oral History Archive (of particular relevance to storytelling) and an Implementation and Reconciliation Group. It is referred to throughout the thesis, but more detailed explanation is available in 2.6 and analysis in Chapter 9.

injustice (see McEvoy & McGregor, 2008). Thirdly, Northern Ireland is afflicted by what is termed the 'meta-conflict' – i.e. the conflict about the conflict itself (Bell et al., 2004). This is the persistent disagreement in society about what happened, why it happened, how it happened – and indeed if a war even happened at all – since UK state policy has tended toward containment and downplaying the extent of the violence (Miller, 1994).

The civil society-driven peacebuilding landscape has resulted in the proliferation of storytelling – a practice that has multiple aims, many of which are commensurate with the goals of transitional justice and peacebuilding, such as giving voice to the marginalised, truth recovery, catharsis and societal healing (see Hackett & Rolston, 2009; Dybris McQuaid, 2016). This research accepts the flexible definition offered by Kelly, who describes storytelling as:

> A project or process which allows reflection, expression, listening, and possible collection of personal, communal and institutional stories related to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland (2005: 12).

The breadth of this definition reflects the variety of projects that might be described as storytelling in Northern Ireland, from oral history projects which seek to record the testimonies of people's lived experiences in the conflict (Hackett and Rolston, 2009; Bryson, 2016) to story circles where stories are shared in a live setting (Maiangwa and Byrne, 2015) along with art, theatre, photography and exhibitions that seek to give voice to people affected by the conflict.

These unique characteristics also underline the significance of this research. While the complexity of peacebuilding and transitional justice arrangements, negative peace and societal division makes Northern Ireland an obvious choice for the case-study, it also

underlines the fragility of the peace and the importance of understanding the work being done in the name of preserving it.

This thesis asks whether or not storytelling can be used to challenge the meta-conflict. Historic transitional justice and peacebuilding attempts such as the CGP have had a tendency to steer clear of challenging the structural causes of the conflict (see Duffy, 2010). Contemporary attempts such as the SHA (NIO, 2014) are in limbo as the UK government prevaricates on the question of investigations and prosecutions (see UK Parliament, 2020; McEvoy et al., 2020). In addition to the risk of being anodyne, storytelling is also argued to carry certain risks, such as its potential for instrumentalization by elites or to undermine the other elements of the SHA (McGrattan, 2016). If storytelling is to challenge the meta-conflict, it must do so while avoiding these pitfalls. An interviewee captured the essence of what is meant by challenging the meta-conflict here:

> If I've got a narrative in my head about what the conflict is about, and you tell me a contradictory version, or a modified version, I have to make a decision about what I do. So, I can either agree with you, and ditch mine, or I can oppose yours and try to get you to adopt mine. Or, I can try and modify it, so that we've got some kind of synthesis, a meeting point where we can see we've got something in common. (Interviewee 9, 2019)

This thesis explores how facilitators understand their role in this process of helping people in Northern Ireland tell and share their stories, and how they convey these stories to audiences in turn. The thesis develops a sociological approach to the implementation of transitional justice using a bottom up approach, and offers an analysis of local transitional justice and peacebuilding in the context of civil society. The outcome is significant in understanding how locally driven measures to address a deficit of transitional justice and

peacebuilding in the region are designed, and how local experts strike a balance between bland accounts and vitriolic manipulation.

While the literature regarding storytelling is growing, there is a lack of a contemporary account which compares the methods and approaches of the diverse projects, and in particular a lack of an account that places the testimony of the facilitators front and centre, with an emphasis on how these projects address the meta-conflict. Three research questions were formulated to address the overall research question:

1. How do storytelling leaders view storytelling's contribution to peace in Northern Ireland?
2. How is storytelling communicated to a wider audience in Northern Ireland?
3. How does storytelling critically engage with the meta-conflict?

In answering these questions, this thesis makes three distinct contributions. Firstly, it offers a detailed qualitative account of the design principles and experiences of storytelling facilitators, and their assessment of storytelling. Secondly, an analysis of the methods used in storytelling through this account in relation to the meta-conflict, by ascertaining the extent to which storytelling projects offer a meaningful attempt to tackle a stale discourse in a divided society. Finally, it argues that storytelling is indeed unified in its challenge to the meta-conflict in terms of its design and method of story-gathering - but that it is also divided and less clear on how these challenging stories are to be shared with wider society.

1.1 - Thesis Outline

The literature review maps out the journey through the literature to select a case study and identify the relevant theories that have shaped this research. It begins by outlining the broad theories of transitional justice and peacebuilding literature, before narrowing focus to grassroots transitional justice and peacebuilding, and the overlap with civil society. Both transitional justice and peacebuilding literature are outlined since storytelling does not neatly conform to either for a complex variety of reasons that are explained throughout the chapter. While on the one hand storytelling offers justice in terms of giving voice to the marginalised (Bryson, 2016) its heterogenous grassroots characteristics make it tricky to characterise this way with certainty. Peacebuilding literature is also helpful in informing the analytical framework in Chapter 3. The literature review culminates with a brief overview of Northern Ireland's past, present and future in terms of peacebuilding and transitional justice work.

Chapter 3 outlines the analytical framework, which informed the shaping of the research questions, interview questions and subsequent analysis. It does so by outlining the problem faced by measuring the impact of a specific transitional justice or peacebuilding mechanism in terms of reconciliation, due to the intangible nature of such a concept. The framework then outlines an alternative approach, by emphasising the local perspective, and introducing the concept of challenging the meta-conflict as a means of assessing the efficacy of a peacebuilding or transitional justice mechanism. As discussed above, the framework explores what is meant by the term, and how the research aims to understand the way and the extent to which storytelling is prepared to challenge the contested

narratives in post-Belfast Agreement (The Belfast Agreement or Good Friday Agreement) Northern Ireland. The chapter concludes by emphasising the significance of challenging contested narratives, since the ongoing presence of grievances is argued to be a major cause of civil conflict.

Chapter 4 outlines the methods. This chapter begins by outlining the epistemological position. It then outlines the steps taken to comply with research law and ethics (including the ethical approval process) as well as risk assessment. It then re-states the research questions and explores the different ways the questions might be addressed, while justifying the use of semi-structured interviews. It then moves through the specifics of the fieldwork, including sampling method, who was interviewed, how they were interviewed and the approach to questioning. It concludes with a reflection on the challenges of conducting expert interviews; the research focuses on the design choices of storytelling facilitators, who are ultimately the experts of their field. It concludes by summarising the outcome of the fieldwork, and the means of data analysis.

Chapter 5 explores the goals of story-gathering, i.e. the phase of storytelling which focuses on the collection of accounts, as opposed to sharing the stories. Initially it outlines some of the basic principles of storytelling, such as the centrality of the storyteller, the importance of securing a greater variety of narratives related to the conflict and 'complicating' the narrative. It also notes the permissibility of content that challenges the meta-conflict in story-gathering design, i.e. the telling of a story that may be deemed controversial or that comments on contested aspect of the conflict. The second half of the chapter explores how facilitators take great pains to establish a platform that is (broadly) unfettered by partisan loyalties or sectarianism, to allow space for marginalised voices. The exceptions and

complexities around this are noted, both in terms of project design and the way storytellers may shape the process with their testimonies.

Chapter 6 gives a clearer sense of how story-gathering can and does challenge the meta-conflict. A central theme is the intrinsic value of a storyteller's account, and the broad commitment to gathering that account. This means that facilitators create a platform where the storyteller is free to challenge the meta-conflict by providing stories that are challenging to the stagnated societal discourse. Some of the motivations underpinning this commitment are explored, such as the importance of time (i.e. gathering testimonies before generations of potential storytellers are lost), historical significance, and giving a voice to marginalised groups and victims. The chapter finishes by considering the way that story-gathering can also promote inter-group contact that in turn challenges the meta-conflict – by exposing groups to alternative representations of the 'Other', either in person or through the accounts they are presented with.

Chapter 7 outlines some of the challenges storytelling faces – both generally, and if it is to successfully challenge the meta-conflict in Northern Ireland. It deals with two major themes – the risk that storytelling may be exploited, and the importance of protecting storytellers. Storytelling is at risk of exploitation both by storytellers with a particular agenda, or organisations who may seek to hijack the accounts offered. After exploring questions of instrumentalisation, the chapter outlines the ethical guidelines followed by the storytelling community, along with the specific concerns that facilitators outlined in the interviews – including ensuring that the implied therapeutic benefits of storytelling are not oversold, that storytellers are not retraumatised, and that storytellers do not implicate themselves or others. The chapter concludes by arguing that a protected storyteller is free to tell their

story with minimal external interference – and thus free to provide detailed accounts that are able to challenge the meta-conflict.

With the section on story-gathering complete, the analysis shifts focus to story-sharing – the phase of storytelling which looks to share and communicate the gathered accounts with a broader audience. Chapter 8 starts by explaining the significance of story-sharing. It then analyses the aims of story-sharing, drawing particular focus to the importance of ensuring that story-sharing is as victim-centred as the process of story-gathering is. The subsection regarding story-sharing's significance concludes by considering the practicalities and benefits of sharing stories with wider society. The second half of Chapter 8 highlights the importance of context sensitivity when sharing stories. It begins by emphasising the need for trust and the challenge of audience engagement. It then considers the challenge of successful contextualisation so that audiences can engage as intended, while also reframing the 'Other' and challenging the perceptions that fuel the meta-conflict. It concludes by demonstrating the importance of knowing your audience generally, and also knowing when it is ready; failure to do so can result in story-sharing that is more likely to damage and retrench the meta-conflict.

Chapter 9 explores the obstacles that explains the different approaches to story-sharing which ultimately prevent the widespread sharing of stories. It begins by exploring the impact of Brexit on peacebuilding and transitional justice in Northern Ireland, before moving onto the associated problem in the shape of a lack of local government at Stormont, which has stymied the development of any proposed peace work in the region. The cost of storytelling is discussed next, followed by an exploration of the significance of the SHA for storytelling. The SHA agreement and the proposed legacy solutions were a topic of great

interest for interviewees; however, the landscape changed dramatically when the UK government made an announcement implying the abandonment of the Historical Investigations Unit element of the agreement - plunging the future of the other SHA mechanisms (Oral History Archive, Independent Commission on Information Retrieval and Implementation and Reconciliation Group) into uncertainty. This shift is explored before discussing the concerns interviewees had regarding the proposed Oral History Archive (OHA) before ending the chapter by considering the relationship between perceptions of justice, storytelling and the SHA's design.

Chapter 10 contains the concluding remarks. It revisits three key contributions of the research; the first being the significance of presenting a bottom-up account from across the spectrum of storytelling facilitators in Northern Ireland. Secondly, it considers the significance of analysing peacebuilding and transitional justice mechanisms in relation to the capacity to tackle the meta-conflict, and finally considers the extent to which storytelling achieves this. The overarching thesis is restated, in that the process of story-gathering typically allows storytellers to challenge the meta-conflict due to a unity in methods and principles across the projects; but there is disagreement about the extent to which stories can and should be shared, due to the challenges of contextualisation, cost and political obstacles.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This project aims to examine the ways in which peacebuilding and transitional justice are communicated in post-conflict societies to affected groups, and how it engages with existing narratives about the conflict. In this context the literature review outlines the central theoretical contributions from peacebuilding and transitional justice literature.

It begins by outlining the central theoretical contributions to the literature on peacebuilding and transitional justice, and ultimately positions itself between these two. As the review proceeds to narrow towards Northern Ireland and storytelling, the ambiguities as to where storytelling lies in relation to peacebuilding and transitional justice becomes increasingly apparent. The complex position of storytelling sits somewhere between transitional justice and peacebuilding - a reaction from civil society and the third sector in general to the incomplete and inconsistent attempts at top-down 'legacy' mechanisms.

2.1 - Transitional Justice – theoretical insights

The purpose of this section is to explore key theoretical contributions in transitional justice research. This section is also used to consider this research's position on theoretical debates in transitional justice, and explain how these theoretical arguments relate and led to Northern Ireland's selection as a case study. It will also make reference to the fact that

transitional justice research would benefit from greater focus upon the way transitional justice is communicated, and its relationship with post-conflict discourses or meta-narratives.

2.1.1 - Historical and theoretical foundations

Given the contention that transitional justice is a relatively new field (Sharp, 2013) a logical starting point is the nature of research to date. It is helpful to consider the "genealogy" of transitional justice (Teitel, 2003; Sharp, 2013). A genealogy can be drawn from key authors to show the shape and history of transitional justice in the modern era, and the four phases and their analytical concerns are outlined below in figure one.

Fig. 1 – The Genealogy of Transitional Justice (adapted from Teitel, 2003; Sharp, 2013)

Phase	Examples of TJ in this period	Critical Focus
I – Post World War II	Nuremberg Trials	International vs national justice, rule of law as tool of development, expansion of criminal law to international stage
II – Post Cold War, particularly the "third wave" (Huntington, 1991) of Democratisation particularly during 1980s and 1990s	States in process of transition from dictatorship to democracy, especially Latin America. Popularity of the Truth Commission or Amnesty and the beginning of the diversification of approaches to Transitional Justice	Contested conceptions of justice emerging from varied political contexts, tension between punishment and amnesty due to political change
		Broader and grander aims than Phase I, moving from accountability to peace, reconciliation and societal healing; nation building.
		International interdependence and Globalization of politics
III – Post civil conflict	Focus on ICC, Africa e.g. SCSL in Sierra Leone but other conflicts e.g. ICTY for Balkans	Normalisation of Transitional Justice, universalisation of humanitarian law
IV – 'Interrogating the peripheries'	Ongoing, transitional justice as routine	Questioning Transitional Justice's neutrality, the balance between the local and international and a focus on the place of economic violence and justice

Building on the acceptance of transitional justice as an inevitable part of peacebuilding post-conflict or regime change, the debate is concerned with the political neutrality of transitional justice mechanisms, as well as balancing the focus of the local versus international, and the dispensation of economic justice (Sharp, 2013.). The diversification of interests in transitional justice research is arguably both symptomatic of and further justification for interest from fields outside of law, such as politics and social sciences.

A history of transitional justice is also implemented by one of the field's prominent theorists, Jon Elster (2004). Rather than narrating the developments of the field of study as above, Elster turns to history to argue that transitional justice is not an exclusively modern occurrence, with reference to transitions in 5th century B.C. Athens and the restoration of the French monarchy after Napoleon (2004: 3 – 47). From these case studies (and a summary of other modern transitional justice interventions) Elster offers broad theoretical insights into the nature of transitional justice (2004). Of particular interest to this research is Elster's emphasis on the identities, emotions and relationships between victim and wrongdoer during transitional justice (2004). This area of focus underlines the importance of understanding the communication of transitional justice, and the way it represents the interests of victims and wrongdoers in its output, and will be a key theme explored in the analysis of storytelling mechanisms.

Another theoretical foundation of the research comes from Pablo de Greiff (2012). Although he conceives of his work as more a 'normative theoretical conception' (2012: 32) it remains (along with his wider body of work) one of the clearest overarching theoretical pieces in the literature, particularly in terms of capturing the essence of transitional justice, and offering a toolkit with which to identify and analyse transitional justice efforts. Crucially, Pablo de Greiff points out that to simply say that transitional justice is about the justice offered during a transition is (obviously) insufficient, and divides this into immediate and mediate aims (2012: 33). These include recognition and civic trust (immediate) as well as reconciliation and democracy (mediate) (de Greiff, 2012); these are characteristics that are helpful in identifying (and creating) transitional justice mechanisms, and demonstrate the overlap between transitional justice and peacebuilding efforts, since many of these aims

are shared with the liberal peacebuilding paradigm. Further insight in terms of defining transitional justice is offered by de Greiff in his efforts to refine and emphasise the centrality of the "four pillars" of transitional justice – truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence (see de Greiff 2015). Using these aims, it is clear to see that it is appropriate to examine storytelling in Northern Ireland through the lens of transitional justice, even if the region has not been the subject of a "formal" transitional justice effort. This is because the storytelling groups typically seek to promote the aims of transitional justice as well as helping to advance truth in the region.

A final theoretical contribution from de Greiff that is key to this research is the importance of a holistic transitional justice program (2012). Specifically, this is the idea that successful transitional justice is not about one particular mechanism, but the interrelation of different mechanisms (commensurate with the aims and pillars above) to form a 'thick web' (de Greiff, 2012: 37). This claim is verified empirically by Olsen et al. (2010), who find that combining trials and amnesties, or trials, amnesties and truth commissions has a positive impact on democracy and reconciliation, in contrast with truth commissions alone, which they argue have a negative impact if implemented in isolation. The significance for this research is threefold. Firstly, Northern Ireland is served by myriad transitional justice, "normal" justice, civil society and peacebuilding mechanisms that are delivered by the European Court of Human Rights, the EU, the British and Irish Governments, devolved government and locals alike. Secondly, the significance of communication for these processes is underlined, since the way that these groups communicate in the absence of a centralised transitional justice group is of enormous significance. Finally, the challenge of understanding the relationship between separate transitional justice efforts is one that

broadens the study of transitional justice away from the field of law, as it moves from a legal analysis to a question of the social effects of interlocking transitional justice efforts.

2.1.2 - Interdisciplinary tensions

Transitional justice has grown since the beginning of the twenty-first century into an interdisciplinary field, drawing interest from legal experts, sociologists, political scientists, theologians and anthropologists, (Anders & Zenker, 2014). This has resulted in some theoretical tensions, as legal experts seek to defend their domain, in contrast with academics from other disciplines hoping to justify their presence in the field. Due to the relative infancy of transitional justice as a discipline (Sharp, 2013) the struggle over transitional justice's identity has theoretical implications, which are worth exploring here to gain a better insight into the state of transitional justice theory, and the relative position of this research. This research is aligned with the claim that the making transitional justice interdisciplinary is inevitable, necessary and positive in enhancing the still important purely legal analyses.

A key voice in opposition to the broadening of transitional justice comes from Christine Bell (2009). Although Bell's argument must come with the caveat that it is made as a Socratic exercise (2009: 6) in response to a piece published championing interdisciplinarity (*Editorial Note*, 2007) it presents the strongest challenge to fields outside of law seeking to engage with transitional justice. One of Bell's central arguments against broadening beyond law is the claim that transitional justice is being "decolonised", by other disciplines - sublimated

into the wider study of transition, and watering down the study of justice itself (2009). Acknowledging that justice is an essential aspect of transitional justice this project conforms to conform to the theoretical concerns outlined by de Greiff and Elster. Additionally, producing research on the communicative aspects of storytelling does not diminish the quality of justice-specific research into transitional justice by legal experts – in fact, the historic tendency for transitions to be studied in terms of justice alone is arguably why a gap has emerged in understanding how transitional justice is communicated.

However, Bell's argument does highlight differences between this kind of focus and that of a purely legal analysis; this is why this research positions itself between transitional justice and peacebuilding. The storytelling processes in Northern Ireland fit roughly into a transitional justice framework, but it is not as "classic" an example of transitional justice research such as seminal case studies into accountability versus truth in transitional Latin American societies (e.g. Méndez, 1997).

Snyder and Vinjamuri (2004) suggest that transitional justice research is divided into two main theoretical orientations - legalism and pragmatism. Legalists are characterised as those with the 'shared belief in the importance of promoting universal standards of justice' (Snyder & Vinjamuri, 2004: 346). A core example of this position would include the assertion that trials (and accountability) are preferable to truth commissions (see Méndez, 1997). This is contrasted with the pragmatist position, proponents of which believe that:

> The consequences of trials for the consolidation of peace and democracy trump the goal of justice per se, since the future prospects for justice depend on the establishment of social peace and unshakeable democratic institutions. (Snyder & Vinjamuri, 2004: 353).

In short, justice is a secondary concern to the establishment of broader objectives of peace, reconciliation and democracy. Despite the tensions between these two positions, there is a shared value of advocacy and normative values driving their work – Snyder and Vinjamuri contrast this with a growing body of research that is more interested in the non-normative, empirical study of transitional justice (2004). While the distinctions of legalist versus pragmatist are a little reductive, since both parties will undertake empirical studies as well as acknowledge their own normative positions in their work, it does underline an important theoretical position for this research. This research is neither pragmatist nor legalist, seeking instead to make an original contribution through purely empirical research; there is no preference given to the importance of justice, or the end goal of ensuring peace and reconciliation; only to consider the process and social implications of how storytelling mechanisms operate in Northern Ireland.

2.1.3 - Contemporary interests in Transitional Justice research

If Sharp's characterisation is to be accepted, transitional justice research today proceeds along three lines; interrogation of transitional justice's neutrality (see Bell, 2009; Bentrovato, 2017), the significance of economic violence and justice through reparations (see Durbach & Chappell, 2014; Durbach et al.,2017) and the tensions between international and local transitional justice.

The importance of focusing on the way that transitional justice is communicated, and the tensions between global and local, is underlined by the physical distance between formal mechanisms and affected communities. For example, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was established in The Hague (see Icty.org 2017), with official languages of English and French; rendering it linguistically and geographically distant from the people of the former Yugoslavia. This distance was addressed by an Outreach program arriving some six years later, and has remained the focal point for academics concerned by how the ICTY bridged this communicative gap (see Clark, 2009; Mannergren Selimovic, 2015; Wu, 2013). Formal mechanisms established by the global North (such as the ICTY or the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) are often criticised for maintaining uneven power relations (Sharp, 2013) or cultural insensitivity through forced democratisation, due to transitional justice's close relationship with the liberal peacebuilding paradigm (see McAuliffe, 2017; Paris, 2010; Mac Ginty, 2010a). Hybrid institutions (incorporating global and local involvement, to resolve the global-local tensions of ad-hoc courts) are also criticised in their relationship with post-conflict societies; this is exemplified by the "spaceship phenomenon", described in Sierra Leone's case as 'a curiosity and an anomaly with little impact on citizens' everyday lives' (Perriello & Wierda, 2006: 2).

2.1.4 – Transitional Justice and Grassroots Initiatives

This section outlines some of the bottom-up approaches to transitional justice and relevant literature – which is significant to the Northern Irish context. While various "legacy" solutions have been proposed and partially implemented over the years, they have also been perceived by locals as inadequate and have resulted in grassroot responses to the historically piecemeal approach of the UK government (cf. Bell, 2003, Aiken, 2010). The history of Northern Irish transitional justice is outlined later; here the focus is on literature concerned with the broad themes of grassroots transitional justice.

It is perhaps useful to frame this in terms of a thematic shift to transitional justice 'from below'. This term has come to:

> Denote a 'resistant' or 'mobilising' character to the actions of community, civil society and other non-state actors in their opposition to powerful hegemonic political, social or economic forces. (McEvoy & McGregor, 2008: 3)

The theoretical implications here are a further broadening of what is considered transitional justice – forces that resist and reinterpret are as much a part of the landscape for McEvoy and McGregor as tribunals and reparations are for Bell (2009). This understanding is also important in terms of case study selection – since this research is concerned with the way that transitional justice is communicated, local expressions are a fruitful starting point. The analysis of these processes will give insight into both how top-down efforts are received, as well as the way that the peacebuilding process is spoken about locally.

Bottom-up processes can take on a vast range of characteristics, depending on the contextual specifics, and (where applicable) the failures of top-down or global processes. For instance, Waldorf (2006) explores one of the most well-known uses of locally implemented transitional justice, the involvement of local courts in Rwanda. Much has been said about Rwanda's approach to transitional justice in the aftermath of the genocide, but its significance here is how once the substantial case load became apparent, local courts (gacaca) were involved to ease the burden on the ICTR (see Rawson, 2012 and Waldorf, 2006). While this may ease the aforementioned spaceship phenomenon by introducing a more culturally sensitive means of bringing perpetrators to justice (Rawson, 2012), the approach is not without its critics. For instance, it is unclear how far removed the state or global component of Rwanda's transitional justice process was from the gacaca courts, since ultimately it was (somewhat counter-intuitively) a traditionally local mechanism imposed upon the population by an authoritarian government (Waldorf, 2006: 65). Equally, Waldorf raises questions about the suitability of local justice mechanisms for documenting the crimes of the genocide, and providing a truthful narrative as a result (2006: 85). While these lessons have emerged from a series of local courts in a very different cultural setting, the thematic problems remain salient to storytelling in Northern Ireland. The extent to which storytelling projects maintain independence, and question marks over how to interpret state interest in their work, remains a hot topic among storytelling leaders. Likewise, the importance of "truth" is a central area for this research, albeit the emergence of truth from a Rwandan court versus a storytelling project in Northern Ireland is very different.

Bickford (2007) explores unofficial truth projects, suggesting three types. Firstly as replacements, in a context where a truth commission seems unlikely for a host of reasons; secondly, as a precursor to a presumed official mechanism (an example being the Iraq History Project) and finally, as a complimentary project, which may or may not be co-operative, although it is preferable when this is the case (such as when the Recovery of Historical Memory Project in Guatemala complemented the work of the official Commission for Historical Clarification) (Bickford, 2007: 1004-1005). Although Bickford categorises Northern Irish projects as falling into the first category, projects are likely to move across the typology through time; while projects in Northern Ireland have undoubtedly started as a response to the absence of official projects (Aiken, 2010) they are also potentially both precursors to official responses to the past through the Stormont House Agreement (SHA), and possibly complimentary processes, dependent on their future relationship with any singular, state-level oral history, truth project components and indeed the wider suite of proposals contained within the SHA. It is also worth reflecting on Bickford's observation that unofficial truth projects can benefit from a high level of professionalism and objectivity (2007: 1028) which resonates strongly with this research, and will be a recurring theme in exploring the efforts of storytelling leaders, who, as a community, have set high standards for ethical storytelling (see e.g. HTR, 2009).

Much like locally managed gacaca courts, the overwhelming thematic concern for unofficial truth projects becomes the challenge of maintaining local authenticity in the face of global or state level pressure, as well as the extent to which anything can truly be considered purely 'local'. This pattern plays out in recent attempts to create a truth commission for the former Yugoslavia, the *Regional Commission Tasked with Establishing the Facts about All Victims of*

War Crimes and Other Serious Human Rights Violations Committed on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia from 1 January 1991 to 31 December 2001 (RECOM). A clear characterisation of the project as bottom-up or top-down is very difficult; its roots are in local human rights groups working with the International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) (Di Lellio & McCurn, 2013) which means that 'dichotomies of universal and local justice, top–down and bottom–up approaches, and formal and informal mechanisms were not helpful' (Di Lellio & McCurn, 2013: 131). To further complicate these relationships, RECOM also requires inter-governmental co-operation to be fully enacted, something which is still being 'dodged' by the signatory states (Milekic, 2019). It is fair to say that a theme repeated across the literature is the complex relationships between global, state and local transitional justice processes; something that is becoming all the more salient for storytelling projects in relation to questions posed by the SHA and other state actions around legacy in Northern Ireland.

Local transitional justice projects are also something that is relatively understudied, which underscores the importance of this research. As Sandoval-Villalba points out in her discussion of transformative versus transitional justice:

> The view that transitional justice should be a bottom-up approach needs to be further discussed. We need more evidence that it would work in a way that would generate structural change in society. Surely, empowering victims is crucial and could constitute a structural change, but how to best deliver on this requires careful consideration. (2017: 192)

Ultimately, the purpose of this section has been to position this research in relation to existing transitional justice literature, and indicate how it can contribute to understanding the processes of communicating transitional justice. The position assumed is one of

emphasising the importance of broadening transitional justice's horizons as a field, since it is this relatively narrow focus that has resulted in the failure to engage more broadly with communicative processes of transitional justice mechanisms.

2.2 - Peacebuilding

The purpose of this section is to introduce the key peacebuilding models proposed by academics and adopted by governments, and explain their significance for this research. Peacebuilding and transitional justice tend to overlap, particularly at the macro level, and this research occupies a space between the two approaches; since there has been no singular, overarching form of transitional justice in Northern Ireland, the theoretical insights from the peacebuilding literature are also helpful here. This section identifies Hybrid peacebuilding as a preferable model for theoretical alignment. While this is because much of Northern Ireland's peacebuilding and transitional justice work is done at the local level, which Hybrid peacebuilding champions, it should also be emphasised that it is far from the embodiment of a perfect hybrid system, more that it has naturally unfolded this way in the space left by any consistent intervention at the state level.

Debates about peacebuilding are shaped by the various conceptualisations of peace proposed in the literature. Negative peace, or minimalist peace, is simply the absence of violence – peace in the most basic sense. Positive peace, or maximalist peace, is a peace marked by the presence or potential for transformation away from the conditions that gave

rise to violence in the first instance (Call and Cousens, 2008). The starting point of peacebuilding is considered important, not just philosophically speaking but also in terms of the way that the peacebuilding process will unfold as a result; for instance, Galtung refers to peace and the mentality behind peacebuilding as transcendence and transformation (as opposed to perhaps reconstruction) to emphasise the importance of change, creativity and ultimately moving beyond the original structural conditions that created the conflict (2004). Galtung (1969) is also influential in his explanation of direct, structural and cultural violence. Briefly, this is conceived of as violence of the obvious, physical or bodily sort as direct. Structural violence is harm visited upon a population through a social structure or institution, such as uneven distribution of wealth; Galtung and Höivik (1971) provide the example of deaths that could be caused by a concentration of medical resources among the upper classes. Cultural violence is defined as 'any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form' (Galtung, 1990: 291). These distinctions are helpful when considering later sections of this literature review and some of the analysis, since it relates to discussions surrounding the onset and responsibility for violence in Northern Ireland. For example, Northern Ireland is frequently described as in state of minimalist peace (Mac Ginty et al., 2007), lacking the transformative and transcendent approach advocated by Galtung.

This is significant for this research, since it is suggested that transitional justice research has tended to focus on the effects of mechanisms on direct violence alone (Nagy, 2008). This is beginning to change with research into contested narratives and the broader shift in the literature towards questions of economic justice and transitional justice neutrality (Sharp, 2013). However, this research remains sensitive to this issue, particularly since it

asks questions about how transitional justice relates to the contested narratives in Northern Ireland, which was fuelled (historically, at least) by structural and cultural violence, as well as direct violence. Differentiating between different types of violence also supports the claim that the process of communicating transitional justice is relatively understudied. Further study of the way these messages are communicated would give a greater understanding of how peacebuilding and transitional justice seek to address the more entrenched issues of cultural violence in post-conflict societies.

Peacebuilding is an ambiguous term which takes on different meanings in different contexts (Call & Cousens, 2008); put simply it aims to establish durable peace in the affected countries by creating conditions throughout the society that ensure that violence does not recur (Paris & Sisk, 2009). From this rather broad starting point, the discussion of durable peace can be broken down into debates about peacebuilding approaches, peacebuilding measurements, the significance of "spoilers" in the peacebuilding process (Stedman, 2000) and the significance of statebuilding. However, statebuilding is less applicable here since the focus is on transitional justice or peacebuilding interventions in Northern Ireland that are specifically designed to address narratives of violence at a (local) micro level; statebuilding analyses tend to be conducted at the macro level as the name would suggest (see Rocha Menocal, 2011). However, statebuilding is still a significant element of the two main peacebuilding approaches, particularly the liberal peacebuilding paradigm, since a "strong" state is required to enforce the proposed conditions (Paris, 2010) has significance in terms of storytelling's relationship with a fragile devolved government, and broader implications for transitional justice and peacebuilding in the hands of unpredictable and divided local governance.

The liberal peacebuilding paradigm is built on a set of core assumptions, namely the mutually reinforcing benefits of peace, democracy and free market economic principles to a country's prosperity and development (Paris, 2010). These assumptions follow on logically from the broadly accepted arguments for the causes of civil conflict, in the shape of the greed versus grievance debate. These arguments contend that the causes of conflict are either economic inequalities or profit-seeking behaviours (Collier & Hoeffler, 2012) or the expression of grievances and justice-seeking behaviour between opposing (often ethnic) groups (cf. Gurr, 2000; Stewart, 2012). In both cases, the adoption of the liberal peacebuilding paradigm would be a direct means of addressing the conditions that gave rise to the violence. The adaptation of "suitable" free market principles and social policies can arguably promote economic growth that will reduce the likelihood of a resumption of violence (Paris, 2010). Likewise, building a durable democracy is seen as a key component of peacebuilding since it increases accountability and responsiveness to the aforementioned grievances, ultimately promoting the resolution of grievances through the democratic system, as opposed to through the use of violence (cf. Paris, 2010; Gurr, 2000). Applied to the chosen context, this initially seems an appealing model; ensuring the equitable distribution of resources and the deepening of democracy in Northern Ireland would apparently be the key to promoting peace in the region and transitional justice could be a component in terms of accountability. However, the fit is not as neat as this in reality; the implications of a collapsed government (McCormack, 2020), weakened democracy and ongoing entrenched perceptions of historic structural inequalities imply that responding to conflict with a liberal democracy is far from a failproof approach to promoting peace in Northern Ireland.

The liberal peacebuilding paradigm is also criticised more broadly, giving rise to alternative approaches to peacebuilding. Among the many problems is the fact that liberal economic reforms can result in a short-term downturn in prosperity, something that even proponents of the paradigm acknowledge (Paris, 2010). This then has the potential to undermine peace, since it could lead to an increased risk of greed-related conflict (see above). Equally, the enforced liberalisation of a society can provide a platform for elites who may seek to use this to make political gains, and may do so by continuing to instrumentalise ethnic tensions (Paris, 2010). This remains prevalent in areas such as the former Yugoslavia, where elites tap into ethnonationalist narratives that fuelled the conflict in order to consolidate political power (Mannergren Selimovic, 2015). This dynamic will then have an adverse effect on broader attempts at reconciliation and peacebuilding, ultimately fuelling the meta-conflict. Elite behaviour and instrumentalisation of peacebuilding processes is a concern on a global scale too, since Goodhand and Walton (2009) point out that peacebuilding in Sri Lanka has been marked by an absence of co-ordinated strategy in the global community. This was fuelled by a cycle of engagement and disengagement, as and when the peacebuilding process reflected the interests of the nations who were involved (Goodhand & Walton, 2009).

This research is not aligned with the liberal peacebuilding paradigm for both theoretical and practical reasons. The above criticisms show how theoretically the paradigm is arguably intrinsically flawed in any context, although its use as a theoretical foundation in research focused on macro-level interventions could potentially be justified. However, the fact that the above problems with the liberal peacebuilding paradigm could be summarised as stemming from an underlying philosophy that is elitist, ethnocentric and top-down in

character (Mac Ginty, 2010b) means that this research would be better served by a theoretical position that emphasises local efforts. In addition to his criticisms of the liberal peacebuilding paradigm, Mac Ginty (2010a) presents hybrid peace as an alternative. In short, the approach avoids the top-down characteristics of liberal peacebuilding by putting power in the hands of locals through a four-phase approach. This starts with two stages of presentation and incentivisation of liberal peace to the affected regions, but then depends on the locals to resist, ignore or accept these ideas and ultimately present their own adapted vision of peace in their context (Mac Ginty, 2010a). This is taken to be a preferable theoretical position for this research to liberal peace, since it avoids the many conceptual flaws, and is more appropriate for a peacebuilding landscape in Northern Ireland that has, perhaps more by accident than design, come to be defined by scattered local efforts, as opposed to a singular, top-down homogenous effort (see Aiken, 2010). As stated above, it remains tricky to fully characterise peacebuilding in Northern Ireland as hybrid since the top-down input has been so inconsistent – as such, it is important to emphasise the contribution of grassroots and civil society interventions.

2.3 - Civil Society, Transitional Justice and Peacebuilding

This section draws together overlaps from the above sections to demonstrate the space this research occupies, specifically the importance of civil society efforts to bridge the gaps created in the implementation of transitional justice and peacebuilding. Brankovic (2018) illustrates some of the ways in which academics have tried to characterise the relationship

between civil society and transitional justice efforts. She describes some of the roles (played by NGOs in particular) as:

> Implementers, opponents, reframers, alternatives and mediators – while also noting that organisations' approaches differ according to the stages of transition, ranging from "active conflict" to "after transitional justice processes" (Brankovic, 2018: 7).

The patterns described by Brankovic broadly conform with what is happening in Northern Ireland, albeit the idea of an alternative or a reframing is interesting in that there is a distinct absence of clear, centralised transitional justice to either reframe, mediate, oppose or implement. In this sense, it is possible that civil society in Northern Ireland is both responding to the piecemeal and decentralised character and also to the absence of any unified attempts.

Brankovic is also critical of the narrow and conventional ways in which civil society is defined by transitional justice thinkers, noting that it stands in contradiction with the radical interpretations of the way it interacts with transitional justice (2018: 8). It is appropriate to incorporate a definition that is flexible and cutting-edge rather than narrowly conventional, since the boundaries between transitional justice, peacebuilding and civil society are so blurred in Northern Ireland. For this reason, Gready and Robins' definition of "new" civil society is adopted here:

> All public spheres separate from the apparatus of the state and the economic market, which serve as locations of political participation and discursive interaction. It is a site of political and social action and contestation, characterised by a diverse range of actors with different, sometimes competing, agendas and repertoires of action. (2017: 958)

The justification for this alternative is the recent significance of social movements in bringing about change, which are often spontaneous and driven by social media, as opposed to a network of NGOs as the civil society is so often conceived (Gready & Robins, 2017). Although NGOs play a central role in the storytelling landscape of Northern Ireland, a more flexible understanding is beneficial in incorporating groups that operate in more ambiguous spheres, such as religious groups (e.g. Corrymeela, 2018) and community groups that are not represented by a specific NGO (e.g. the Ardoyne Commemoration Project – see below).

Unsurprisingly, the aforementioned tensions between global and local transitional justice projects also play out when transitional justice overlaps with civil society and peacebuilding. This should be apparent, since the grassroots transitional justice projects are typically the results of civil society actors responding to perceived gaps in the justice and peacebuilding apparatus of their particular context. The global versus local tension between transitional justice and civil society is exemplified in international community attempts to build a civil society in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina, where it is suggested that the international community failed to acknowledge political and social contexts, and created a civil society dependent on external support (Belloni, 2001).

Although this tension is repeated throughout the literature, nuance can be added to it when the binary distinctions of global and local are considered. Through the lens of post-conflict Burundi, Popplewell (2019) argues that even that which would ordinarily be labelled as local is often affected by global forces. Popplewell gives the example of the bashingantahe – a traditional council of elders, and how despite appearing initially to retain a high degree of local authenticity:

> The bashingantahe is also the product of decades of prior hybridisation, and has been shaped through its interactions with colonial power structures, the post-colonial authorities and global power relations during the Cold War. (2019: 138)

Furthermore, its modern incarnation aligns itself with local traditional values, but also Western liberal values in order to maintain the support from the international community, which rejuvenated some of the bashingantahe after the conflict (Popplewell, 2019). The lesson for this research is that even the most assiduously local civil society organisations do not exist in a vacuum, and are clearly influenced by political and social trends both regional and global. While it will be helpful to consider the relationship between civil society-driven peacebuilding and transitional justice efforts in Northern Ireland and external forces, it is also necessary to do so carefully given the ever-present political divisions.

Andrieu's argument that post-conflict statebuilding is essentially an illiberal enterprise with the aim of promoting political liberalism and democracy (2010) is an example of how critical this theme is to research that is at the nexus of peacebuilding, transitional justice and civil society. Andrieu goes on to argue the importance of focusing upon civil society as a priority in post-conflict societies, and proposes a Habermasian model that shifts emphasis from top-down, state-level narratives of peace, to one that encourages intersubjective 'deliberative peace and communicative action' to rebuild the civil society through discussion in the public sphere (2010: 551-552). This approach is problematic; Andrieu acknowledges that:

> We are facing a typical 'chicken and egg' problem: how to democratically bring about the conditions of a healthy and authentic democracy? (2010: 554)

In short, this section has established that transitional justice, peacebuilding and civil society overlap in significant ways, a pattern that plays out in Northern Ireland and further justifies the selection as case study. The region is rich with examples of local, civil society-led initiatives in the absence of a holistic approach. It also clarifies the research's position in relation to definitions that emphasise a broad perspective on what constitutes the civil society, and underlines the importance of navigating the subtleties of global versus local tensions, and the importance of dialogue in literature dealing with this complicated nexus.

2.4 - Between Transitional Justice and Peacebuilding: the theoretical position of this research

This research will draw on theoretical contributions from both transitional justice and peacebuilding research. It has been argued that transitional justice benefits from broadening its concerns beyond legalism (McEvoy, 2008) if it is to understand more complex phenomena, such as the way it is communicating its messages to those it purports to serve. However, it is still valid to point out that transitional justice should have a strong justice component, i.e. a legal basis and mandate to promote accountability as well as otherwise promote the four pillars (de Greiff, 2015; Bell, 2009) and that is why peacebuilding also offers important insights since the extent to which storytelling offers any of the mediate and immediate goals of transitional justice is disputed. Contemporary developments in transitional justice literature have introduced more uncertainty in terms of what constitutes transitional justice, as grassroots projects and civil society overlaps refuse to conform to traditional definitions. Adopting a flexible theoretical position is also

important for engaging with the selected case study of Northern Ireland, where a unique post-conflict landscape has a significant hand in shaping all peacebuilding and transitional justice efforts.

2.5 – Peacebuilding and Transitional Justice in Northern Ireland – Past

The nature of historic transitional justice in Northern Ireland can be summed up as 'piecemeal' (Bell, 2003: 1108) or 'decentralized' (Aiken, 2010: 167); these claims will be explained further below to characterise transitional justice in Northern Ireland. This has significance here for two reasons, since the decision to construct peace in the form of the 1998 Belfast Agreement (BFA) with no fault assigned had implications:

> This decision helped to stabilize the peace process and ensured an end to political conflict, it nevertheless effectively ruled out the use of a centralized transitional justice mechanism mandated to investigate past abuses. (Aiken, 2013: 62)

Transitional justice of a singular nature had to be sacrificed in Northern Ireland for the sake of peace, which shaped the nature of both top-down and bottom-up transitional justice processes. The environment which these processes emerged in means that the extent to which either top-down or bottom-up process can be considered 'formal' transitional justice is questionable, as is the way in which some of these mechanisms have unfolded, particularly the top-down approaches which are rarely implemented in a cohesive or

consistent fashion. It is also essential to note the extent of the disagreement over the conflict itself, i.e. the meta-conflict and its impact on transitional justice, as Aiken continues:

> In essence, because of the continued existence of zero-sum perceptions of who was 'right' and who was 'wrong' in employing violence during the Troubles, no single transitional justice strategy has thus far been able to be employed without being perceived as biased or sectarian. (2013: 62)

The structure of transitional justice is shaped by both practical requirements for peace, and the persistent disagreement over the nature of the conflict. What follows below is a (necessarily brief) description of some of the forms of top-down transitional justice in Northern Ireland.

The violence itself requires contextualisation. If the approximate 4,000 casualties and 40,000 injuries over a thirty-year period do not seem as bloody as other conflicts, it has been pointed out that relative to Northern Ireland's population of 1.5 million the proportionate impact of the conflict is significant (Aguiar, 2017). That said, objectively speaking Northern Ireland has been an area marked by conflict (on and off) if accepting the Uppsala Conflict Data Program definition:

> Contested incompatibility that concerns government or territory or both where the use of armed force between two parties results in at least 25 battle-related deaths. Of these two parties, at least one is the government of a state. (Nygård et al., 2016: 2)

The conflict in Northern Ireland was brought to an end in 1998 with the BFA being signed by the key political parties of Northern Ireland, as well as the British and Irish Governments (Bell, 2003). This itself has been interpreted as the beginning of transitional justice in Northern Ireland, since the Belfast Agreement included details on prisoner release, which

was argued to be necessary for securing peace. This is because it acknowledged the prisoners as political, and represented the beginning of the British government's engagement with the topic as a political one - something that had been hitherto resisted (cf. Bell, 2003; McEvoy, 1999).

Involvement at an international level has continued and even transcended the jurisdiction of the state, but it continues to be "piecemeal" in that it is provided by the European Court of Human Rights, as and when it is made use of by affected individuals or groups in Northern Ireland. Examples include the recent decision to uphold the 1978 judgement that the "hooded men" group were subject to inhuman and degrading treatment, but not torture, at the hands of the British government (McDonald, 2018). Appeals to the domestic and European court are consistent with the broader picture of decentralised transitional justice efforts, and the absence of a cohesive tribunal or formal transitional justice mechanisms. Recent analysis of the case has demonstrated persistent, systematic state denial for over forty years (Duffy, 2019). In terms of the thematic focus upon discourse and narrative in post-conflict justice interventions, it is also worth reflecting on Duffy's concluding remarks:

> Whether these experiences epitomised by the utter powerlessness of detainees could be transformed or validated by incorporating the victims' worldviews into new, multifaceted, and officially sanctioned histories of conflict and violence remains to be seen, particularly in a region of contested histories and identities. (2019: 51)

This serves to underline the contemporary importance of investigating justice or peacebuilding processes, which have an explicit focus on giving voice to victim worldviews, and how these processes navigate these contested histories and identities.

State level efforts are too numerous to list fully here, and often were partially enacted due to the political impasse that continues to afflict the region. A prominent example which featured the involvement of the local executive as well as the British and Irish governments at varying stages is the SHA. This was a package of reforms that would tackle the past through what is often described as 'legacy' legislation, as well as broader areas such as welfare and government funding (NIO, 2014). Legacy is a word often used to describe legislation relating to the past, or policy that at least echoes transitional justice. It is also poorly defined and euphemistic, an indication in itself of the UK government's disinterest in a fulsome engagement with justice and peacebuilding in the region. The SHA is explored further below, as it is an example of contemporary transitional justice and has particular significance for this research, since storytellers at the time of this project were actively engaged with a public consultation regarding the future implementation of the SHA.

Similarly, the Consultative Group on the Past (CGP) produced a report in 2009 that advised the government on how to deal with Northern Ireland's violent and divisive history; amongst others, the recommendations included a Legacy Commission and a "recognition payment" (CGP, 2009). These suggestions proved controversial, particularly the latter which became a debate in itself, and one that was captured by the typical sectarian narratives (see Duffy, 2010). There was hope that the CGP's proposals could be enacted by the Haass-O'Sullivan report (Panel of the Parties, 2013) although the negotiations stalled over the issues of investigations, flags and parades (Devenport, 2013).

While these attempts to provide closure on Northern Ireland's past struggled to gain traction due to collapsed governments and the persistent meta-conflict, they have also been criticised for trying to provide singular notions of truth about the conflict, as opposed

to encouraging the bottom-up approach, which has organically become more about multiple voices and multiple truths to stand alongside one another (cf. Bell, 2003; Bell et. al, 2004; Hamber & Kelly, 2016). It is at this point that the significance of understanding the clarity of message and communication in a transitional justice process becomes doubly clear; many academics emphasise the importance of multiple voices in the process, but do not necessarily delve any deeper into the dynamics of a transitional justice landscape defined by fragmentation.

While the CGP and SHA attempted to pave the way for a suite of transitional justice-type measures to be enacted in Northern Ireland, and have stalled, some legal attempts have come to fruition. Again, there are examples to pick from too numerous to list here; these include the Cory Commission in 2003, and the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, both of which focused upon police collusion, the former also covering high profile cases such as the killing of human rights campaigner Pat Finucane, the latter also covering informant misuse (see Aiken, 2010; Lundy, 2011). Another transitional justice process rooted in law is the 2010 Bloody Sunday Inquiry (following on from a widely condemned 1972 attempt) which has proved, by comparison, to be reasonably successful:

> By reducing long-standing feelings of injustice and minimizing conflicting perceptions surrounding the events of Bloody Sunday, the Inquiry has been able to remove a key source of intercommunity tension that impelled the early violence of the Troubles and that continued to divide nationalists and unionists even after the signing of the Belfast Agreement. (Aiken, 2015: 117)

However, Aiken also points out the immense financial cost of such an effort, and the fact that it represents one (relatively small) part of a very big picture of entrenched mistrust in the region (2015). Other state-level efforts can be reeled off here and similarly

problematised; the Historical Enquiries Team was a police-run investigation into unsolved deaths during the conflict, but was ultimately wound down due to funding issues (Aguiar, 2017) and concerns regarding transparency over state involvement in investigated deaths (cf. Hamber & Kelly, 2016; Justice Inspectorate, 2013).

2.6 – Peacebuilding and Transitional Justice in Northern Ireland – Present and Future

As mentioned above, a key contemporary issue for transitional justice in Northern Ireland is the implementation of the SHA. At the start of this research, the SHA was subject to a public consultation issued by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) (UK Parliament, 2019). This section will briefly summarise the SHA and a selection of responses to it from academics and major peacebuilding organisations. Further exploration of the implications for storytelling, and the responses of storytelling organisations to the public consultation regarding the SHA is explored in Chapter 9. Since this chapter seeks to outline the literature that influenced the research design, it will not explore recent developments regarding the apparent and possible abandonment of the SHA in favour of an alternative approach to legacy, the principle difference being the avoidance of historic investigations and trials (UK Government, 2020). These recent developments are instead covered in Chapter 9. This section will also briefly consider some ongoing trials and inquests, which may not explicitly constitute transitional justice in the way that the SHA arguably does, but remains of significance to the case study and will still need to be supported and recognised by the SHA as part of its mandate (NIO, 2014: 10). The section concludes by considering the

implications of Brexit for peace in Northern Ireland; again, this is to offer context to insights drawn during the fieldwork.

Although it is a complex and multifaceted set of proposals for dealing with Northern Ireland's past, The SHA can be broken down into four key components:

- A new independent Historical Investigations Unit (HIU) which deals with investigations into deaths during the conflict

- An Independent Commission on Information Retrieval (ICIR) – a process that is separate from the justice system and helps victims and the bereaved to privately obtain information regarding deaths during the conflict

- An Oral History Archive (OHA) which aims to be an independent repository of conflict related stories

- The Implementation and Reconciliation Group (IRG) assesses the implementation of the other groups and encourages acknowledgement and reconciliation more broadly (NIO, 2014; UK Parliament, 2019; HTR, 2016).

When examining the SHA in light of the literature outlined above, it is also important to note the guiding principles of the SHA which include the following:

> Promoting reconciliation; upholding the rule of law; acknowledging and addressing the suffering of victims and survivors; facilitating the pursuit of justice and information recovery; is human rights compliant; and is balanced, proportionate, transparent, fair and equitable (NIO, 2014: 5)

The various groups and aims that constitute the SHA are very close to the four pillars of transitional justice as outlined by de Greiff (2015), albeit the extent to which it is truly

transitional justice would constitute a worthy research topic in itself. It is also worth noting

that the status of reparations or pensions for victims is somewhat ambiguously addressed

in paragraph 28 as:

> Further work will be undertaken to seek an acceptable way forward on the proposal for a pension for severely physically injured victims in Northern Ireland. (NIO, 2014: 6)

The pension seemingly became one of the more successful aspects of the agreement when

a payment to those injured through no fault of their own was agreed in January 2020 (UK

Government, 2020) although implementation and dispensation of payments has stalled at

the time of writing, owing to a standoff over whether Westminster or Stormont should foot

the bill, appointing a department to make payments versus waiting for funds before

appointing a department and uncertainties around who should receive the payment

(O'Neil, 2020).

In addition to the SHA as a more immediately recognisable expression of transitional justice

in Northern Ireland, there are also ongoing trials and enquiries which are of significance to

the transition. The trial of "Soldier F", who is charged with two accounts of murder and five

attempted murders during Bloody Sunday, reached the courts on the 18th of September

2019 (The Guardian, 2019). At the time of announcing their intention to charge "Soldier F",

Northern Ireland's Public Prosecution Service also explained that the evidence regarding

other members of the parachute regiment during the events of Bloody Sunday was not

sufficient for criminal proceedings (Bowcott, 2019). The handling of Bloody Sunday is of

enormous significance to peace in the region, since it is such a contested event that it is

almost symbolic of the meta-conflict in the region (see below) and was often touched upon by interviewees during the fieldwork.

Simultaneously, the Ballymurphy inquest has been opened, which investigates the deaths of ten civilians during the first three days of Operation Demetrius (Judicary NI, 2019a) which marked the beginning of internment – imprisonment without trial – of suspected IRA members by British armed forces. This is another significant investigation in terms of peace and justice for the region for reasons similar to the above, perhaps with the added dimension that commentators have suggested it has not received the level of media coverage it deserves (Greenslade, 2019). The inquest is also notable as the first to be heard by the newly funded Legacy Inquest Unit (Judiciary NI, 2019b).

While the extent to which the trial of "Soldier F" and the Ballymurphy inquest can be considered conventional transitional justice is debatable (since they have been conducted within existing justice systems in the UK) they are of undeniable contemporary and future significance to peace and the transition. Similarly, the impact of Brexit is also worth considering in terms of its effects on peace and transition. The most pressing concern would be the amount of funding offered by the EU to storytelling (and other grassroots peacebuilding projects) as part of the EU PEACE programme for Northern Ireland and border regions of the Republic of Ireland. At present, it is proposed that funding continues after Brexit until 2020 at least, with contributions from the UK government to be added to the existing projects (European Parliament, 2019). Projects thereafter are a subject of debate, with some projects not yet applying for post 2020 funding due to doubts; although the EU has also publicly stated it wishes to continue funding projects in the region (Chu and Evans, 2019).

Beyond funding, it is the border with the Republic of Ireland that causes most confusion, and poses the biggest threat to peace in Northern Ireland. The border is symbolically significant; in crude terms, too "hard" (i.e. with checks and physical structures to enforce border laws) and it is likely to antagonise nationalists (although it will be practically frustrating to all parties). Too "soft", or anything too dissimilar to the rest of the UK's relationship with the EU, and unionists are likely to be concerned by what this means for the status of Northern Ireland within the Union. Recently leaked government documents as part of Operation Yellowhammer (worst-case scenario planning for no-deal Brexit) suggest that there is a possibility of increased criminal and dissident activity in border counties, likely to be exacerbated by border-related economic hardship (UK Government, 2019). It should be noted that this is worse-case scenario planning, and is ambiguous about any direct relationship between the symbolic or identity status of the border, and increased violence. However, the same document concedes that initial efforts to avoid a hard border will have to give way to an alternative agreement, and urgently. Whatever this may be, any return to hard borders manned by PSNI may be the targets of the future for dissidents (Creighton, 2019).

Intercommunity tensions may also be exacerbated, since Brexit threatens to undermine the BFA. Since the agreement enshrines the equality of all citizens in the region, and all citizens have the choice to take both Irish and British citizenship, those with Irish citizenship will enjoy rights that those who only take British citizenship do not (Driscoll, 2019).

2.7 - Storytelling in Northern Ireland

In the absence of an overarching transitional justice mechanism, bottom-up transitional justice and peacebuilding processes have sprung up to fill the void in Northern Ireland. Storytelling processes are selected because of the centrality of communication to their success; a storytelling mechanism essentially recasts transitional justice *as* communication. It is a case study that will illuminate the research problem because it is about the way stories are told and received in post-conflict Northern Ireland. This section explains how they work, their characteristics, strengths and weaknesses, all of which illustrates why they are a perfect lens through which to examine the communication of transitional justice and peacebuilding. Although there is some research into storytelling, much of it is very recent and has only begun to scratch the surface. Research also tends to be focused on a particular case study or two, whereas this research draws from the experiences of multiple storytelling projects. Even less research directly tackles storytelling specifically through the lens of meta-conflict, and the extent to which it is prepared to discuss the most controversial aspects of the past, rather than sidestep them as much of the top-down efforts tend to.

Transitional societies are afflicted by multiple contested narratives of the conflict that compete for eminence. This is not confined to Northern Ireland, and is typical of almost any post-conflict society – the significance of contested narratives more broadly and analytically, and how they are related to storytelling is discussed later. Storytelling processes are defined here as:

> A project or process which allows reflection, expression, listening, and possible collection of personal, communal and institutional stories related to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland (Kelly, 2005: 12).

This relatively broad definition allows for the inclusion of projects that might also be dubbed oral history or oral archives, intergroup and intragroup fora, unofficial truth recovery mechanisms led by non-state organisations in the region and creative interpretations, such as documentaries and art-related projects. While the definition is not exclusively local in character, the reality is that storytelling is the preserve of local agencies, not least due to the stagnation of top-down mechanisms in the region. A broad summary of storytelling processes was conducted fourteen years ago by Healing Through Remembering (HTR) which reported on thirty-two different storytelling processes, past and present (Kelly, 2005). The organisation continues to monitor the state of storytelling in Northern Ireland, with guidelines on ethical implementation of storytelling (HTR, 2009) and reports on the future of storytelling (HTR, 2014). From a theoretical perspective, this research adopted the definition offered by Kelly above, since its breadth allows for an inclusive approach, which became increasingly necessary in the field, since storytelling projects overlap and interact with different approaches and philosophies. This is explained further in the methods section.

Despite the aforementioned guidance documents, storytelling is heterogeneous in character and is lacking in a singular method or guiding philosophy (Dybris McQuaid, 2016; Aguiar, 2017) although it is typically characterised by the fact that 'they have employed collaborative storytelling methods that favour shared ownership and authorship when working with contested stories' (Aguiar, 2017: 20). The aims of storytelling are diverse, not

least because participants themselves may have a variety of aims, ranging from the sharing of stories and seeking of truth, to the shaming of enemies or laying claim to moral authority (see Shea, 2010: 292). Storytelling also has some core differences in terms of projects that emphasise healing versus projects that emphasise learning (Heatherington & Hackett, 2005). Dybris McQuaid also explores a similar dichotomy, in terms of individual healing and social cohesion:

> To facilitate processes of catharsis and healing for individuals and communities, for others it is about establishing, sharing and restoring lines of communication across existing divides. (2016: 64)

Other goals include recording stories as an attempt to address gaps or errors in the narrative, or to make use of the storytelling outputs as evidence in the pursuit of justice through the legal system (Kelly, 2005; Dybris McQuaid, 2016). By aiming to provide catharsis and explanation through an abstract form of truth recovery, these processes are arguably conforming to de Greiff's "truth" pillar (2015) and constitute informal transitional justice. However, the literature also emphasises the sheer variety of goals and underpinning philosophies; this further justifies the methods selected (expert interviews, to gain clarity over the broad position of storytelling) and is also reflected in the interview structure (see chapter 4 and appendix 1).

One of the most well-known examples of storytelling in Northern Ireland is the Ardoyne Community Project, a locally owned testimony-based commemoration of the Troubles in the Ardoyne community, where locals were invited to share their experiences of the conflict and have them recorded in a book (Lundy & McGovern, 2008). The methods involved are consistent with the bottom-up transitional justice model championed by McEvoy and

McGovern, with locals taking ownership of the interview and editorial processes (Lundy & McGovern, 2008). However, given the diversity of approaches to storytelling, it is worth remembering that this is one approach that is considerably different when compared with other approaches, for example the use of intergroup forums by Towards Understanding and Healing (TUH) (Maiangwa & Byrne, 2015). Likewise, Anderson (2019) frames the Prisons Memory Archive as "accidental" and informal transitional justice, through its promotion of inter-community contact and agency among storytellers. Alternatively, it has been argued that oral history may provide some of the answers to the failings of transitional justice, such as the ability to identify and approach under-represented groups, or avoid the dangers of participant-voice instrumentalisation (Bryson, 2016). It should be noted that Bryson's emphasis is on oral history, which may be more tightly defined than storytelling, but overlaps strongly and conforms to Kelly's definition above. Ultimately, storytelling enjoys a close relationship with transitional justice processes; this is reflected on in terms of the questions posed to interviewees and the subsequent analysis.

Despite the shift to bottom-up thinking, and emphasis on local participation, the storytelling process places great responsibility in the hands of facilitators in terms of the way they identify, approach and select storytellers, or how they frame the content of the stories shared under their facilitation (see Dybris McQuaid, 2016: 73-75). The relationship between facilitator and storyteller can also be the starting point for some of the challenges associated with storytelling. From a practical perspective, the loss of control can be a concern for those facilitating storytelling projects. While Aguiar (2017) is broadly positive thanks to the potential for shared storytelling to allow victims to reconcile the differences between their experiences and media narratives, the risk of withdrawal of testimony is

increased when participants have final editorial say in a project. Again, depending on format, there is also the danger that any kind of truth recovery process results in a disproportionate amount of the facilitator "filling in the blanks" for a storyteller, as was sometimes the case during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, a pattern some fear in storytelling processes too (Hackett & Rolston, 2009: 369).

Another danger for storytellers and facilitators is the possibility of there not being an audience for the story, which robs the storyteller of the potential payoff in terms of dignity gained, or narratives challenged (Dybris McQuaid, 2016: 68). This is important for this research, since it is concerned with the way that transitional justice and peacebuilding is communicated; an important dimension of storytelling research is the published outputs of the processes, and the kind of audiences these outputs can claim, in addition to any "live" audiences present when the story is shared.

The therapeutic dimension of storytelling is also a source of concern. The experience of storytelling has been argued to have the potential to retraumatise the storyteller (Hackett and Rolston, 2009). This is a similar concern to that raised by critics of truth commissions (Mendeloff, 2004). For Hackett and Rolston, the danger is:

> Not just that the past is ever present, but that its very vividness prevents the present being real. It is as if the past and present are inverted in terms of their immediacy. (2009: 359)

This has significant implications for peacebuilding, since a retraumatised population is certainly not conducive to reconciliation. Similarly, even if the storyteller is not re-traumatised, the process still risks turning into "just" therapy for the storyteller or victim, rather than a process of societal catharsis or reconciliation (Hackett and Rolston, 2009). This

underlines the importance of the facilitator and any developments in storytelling as a process (e.g. the aforementioned ethical guidelines) as a guarantor of potential transformation.

If the risk of re-traumatisation is obviated, then the storyteller is still vulnerable in other respects. Storytelling can come at a risk, perceived or otherwise. Dybris McQuaid points out that in the absence of a clear framework for transitional justice in Northern Ireland, the sharing of stories carries the risk of prosecution (especially if the story is self-incriminating in any way) (2016: 68). Storytellers may also feel insecure in the way their testimonies are to be stored and used, irrespective of how careful the facilitator is. In the US-based project *Boston College's Belfast Oral History Project*, when participants were assured that their testimonies would only be published after they had died, they were in fact handed over to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) through a US court ruling (Havemann, 2012; Aguiar, 2017: 18-19). The storytelling movement as a whole risks being held back by such incidents, since it creates a 'chill factor', or at least results in some projects operating 'under the radar' with a heightened sense of awareness around issues of legality and confidentiality (Bryson, 2016: 315).

Finally, it is worth returning to storytelling's heterogeneity in more detail before concluding. Storytelling's grassroots authenticity, and the contextually responsive nature of each project, comes at a price. Storytelling is broadly acknowledged to have no singular approach (see Aguiar, 2017; Bryson, 2016; Irish Peace Centres, 2011 amongst others), to the extent that in their evaluation of storytelling the Irish Peace Centres was:

> Struck by the diversity of the impacts – socially constructive and destructive – that were evident anecdotally in these initiatives. At the same time, we were

> struck by the fact that very few of these initiatives were ever evaluated, and that, in fact, there was no readily apparent means of evaluating them, even if the interest and opportunity was present. (2011: 65)

This pattern, that storytelling lacks a cohesive, recognisable form, and lacks extensive evaluation and analysis, plays out across the literature. Anderson's aforementioned claims that the PMA "accidentally" promoted the goals of peacebuilding and transitional justice are also relevant here, since she suggests these happy accidents are indicative of a lack of understanding of these fields during the design and implementation of storytelling projects like the PMA (2019). It should be emphasised that this is not an explicit criticism of the PMA, but a reflection of the contemporary reality of projects like this – it is a continually evolving project, with the digital platform and archive evolving throughout the time this research was conducted.

Although oral history is ancient, its deployment in a post-conflict setting through peacebuilding organisations is new, and as such requires focus and attention from community practitioners and academics alike (Bryson, 2016). This call for reflection and critical thought around the implementation of storytelling is undoubtedly the current area of focus in storytelling research, with Side (2017) emphasising the importance of the SHA learning lessons from the BBC's Legacy project, a daily 2 minute radio broadcast during 1999, featuring stories of the Troubles. Despite Legacy succeeding in facilitating discussion about the conflict, it did so in a relatively cautious fashion that failed to encourage inter-community working; it also failed to encourage a dynamic approach that considered the range of ways in which stories may be received, and also failed to position conflicting stories and storytellers alongside each other for a more challenging approach (Side, 2017: 346).

Given the proposed research problem, the lack of research into the communication of transitional justice and peacebuilding mechanisms, storytelling seems an area ripe for exploration and research. The characteristics, advantages and pitfalls hinge on the way the process is communicated, both in the immediate setting of the storytelling process (e.g. a forum, or an interview) but also in its framing and publication (see Accounts of the Conflict, 2019). The literature reviewed here is mostly very recent, underlining its position at the cutting edge of peacebuilding and transitional justice research in Northern Ireland. These examples also ask relatively broad questions of storytelling, and are confined to analyses that either focus on one or two explicitly, rather than multiple projects as this research does, or make generalisations rather than in-depth examinations of the communicative processes at the heart of storytelling.

Chapter 3 - Analytical Framework

The aim of this section is to establish an analytical framework to inform methodological design and the analysis of the data gathered during the fieldwork. This analytical framework is important in offering a unique contribution to knowledge, since it will investigate storytelling's potential to critically engage with the meta-conflict – an alternative and potentially less problematic lens through which to evaluate peacebuilding than other past attempts, such as reconciliation.

Many analyses of transitional justice and peacebuilding in the social sciences tend to speak broadly of the impact of the examined mechanisms, and ask questions of a more general nature, i.e. the extent to which they contribute to peacebuilding or reconciliation in the region. Examples include Clark's (2011) examination of the ICTY's impact on reconciliation and the promotion of positive peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Aiken's (2015) examination of the extent to which the Bloody Sunday Inquiries contributed to reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

This research seeks to avoid the problems of evaluating the contributions of storytelling in terms of concepts as nebulous as reconciliation by offering more specific lines of enquiry. This is not to say the research is unique in measuring transitional justice efforts by specified standards; simply that it is unique in terms of the frames of analysis, their application to the case study and how these measures in turn can contribute to a much broader discussion of reconciliation.

Therefore, it is proposed that the research implements a two-part approach to offer these potentially unique insights. The first approach is to simply emphasise the importance of rooting any measure of a transitional justice or peacebuilding project in the views of locals and experts, rather than imposing a globally determined top-down measure. This is coherent for a number of reasons; contemporary literature argues that effective measurement of efficacy comes from locals, but it also makes sense to root the analysis in the views of locals when the case study is a grassroots movement.

Secondly, it considers the significance of contested narratives in post-conflict or transitional societies. In Northern Ireland's case, this has led to what is sometimes referred to as the 'meta-conflict' – the persistent disagreement about the conflict (Bell et al., 2004), which this research seeks to use as a lens through which to analyse storytelling.

3.1 - The challenges of measuring reconciliation

A critical starting point for the measurement of reconciliation and peacebuilding is the inherent complexity of the task. The implementation and measurement of peacebuilding mechanisms tend to involve numerous actors (e.g. development agencies, states, locals) which in turn results in highly changeable 'rules of the game' and politicises the process (McCandless, 2013: 244). The discussion of measuring peacebuilding and reconciliation deserves a thesis in its own right, so the focus here is

on the challenges of measuring. This is ultimately with a view to demonstrate the failure of top-down measurements from the global north, and the usefulness of ensuring that the efficacy of local peacebuilding efforts is framed by local actors.

Despite the complexity of reconciliation, a starting point is necessary to engage with it as a concept. Put simply, reconciliation:

> Describes coming together; it is the antithesis of falling or growing apart. Reconciliation has a normative— almost a moral—aspect as well. It is the coming together (or re-coming together) of things that should be together. (Daly & Sarkin, 2007: 5)

This normative dimension adds to the difficulties in objectively measuring the concept of reconciliation. Nevertheless, a variety of measures can be proposed for a more objective, scientific measurement of reconciliation; drawing from a variety of cases, these include:

- As a minimum, the absence of recurrence, alongside state capacity to resolve future conflicts peacefully (Call, 2008)
- Economic prosperity as proxy (Mac Ginty, 2013)
- Measuring the number of refugees who return home
- Level of cooperation in industry or sport (Petrović, 2017)
- Analysis of public opinion data generated by questionnaires, regarding opinions of other ethnic groups and transitional justice efforts (see Meernik and Guerrero, 2014)
- Frameworks for measuring state-led efforts at promoting reconciliation (see Brounéus, 2008).

The absence of a functioning local government for much of the research suggests a low level of reconciliation in the first and last points. Others are equally problematic, both

for the analytical framework required for this research and the purposes of measuring peacebuilding in general. Attempting to make use of economic prosperity is largely unhelpful in determining the progress of peacebuilding, both for this research and in general. Many countries continue to make progress economically despite being mired in conflict – Mac Ginty illustrates this point with the example of Sri Lanka (2013: 58). There is some further significance to economic proxies in peacebuilding measurement for Northern Ireland and this research, since an ongoing concern in the literature is the structural inequalities that were maintained during the conflict, and the sectarian lines along which this operated (Duffy, 2010). These divisions persist today in welfare reform debates, in which voices often divide along identity-group lines (Wilson, 2016). Attempts to address economic inequalities created by the conflict, such as a proposed 'recognition payment' of £12,000 were quickly subsumed into sectarian discourses (Duffy, 2010: 41). In this sense, there is a relevance of sorts to economic prosperity and peacebuilding in Northern Ireland, but to clarify, it is only of use to this research in so far as its impact on discourses or impact on storytelling project funding, rather than a measure outright.

It is worth noting that despite specific mention of reconciliation in state accommodations both the BFA (NIO, 1998) and SHA (NIO, 2014), little is offered in the way of a fleshed-out definition. Both documents add some additional comments after use of the term; the BFA states that 'it is essential to acknowledge and address the suffering of the victims of violence as a necessary element of reconciliation' (NIO, 1998: 22) and the SHA (through the IRG) aims to 'contribute to reconciliation, better

understanding of the past and reducing sectarianism' (NIO, 2014: 10). This suggests the state-led definition includes acknowledgement, addressing suffering, understanding the past and reducing sectarianism. While these are entirely reasonable goals in healing a divided Northern Ireland, they are diverse, complex and difficult to measure.

Some measures aim to capture various aspects of reconciliation, by combining the broader aims of the characteristics outlined above, and have been designed by academics with expertise in the Northern Irish context (e.g. Hamber and Kelly, 2018). To summarise Hamber and Kelly's work, it incorporates strands such as a shared vision of a fair society, acknowledgement, building relationships, cultural and attitudinal change and social, economic and political change (2018: 1-2). The measure is robust, but the authors also reflect similarly on the pitfalls of reconciliation, such as the loaded quasi-religious or moralistic nature of the term and reticence to use the term in a maximalist sense in Northern Ireland (Hamber and Kelly, 2018). While the definition may offer enough depth, it is difficult to apply as the foundation for the analysis because relating storytelling back to aims as grand as social and economic change is to misunderstand the scope of storytelling; it is perhaps a measure best used elsewhere. Ultimately, this illustrates the unwieldy nature of measuring reconciliation, particularly in relation to so specific an intervention.

Broader quantitative measures may have their place in peacebuilding and are perhaps better suited to addressing a robust and multi-faceted definition of reconciliation, but they are unhelpful for this research. Methodologically speaking, they are overly reliant on samples and may result in generalisations – a weakness that the Northern Ireland

Peace Monitoring Report acknowledges (Wilson, 2016: 16). The solution to this is a broad scope, incorporating far-reaching evidence upon which to draw conclusions – although this has problems itself. Similar large-scale peace reports such as the Global Peace Index consist of a diverse range of metrics, but ultimately only really measure the absence of violence or militarism in a country, as opposed to the promotion of positive peace (Mac Ginty, 2013). Broader reports give helpful context and present the characteristics of post-conflict society, but they do not offer the means of measurement or analytical framework to suit a thorough examination of the communication of local peacebuilding and transitional justice efforts.

In short, trying to pin down a concept as a problematic as reconciliation is avoided here, since it tends to lead to top-down and expansive measures, which are not an appropriate measure for a grassroots process like storytelling. For these reasons, a qualitative approach was adopted, which is discussed further in Chapter 4, with a strong emphasis on the views of local experts, which is explored below.

3.2 - Locally centred peacebuilding measurement

This research positions itself alongside the works of other thinkers who emphasise a shift to the local in terms of their approach to transitional justice and peacebuilding, through design, implementation, measurement and analysis (cf. Mac Ginty 2010a; McEvoy 2008; Lundy & McGovern 2008). Almost all of the metrics proposed above suffer

from being 'top-down'; they are measures and analyses which come from '…media sources, academics, policy makers, national elites, military and humanitarian spokespeople…' (Mac Ginty & Firchow, 2016: 6).

Top-down approaches face numerous problems, such as the rendering of a generalised narrative that is stripped of contextual significance (Mac Ginty & Firchow, 2016). As a result, this research is broadly guided by the principles of locally centred measurements of peacebuilding and transitional justice. For example, it draws from the philosophy of Mac Ginty's (2013) 'everyday peace indicators' – an approach which identifies the key dimensions and metrics (simple examples might include absence of sectarian graffiti or presence of tourists) in conjunction with locals, as opposed to applying a top-down framework (see Mac Ginty, 2013; Mac Ginty & Firchow, 2016). This research will not make use of everyday peace indicators specifically, but lessons can be drawn from the arguments that underpin Mac Ginty's approach.

Everyday peace indicators operate according to four key principles. Two of these are particularly applicable to this research, and influenced the methodology. Firstly, they are locally based, and allow for rich, context-specific data to be gathered, as opposed to the more generalised state-level analyses described previously. This is appropriate for this research since it is qualitatively focused on local attempts to bring peace and justice to Northern Ireland. Secondly, they are reflexive and open to change, which is important since post-conflict societies are prone to changing social, political and security circumstances (see Mac Ginty, 2013: 59-60). This flexibility seemed crucial when designing research concerned with Northern Ireland; it faces changes to its

peacebuilding funding and borders due to the United Kingdom's impending departure from the European Union, as well as the absence of government for much of the research period. It also proved helpful when carrying out the research, since the interview focus could be adjusted in relation to the kind of responses that were generated.

Other scholars support Mac Ginty's assertions. It is also important to note that analyses of transitional justice have arrived at similar conclusions, with Hirsch et al. suggesting that truth commissions would be better served by an integrative approach by involving locals in not only measurement, but also design and implementation (2012). Scholars of storytelling have also contended that the best measures of such projects are through locals, for example Moloney (2014) contends that oral history projects are best measured by community members, and accordingly used participant observation and expert interviews to support her research. This project proceeded in a similar vein, albeit participant observation was not feasible (see methods), and emphasised the importance of local experts. It is also a matter of common sense. When measuring the efficacy of a grassroots peacebuilding project, and with a particular emphasis on the communicative methods deployed by the project, it makes sense to start with project leaders and local experts.

3.3 - Meta-conflict and contested narratives

Contested narratives are not unique to Northern Ireland, and typically occur in any post-conflict or transitional state – this is perhaps unsurprising, since the state is seeking to move from a position of entrenched mistrust and even hatred between groups, to one that is peaceful, united and democratic (Posel, 2008). This transition is heavily mediated by transitional justice and peacebuilding institutions, but will be affected by other social institutions such as the media, education and civil society as a whole.

Contested narratives are exemplified in East Timor, where narratives of sacrifice for the sake of peace, preferred by the state and UN-backed transitional justice mechanisms, are resisted by individuals, local communities and NGOS (Kent, 2011). Transitional justice mechanisms play very different roles across these narratives – for example, a trial may be seen as promoting only singular and closed truths in the pursuit of accountability, shutting off debate, but with it potential conversations that may lead to reconciliation (Brants and Klep, 2013). Meanwhile, a truth commission may pave the way for a national narrative (Minow, 2008) although this in turn can allow for further contestation by civil society in the future (Brants and Klep, 2013). The significance here is that the different types of peacebuilding or transitional justice institutions deployed may have implications for the narratives that emerge in a divided society, which in turn can affect the quality of peace. In the case of Northern Ireland, the narrative is one that is characterised by ongoing disagreement between the different identity groups, which is discussed further below.

3.4 - Meta-conflict as a thematic focus

The hypothesis here is simple; that the meta-conflict blocks the road to reconciliation, both by entrenching oppositional narratives and proving a serious headache for peacebuilding and transitional justice mechanisms, in that it poses a question as to how the mechanism in question should challenge these contested narratives. The extent to which it lingers both in general and as a part of storytelling is partially a reverse measure of reconciliation. This is explored further in the concluding section below, where the relationship between the meta-conflict and theories of civil conflict are explored.

Northern Ireland's entrenched contested narratives are often neatly referred to as the "meta-conflict". It can be defined as when:

> In many ethnic or quasi-ethnic conflicts, a conflict-about-the-conflict, or a 'meta-conflict' continues to exist … There remains no agreement as to what the conflict was about, or as to what caused it … there even remains a conflict as to whether any 'armed conflict' took place. (Bell et al., 2004: 316)

The presence of meta-conflict is not unique to Northern Ireland (see above) – it is still significant in other post-conflict societies today, such as in the former Yugoslavia. Examples of this are numerous, from the absence of consensus surrounding the conflict and ethnic segregation in education (Tolomelli, 2015) to the fact that just over half (55.7%) of Serbs accept the details of the massacre at Srebrenica, meaning that nearly half dispute what is seen as one of the ICTY's central accomplishments (Milanović, 2016).

The persistence of meta-conflict in Northern Ireland has serious implications for peacebuilding and transitional justice efforts. Its presence has shaped (and in some ways, been the inception of) the piecemeal, ground-up nature of the post-conflict response, since this means that the need for agreement and a singular approach to the conflict – and transitional justice – is circumvented (Bell, 2003), as well as potentially impossible and even inappropriate. Put simply, the persistence of the meta-conflict in Northern Ireland's governance continues to hamper transitional justice and peacebuilding efforts in the region. For example, the CGP, formed independently with the remit of establishing a way of dealing with Northern Ireland's violent past, has been criticised for its handling of the meta-conflict. Duffy (2010) identifies a number of ways in which it fails to address the meta-conflict, for instance the lack of engagement with sectarianism or the structural inequalities that exacerbate it (2010: 34) as well as vague suggestions that Northern Ireland 'draw a line' under its past, with little explanation as to how or why forgetting is preferable (2010: 44).

The tension between forgetting and moving on, versus remembering and establishing truth is recurrent in the analysis presented here. For some, the pursuit of truth-seeking has a spurious link with reconciliation, and even has the potential to re-traumatise rather than heal the victims (Mendeloff, 2004). The significance of this point for storytelling and meta-conflict as an analytical focus, is that:

> It is arguable that to set out to establish the 'one great truth' about a conflict as complex as that in Northern Ireland may be to set the enterprise up for failure … a broader truth-eliciting process might be tasked with establishing particular truths that cumulatively, contribute to truth (rather than establishing *the* truth) (Bell et al., 2004: 316).

The importance of meta-conflict as an analytical tool is easier to understand when directly applied to storytelling examples. Some authors present the relationship as relatively beneficial, since micro-truths (i.e. the personal accounts of the conflict) are less controversial than the macro-truths (i.e. statements about how the conflict played out, or hierarchies of victimhood) which makes personal storytelling a controversy-free forum for discussing the conflict (cf. Chapman & Ball, 2001; Dybris McQuaid, 2016). What this research seeks to understand is where the cut off is here, and to what extent are these macro-truths (i.e. questions surrounding the meta-conflict) addressed by storytelling processes? Other authors also present the evasion of the meta-conflict as a positive aspect of storytelling; Aguiar explains how those working on the Prisons Memory Archive (PMA):

> Offer very little historical context, eschew archival footage and images of the conflict, and only uses material from the PMA. Moreover, they identify their interviewees by their names, and not by their paramilitary or religious affiliations. As a result, both films promote what unites their participants – being women – rather than by what separates them – being Catholic or Protestant women, republican or loyalist women – and highlight the diversity of people's experiences. (2017: 25)

Other authors have pointed out that while it is a positive that storytelling is not reduced to reproducing sectarian narratives, in doing so it may offer little in the way of explaining some of the overarching narratives of the conflict:

> The oft repeated phrases of 'people getting on with their lives', 'we all bleed, we all hurt, we all suffer' or 'being caught up in violence' work in equalising conflict, but do not really offer many systemic or agentic explanations and interpretations of what happened, but instead describes how (some) people

> lived and coped with circumstances beyond their control. (Dybris McQuaid, 2016: 80)

The aim of the research is not to question the normative value of such a choice or outcome, but to ask if this is typical of storytelling processes, and to try to understand more about the decision making that may (consciously or unconsciously) lead to avoiding controversy, as well as whether this outcome is typical of storytelling projects. However, it is interesting to see storytelling projects avoid challenging this meta-conflict, since the persistence of the meta-conflict is a force that contributed to the political impasse during the fieldwork and generally resulted in the stagnation of political progress and reconciliation in Northern Ireland since the BFA was signed, even if storytelling that cuts to the root of the conflict carries with it a risk of entrenching existing divides (Maiangwa and Byrne, 2015). Research in other contexts has touched upon this tension such as Julia Chaitin's (2014) continuum of personal narratives in the Israel-Palestine conflict, where she argues that narratives of vengeance and victimhood threaten peacebuilding, while narratives expressing confusion and embracing the Other (while still expressing their pain, grievance or loss) are more likely to promote peace.

Whether a storytelling initiative explores the broader contested themes of the conflict or not, stories may still have to conform to existing narratives or agendas (Dybris McQuaid, 2016: 68), which means that the meta-conflict will seep into the process one way or another, given its prevalence in Northern Ireland. For this reason alone, it is important to address the presence of the meta-conflict in storytelling. Existing work on

meta-conflict resolution tends to be far reaching in its scope, exploring the significance of inclusive institutional design, diversity in law enforcement and economic equity (Fitzduff, 2004). However, there is also emphasis on the importance of widening political perspectives, and facilitating intra and inter-community dialogue (Fitzduff, 2004). However, Fitzduff's discussion is broad in scope, and this research explores the potential of storytelling to facilitate meaningful meta-conflict resolving discourse, and what this means in the eyes of experts.

The relationship between the meta-conflict and storytelling in Northern Ireland specifically is relatively understudied. Historic research has demonstrated that competing narratives were propagated by storytelling groups along the Irish border and in nationalist Derry (Dawson, 2007) although the storytelling landscape has since shifted and professionalised – and this research differs in breadth and focus. It is touched upon in existing literature, building up an approximate picture of how existing research views the relationship between the two, but given the heterogenous character of storytelling's methods, a clear picture does not exist. Some insight can be drawn from practitioners and academics calling for storytelling to emphasise multiple (and potentially conflicting) narratives to sit alongside each other (see e.g. Bryson, 2016; Bell et al., 2004) and recent responses to the SHA, and how it may enable storytellers to 'disturb the safety net' (Side, 2017: 348) if indeed aspects like the Oral History Archive (or whatever alternative is proposed since it is now in legacy - limbo) incorporate a diverse range of voices to sit side by side (Hamber and Kelly, 2016). This relates very much to the archival side of storytelling; how stories are positioned in

relation to one another to build up a picture with the hope of promoting reconciliation. While this research is helpful in clarifying some of the positions in this sense, other dimensions remain understudied, or only briefly explained. For instance, the methods deployed in gathering stories, or the approaches to communicating and sharing these stories after they have been gathered. Some answers may be inferred by considering documents regarding various projects approaches to methods and ethics (see e.g. HTR, 2009). This research seeks to draw together these loose threads, and offer a picture of how storytelling critically engages with the contested narratives of Northern Ireland's past.

3.5- The significance of the meta-conflict as a thematic focus

The previous section demonstrates the persistence of meta-conflict within Northern Ireland, and emerging themes regarding its relationship with processes like storytelling. To conclude, it is worth underlining the relevance of meta-conflict as a thematic focus to the broader question of positive peace in Northern Ireland.

If the meta-conflict persists, and goes unchecked, then disagreement surrounding the conflict persists. Disagreement between the affected groups becomes entrenched. When this possibility is considered alongside prominent arguments regarding the onset of civil conflict, this is especially troubling to the prospects of reconciliation. As mentioned above in 2.2, prevailing theories posit that civil conflict is either caused by "greed", i.e. the pursuit of material gain, in particular when it becomes feasible and the "opportunity costs" are low (Collier and Hoeffler, 2012) or "grievance", where identity groups seek to correct perceived injustices perpetrated against them (see Gurr, 2000; Stewart, 2012). Without descending fully into a greed versus grievance analysis here, it is simply worth accepting that much of the civil conflict literature argues that grievances are at least a strong candidate to be the cause of civil conflict – arguably even playing a role in greed-related conflicts, since these tend to be about correcting economic injustices (Berdal, 2005).

The relevance here, then, is that if the meta-conflict is not resolved, then grievances between groups may persist or evolve, and threaten the peace. It is also important to

note the fine line walked by peacebuilders here – stories which actively engage in political discourse have the potential to provoke grievance, the kind of risk that the Rwandan government attempts to avoid by prescribing fixed notions of truth in the post-genocide discourse (Bentrovato, 2017). This research does not seek to make any extravagant claims; it is not argued here that Northern Ireland is on the precipice of civil conflict because of the persistence of meta-conflict.

However, this section has sought to outline a lens through which peacebuilding and transitional justice processes can be meaningfully analysed, and provide findings that can be part of the broader conversation about abstract concepts like positive peace. Finding out if storytelling helps to address the meta-conflict takes on added significance when the prevalence of the grievance-based argument for the onset of civil conflict is factored in and further justifies this analytical framework. Likewise, since storytelling projects do not necessarily claim to be the silver bullet for Northern Ireland's contested narrative, it is helpful to combine a focus upon the meta-conflict and locally-driven interpretations of efficacy (as outlined in 3.2) into the design of the research, and its analysis.

Chapter 4 - Methods

This research used semi-structured, in-depth expert interviews with storytelling leaders. This chapter aims to explain and explore the way in which the research was carried out, and does so by offering a narrative of the research process. This chapter starts by outlining a brief epistemological position. It then moves to the ethical approval and risk assessment phase, which is of increased importance in terms of both the traumatic subject matter and political sensitivity of the material being discussed. This is followed by a discussion of how the research questions would be answered, by outlining the preferred method (semi-structured interviewing) versus a selection of alternatives, and a brief discussion of the advantages and disadvantages offered by the various approaches. Sampling is discussed next, explaining how the research identified storytelling leaders for interview, and subsequently a description of the interviewees and the projects they represented. The manner in which the interviews were conducted is described, with particular focus on questioning, and the dynamics of conducting an interview with an expert. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the outcome of the fieldwork. The chapter is written reflexively, with an emphasis on the challenges encountered and the limitations of the fieldwork explored throughout. The chapter also (briefly) acknowledges further research opportunities or alternatives that became apparent through designing the research and gathering primary data, along with justifications why these alternatives were not pursued in this instance.

4.1 - Epistemological Position

Crotty's (2003) asserts that epistemological positions in social science research design broadly fall into the categories of objective, subjective and constructionist. This research was designed from a constructionist perspective. This seemed the salient epistemological position for this research project given the way that constructionism understands the notion of truth. While objective, positivist research projects may assert that truths exist as concrete facts observable in the world (Ratner, 2012a), and subjectivists hold that no truth exists save the one in the mind of the researcher, preferring to emphasise the subjective freedom of the researcher and subject to explore and interpret reality and truth as they see fit (Ratner, 2012b), constructionism offers an alternative that is more suitable for this project.

Social constructionists accept the relative perspective of subjectivists, positing that no objective truths can be discovered by the researcher, but diverge from subjectivism by emphasising the way in which truth is continually created, revised and destroyed by social interactions (Bryman 2016). This is a more helpful approach for a research project that deals with the way that peacebuilders engage with notions of 'truth' about the contested past of their society, since it enables the project to understand how storytelling facilitators and participants alike seek to shape the truth of the conflict. Additionally, constructionist approaches privilege contextual sensitivity and flexibility over specific methodological commitments:

> In broader terms, they relinquish the grip of 'methodology' as the royal
> road to truth. Methods themselves do not provide guarantees of 'objective
> knowledge', so much as they attest to one's commitment to the realities of
> a particular community. (Gergen and Gergen, 2011: 7)

In this research, Storytelling in Northern Ireland is selected as a case study to illuminate the broader questions relating to the communication of peacebuilding and transitional justice. It is important to note that in a case study approach, the balance ultimately shifts towards a contextually sensitive piece of research, rather than unveiling truths that will speak for all peacebuilding efforts in all civil conflicts. This is typical of qualitative research into areas of conflict and violence, particularly when using interviews. For example, Meschoulam (2014) accepts that it is difficult to transfer the results of interviews regarding the experience of criminal violence for residents of Mexico City to another context, but equally they are easily replicable in other areas, with powerful implications in terms of causal relationships in Mexico City itself. The same is true of this research, in that it has implications for understanding how projects like storytelling relate to post-conflict meta-narratives, and similar approaches could be undertaken elsewhere.

Adopting a social constructionist approach offers not only a context-focused approach, but is also consistent with wider theories regarding ethnic identity, divided societies and the causes of civil conflict. The prevalent theory regarding the construction of ethnic identity is (somewhat confusingly labelled, compared with social constructionism) constructivism (Demmers, 2016), the argument being that identity is socially constructed and adapts through multiple interactions at macro and micro levels, e.g.

modernisation and colonialism shaping identity as much as specific local social practices (Demmers, 2016). Arguments regarding the onset of civil conflict that emerge from constructivism are likewise aware of the interactions of social conditions, and typically divide along lines of either "greed" based arguments, where the primary cause of conflict is seen as the desire for material gain (see Collier and Hoeffler, 2012) and "grievance", where the primary cause is argued to be perceived inter-ethnic injustices, whether these are political, social or economic (see Gurr, 2000, Stewart, 2012).

In short, the research adopts an epistemological position of social constructionism, because it offers a nuanced understanding of how social interactions operate to construct "truth" – a position that is consistent with the tendency for research of post-conflict societies to contain unique explanations as to how the conflict and peace work has unfolded, and particularly true of Northern Ireland. This position also reinforces the prevailing wisdom in academic literature regarding ethnicity, divided societies and civil conflict, since these too argue for no fixed truths, save the socially constructed explanations for these phenomena. This in turn supports how the research interrogates one of the principal areas of focus – the meta-conflict – and how it is negotiated by storytelling. The concept of meta-conflict itself is far better understood in terms of a social constructionist epistemology and constructivist perspective (within civil conflict literature), since the alternative realist approach would be more likely to lead to a primordialist interpretation of ethnicity and conflict. This would tend to posit that ethnicities and inter-ethnic tensions are fixed due to enduring ethnic characteristics, popularised as the "ancient hatreds" arguments (see Varshney, 2007, for summary).

Aside from the fact that, as argued above, primordialist arguments are broadly considered to be inferior explanations of inter-ethnic tension as a whole, it would be particularly flimsy when applied to a case study such as Northern Ireland, where there is very little evidence to support the idea of fixed ethnic identities. Likewise, to disregard the impact of political manoeuvrings and elite interests on the formation of identity and onset civil conflict would be inexcusably short-sighted (Varshney, 2007). Indeed, the importance of questions within the interview regarding interpretations of Brexit, and proposed legislation regarding dealing with the past, underline the importance of a constructionist approach in this regard.

4.2 - Law, Ethical Approval and Risk Assessment

All research undertaken was compliant with UK law at the time it was conducted. Ethical approval was sought through the University of Essex's ethical approval system. This consisted of an ethical approval form that was initially submitted to the project's primary supervisor along with the relevant documentation – in this case, a semi-structured interview template (Appendix 1), research proposal, participant information sheet (Appendix 2) and participant consent form (Appendix 3). Both of the latter two documents were based upon an example of best practice supplied by the University. Following approval from the primary supervisor, the ethical approval form was sent to the Sociology department's ethical approval officer. After making revisions or additions

requested by both the primary supervisor and ethical approval officer, the research proposal was approved.

While ethical approval was being secured, a risk assessment was also drawn up based on University guidelines (Essex.ac.uk, 2019). Risk assessments are considered ongoing processes at the University, but the original document was authorised and required minimal additions during the research. This was because the original design was broad in its scope in terms of potential risk for researcher and participant. The assessment also allowed for the possibility of interviewing storytellers, which brought with it a range of potential challenges, such as the risk of retraumatisation or reprisal.

It was also a challenging document to complete, since there was a significant range of outcomes to consider, and the types of risks that existed in the field were quite different to those that existed in reality. In theory, an English PhD student could have ended up interviewing ex-paramilitaries in isolated republican areas of Northern Ireland; in reality, the bulk of my research ended up being the interviewing of peacebuilders in central Belfast and Derry. This was because the research was initially designed in a way that was open to the possibility of interviewing storytellers, as well as the leaders and facilitators of storytelling. In reality, only the latter was possible; the reasons for which are explored below.

Although the risk assessment did not necessarily accurately predict the exact risks involved, it formed a sound basis that was always informing the research when in the field. Although no interviews took place in specifically risky locations, sometimes the journey to them was through or in areas that might be considered riskier than average

– e.g. through the Bogside a few weeks after the shooting of Lyra McKee (BBC News, 2019a). It is important to note here the tension between perceived risk, in that an English researcher might feel vulnerable traveling through areas affected by dissident Republican violence, and actual risk, considering the areas are broadly free from violence otherwise, and the risks involved are arguably similar to travelling through any city. Equally, advance research of the area was important and undertaken, and it was deemed safe enough considering the overwhelming majority of the violence is directed against the police and the British state, rather than outsiders (BBC News, 2019a). Having made calculations regarding risks in terms of location, and an ongoing consideration of the contextual risks associated with fieldwork in Northern Ireland made it easier to safely plan for these trips, e.g. selecting the safest routes possible when on foot, using taxis where prudent, and scheduling interviews during the day in public locations. Reference to appropriate literature in the research design was also helpful, for instance Julia Chaitin (2003) encourages resilience and sensitivity in the face of social and political identity-specific risks.

Similarly, in terms of unexpected risk, some storytelling leaders were occasionally emotional when discussing particularly distressing stories of loss or tragedy they had encountered as part of their work. Although it should be noted that the bulk of the questioning was on the procedures and social or political context of storytelling, it is ultimately impossible to fully disentangle the subject matter from an interview that is some steps removed from the tragedies at the heart of the conflict. In this case, the careful consideration of the possibilities of distressed storytellers as part of the ethical

approval and risk assessment process, and training undertaken in the first year of the PhD, meant I was in a position to react appropriately. Emotional reactions during in-depth interviewing can also be prepared for through familiarity with relevant literature, e.g. ensuring that adequate suggestions for follow up support are available if needed (Hess, 2006: 584) although typically this was unnecessary as the interviewees were only briefly touching on traumas they had experienced voluntarily in their own work, had already undergone training themselves in managing trauma and potential retraumatisation, and were better immersed in the available conflict-trauma services available in Northern Ireland than I was. For some organisations, addressing the absence of more rigorous state provision in relation to trauma is part of their mandate, so to have me advise them on the matter would have been absurdly arrogant – but familiarity with these services is still a bare minimum when handling interviews of a sensitive nature.

It is also worth noting that ethical and safety considerations in the field were informed by avenues of support offered by the University. First year PhD students are required to attend a weekly colloquium, which typically focused on issues of epistemology and research design, with a significant focus on ethical approval and interview methods. The University also offered a Summer School in Human Rights, which consisted of multiple sessions on interviewing victims of human rights violations.

4.3 - Addressing the research questions

With the area of enquiry identified and epistemological position mapped out, this section turns to the selection of methods or tools to answer the proposed research questions, and why these tools are preferable to others in this context.

The overarching research question is into the way that transitional justice and peacebuilding processes communicate their outcomes to affected populaces. This research seeks to explore the difficulties of negotiating entrenched narratives surrounding conflict, and selects Northern Ireland as a case study due to the prevalence of the meta-conflict, and unique landscape of grassroots peacebuilding and transitional justice organisations. Storytelling was the chosen form of transitional justice or peacebuilding for study; while it enjoys a growing body of research, storytelling also remains an understudied area with an unclear relationship with the meta-conflict. Enquiries into storytelling tend to be specific to a particular project (see for example Lundy and McGovern, 2008 or Aguiar, 2017, among others), focused upon reviewing and summarising existing contributions (see Kelly, 2005; Irish Peace Centres, 2011) or in the instances of more specified areas of focus, the questions of tackling the meta-conflict and entrenched narratives is understudied. Therefore, the following research questions were formed to tackle the overarching area of enquiry:

1. How do storytelling leaders view storytelling's contribution to peace in Northern Ireland?
2. How is storytelling communicated to a wider audience in Northern Ireland?

3.   How does storytelling critically engage with the meta-conflict?

 In order to answer these questions, the research focused upon conducting semi-structured interviews with *storytelling leaders* and *facilitators* (i.e. those who designed, ran and supported the storytelling community). Earlier research designs also included storytelling participants, or *storytellers* (members of the public who shared their story with the facilitators as part of the project) as interviewees, but early on it became clear this would be unfeasible for this particular project. The distinction drawn here is for the sake of the methodological clarity; in reality, some of these facilitators would themselves have stories to tell, and will have shared them in storytelling formats, although others will have remained squarely in the facilitation role. It is also worth bearing in mind that some storytelling projects encourage the exchange of skills and creation of local storytelling leaders, so that the storytelling process is able to continue among communities after the efforts of the original storytelling project, and thus the storytellers can also become storytelling facilitators themselves (see e.g. Peace Process: Layers of Meaning, 2014; peaceprocesshistory.org, 2019b). In most cases, storytelling leaders were the gatekeepers to storytellers themselves, and were understandably very protective of the people they had worked with. Storytelling leaders universally emphasised the importance of trust between facilitator and storyteller, and the challenge of capturing stories. Fear of community reaction or legal action, along with the traumatic nature of reliving experiences made it difficult for local storytellers to capture some accounts. This made it unlikely that a researcher from outside the community would be welcomed, although some storytelling leaders suggested that

being an outsider occasionally came with a perceived neutrality or detachment that some storytelling participants welcomed (Interviewee 18, 2019).

The research was also restricted to leaders for reasons of volume; since storytelling forms one part of Northern Ireland's decentralised (Aiken 2010) grassroots peacebuilding apparatus (McEvoy 2008; McEvoy and Bryson, 2016), a multitude of projects have taken place since the BFA. As a result, there is a relatively large number of people who have been involved in storytelling projects – interviewing both leaders and participants may have led to a dilution of one side's perspective on the research questions. Since this research was ultimately concerned with procedural and theoretical dimensions of storytelling, facilitators were prioritised. That is not to say that the views of participants regarding the communication of storytelling outcomes, or its relationship with the meta-conflict are less important, but simply inaccessible and outside the scope of this project. Posing these questions to storytellers could make for an interesting project for researchers who have the access and scope to do so.

Interviews were selected as the principle method of research for a number of reasons. The heterogeneous character of storytelling (Irish Peace Centres, 2011), set against a backdrop of decentralised peacebuilding lends itself to a probing qualitative analysis. Approaching storytelling from a more quantitative perspective (e.g. use of surveys or regression analyses) could certainly lead to useful insights, such as the extent to which storytelling projects are read and how they are received by the wider population of Northern Ireland in relation to peace and reconciliation. However, this is very much a different set of questions, and are perhaps questions that follow on from the outcomes

of this research. Equally, attempts to measure concepts like reconciliation or the establishment of positive peace in a quantitative sense are notoriously very difficult, as discussed above. At this stage, the gap in knowledge seems to be one best addressed by a qualitative approach.

Semi-structured interviews also have the advantage of being flexible in post-conflict research, allowing the researcher to respond to the diverse experiences of interviewees (Brounéus, 2011). Of course, interviews may flow in various ways when the topic is not conflict-related, but the added dimensions of sectarian divides, entrenched meta-conflict and variety among storytelling processes themselves meant that flexibility was key. Discussions could, and indeed did, go in unexpected directions. The line between storytelling leader and storyteller (in some cases) is extremely thin; many interviewees were keen to share as much as they could, even if it was on the peripheries of the research design. Some interviews veered into the territory of football, family friends or the philosophical nature of what constitutes a story. Semi-structured interviewing helped conversations like this flow, and it was very much an on-the-fly process of judging whether the line of discussion was fruitful. Conversations about technical aspects of storytelling, tackling the political and social aspects of the meta-conflict and discussing what it is like to bear witness to tales of loss and trauma, do not necessarily flow naturally with a stranger. This in itself is enough of a reason to prioritise semi-structured interviewing over more formal or rigid methods, since it allows the interviewer to make judgements about which divergences are potentially leading to

unexpectedly fruitful areas of discussion. The specifics of interviewing, and experts in particular, are explored further below.

4.4 - Sampling

Since definitions of storytelling are typically broad, many projects could potentially fall into the domain of this research. While fieldwork was taking place, the BBC broadcast documentaries with a storytelling dimension such as *The Life After*, detailing the losses of a group of women and their lives after the conflict, interwoven with poetry (BBC, 2019). Another prominent project during the fieldwork was an art collection based on testimony of victims went on exhibition in Northern Ireland, the USA and England (Davidson, 2019). These are just two examples to highlight the ongoing nature of storytelling, and indeed its broad reach, since both projects arguably blend storytelling with other forms of art and peacebuilding methodologies. Storytelling then is not just ongoing, but also evolving, as it interacts with other peacebuilding approaches.

Storytelling is an ongoing process with many processes that may exist at the peripheries. One of the challenges during fieldwork was determining what was relevant, and what was not, since the reality of storytelling on the ground is (unsurprisingly) not neatly demarcated from other manifestations of peacebuilding, transitional justice or civil society work. The fieldwork aimed to be representative of storytelling, and storytelling's most recent large projects. The starting point for sampling was the HTR

subnetwork, known as the Stories Network (HTR, 2015). From there, further contacts were gathered through 'snowball sampling', i.e. gaining access or pointers from interviewees about further suitable and willing participants (Morgan, 2012). Using this was advantageous for four main reasons.

Firstly, the document was the most up-to-date list of storytelling leaders in Northern Ireland (dated 2015). Focusing on more recent projects offers a more original contribution, since earlier projects like the Ardoyne Community Project (Lundy and McGovern, 2008) have already been written about. Bounding the research in the present and recent past also lends significance to the analysis of the interactions between the projects and the persistence of the meta-conflict today.

Secondly, the individuals on the list were drawn from major peacebuilding and civil society groups in Northern Ireland – and thus bigger storytelling projects. This is not to denigrate the efforts of smaller scale projects, but interviewing project leads from larger projects was simply more feasible than interviewing an individual storyteller, or small-scale projects that may not have the resources or inclinations to talk to external researchers. Again, research of smaller, individual storytelling efforts is an area of valid enquiry, but it would be better pursued by a researcher already embedded in the Northern Ireland peacebuilding community, with the contacts and reputation needed to gain access to individuals involved.

Thirdly, being part of the Stories Network implies a commitment to storytelling in the long term, either from the named individuals or from the organisations they represent. Again, this is not to denigrate those that do not belong to the network, as there are many

entirely valid reasons why a storyteller may not choose to be a member, e.g. geographical limitations if they are located outside of Belfast – and the use of snowball sampling in addition to the Stories Network means that organisations that fall outside of it were still captured.

Finally, by being part of the Stories Network, the list represents individuals who specifically identify as storytellers (or oral historians in some cases) and avoids mistakenly focusing on more peripheral projects, e.g. documentary makers and journalists who may conform to some of the aims of storytelling, but may have diverse interests, goals and methods. However, it should also be noted that some storytellers are also journalists and documentary makers. Confusing overlaps like this are clarified by association with the Stories Network, since its membership is a self-selecting means of ensuring the research was dealing with storytelling leaders.

Using the stories network as the starting point for sampling was also far from fool-proof. For instance, as a Belfast-based organisation, some practitioners further afield were not involved, and it was only through snowball sampling that other significant interviewees were identified. This was particularly true of Derry based projects. Equally, presence on the list did not universally guarantee the aforementioned advantages. Access problems typical to this kind of research abounded; some storytelling leaders had moved on to other projects or organisations, or were simply very difficult to get in touch with. Others were accessible, but harder to secure an interview with. Some eventually opted to be interviewed after other interviewees encouraged them to participate. Many organisations had more than one individual participating, but contacting the

organisation directly either resulted in no response, implying an unexplained lack of interest, or an email merry-go-round, with some individuals interested and others implying interviews were not permitted. The outcome of the sampling method was that nineteen interviews were conducted, ranging between one and three hours in length. Many interviews also involved a degree of informal conversation (i.e. unrecorded or transcribed), and some further discussion or orientation at the location; e.g. perusal of archives, publications and associated museums.

4.5 - Who was interviewed?

In short, the approach to sampling was a snowball sampling, using the stories network list as a starting point. The sample is not presented as exhaustive, but representative, since interviews were arranged with a variety of different organisations. Interviewees often worked across a number of organisations or projects. Although many interviewees were happy to be identified through the research, some preferred to remain anonymous, so although the project yielded extensive descriptions of the backgrounds of storytelling leaders, it is more straightforward and ethical to anonymise all.

The projects that the interviewees were involved with are summarised in figure 2. It should be noted that this is a very brief summary of the associated organisations for the sake of characterising the interviewees at to demonstrate the breadth of the sampling.

It should also be noted that the projects in figure 2 are representative of the projects that interviewees are or were involved in, and is not presented as an exhaustive list; there are likely more projects, and indeed sub-projects within specific organisations that there is not sufficient space to cover.

Fig. 2 - Overview of projects that interviewees contributed to.

Organisation or Project	Brief description
Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA)	An organisation that supports couples from different religious backgrounds in Northern Ireland, as well as promoting integrated education and shared social housing (NIMMA, 2019). NIMMA has published two collections of stories, 'Mixed Emotions' (NIMMA, 2012) and 'Both Sides Now' (NIMMA, 2015) about the experiences of couples in mixed marriages.
Dúchas	Dúchas is a Belfast- based organisation set up by the Falls Road Council to gather stories about people's experiences of the conflict. It has also worked with a range of communities in Belfast, and helped train members of other communities in the story gathering process in projects such as 'Pieces of the Past' (Dúchas, 2019).
The Peace Process: Layers of Meaning	A project initially designed to create an archive of 100 interviews regarding the peace process, with an explicit focus on capturing a diverse range of voices in terms of political power, position and involvement in the conflict itself. The project also came to identify the opportunity and importance of developing oral history skills among the groups it came into contact with peaceprocesshistory.org, 2019a).
Diversity Challenges	A charity that aims to encourage cultural change within Northern Ireland, particularly cross-community respect and understanding. It does so through a number of approaches, and has supported a number of storytelling projects. (Diversity Challenges, 2019)
Green and Blue: Across the Thin Line	A project focused on the interactions between the RUC and An Garda Síochána along the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland; the project focused on both training story-gathering and storytelling itself. These stories are published online, and also went on to form the basis of a play. (Green and Blue, 2019)
AFTERMATH	Aftermath makes use of discussion and artistic approaches to storytelling. It explicitly describes itself as not having a political or

	moral position on the conflict in Northern Ireland. It has taken the form of a number of live events and discussions, but also has a selection of interviews (audio and video) available online, in addition to examples of its musical and artistic contributions (Aftermath, 2019)
Accounts of the Conflict (INCORE, Ulster University)	Accounts of the Conflict is a digital archive of multiple storytelling projects, managed by a team at Ulster University. The website both acts as a hub that points visitors towards externally hosted content, as well as a repository for stories that other organisations are prepared to upload directly to the archive (Accounts of the Conflict, 2019).
Prisons Memory Archive (PMA)	The PMA is run from Queens University, Belfast, although it has further support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Community Relations Council. The archive contains 'walk and talk' video stories from those connected with (e.g. prisoners and officers) Armagh Gaol and Maze and Maze Long Kesh prison (Prisons Memory Archive, 2019). The archive footage is from 2006-2007, but the project continues to evolve and is looking for new ways to share its content online. The PMA has also given rise to a number of documentaries and publications, which have subsequently been shared with select groups.
Legacy (BBC)	A project co-ordinated by BBC Radio Ulster. The project gathered a range of testimonies related to the conflict, which were broadcast on Radio Ulster and also published in the form of 12 audio CDs and a book (BBC Northern Ireland, 2008).
Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Foundation (RUCGC)	The RUC GC was established following the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 to commemorate the work of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, which was succeeded by the Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI). The Foundation is both a charity, and following devolution of policing to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2010, it became an executive Non-Departmental Public Body, accountable to the Northern Ireland Minister of Justice (RUCGC, 2019). The RUC GC runs a memorial garden, bursary scheme for policing-related research projects and organises the RUC GC day. This research was primarily concerned with the Oral History branch, which seeks to capture the stories of former RUC personnel. The project has a searchable on-site computerised archive, and a series of purchasable publications in both print and audio format.
Five Decades Project (Forthspring)	The Five Decades Project gathers stories from the 60's through to the 2000's and beyond. Based on Belfast's Springfield road, an area very much seen as an 'interface' (an area where otherwise

	segregated nationalist and republican communities meet, sometimes marked by a 'peace wall'). As such, stories are gathered from both side with the aim to create a 'shared, but not agreed, account of the conflict' (Forthspring Inter Community Group, 2019). The project is a part of Forthspring, an inter-community group that runs a number of projects that aim to provide local services and encourage cross-community relationships (Forthspring Inter Community Group, 2019). Forthspring runs a number of storytelling-related projects, which make use of the stories gathered as part of the Five Decades Project.
Unheard Voices	A project based in Derry aiming to give voice to the experiences of women during the conflict, and to promote reconciliation between the different groups in Derry. The project promoted intergroup contact and co-operation in the first instance, before generating stories from the participants. (Campbell, 2016)
Towards Understanding and Healing (TUH)	TUH is a Derry-based organisation which has a diverse range of peacebuilding and reconciliatory aims, which offers 'a space for people to begin to articulate and share personal stories and also listen to other stories or 'truths' in a way that does not diminish their own personal experience' (TUH, 2019). The organisation aims to capture a diverse range of voices, and as opposed to some of the oral history inclined projects, makes use of live "story or talking circles". In addition to this, TUH is engaged in other storytelling projects, including publications, educational visits and exhibits drawing on its work. It also has an interest in influencing policy related to dealing with the past.
Recovery of Living Memory Archive (RoLMA) (Pat Finucane Centre)	RoLMA is storytelling project working within the Pat Finucane Centre. The Derry-based organisation works with victims by engaging with statutory bodies, e.g. requesting documents from court services. RoLMA is consistent with this approach, as a victim-centred storytelling project. It focuses on truth-recovery and expression on behalf of affected families. It uses a three phase approach; to offer advocacy and support to create a document that outlines the facts of the victim's death, a record of the impact of the death, and finally combining the previous two phases into a document to be stored in the Linenhall Library, Belfast and National Library, Dublin (Patfinucanecentre.org, 2019).
Journalists	A number of journalists past and present were interviewed. Newspaper articles may be on the peripheries of more rigid definitions of storytelling, but given the reach of a story being

	published in the media and the overlaps of journalists and storytelling project co-ordinators (in some cases they are one and the same) journalist interviews are included here. Journalists interviewed worked for the BBC and the Irish Times, among others.
Stories from Silence (WAVE Trauma Centre)	Stories from Silence was a major storytelling project commissioned by the WAVE Trauma Centre. It has three main thematic strands, dealing with stories from senior citizens, the experience of losing a parent, and the experience of losing a child. The project has a website with summaries and where excerpts can be listened to (Storiesfromsilence.com, 2019). A third phase has launched since the fieldwork was carried out.
	WAVE also support a number of smaller storytelling-related projects which can be seen through the website and social media sites – e.g. single storytellers hosting an event or series of events, as opposed to broader projects like Stories from Silence. Additionally, WAVE supports projects such as Silent Testimony, a series of portraits related to individuals who experienced loss due to the troubles. More recently, it has used Silent Testimony works and other gathered stories as a source to protest the lack of a victim's pension (see Chapter 9). Projects like this fall just outside the scope and remit of this research, but indicate the extensive work WAVE does in a storytelling and victim support.
Major Ecumenical/Peacebuilding Groups	Staff at major ecumenical (i.e. cross-denominational) peacebuilding organisation were interviewed. The organisation implements storytelling projects alongside a wider body of peacebuilding and ecumenical projects. The exact organisations are kept deliberately ambiguous due to requests for anonymity.

To summarise, the interviewees were drawn from a range of organisations and projects that meant their roles included NGO worker, academic, journalist and volunteer. Often interviewees could be described as more than one of these simultaneously. Backgrounds varied in terms of national identity (Irish, British, Northern Irish), age (some would have experienced the entirety of the Troubles) and association with the different protagonists of the conflict, although this was not a focal point of the interview. Since all interviewees shared a commitment to peacebuilding, pushing for an account

of their ideological position seemed intrusive, although sometimes it was apparent by association, volunteered or inferred without prompting. The shared ground was always significant involvement in leading or carrying out a major storytelling project. In terms of interviewee gender, ten were male and nine were female, although gender identities were not explicitly declared. Interviewee age groups varied considerably, and were also not specifically recorded or declared. As an extremely rough approximation, eight interviewees were closer to my own age at the time of the fieldwork (mid 30's) while the remaining eleven would have likely experienced much of, if not the entirety, of the period labelled as 'the Troubles' (1969-1998). This comparison is not to dismiss the conflict experience of younger interviewees, who would have inevitably experienced a great deal of exposure to violence and division in their earlier years, and during the burgeoning post-agreement peace.

The aim was to capture as wide a range of storytelling projects as possible – therefore no attempt was made to privilege or disregard any particular identity group during the process of selecting interviewees and projects to approach. Each project has its own background – some are emphatically neutral; others originate in areas that have a specific political identity. The particulars of how these different organisations operate is explored further in the analysis, but it is worth emphasising here that the research simply sought to interview as wide a range of major storytelling facilitators as possible.

4.6 - How were interviews conducted?

Interviews were arranged primarily over email in advanced of fieldwork trips, or over Skype or telephone. Three separate fieldwork trips were conducted, two to Belfast (28th January to 2nd February, and April 1st to April 4th 2019), and one to Derry (13th- 15th May 2019). Fieldwork trips were funded by the University of Essex Sociology Department Small Graduate Grant fund, which awards funds to postgraduate students for the purposes of fieldwork, conferences and other research-related expenditures.

Interviews that took place in Belfast and Derry were typically located in areas suggested by interviewees. In some cases, the choices were obvious – a handful worked at Queen's University or Ulster University, or had strong ties with them, and were happy to meet in offices or library rooms there. Many projects were part of wider organisations, and had an office assigned to them – for example, Dúchas sits within the Falls Road Council buildings, and the Five Decades Project is run by the Forthspring Inter Community Group, which itself is situated within the Springfield Methodist Church, Belfast. A handful of groups had their own offices, such as NIMMA and TUH. In all of these instances, the practical side of interviewing was very straightforward. Interviews were conducted in a quiet space where interviewees were comfortable, and all parties were safe and secure since they were within a building with others coming and going.

Interviews without an obvious meeting point, or organisation-specific facilities were more complicated, since some interviewees no longer worked on a specific project, or

worked across projects but did not have a particular project or base to make use of. Others were more practical considerations, e.g. interviewees who worked outside of Belfast, but would travel in for personal reasons. In all of these cases, the interviews had to take place in public locations, typically cafes, hotel lobbies or communal workspaces inside Universities. With this came problems fairly typical when interviewing in public spaces such as uncontrollable ambient noise levels, which makes transcription challenging. Another completely unexpected consequence of public interviews was being interrupted – on one occasion the interview was interrupted by the person on a neighbouring table who found our conversation interesting and relevant to their own studies. The conversation ended up taking a detour and business cards were swapped, but ultimately this was an unavoidable and essential part of the research. Storytelling facilitators work on limited funds or sometimes on a completely voluntary basis; they are offering their free time to talk to someone they have never met about traumatic events. Given that not all potential participants were interested, available or even replied, the fact they were willing to participate meant doing so on their terms, so long as it was safe and ethical.

A further four interviews were conducted remotely. Two were conducted via Skype, and two were conducted over the telephone. This made the recording process more straightforward, but certainly affects the interview dynamic. Skype conversations have a tendency to be stilted due to a delay in the connection, where both parties either talk over each other or allow for longer pauses to compensate for the delay (see Seitz, 2016 and Iacono et al., 2016). Phone conversations are preferable in this regard since there

was no delay, but they are still at a disadvantage when compared to in-person interviewing due to the complete absence of body language, or ambiguities regarding the level of focus of the interviewee (Christmann, 2009: 177). Skype has the potential to overcome this issue since it makes use of cameras, although the aforementioned problems and the visibility of a stream of your own camera makes for a comparably unnatural process. These were important interviews that could not be conducted any other way due to where the interviewees lived, and technology was pivotal in capturing these voices; albeit the establishment of trust between interviewer and interviewee is somewhat more challenging in these instances. However, there is a growing body of literature that is helpful in mollifying the disadvantages of these approaches, and indeed the same literature emphasises how the Skype approach may actually be more effective at building rapport than researchers may initially think – i.e. through the added effort required in terms of email exchange and overcoming technical obstacles together (Seitz, 2016).

4.7 - Questioning

Interviews were semi-structured (as explained above) and followed a loose structure as outlined in Appendix 1. Key areas of enquiry were identified in relation to the research questions, with potential, likely follow up questions listed as prompts in interview. The questions differ slightly from the overarching research questions, and ultimately seek

to probe aspects of the research question; as Wengraf (2001) points out, it is unusual to simply pose research questions to interviewees, and advantageous to break them down into separate (closely related) questions.

Conversations unsurprisingly flowed differently between participants and resulted in very different directions of questioning, although ultimately all interviews moved through the same thematic phases of discussion. Some questions became more or less relevant as the research progressed. For example. The question 'Has storytelling contributed to peace and justice in Northern Ireland?' became redundant early on. Interviewees made it clear through their narrative statements and general discussions of storytelling that they felt it had made a contribution. It became far more interesting to unearth what *kind* of contribution they felt it had made, and the way it had happened. Ultimately, it was rarely used unless it became unclear what the participant's view of storytelling really was. In those cases, the interviewee's evaluation of storytelling was far too nuanced and multicausal to be sufficiently understood by simply asking if storytelling had contributed to reconciliation; which once again serves to underline the helpfulness of a semi-structured approach. It meant that far more meaningful questions could be asked in relation to storytelling's ultimate contribution to reconciliation, even if the research cannot quantify storytelling's contribution to reconciliation.

Two questions were added early on, as they emerged as questions repeatedly asked as part of the flow of a semi-structured approach. The questions added were related to the interviewee's involvement and view of the public consultation regarding the SHA (see Appendix 1 and gov.uk, 2019), and the extent to which they saw storytelling as a process

that offers justice. The focus on the SHA was something that was considered prior to the first fieldwork trip, since it became clear that it was having an effect on the research, in that a number of organisations were preparing their responses and submissions for the public consultation around the time I was trying to secure interviews (Summer 2018). It was incorporated as a question during the first fieldwork trip, and then for subsequent fieldwork trips and interviews where appropriate, simply because it was something most storytelling leaders were quick to raise in their interview.

Assessing the justice dimension of storytelling became more prominent in the research as I reflected on the differences between the literature and the reality of storytelling in the field. While there is plenty of literature exploring the nature of grassroots transitional justice, it was not clear in early interviews whether or not storytelling facilitators saw their work as justice-related. This question became essential in interpreting the research's position in relation to the literature that informed its design, and understanding storytelling's contribution and communication of peace in Northern Ireland.

The aim for each interview was to have posed as similar a set of questions as possible to each, in order to ensure relative reproducibility of the research. However, questioning in practice varied along four main lines.

1. Some questions were pre-prepared or tailored to an interviewee's experience or expertise.
2. Questions were reworded to try to make the conversation flow more naturally, in response to the directions the interviewee took.
3. Interviews were affected by my own experience and progress as a researcher.

4. Questions were omitted due to time constraints, or irrelevance.

Specific questions were sometimes written in advance of an interview to interrogate a particular area of expertise an interviewee possessed, or a particular dimension of the projects they had worked on that had significance to the research – examples of the latter may include highlighting specific stories in a project that touch upon the meta-conflict, e.g. a couple from opposing religious backgrounds explaining how they specifically avoid talking about local politics (NIMMA, 2012: 16). In other cases, it seems unintuitive to not ask questions that may illuminate the research, but may not apply to other interviewees who do not possess the same expertise. A selection of tailored questions can also help to build rapport, in that it demonstrates to the interviewee knowledge and respect for their work.

The semi-structured approach meant that sometimes the question being asked would be phrased in different ways; it may have been that the interviewee covered the content in an opening narrative statement, or that they used alternative language to explain their perceptions. An example of this was the distinction of storytelling versus oral history, which itself offered an interesting line of discussion with interviewees. This example also serves to underline the importance of appreciating the differences between interviewees. Asking each interviewee identical questions, or questions that were not worded suitably to reflect the flow of discussion, would have been inappropriate.

Some interviewees possessed specific expertise regarding oral history; failure to dig deeper into their understanding of the subtle differences between storytelling and oral

history would have been a missed opportunity. To take the issue of interviewee difference further, it also risked offence to not vary questioning appropriately when interviewing. This is why researching interviewees in advance, and carefully navigating the interview with appropriate flexibility, were essential to elucidating broadly similar sets of data in the most appropriate way possible.

An alternative approach could have been to have relentlessly questioned each interviewee with little consideration for the potential to give offence. This kind of questioning has arguably become commonplace within mainstream journalism (see Mutch, 2015) and may be appropriate in other academic contexts where the interviewee is likely to be intentionally obscuring the truth, notoriously unresponsive to any other type of approach or where the interviewer is politically and socially disadvantaged (see feminist approaches to interviewing, Obelenė, 2009). This would have been inappropriate in a context where people were keen to share their experiences of storytelling, had no reason to obscure truth and freely given their time to share their views. It would also have had a negative effect on the snowball sampling method, since the storytelling community is closely-knit by umbrella organisations like HTR, as well as the way in which individuals work across different projects. In short, it would have been unethical and ineffective to not tailor questions to each interviewee, where appropriate.

A question might also be worded differently simply to ensure it flowed naturally within the conversation, or to reflect on the way the direction the conversation had already taken. As mentioned above, this was done given the importance placed upon establishing a rapport for the sake of asking complex questions and building a positive

relationship with the broader storytelling community. Although I have conducted interviews in the past as part of a Post Graduate Certificate in Education, and undertook the necessary training as mentioned above, as an early researcher my interview abilities developed as the research progressed. At the beginning I was keen to keep conversations as fluid as possible, but realised that while that may be ideal, at times the interview will need to change direction abruptly. As such, questions were reworded in pursuit of a natural conversation, but as the research progressed, I felt increasingly confident as an interviewer and more able to determine when an interviewee was ready for an abrupt change in focus, whether to shift to an entirely different area of the semi-structured interview plan, or to bring the interviewee back to a relevant point they touched upon but did not fully explore.

Occasionally, questions would simply not be asked at all. This would usually be due to lack of time, since interviewees were ultimately giving up their free time to offer the interview. Circumstances varied, but interviews took place in a number of time-restricted contexts. Given the aforementioned difficulty of securing interviews, it was important to respect time boundaries. Another reason for omitting a question was relevance. If it was clear an interviewee had not been involved in the design of a storytelling project, but had another area of expertise, certain questions were omitted in order to understand their work.

4.8 - Expert interviews

Having explored some of the dynamics of semi-structured interviews above, it is helpful to also pay attention to the specifics of expert interviews. As Meuser and Nagel explain, much can be made of defining an expert, but common sense should prevail, and researchers should be able to identify those who possess exceptional knowledge of the phenomena they are investigating (2009: 17-19). All of the interviewees were experts, whether in an objective sense as a senior figure within the storytelling community, or in a more contextually relevant sense, in that they were experts of their own projects.

An unavoidable challenge when interviewing experts in a context as distinct as Northern Ireland's, is the mismatch in terms of contextual knowledge. As an 'outsider' approaching the project as a case study to illustrate the way in which peacebuilding and transitional justice is communicated, my knowledge (as interviewer) of Northern Ireland's broader history and conflict was considerably less than theirs. No amount of preparatory work could bridge the gap to an individual who has either lived through the conflict as an adult, or been born during the conflict and grown up in the complex political and social landscape of a country emerging from civil conflict. On top of this gulf in experiential knowledge, is the expertise gained from careers dedicated to peacebuilding. In most cases, storytelling leaders interviewed had worked in related fields for much of their working lives. Much of the existing literature regarding storytelling has been written by experts who have been working on an associated project (for example Aguiar, 2017; Moloney 2014) and thus have gained the expertise

that allows them to conduct research on an equal footing through 'ethnographic embedding' (see Pfadenhauer, 2009). Trying to capture a range of storytelling projects, without prior work experience in Northern Ireland's peacebuilding efforts poses significant challenges in terms of knowledge and credibility when conducting these interviews.

Despite the aforementioned disadvantages of the knowledge gap, the reality was simply some occasional gaps in contextual knowledge (e.g. specific dates in Irish history, or mixing up Derry-born professional footballer James McClean with Hammersmith-born Aaron McClean; doubly embarrassing for a PhD student who follows football) that may provoke a raised eyebrow from an interviewee, although these could often be a talking point in the interview itself, regarding the absence of interest and knowledge endemic in mainland UK in relation to Northern Ireland (see Greenslade, 2013). The main negative impact this could have is in terms of rapport building, particularly when compared with a researcher who has already 'embedded' themselves in Northern Ireland.

However, the status of 'quasi-expert', i.e. the interviewer with *some* but comparatively less expertise, (Pfadenhauer, 2009) also possesses certain advantages to offset these disadvantages. For instance, the quasi-expert is free from the 'burden of competition' (Trinczek, 1995: 63, as cited in Pfadenhauer, 2009), a term that maybe applies more firmly to interviews of individuals in distinctly competitive environments (e.g. business managers) but may also apply here, in the sense that my externality and inferior knowledge of their work may encourage an openness and reflexivity, that perhaps

would be less pronounced if interviewed by someone with similar knowledge and experience (e.g. another storytelling expert). This was certainly reflected to the extent that most interviewees expressed a satisfaction at having had the chance to participate, and share their experiences or views, particularly those that had moved on from storytelling to different careers.

The ability to offer an input into the interview (such as an appropriate counterpoint or request for clarification) beyond simply following a set of pre-designed questions creates a greater degree of openness (see Pfadenhauer, 2009; Meuser and Nagel, 2009). It also reaffirms the importance of a flexible and semi-structured approach to interviews with such potentially sensitive and complex content. As the research progressed, interviews felt more fluent and perhaps managed to probe further, as conversations became more natural and the type of questions the research needed became more apparent.

Some scholars have identified specific tensions that exist in expert interviewing, particularly when deploying democratic research principles. Obelenė (2009) urges caution in terms of involving interviewees at each phase of the research, since it risks inviting them to censor and control the work the researcher is doing. This research heeds this warning, but when discussing matters of such a sensitive nature, a democratic approach was sensible in terms of ensuring future interviews, building positive relationships and reputation within the storytelling community, as well as normatively speaking.

4.9 - Outcome of fieldwork and analytical approach

The interviews were successful in the rudimentary sense of gathering primary data; each interview contributed data that was relevant to the research questions. Many of these interviews also yielded further data, in terms of gathering publications and reports. Despite the detailed explanations of pitfalls and challenges above, the interviewees answered the questions in detail. No questions were refused, and detail was freely given, apart from where the interviewee felt it may be incriminating or risky. Despite some of the difficulties of interviewing, most interviewees were keen to explain their work and its significance. Each interview was recorded for transcription, yielding a substantial amount of data for analysis.

The interview audio was transcribed by a private transcription company. The researching and vetting of transcription providers was a particularly lengthy process to ensure value, security, ethical practice and legal compliance. I proofread transcriptions and did a first edit, for instance revisiting words that transcribers had struggled with, correcting complex words or place names (although the standard regarding the latter was surprisingly high) and doing some early formatting in terms of punctuation and grammar. Quotes that were eventually used were double checked against the original audio to ensure that the punctuation and grammar was as close as possible to the original audio, albeit sticking to the 'smart-verbatim' approach to ensure fluidity rather than unnecessarily reproduce stammers, repetition etc.

Analysis was conducted in NVivo. The transcriptions were entered into the software and 'codes' were created, i.e. coding themes and subthemes that could be assigned to specific excerpts of text. The process used to generate codes was generally that of a thematic content analysis – this was ongoing throughout the fieldwork, and continued with the reading and re-reading of transcripts, while identifying analytical themes. Codes could then generate nodes; collections of coded text from across the fieldwork that corresponded to a particular theme, e.g. the goal of storytelling. Codes began as broader themes, but eventually sub codes also became apparent. The overarching coding themes were established through the thematic content analysis, and are the chapters presented in Chapters 5-9, and the sub-chapters are the sub-themes or codes that are more specific examples that feed into the broader theme. These themes became clearer as the research progressed and certain patterns emerged in the content of interviews; e.g. early on it became apparent that there was unity regarding the gathering of stories, but dissent over how to share them. This gave shape to the analysis in terms of the broader themes (i.e. chapters) but more specific themes emerged as the thematic content analysis progressed, e.g. coding comments about the SHA as a sub-theme of Chapter 9, which deals with the obstacles to story-sharing.

Nodes also referred back to overarching research questions, particularly regarding the ways in which storytelling critically engaged with the meta-conflict. In line with the shift in questioning, the research question "how do storytelling leaders view storytelling's contribution to peacebuilding in Northern Ireland?" was not an explicit analytical focus, and instead was answered in reference to both the other questions regarding the meta-

conflict and the communicating of stories, and implicitly by understanding the methods

and philosophies behind storytelling projects.

Chapter 5 - Storytelling, story-gathering and the meta-conflict

The analysis of the fieldwork is split in half based on a distinction made here between story-gathering and story-sharing. The terms are self-explanatory, in that story-gathering refers to the collection of stories and testimonies, while story-sharing refers to the ways in which stories are shared with a wider audience beyond the original group of storytellers. The distinction is imperfect, since for some projects storytelling will overlap – for instance, in events where people tell their story to a live audience. However, the distinction is justified on the basis that it is along these lines that the most striking difference emerged during the fieldwork. It is also worth noting the distinction between storytelling facilitator, expert or leader and storyteller. The former (facilitator, expert or leader) are the individuals that were interviewed for this research, and constitute the leaders, experts and designers of storytelling. Storytellers are those who tell their story, the process of which may vary depending on the approach of the project, but could be more simply defined as the participants. Again, the distinction is imperfect since storytelling facilitators may also share their stories, and in many cases projects incorporate an element of participant training so that storytellers themselves also become storytelling facilitators (e.g. Green and Blue, 2014; peaceprocesshistory.org, 2019b).

Storytelling facilitators are united in their approach to story-gathering, in that storytellers are free to share stories that may challenge the meta-conflict. However,

there is much more uncertainty and difference around the extent and the way in which those stories should be shared, and indeed if those stories should be used to actively challenge the meta-conflict. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 explore how storytelling is relatively unified in its approach to story-gathering. Chapters 8 and 9 reflect on the diverse views around story-sharing.

This chapter argues that storytelling projects, and specifically the story-gathering phase of storytelling projects, allow for critical engagement with the meta-conflict. There are two main sections to this argument. However, before explaining these, it is first helpful to return to what is meant by critically engaging with the meta-conflict. The meta-conflict is the conflict *about* the conflict, the persistent disagreement in divided societies afflicted by ethnic conflict after the violence stops about what the conflict was about, why it happened, how it was fought (see Bell et al., 2004). Storytelling that critically engages with the meta-conflict is therefore the telling of stories which seek to disrupt this stalemate. Storytelling may also achieve this in terms of its broader construction, by representing a wide range of perspectives (cf. Hamber & Kelly, 2016) and 'complicating' (a phrase used by Interviewee 3 and 6) the debate. However, this research also asks whether storytelling can encourage storytellers to challenge narratives or present stories that seek to comment on the meta-conflict. Naturally, there is a fine line between avoiding storytelling that is excessively 'safe', and simply further entrenching divided perspectives. An alternative phrasing of this line was recently offered by Dybris McQuaid et al., who argue for the democratisation of post-conflict remembrance (2019/20). They continue:

> In dialogues with the past, this means challenging both an antagonistic memory mode where groups are remembering "against" each other and rejecting each other's past, sometimes violently, but it also means complicating cosmopolitan modes of memory in which global discourses of individual human rights and universal norms may cloak ongoing conflict, contestation, and emotional belongings. Instead, an agonistic mode of memory would accept ongoing political conflicts and group identification but aim to challenge this without violence and preferably without entrenching differences. (Dybris McQuaid et al., 2019/2020: 723)

The first section argues that the goals of storytelling projects allow participants to critically engage with the meta-conflict. However, it is clear that the more specific goals of storytelling projects are diverse, and this section also explains these goals in relation to the other research questions, i.e. the views of storytelling facilitators of storytelling's contribution to peacebuilding in Northern Ireland more generally.

The second section argues, through considering the design and underpinning philosophies involved, that storytelling facilitators have created a platform that is free from partisan loyalties and privileges above all else the voice of the storyteller. This gives them the option to present a story that critically engages with the meta-conflict – if they choose to do so. Storytellers critically engaging with the meta-conflict is not always guaranteed, but it is certainly a possible and real outcome of storytelling projects in the story collection phase.

5.1 - The goal(s) of storytelling

Capturing the goal of storytelling is very difficult, since there are many different projects from different backgrounds.

This section begins by describing the centrality of the storyteller as an aim, which gathers together expressed goals which, while still diverse in character, all share an emphasis in the storyteller as a point of focus. It also considers the way in which storytellers view reconciliation; a nebulous concept which storytelling facilitators are broadly cautious of using. The final two parts of this section argue that storytelling is committed to capturing and representing a diverse range of views to complicate what has otherwise become a simplistic and binary post-conflict narrative, and that storytelling facilitators do not aim to prevent stories from covering or challenging aspects of the meta – conflict - if anything, allowing it due to a commitment among facilitators to allow storytellers to tell the story they want – a commitment explored when the specifics of storytelling design are considered.

5.1.1 - Centrality of the storyteller: Catharsis, Therapy and Acknowledgement

A recurring pattern in the way that storytelling facilitators approached their projects was to place the storyteller at the front and centre of everything they did. This may seem self-evident, since the projects would not exist without the storytellers, but ultimately a storyteller, or a family of storytellers, will shape the focus of their stories:

> So, for example, some families might want to primarily focus on the person when they were alive. Some people…some families don't know why we only really tell the story of the death. Some people might not want the ins and outs of the actual death, they might want to focus on their thirty years of campaign work, trying to clear their name, try to find out information. It really depends. (Interviewee 16, 2019)

Interviewee 16 was talking in the context of fleshing out the details of a person's life, since sometimes a victim could be reduced to a story about their death, and little more. The importance of this acknowledgement furthers the case for storytelling as an abstract form of transitional justice, since de Greiff emphasises recognition as an immediate aim (2012) of transitional justice, although the term acknowledgement is used frequently by interviewees and within the literature (Shea, 2010; Hamber & Kelly, 2016). The extent to which storytellers chose to explore broader issues like reconciliation and critically engage with the meta-conflict was ultimately determined by them, and their needs in that situation.

The sense of storytellers benefitting personally and immediately from the experience is most commonly expressed in terms of storytelling as a therapeutic process, although not all storytellers would welcome therapy as an expressed aim of their work:

> That's another thing that we would talk about or would have talked about a lot at the Storytelling Network, of different kind of projects and "this is a therapeutic process", and for me, the Oral History part of it, my aim in it is not to make it a therapeutic process, which I do think is a more intimate process, whereas this is a recorded interview which is going to go into public domain. I certainly would be very interested in creating a process that doesn't cause harm, I don't want it to cause harm, that's my … that would be my motivation in the design of it, how people can have some kind of control over this process. So, there have been a couple contributors that have said to me that they have experience a release feeling out of it, but that's not what we design into it. (Interviewee 6, 2019)

For this project, any kind of therapeutic benefit was a fortunate coincidental dividend, rather than the aim of the project. Storytelling leaders varied widely on the topic, frequently acknowledging the importance of catharsis or release of some description, but often stopping short of describing it as an outright goal of the project, or raising problems with that assumption – which is corroborated by existing literature which emphasises this diversity (see Hackett & Rolston, 2009; Dybris McQuaid, 2016). When questioned, interviewees were often unsure as to how explicitly they would label storytelling as cathartic, or how easily it can be disentangled from another aspects:

> Interviewee: I'm not sure; catharsis, yes … but not really. I don't think I used the word catharsis.
>
> Interviewer: No sorry you didn't. That's me.
>
> Interviewee: I think you're paraphrasing and I'm not sure that that's quite what I mean. It was more like a kind of debriefing to that extent. But as I said to you initially, as a journalist instinctively I have a duty to the listener, so I'm not just thinking about the person I'm talking to, I am thinking about

them, but I'm thinking about how can we get this across to increase understanding or deepen understanding for the listener. And I think that they're kind of intertwined really, because if people know that they're telling their story because it's actually now going to be showcased, and it's going to be out there and it's going to become part of public narrative, I think that's actually very validating. So, it's a double-edged sword, they're intertwined and they're not independent of each other; they're interlinked. I think that fact that it is going to be put out there… and I think it's important that individual stories like this become part of the public narrative about conflict or any of these very painful issues in society. (Interviewee 18, 2019).

Terms such as catharsis and therapy may be avoided by some storytelling facilitators since they are loaded with assumptions about the objective psychological benefits. This is potentially problematic, because:

There's also the kind of assumption that it's healing and cathartic for people to tell their stories. So, a lot of projects are kind of motivated by that assumption as well. Whether that's evidenced or not isn't really measured very often. (Interviewee 11, 2019)

Other interviewees describe the emotional dimension of storytelling, but stop short of labels like catharsis or therapy:

In my experience there's been a number of those kind of processes where I've sat down and I've interviewed individuals or multiple family members, and…the process could have taken months longer even because when somebodies own words are reflected back to them, it can be very…can be difficult to read. But the pain that's felt in that sort of short term, and then the feeling of relief and the feeling of…that they have achieved this and they've actually done something to remember their loved one…is just so…can be really, really powerful. (Interviewee 16, 2019).

The above quote was in relation to work done by the Pat Finucane Centre, which also has a broader role as an organisation in terms of advocacy and lobbying for families and

victims. If therapy is too controversial a label for the goals of storytelling, then perhaps acknowledgement is less so. It is perhaps a better fit for the symbiotic relationship between publication, validation and any kind of emotional benefit that comes from storytelling, as described in the quote above from Interviewee 18. Other interviewees supported this idea; that the emotional benefits of storytelling are hard to pin down, save for the significance of having a story acknowledged.

> Yeah, I was just going to say, so maybe sometimes the goal isn't necessarily even anything tangible. I know, for some families, that actually the goal is just about acknowledgement. So actually, having your loved one's named spoken, or in the paper, or in a book, or somewhere. It means that they're remembered. (Interviewee 17, 2019)

The diverse ways that terms like catharsis, therapy, emotion, acknowledgement and relief are understood and used underlines the lack of agreement among storytelling leaders about how central they are, and the extent of their effects. A broad summary would be that most storytellers accept that emotional release from storytelling is at least a secondary benefit, but that complications surrounding this assumption persist. The significance of any kind of emotional release for this research is where facilitators underline the extent to which it has contributed to peacebuilding in Northern Ireland, and its implications for the meta-conflict. The relatively small numbers of people experiencing catharsis through storytelling, while beneficial, is proportionately quite unlikely to make a significant impact on a societal level. Storytelling projects gather testimonies in the hundreds rather than the thousands – for example, the PMA contains 175 stories, (Nidirect, 2020), while Dúchas contains over 250 (Dúchas, 2020), to illustrate the numbers participating in the immediate sense. What is perhaps more interesting for

this research is the way in which these stories are then communicated, since that is part of the validation process and has the potential to affect a broader audience – this is explored in greater detail in chapters 8 and 9. It is also important to understand how storytellers use their platform, and if any particular topics are engaged with in the process of this (potential) catharsis. This is explored further below, and in 5.2.

5.1.2 - Reconciliation

As discussed before, reconciliation is a notoriously intangible concept to pin down – something that storytelling facilitators perhaps are increasingly aware of, since many did not speak explicitly in terms of reconciliation when discussing the goal of storytelling. If anything, reconciliation is perhaps deployed as part of the language of describing the aims of a project, rather than being a concept that is fleshed out, defined and measured. This may be a result of EU PEACE funding that required an element of reconciliatory or intergroup work to secure funding (Interview 11, 2019). EU PEACE programmes also make various references to the term, for example stating 'reconciling communities and contributing to peace' and '[European] Parliament underlined the importance of the PEACE programme in building progress , economic and social cohesion and reconciliation between communities' (European Parliament, 2019) as key aims, although typically retaining the uncertainty of the term. That said, there is

certainly a history and a strong associational link between the two, (see Dybris McQuaid,

2016):

> I have experienced it being about reconciliation, but it isn't necessarily
> about reconciliation, whereas I know other practitioners feel that it is
> necessarily about reconciliation. So, I do think there's a lot of different
> motives for the people designing different projects but also there's a lot of
> different motives for the people taking part, for the contributors…
> (Interviewee 6, 2019)

Although this quote suggests it is not a universal trend, it suggests for some it was a key

motivator. Most interviewees largely avoided the term, or spoke about reconciliation in

heavily-couched terms, emphasising the ambiguity of the term, or the naivety of

applying it to Northern Ireland in the present context – which is consistent with Hamber

and Kelly's (2018) assessment of using the term. Perhaps Interviewee 6 has convinced

fellow storytelling facilitators of the pitfalls of conflating storytelling, peacebuilding and

reconciliation – or reconciliation is simply used as a catch-all term for various projects

that aim to broadly promote peace, contact or de-mythologising the Other, without a

specific commitment from the project to ensure (or define) reconciliation in a concrete

sense. For example, some facilitators would talk about reconciliation as being an aspect

of the project, given the Northern Ireland context versus oral history in the rest of the

United Kingdom:

> Interviewee: Well I just understood that it was just simply giving a voice to
> ordinary people. And that's the way that they've put…gone down that
> route. If you're talking about storytelling, perhaps, or oral history in the
> context of Norfolk, then you wouldn't have that reconciliation presumably.
> [. . .] An element of reconciliation. It's not something that I would have
> seen…perhaps generally, outside of Northern Ireland. Perhaps other areas
> where you have had conflict but I would have thought, you're talking about
> storytelling, the mill workers around Bradford or something, then there

wouldn't be that same...again, I'm being naive, but I just don't see it as the same game at all.

Interviewer: No. So reconciliation is an important component of it, for you, then? Particularly in this context?

Interviewee: Well that came...the Royal Ulster Constabulary was established in 1922. We did not pursue oral history of the Troubles as a lot of people will have...are doing, but it's not something that we set out to tell. The story of the RUC in the Troubles. (Interviewee 10, 2019)

The implication here is that reconciliation is a component in an abstract sense, but only

a component or approximate element, since the actual design of the project is to simply

capture the experience of serving in the RUC. Other storytellers are more explicit in their

reticence to describe reconciliation as a key aim of storytelling:

Interviewer: That sounds like it might be what people would describe as reconciliation. Is that a word you'd use? Or would you avoid that word?

Interviewee: I wouldn't avoid it, but I think it can be used… I think it gets used an awful lot in the Northern Ireland context. I think it sometimes gets used in quite a glib way that people maybe don't think about all the meanings of it. I think there's also a sense, sometimes, that, broadly speaking, peace and reconciliation is a good thing and it needs to be… We do this peace and reconciliation work and then everything will be fine. And of course, it is a good thing. Of course, these are all things to be striving for and working towards, but I don't know, actually, to what extent you can ever fully achieve that… (Interviewee 17, 2019)

I think you could perhaps say in your blurb that it is hoped that these interviews might make some modest contribution towards the overall aim of reconciliation, and good luck with defining that! Sorry, but I suppose I'm nervous about those big terms. I often cite this, we did interviews in South Africa, one of the former ANC activists who is now a government lawyer and had been very involved in the transition and the truth and reconciliation commission, and we were asking him for advice and he said, "Well my key advice to you is whatever the hell you put together over there, don't call it truth, and don't call it reconciliation." (Interview 3, 2019)

Other interviewees also expressed misgivings about the assumptions surrounding reconciliation, suggesting ' …to assume that therefore reconciliation flows from engaging…as an audience member, engaging with that story is just an entirely huge leap and assumption to make' (Interviewee 11, 2019). While these interviewees were reserved in the extent to which they embraced the term, there is perhaps still an acceptance of them as part of the language of peacebuilding. Indeed, other interviewees simply used the phrase in a generic or descriptive sense, rather than stating it as an explicit aim. In some cases, reconciliation may have been used to describe projects which encouraged intergroup contact (Interview 14, 2019 – see quote in 5.2) which perhaps explains Interviewee 6's feeling that many practitioners felt that reconciliation was a key aim. A final alternative is that the selection of interviewees just so happened to be broadly cynical about the extent to which reconciliation was a useful concept; likewise, questioning did not focus on their views of reconciliation, although interviewees were asked for their take on the goal of storying, which would have left it open to interviewees to explore reconciliation if they felt it was particularly central.

5.1.3 - Diverse accounts and complicating the narrative

If storytellers were unsure and reluctant to embrace reconciliation as a firm aim of storytelling, the opposite is true of encouraging a multitude of narratives that can sit alongside each other to inform the conversation about the conflict – a sentiment also found in academic literature regarding storytelling and resolving meta-conflict through

diversity of representation. Another way of phrasing this is 'complicating' the narrative – emphasising a diversity of voices, and avoiding simplistic answers (see Hamber & Kelly, 2016). For some interviewees, this was a practical decision as much as anything, since it gives the reader a wider range of evidence from which to draw conclusions regarding the conflict, without being told what to think about it:

> If there is a broader diversity of stories or oral histories that are out there, the greater chance there is of there being a better understanding of the nature of the conflict and the complexity of the conflict. If all the stories out there all come from one perspective, or one or two perspectives, then you are not getting a full gambit as to what went on. As I say, we recognised that there was this gap, and we hoped by doing Green and Blue that we would help address that. (Interviewee 5, 2019)

> It might, yes. I think anyway that if you're reading somebody's story that you're going to get a basic understanding of where they came from, or why they did… or why they got involved in what they did. Just to hear on the news that a loyalist shot and killed… you just automatically would think… if that's all you're hearing you make up your mind based on that. But when you talk to people and explain here's why I done what I done, and then you talk it through, and you have a better understanding of why… even though you totally disagree. It gives you an understanding, I think. (Interviewee 4, 2019)

Interviewees 4 and 5 support the notion of presenting a variety of viewpoints, simultaneously, in order to properly contextualise some of the more controversial aspects of the conflict. This is reflected in research in other contexts, for instance the notion that the archives of truth commissions (the most similar transitional justice mechanism to storytelling) should be considered a new democratic space, reshaping testimony as part of a policy shaping discourse as people try to understand why certain controversial actions transpired (Jones & Oliveira, 2016).

For interviewees immersed in the theoretical aspect of storytelling, it was important to

emphasise the way storytelling relates to existing transitional justice mechanisms, and

how capturing diverse narratives of the conflict addresses a gap left by the piecemeal

transitional justice interventions (see Bell, 2003):

> When I give talks about these things and I'm trying to, as it were, sell the benefits of using oral history or storytelling in transition and justice, the kind of thing that I would be saying is it's about broadening the canvas and dealing with past, it's about getting beyond legalism, it's about pointing out the narrowing potential of those other legalistic approaches that are case by case and tend to fragment. (Interviewee 3, 2019)

Other interviewees emphasised the importance of diverse narratives, since the

dominant one is simplistic and binary, when in reality there were many identity groups

involved in the conflict who go unrepresented:

> We deliberately set out to have constituencies share virtual space: The Royalist, the Republican, the Prison Officer, the Teacher, the Probation Worker. To complicate it as well, because there's often this narrative that the conflict was about two sides, Catholics and Protestants, fighting each other. If you take something like a prison, you will see the layers are much, much more complex. Prison Officers were caught between Royalists and Republicans. They didn't side with one or the other: there's three sides to start with. Then there's the Governors: there's a kind of hierarchical difference between Prison Officers and Governors, and I haven't heard one Prison Officer say one good thing about a Governor. So, it was to complicate the narrative of simply a religious war. But also, because we'd moved into the ceasefire period, was to encourage people to start hearing the story, and to tolerate the story of "The Other". (Interviewee 7, 2019)

Journalists who perhaps operated on the peripheries of the storytelling community (but

felt they had a storytelling responsibility and participated in the delivery of storytelling

projects) also emphasised the importance of complexity, particularly in explaining the

factors that contribute to violence:

> I, and many others, who wrote a huge amount around the time of the murder of Lyra McKee, and a lot of what I wrote was about trying to explain Creggan [the suburb of Derry where Lyra McKee was shot] and to understand Creggan [. . .] . So, I think it comes down to how you approach it. So, a lot of my coverage would have been deliberately… You've got straight news stories, which is fine, but then a lot of your coverage is very nuanced, deliberately, because it is a complex problem. It is a complex issue. And I would certainly feel a responsibility to try and reflect that, to reflect all those complexities of how come you do get young people who actually think that the only avenue for them, in life, is to become involved with these dissident groups? (Interviewee 17, 2019)

Perhaps the most succinct expression of what seemed to be a universally held value in

the storytelling community was use of the phrase coined by Michael Ignatieff; to 'narrow

the range of permissible lies' (1996: 113). This phrase was used to describe how

storytelling was not designed to generate consensus in a narrow sense, but how it might

contribute to narrative of the conflict:

> Interviewee: I wouldn't call it consensus but some agreed things and less disagreed things. [. . .] Maybe that's how… so do you know that expression 'narrowing the permissible lies?' You know that idea?
>
> Interviewer: Yes.
>
> Interviewee: Which is another way… which is the opposite of creating the consensus. So, I sort of have a sense of… tell me any historical period where there is a consensus on, but I suppose you're right, there are periods when people say, 'well look these things happened'. And these bits are actually… kind of like agreed on but then there's still room for lots of disagreement, of interpretations of things and stuff. On the whole, I think that oral history, storytelling probably works best to complicate history. (Interviewee 6)

Although hesitant to state consensus as an aim, storytelling facilitators tended to emphasise the value of complicating the conflict of the narrative by adding breadth and depth, and allowing conflicting narratives to sit alongside one another.

5.1.4 - The content of stories and the meta-conflict

Storytelling facilitators were broadly very keen to emphasise that storytellers are free to share whatever story they choose to. Projects were not designed to illicit a particular response, so if the meta-conflict was addressed in a story, it was at the behest of the storyteller.

An example that captures this experience came from a storytelling facilitator from a Falls Road based project that worked across the identity groups in Belfast and helped facilitate the gathering of stories from a variety of communities. When asked if particular types of stories would need to be omitted, moderated or changed in any way for the sake of balance (i.e. meeting a quota across identity groups, or conforming to a pre-determined narrative balance) their reaction was an emphatic rejection:

> I don't know if you can have a balance. The story is what it is, from your point of view. If a loyalist was to tell their story, I'll not ask them to change it or asking them to tone it down just for… you know? We do live in a divided society and I think if we have that understanding then that's more the need to know. We do have two different sets and two different views… (Interviewee 4, 2019).

This response is fairly typical of storytellers when asked if anything is out of bounds, and consistent with the aforementioned commitment to complicating the narrative. Interviewee 4 captures a sentiment many interviewees expressed – that balance for balance's sake would ultimately prove unhelpful. Others articulated the need to allow storytellers freedom of expression (in the context of a traditional oral history approach to the project) in terms of the way the interview was conducted:

> We used those open questions… it therefore allowed… the storyteller to just flow on; and we didn't home in on something if somebody suddenly started talking about a particular bar, "oh then what happened then?". We allowed them to decide what they were going to say or what they weren't going to say. (Interviewee 5, 2019)

> I could have set out to bring out stories from a policing point of view that reflected things as something that perhaps they weren't, something that suited a particular viewpoint in Northern Ireland. I wasn't prepared to do that. (Interviewee 10, 2019).

The above two quotes were broadly characteristic of a commitment among facilitators to allow storytellers to express themselves as they saw fit – stories would go unmoderated (in terms of the gathering or collection phase) and the actual flow of the interview where the story itself was recorded was seen as an open space for storytellers to take the story where they wanted. This commitment is perhaps unsurprising, since all storytelling facilitators involved with the storytelling network will be familiar with the Ethical Principles developed by peacebuilding umbrella organisation HTR (2009). They are also likely to be guided by their own specially adopted ethical frameworks, which may in turn draw on the ideas from fellow practitioners. For example, the storytelling

project Green and Blue adopted an approach based on guidelines from TUH (Green and Blue, 2014).

It is also worth noting a third sphere of storytelling, in terms of live events. An outlier to the binary classification of story-gathering and story-sharing are the live events where the story is shared and unfolds before a live audience, with no opportunity to decide what should or should not be included for further dissemination, since it is happening there and then. One way that these types of events were classified was 'talking circles', which was in turn described as 'often a precursor to somebody gaining confidence; having articulated their story once or twice, they then are more comfortable in putting their story down for prosperity' (Interviewee 11, 2019). A prominent example of this method comes from *Testimony* events by TUH, who adopt a 'talking circles' (similar to Parent Circles implemented in the Israel-Palestine conflict – see Hanley, 2004) approach in their *Testimony* events; their position regarding allowing storytellers to critically engage with contentious issues was slightly different, preferring to emphasise a de-politicised and empathetic platform:

> …what the event is, is to get away from the argy-bargy of political discourse, the whataboutery. If you listen, so, if you're speaking, we're all listening. Then the two witnesses have an important role, they set the tone for other people's responses. Because then it goes out to the wider circle. And then it finishes with usually with a piece of music and the function of the piece of music as well as supporting the ritual is the aspect of this, the function of the piece of music is to give people a little time to digest what just happened. (Interviewee 15, 2019).

The logic behind this de-politicisation of the platform is that the expressed aim is to encourage contact, discussion and empathy away from the politically charged aspects

of remembering the conflict. It is useful to note here that this format is perhaps distinct when compared with the other 'traditional' oral history or storytelling approaches deployed by the other interviewees. Another justification for depoliticising the Testimony events is protecting the participants. A final point that is worth emphasising here, is that the Testimony events still allow for challenge, and a degree of meaningful dissonance in the process, albeit here emphasising a more emotional dimension. Events are mixed, with representatives from different groups, and the facilitators accept that emotionally the events are, to varying extents 'unsafe or uncertain' (Interviewee 15, 2019).

Critically, in terms of addressing questions relating storytelling's relationship with the meta-conflict, it is clear that storytelling in the conventional sense of story-gathering is challenging the meta-conflict. Complicated outliers like Testimony events aside, projects tend to at least allow for the possibility of a storyteller challenging the meta-conflict, should the participant want to take the story in that direction:

> But if it is not personal, if it just an overall comment I would definitely let them [talk about contentious issues] because that is what researchers want to know as well. What was going on there, what was the overall perception of who's to blame? Being an onlooker from outside here, it's always Catholic and Protestant, but when you're here, it's not. It's Catholics and Protestants and then loyalists and then the army and they all weigh in. So, there's loads of different sides to the conflict when you're in the conflict. (Interviewee 14, 2019).

In allowing storytellers the freedom to choose the direction that their testimony took, there was a belief among storytelling facilitators that this would lead to broader

understanding of the conflict, consistent with the aforementioned commitment to complicating the narrative:

> I often talk about pointillism, I remember a woman that transcribed interviews for me in Dublin years ago, this technique of pointillism, and it was like you'd come back six weeks later, it would start with a few dots and then it would suddenly take the shape of the city of Rome, you know so it was this technique. And I often think of these tiny little pencil points of individual stories and from that the patterns and themes emerge, rather than starting with the map of Rome if you know what I mean, and saying, 'Where do you fit into this Mrs Brown?' (Interviewee 3, 2019)

This attitude was common among facilitators – that if left unfettered a comprehensive storytelling project would organically produce an overarching account of the conflict. The account that the wider body of stories can create should not, however, be confused with a simplistic and narrow set of answers relating to the conflict. Facilitators were quick to emphasise the complexity of the conflict, and that the ultimate goal of storytelling projects was to reflect this complexity back to the people for further discussion. If the goal of storytelling vis-à-vis the meta-conflict was to simply allow storytellers freedom in how they set down their stories and to contribute to this complex web of accounts, then the logical question that follows, as stated above, is how did the project design affect the expression of stories that challenge the meta-conflict? The answer to which is presented in section 5.2.

5.1.5 - Conclusion

The goals of storytelling are diverse, ranging from victim, family or storyteller centred approaches, an abstract sense of reconciliation and finally to complicating what has become an over-simplified narrative by ensuring that a more diverse range of accounts are shared. The relationship between these diverse goals has been considered in relation to the research questions; reconciliation seems to be a means of talking about peacebuilding work that storytellers may use, but usually only descriptively or in place of proxies for reconciliation, such as inter-group contact. Likewise, the extent to which the goals of storytelling allow for stories that challenge the meta-conflict by talking about the contentious issues that have come to inhibit peacebuilding in Northern Ireland is considered. A more fulsome analysis of how storytelling project design (in the gathering phase) affects the expression of such stories is considered in the following section.

5.2 - Storytelling – a champion for marginalised voices

In this section it is argued that storytelling, and in particular the story-gathering aspect of storytelling, is a deliberately free of a partisan or sectarian bias, which enables storytellers to freely share stories that are as politically engaged or disengaged as they see fit. This means that at the gathering phase, or the phase where storytellers express their stories, they have the opportunity to critically engage with the meta-conflict, by sharing stories that address the controversial aspects of the conflict, such as its causes and conduct.

The issue of 'complicating' is closely related to the commitment of storytelling facilitators to establish a platform for marginalised voices. Storytelling facilitators gather stories with a philosophy that seeks to champion the marginalised voices of their constituency. There is no explicit agenda, since this interferes with the ethical guidelines most projects are informed by.

Storytelling projects are heterogeneous in character, emerging from below in a transitional justice and peacebuilding vacuum. Some storytelling projects have slight variations in terms of how they approach avoiding sectarian bias and offering a blank canvas to participants. Storytelling as a whole has some implicit assumptions about what is normatively correct, such as encouraging oppressed groups to speak. This section seeks to explain the contextual necessity of managing the tension of championing the marginalised while not unduly influencing the construction of narratives, as well as the fact that storytelling remains a (relatively) unfettered

environment in which to share a story and contribute to a narrative. Finally, this section considers the ways in which storytellers interact with the platform that facilitators have provided for them.

Ultimately, this section seeks to demonstrate the broadly blank canvas that facilitators are committed to, and its potential as a platform to allow storytellers to tackle the meta-conflict and other contentious aspects of the conflict. While it is not a guarantee that storytellers definitely will choose to do so, the stage is certainly set if they want to, in the majority of storytelling projects.

5.2.1 - Storytelling as a platform largely free of sectarian bias

Before considering some of the ways in which storytelling facilitators set out to foster an environment free of sectarian bias for gathering stories, it is worth contextualising these efforts against a backdrop of assumptions about the "soft" and "easy" nature of storytelling (cf. Bryson, 2016; Hackett & Rolston, 2009), often demonstrated by external stakeholders, funders etc.

> So, the PEACE programme had to design something which began to look at that without becoming too contentious, so storytelling fitted that bill for them in a way... A lot of funding going towards victims' organisations as well... But storytelling fitted the bill of practice work, in some ways, without it being super contentious - like, it wasn't getting into justice issues. (Interviewee 11, 2019)

> This is me putting words out; this is not their policy. My perception would be that this was an area they thought would be a bit less contentious...

> Gather stories, do creative things with them, do it on a cross-community basis, target audiences... (Interviewee 11, 2019)

The implication being here that storytelling was viewed favourably because it swerved some of the trickier questions posed by conventional transitional justice interventions, such as the limitations of top-down mechanisms (Perriello and Wierda, 2006: 2) or the political minefield of historical investigations, to name but a few. However, the notion that it is an easily implemented solution was criticised by other interviewees too:

> But then again, you've come to the place that put the international spotlight on the fact that it can when done, I was going to say badly but that's a bit pejorative, but you know I'm thinking of the Boston College tapes project. So, we are the international flagship example of just how not soft and not easy and not unproblematic storytelling and oral history can be. So, there's that edge to it as well, that it can be quite dangerous actually. (Interviewee 3, 2019)

In short, storytelling facilitators are acutely aware of the perception of storytelling as an easy interim solution in the absence of functioning government to deliver the SHA when in reality, storytelling is complex and has the potential to discuss content that is controversial – politically, socially, historically and even legally speaking. It is this growing awareness and rejection of storytelling's 'softness' that this research is based upon – to establish whether or not storytelling projects really do encourage critical engagement with some of the more controversial aspects of the conflict.

Storytelling, as a rule, rejects conducting the gathering of stories in a politicised setting. Storytelling facilitators typically sought to disentangle their projects from sectarian bias (although this generalisation is further complicated below) to allow storytellers as much freedom as possible in the story sharing process:

> No, I mean I think if I've understood you correctly, my answer would be that I would be strongly opposed to any such [overall message], because it would run counter to all of my training, which is about your providing an opportunity for someone to tell their story [. . .] If I had that a priori plan to adhere to some particular philosophy or standpoint, I think any kind of ethical standpoint… and there's an example of that in the oral history journal where someone interviewed their grandmother and the grandmother comes back and… the article's called 'that's not what I said', and it's a nice reflexive piece on the grandmother rejecting sharply the analysis that the granddaughter subjected her transcript to. Now that's taken us away from the kind of political conflict that you're talking about, but I guess I'm citing that as an example as why I think to go in with some kind of a message just runs counter to my fundamental sense of what we're about. (Interviewee 3, 2019)

This response was characteristic of a storytelling facilitator's view of how to manage the space in which a storyteller shares their story. Interviewee 3 is an academic, but their approach is echoed by storytelling facilitators with a different background:

> I was brought up on objectivity. I was slightly shifted away from that as a civil servant, being put in a more difficult decision. I have approached this, my hand on my heart, I don't have an agenda either to portray the RUC as, you know, everything right or everything wrong. I got people- all of the people who did the interviewing for me were all former officers. I equipped them with the understanding of what we're trying to do. The technique, the equipment. They went out and gathered the stories and put them into the archive. I think it's for others to work out what that means and to set that down against somebody else's story (Interviewee 10, 2019)

The final sentence is prescient in that the analysis will consider the difference between story-gathering and story-sharing. The remainder is further reminder of the importance for storytelling facilitators of beginning with a broadly 'objective' starting point, and both of the above are influenced by the aforementioned importance of ethical guidelines, which are increasingly adopted formally and informally by storytelling practitioners. Both these quotes are taken from interviews with facilitators who

identified more as oral historians than storytellers. Other storytelling facilitators, who made use of different methods such as filmmaking, also tried to offer a blank canvas when gathering the stories:

> Those two elements, for us, were what brought me to the thought about making an archive. When we did those three, we tried to edit it into a story, and as a filmmaker when you edit, you're meant to create from two edits: from two pieces of film you cut together a third meaning. This was undermining the significance, these were golden moments, and so someone suggested the idea of an archive. With digital developments you can make everything accessible, you don't have to leave out a percent of your material, which most filmmakers have to do. So, we started with the idea of making an archive, minimal editing, no editing, if possible… (Interviewee 7, 2019)

In this example there is a complex relationship between the story-gathering process and the sharing of the stories, as both parts of the process inform one another in a cyclical pattern. The story sharing method or output, a film, was potentially robbing the stories of meaning; and so the knowledge that the creation of the film would follow a different pattern (i.e. the creation of the archive) meant that the stories were gathered in a different way. Critically, the rejection of traditional filmmaking practices (i.e. cutting two pieces together to create a third meaning – for example Marcel Ophuls use of dialectical montage in *Hotel Terminus* to construct a third meaning around the actions of Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie – see Suleiman, 2002) was done so to reinforce a less loaded approach.

"Neutrality" is also seen as a valuable trait in a storytelling facilitator – i.e. beyond the philosophical starting point of the project; something inherent within the storytelling facilitator themselves:

> I could go everywhere. I do not know why. I could go to South Armagh with my London accent and people would talk to me and they would not talk to my colleagues who actually were from Northern Ireland and I think that is partly because I am viewed as sort of neutral. I do not have any baggage. (Interviewee 18, 2019)

An apparently neutral position is something of a gift for anyone working on a storytelling project. In this respect there is a possible tension between the practicalities of some projects, and the value of neutrality, since many projects relied upon people from within the constituency doing the storytelling to actually go out and capture the stories. As indicated above, storytelling projects that aimed to capture the experience of former RUC officers made use of former RUC officers for story-gathering for the sake of access, openness and technical comprehension (Interview 10, 2019 and Interview 12, 2019). Other interviewees echoed this sentiment, when talking on the importance of local involvement in story-gathering:

> People coming in, unknowns, aren't going to get the same interview. I'm not saying whether that would be better or worse, but you're definitely not going to get the same… and if you get the interview at all (Interview 4).

Despite this tension, these same interviewees are also quoted above emphasising the importance of objectivity and commitment to non-partisan identity in terms of the overall approach to the project. Facilitators cannot be shorn of identities, particularly in a divided context like Northern Ireland, but globally also. Identity in this case simply has to be used in order to capture stories that would otherwise be difficult to access.

Finally, it is worth noting that storytelling facilitators will do everything they can to be representative and free from a particular political bias in their approach to story-

gathering. This is well illustrated in the challenge of being fully inclusive in a project that works with multiple identity groups:

> But I think that for example some suggestion that academics are more sympathetic to Republicans, it really doesn't stack up. There may be other reasons why people have been less confident or less willing to come forward and tell their stories. But if anything to be honest, I suppose as an academic who's worked in this field, I feel that in my experience quite honestly, I have always bent over backwards to the point of nearly breaking your back to reach out to and… So almost to the point of giving way to priority, so when I did three exemplary projects spinning out of that Peace Process: Layers of Meaning project, one of them was with a Labour & Ulster Unionist councillor, another one was in mixed interfaith marriages, and the other one was located in East Belfast [a predominantly Loyalist area], I did a project on the peace walls. And yes, I had to work twice as hard to bring the inner east community on board, but work twice as hard I did. (Interviewee 3, 2019)

In short, securing a platform free of partisan allegiances is not without its challenges. However, it is broadly accepted as a starting point for the story-gathering process, in terms of ethics and conduct of the storytelling facilitator, but also the overall design of the projects, particularly where story-gathering was carried out by a team rather than a single individual. This characterisation is true for interviewees for this research; historically, there have been instances where sectarianism has seeped into storytelling (see Dawson, 2007) and smaller projects at present may be less inclined to conform to this characterisation.

An alternative means of creating a platform devoid of a specific bias, is the decision to design a storytelling project that seeks to evade the contentious issues of the conflict, and emphasise emotional aspects of testimony instead:

Interviewer: it sounds like you are encouraging the exploration of very, very contentious issues because that's the…

Interviewee: No, no, and no.

Interviewer: So, it's not that then?

Interviewee: Well you see that language, the exploration of contentious issues, that's a language of debate I think, of dialogue. This is lived experience. This is someone saying, "Here's what happened in my life." And when, for example X will say, "When the police came," to his place of work, "X, we need to bring you home.", "Why do you need me to bring you home?". "Because your father's been shot." "Is he alive, is he dead?" "He's dead." So, they drive him back to his home from his place at work and he sees his Daddy under blanket, lying on the street. He's sees a few bullet holes through. That's what it is. It's not exploring contentious issues, in this sense, it's the lived experience. That's what you're setting up. Exploring contentious issues to me is a language of dialogue which is more the language of the mind. The language of a Testimony event is more the language of the heart. (Interviewee 15, 2019)

The final sentence is critical here; Testimony events run by TUH have an expressed aim to explore issues on an emotional, empathetic level, rather than promote a more technical discourse. It is important to note that Testimony's structure is different, since it is a 'live' storytelling; here the process of story-gathering and story sharing, communicating and discussion is a process that happens simultaneously before a live audience. While on face value this may mean that the meta-conflict goes unchallenged, this would be a simplistic conclusion to draw. The characteristics are perhaps somewhat different to the blank canvas other storytelling facilitators try to offer, in that it has a more specific line of enquiry and a specific rejection of covering contentious issues. However, it is also clear from the quote above that this anything but soft and easy. Testimony events are still challenging, and perhaps seek to tackle the emotional barriers created by the meta-conflict as a priority. This emotionally centred approach is

consistent with Dawson's arguments about moving away from 'pathologising' Northern

Ireland as a place of trauma:

> *Critical enquiry could then focus its attention on 'the real feelings and desires* of actual victims' – or, to avoid the exclusive and politicised connotations attached to this term in Northern Ireland, of those who have been subjected to, or harmed by, or engaged in political violence (or all of these) – *when freed from hegemonic silencing and the pressure to represent themselves as trauma victims* (2017: 90, emphasis added)

While offering something slightly different, Testimony events then still have the

potential to challenge the meta-conflict – in this case, in an unexpected way. By moving

away from the political discourse, they challenge one of the great unspoken 'truths' of

the meta-narrative which seeks to represent Northern Ireland as chronically

traumatised and allow participants to explore emotion and memory in new ways.

Storytelling is arguably seeking a kind of justice in terms of addressing any incorrect,

inadequate or unfairly weighted narratives. In these cases, storytelling is not neutral, but

challenging otherwise problematic accounts or meta-narratives of the conflict. There is

a subtle balance here, in that storytelling facilitators are committed to the notion of

allowing someone the space to freely recount their story, which in itself is based on a

desire to seek justice for participants:

> If somebody's sharing an experience, you have to try and disassociate what your views are, or what your beliefs are, or what your impressions are of where that story or experience sits with your knowledge - and tell their story, if that makes any sense. And it's probably easier to-do it with somebody that you've a ten year, or five year, or two year relationship with, than somebody that's coming in the door and trying to interview somebody and they obviously have their own slant, their acknowledgement or their own knowledge or their own view on things, you know. (Interviewee 16, 2019)

While the underlying methodology may be one of detachment, it is motivated by a commitment to provide a platform where storytellers can express the kind of narrative that they feel has been missing, whether this is in deeply emotional terms, or seeking to reinterpret and address aspects of the meta-conflict. Facilitators are motivated to provide justice and freedom to their participants, but in doing so commit in the moment of storytelling itself to as much openness as possible. The question then turns to what storytellers themselves choose to do with this blank canvas.

5.2.2 - The choices of storytellers

Storytelling facilitators offering this blank canvas does not guarantee any kind of particular behaviours or stories from the storytellers themselves. Sometimes, storytellers could be frustrating, in that the story the facilitator was expecting may never arrive:

> We had many situations where we know that people didn't speak about things that we hoped they would speak about. We had one person who was in the first hunger strike - hardly talks about it at all… (Interviewee 7, 2019)

An explanation (beyond the approach adopted by most facilitators) as to why storytellers were not prompted to offer these stories came from a different interviewee:

> All we prompt is what people wanted to say. And we also use the strapline we aren't ambulance chasers. There are horrendous cases that we can follow up. Horrendous. They got injuries; families torn asunder. And there

were things that we could do. The whole impact of alcoholism, resorting to the bottle as a way out of things. The lack of leadership, perhaps. Not so much leadership as caring for people in the initial phase. There are so many areas you could cover if you really wanted to do a full exposé… (Interviewee 10, 2019)

While this emphasises the commitment of facilitators to not over-interfere with the story-gathering process, in that storytellers are left to determine the content of their own stories, it also shows how potentially frustrating it could be. This is particularly so in the case of the first quote where a prisoner visited the site of the hunger strikes, and still did not want to share their story.

If the commitment to non-interferences of facilitators meant that sometimes the key stories were missed or avoided, the opposite was also true. If a storyteller wanted to bring political comment, or critically engage with the meta-conflict (i.e. directly addressing the unanswered questions regarding the causes and nature of the conflict) then a facilitator committed to an unfettered platform did not, and indeed perhaps could not stop them, even if they wanted to:

> Even if you start out wanting the personal story, it's almost impossible, as a neo-feminist would say, to it not becoming political. We have lots of cases where people talk about the bigger picture, how they organised within the prison, how "we" managed to win our struggle in the prison. We had Prison Officers talking about the difficulty, the way they were treated by the authorities in order to get a political arrangement with the prisoners; they would go over their heads and they were furious and frustrated by this. We didn't encourage, but we didn't stop anyone saying anything that they wanted to. (Interviewee 7, 2019)

This sentiment, that politics and contested aspects of the conflict were central to many storyteller's stories and came out organically, was supported by other interviewees:

> So, if you want to talk about the death of A, B or C, you have to put it in its context, you know and it would be doing an injustice… to not talk about why families are where they're at. It's not like you lost somebody and you can grieve them and that's it, and you can kind of have that in your heart…and there's…the usual grieving process. The reason the families come to us, or other groups is because there's an unresolved issue and that's linked to, either failings by the state… Or a lack of accountability from whoever - you can't really separate them out. (Interviewee 16, 2019)

In short, the freedom offered by facilitators means that storytellers are able to venture into more controversial or political territories, if they want to – essentially offering an interpretation of the meta-conflict in relation to their own lived experience.

However, this is not to say that storytellers would immediately sit down and begin to deconstruct the tensions inherent within the meta-narrative of the Troubles. Ultimately, their concern was sharing their story. In the case below, the facilitator found that their participants did not particularly want to explore political discourse, precisely because of the negative effects it had already had on their lives:

> But to be fair, most of the people I spoke to who'd been through that kind of thing, they weren't banging a drum, they were fed up with politics and what that kind of polarised politics… the results of that for them and their family. So, a lot of them really weren't interested in it. (Interviewee 18, 2019)

Storytelling participants have the option of engaging with the meta-conflict and broader, contentious issues of the conflict, but in certain instances they do not necessarily choose to do so. It is also worth exploring the boundaries of the meta-conflict, particularly in relation to Interviewee 18. Discussing the meta-conflict in a sterile, academic sense can give the impression that the topics that constitute the meta-

conflict are clear and closed. In reality, the contentious aspects of the conflict are interwoven with the lives of storytellers. The way in which the conflict was fought may be particularly salient to one victim, while questions of accountability may be far more significant to another – as hinted at in the above quote from Interviewee 16. While interviewees may have avoided direct political discourse in some projects, they may also talk thematically about major challenges to their lives that fuelled the meta-conflict:

> The other theme, finally, is probably poverty, because most of these things happened, or with my interviewees anyway nearly all of them were from really deprived areas anyway, so on top of the deprivation they were also experiencing this extreme conflict trauma, and the deprived areas were disproportionately affected. So, to me that's a big thing. Although what you do with that, I'm not sure. (Interviewee 18, 2019).

> They have a lot of talks and a lot of people coming to talk about very political experiences that can be shared. Yes, personally I think that ought to be what unites people is the economic issues in Northern Ireland… (Interviewee 18, 2019).

These comments were particularly interesting in that Interviewee 18 had expressed misgivings about political discussion in storytelling earlier in the interview. The line between economic deprivation and politics in Northern Ireland is very fine (e.g. see Rowland et. al, 2018, for an explanation of the relationship between equality legislation and improved employment differentials between Protestants and Catholics), so this serves to illustrate how interlinked these themes actually are when a storyteller comes to tell their story. Even in this case, where stories were boiled down to brief audio clips, and the emphasis was more on personal trauma as a result of the brevity of the project's output, there is potential for questions relating to the meta-conflict to surface. This is because storytelling as a method is intrinsically open to the possibility of participants

expressing, sharing unfettered accounts, and contributing to a more complicated narrative of the conflict.

5.2.3 - Conclusion

It has been argued that storytelling projects offer a blank canvas for storytellers to share a story that can challenge the meta-conflict - due to a commitment from storytelling facilitators to ensure that storytellers are free to explore the stories they want to share.

Exceptions to the rule exist, but these are usually contextually appropriate, such as to protect storytellers in a live setting, to explore a specific theme that has been supressed such as the politics of emotion, or a necessary stance to address a longstanding historic injustice. Equally, they still preserve freedom for the storyteller to challenge something about the conflict, but may simply narrow or specify the parameters slightly, for example Testimony events are still emotionally challenging the meta-conflict's stalemate in terms of relating to the "Other".

The extent to which a storyteller wants to critically engage with the meta-conflict is varied. It is worth noting here Lane's (2019) argument that some storytellers are marginalised by the focus on the conflict, preferring to share stories removed from the context of violence and politics. But even in the subject of Lane's case study, *Tenx9,* stories related to conflict were still permitted, and as such the blank canvas approach remains true even in this context – the key issue is the motivation of the storyteller.

The nature of talking about conflict meant that for many facilitators, their storytellers naturally shared stories which addressed the meta-conflict, e.g. whether it was about addressing a crime perpetrated by the state, or a comment on perceived injustices meted out inside prisons during the conflict. Critically, in terms of the research questions, the meta-conflict is not made taboo for most storytellers, at least in terms of the design and approach of storytelling projects.

Chapter 6 - How story-gathering can challenge the meta-conflict

This section is an expansion of some key areas already identified in the previous chapter, regarding the aims, philosophies and methods that underpin storytelling in Northern Ireland. It develops three themes that emerged during the fieldwork as of universal significance for storytelling facilitators; first, the historical significance of storytelling, second, the way in which storytelling gives voices to marginalised groups, and concludes by considering the ways that storytelling encourages intergroup contact and relationships that bridge divides. This section is still primarily focused upon the story-gathering dimension of storytelling, i.e. the phase of collecting stories, although this distinction is not entirely clear cut and some overlap into the sharing of stories is inevitable. This is because it is in this gathering phase that storytellers appear to be relatively unified in their approach. As a result, this aspect of storytelling can be characterised as having significant impact on peacebuilding in Northern Ireland, since each of these themes help challenge the meta-conflict. Storytelling's commitment to historicity means that storytellers are free to present a story even if it is controversial and challenging. A similar pattern follows in giving voice to marginalised groups, since in doing so a statement is made about how the meta-conflict has produced an imbalanced narrative. Since the meta-conflict is fuelled by polarising accounts from narrow sections of Northern Ireland, giving voice to groups otherwise unheard helps diversify such an oppositional narrative. Finally, intergroup contact does not just reduce

anxiety about the other, but actively helps to dispel myths perpetuated by the meta-conflict.

6.1 - Storytelling's historical significance

In this section the historical significance of storytelling, and how this relates to peacebuilding or challenging the meta-conflict, is considered. After a brief summary of the more immediate and intrinsically valuable benefits of historically rigorous storytelling, it is argued that storytelling facilitators are inclined to offer free reign over the content that storytellers cover, resulting in collected narratives that can challenge the meta-conflict. Finally, they seek to present society with a repository from which healing and learning can take place.

6.1.1 - Time

A relatively obvious but crucial point about the historical significance of storytelling is the finite amount of time in which storytelling facilitators (as well as historians, academics, community leaders and state officials) have to capture the accounts of those with first-hand experience of the conflict. Although the roots of the conflict go back hundreds of years, storytelling projects tend to focus on the era of 'the Troubles', a

period that is delineated in different ways but always starting in the late 60s. Although

projects will also be able to consider stories from different decades (e.g. the Five

Decades Project, Forthspring Inter Community Group, n.d.), time is running out to

capture the accounts of adults involved in the early phase of 'the Troubles'. Almost all

interviewees referred to this urgency, typically unprompted – it is an urgent motivation

in their work. The interviewees highlighted the urgency of their efforts:

> One of the drivers for that really was the observation that we are losing so many of these stories. So, people have made an effort to go out and capture them in all sorts of different ways. (Interviewee 11, 2019)

> So, there's a push on it in these last few years, I've noticed myself, because everyone is realising it's precious and it's time sensitive - so I think that's becoming more obvious now is that it's now or never. (Interviewee 14, 2019)

> But I think it's important because people are dying out. Since we filmed, we've lost, I think, seven people. (Interviewee 7, 2019)

> If we hadn't got the stories when we did, and if we don't go on and get some more, then we'll lose people […] so you can't mess about for too long. (Interviewee 10, 2019)

> For me it was [about] recording the stories of people in my community, that if not recorded would either be lost, or never to be told… or to be told by someone else. To be told by the BBC, who is no friend of ours. *So, if we don't tell our story, somebody else is either going to make it up, or it doesn't get told*. (Interviewee 4, 2019, emphasis added)

The perception is that storytellers have something valuable to contribute by offering

their unfettered accounts of the conflict. This is something that is explored further when

the importance of storytelling to give voice to marginalised groups is expanded upon in

6.2, but it is also explored here in terms of the value that these stories possess, but also their fragility. These stories have the potential to be exploited or manipulated (see chapter 7) but ultimately storytelling facilitators see it as their duty to capture these stories for the benefit of society.

6.1.2 - Intrinsically valuable stories

Many facilitators commented on the intrinsic value of simply gathering these stories for posterity's sake, as accounts of the conflict that were otherwise at risk of being lost. In many cases, there was a need to persuade storytellers of the relevance of their experience:

> The second thing that was important for them was, first of all, actually getting them to realise that they had a story to tell. That what they went through was abnormal, and it was of interest, cause they said "Oh, [*redacted*], why are you asking me!?" and then they would sit down and tell you something and you'd say "You've just told me the story". (Interviewee 5, 2019)

This was fairly common although not universal to all storytelling projects, since some are born out of a perceived gap or injustice to a particular community or story, and hence storytellers will be aware of the need to address this injustice in the narrative. However, there was a universal commitment to gathering stories that simply expressed the experience of living through the conflict as something that is valuable in itself:

> You could tell while you were doing the work that it was worthwhile and that it was a one off that you were getting these women to speak. […] You are creating a wider body of work of what life was like here and that's important to me. (Interviewee 14, 2019)

This certainly was a common theme among storytelling facilitators – a most basic motivation or underpinning principle for a project would be the assumption that the gathering of these stories for the sake of simply building an account of life during the conflict was an almost self-evident good. However, this goal was almost always allied to another since history for history's sake alone is often criticised in oral history literature, with Thompson describing purely fact-finding history as follows:

> They have one thing in common with the bland contemporary tourism which exploits the past as if it were another foreign country to escape to: a heritage of buildings and landscape so lovingly cared for that it is almost inhumanly comfortable, purged of social suffering, cruelty and conflict to the point that even a slavery plantation becomes a positive pleasure. (2017: 1)

In addition to discussions on broader motivations and the value of capturing experiences of marginalised groups, it is important to consider what makes storytelling projects distinct from a purely fact-driven project. Storytelling facilitators echoed these sentiments, and while they saw recording the story for the story's sake as important, it was set against the context of engaging with a contested past.

6.1.3 - Storytelling, history and challenging the meta-conflict

Storytelling in Northern Ireland distinguishes itself from similar projects in other contexts by seeking to contribute to peace in the region. Significantly, it does seek to challenge the stagnation and silence caused by the meta-conflict through projects that do not shy away from controversial subject material. There is a fine line to be walked by project leaders, by ensuring that contributions allow storytellers to critically address their grievances in their stories, but also not simply repeating and entrenching existing divisions – which would essentially deepen the meta-conflict. This seems to be greater risk for the sharing and communicating of stories, as they become part of a wider post-conflict discourse than at the phase of story collection, which this section is focused upon.

Most facilitators made a simple commitment to the idea of giving storytellers the freedom to critically engage with the meta-conflict, using some of the justifications already explored in relation to the importance of history and the broader goals of storytelling:

> We talk about stories and we talk about oral history. History is a key part of that, as well. If people don't share these stories, now, and don't talk about their experiences, what happens when those people aren't here anymore? Do we end up with a sanitised version of history, in which the controversial aspects weren't…? I think, for the present and also for the future, you're absolutely obliged to try and explore those contentious issues. (Interviewee 17, 2019, emphasis added)

For this facilitator, the gathering of accounts was tied up with a commitment to explore the kind of issues at the heart of the meta-conflict. Exploration of these contested issues is an important part of moving towards a positive peace in Northern Ireland, since failure to move beyond these issues results in the entrenchment of grievances, and thus increases the risk of further division or reigniting the conflict (see Gurr, 2000; Stewart, 2012). One interviewee explored the benefit of accounts helping to clarify narratives and reduce the confusion or contestation that follows a conflict:

> Not only in Northern Ireland, for example, in County Cork at the time of the Irish war of independence, a lot of things went on then and nobody really knows what happened. And of course the folk that would have been involved then are probably long since dead, but that would have been a case where it would have been useful for stories to have been told a little bit afterwards, instead of letting a lot of festering hate build up, and rumours start about what happened. I think whilst there's not a forensic truth that comes out of telling stories, at least it can do much to dispel some of the more ridiculous rumours about what goes on in this place. (Interviewee 12, 2019)

Storytelling may not establish 'forensic' truths. This is often accepted in narrative approaches to transitional justice (see Lenta, 2000) but can contribute to a historical understanding of events, and does much to 'narrow the range of permissible lies' (Ignatieff, 1996: 113) as already discussed by other interviewees. The previous interview demonstrates how important storytelling is to rule out some of the more nonsensical beliefs that can arise in a divided society. Many of these views came in conversation with interviewees, for instance reference to the belief that you could distinguish between Catholic and Protestant just by looking at them (explained by, but not believed by; Interviewee 1, 2019) which is still clung to by some.

Other facilitators suggested that certain aspects of the conflict could no longer be denied or contested:

> I think that oral history can play a significant part in telling a story, because as humans we live narratively, and I think that *there are things that can't be contested any longer* around the sectarianism that went on here, and the lack of civil rights. (Interviewee 2, 2019, emphasis added)

It is in this respect that storytelling constitutes a form of grassroots transitional justice; as a platform to challenge the injustices of the conflict through narrative alone (Bryson, 2016; McEvoy and Bryson, 2016; Lundy and McGovern, 2008). This particular quote emphasises the importance of history and the tendency to 'live narratively' as a driver in this process, and also implies the need for these accounts to critically engage with the meta-conflict. Themes of sectarianism or civil rights abuse are at the heart of the meta-conflict, and have been neatly side-stepped by historic attempts to implement transitional justice in Northern Ireland in the past (Duffy, 2010), while storytelling here is understood as platform to at least gather stories that do deal with these issues. What is also interesting about this quote is the claim that there are 'things that can't be contested any longer'. Most facilitators hinted at a rejection of storytelling as presenting forensic truth. Simultaneously, state-led interventions such as the Bloody Sunday inquiry established, at significant cost in terms of time and money, some fairly ambiguous and narrow but agreed truths, leading to an apology from the British government and prosecution of some of the soldiers involved (Aiken, 2015). Nonetheless, this remains contested in the British media (Metro, 2019) and suggests that

the only 'truths' to be offered by storytelling are to be found in the complexity of multiple (and possibly dissenting) voices, which is explored further below. In the interest of fair representation of Interviewee 2's comment, it should be noted that it is couched as being a personal opinion, and much of their interview explored very similar arguments regarding presenting a complex set of views, rather than storytelling as driver for a singular truth. To return to the theme of transitional justice, other facilitators instead explored this in terms of how the broadly understood aims of transitional justice overlapped with that of storytellers:

> When people have expressed anything about their motive for doing it, [it] has been something about a need to say something about the experiences. […] That people in general, society, need to learn from this, and so they want to be part of something. Where there's a societal learning […] 'so, it won't happen again', *there's a non-recurrence motive for it*. (Interviewee 6, 2019, emphasis added)

This quote is perhaps more of a return to the principle of narrowing permissible lies, but in particular it ties in with the de Greiff's pillar of transitional justice (2015) if non-recurrence is a motive for a storyteller. This is perhaps a less contentious aspect of storytelling design than establishing truth, instead emphasising the importance of learning. This requires a commitment from the facilitator to offer a platform where storytellers are free to shape their story as they see fit, and critically engage with contentious themes if the message is to have any significance in terms of non-recurrence. However, some caution is also required since there are misgivings over the lack of empirical evidence for testimony-based approaches in peacebuilding (Mendeloff, 2004).

Again, it should be noted that this section relates specifically to the gathering of stories, although the same interviewee also explored the possible uses for the stories the project had gathered. Gathered stories have the potential to not only address broad transitional justice goals, but also to tackle intractability as a future resource:

> So, I have that sense of it, and that is as a historical archive […] for people to be able to come and use it and publish from it. For us ourselves to create films from it, publications from it, all of that kind of stuff […] and then make it publicly available in a public place, which is what we're hoping to do. (Interviewee 6, 2019)

Accounts can then be used to consider a diversity of opinions (that may conflict with one another) side by side (Hamber & Kelly, 2016) but also to produce publications and research out of the accounts – thus using diverse narratives to challenge the meta-conflict. The archive in question in the quote is currently on hold, due to funding difficulties. But crucially it demonstrates a commitment from facilitators to a long term vision of storytelling contributing to a nuanced overarching narrative of the conflict, by allowing storytellers to explore the contentious aspects of the conflict, but in a way that enshrines the value of having contested narratives sit side-by-side, to 'complicate' (Interviewee 6, 2019; Interviewee 3, 2019) the interpretation of the conflict. Unsurprisingly, there is variation between storytelling facilitators as to how to achieve this:

> My role to date is to take those recordings. I see it more as for posterity. In the end of it, when things have calmed down a bit, historians, academics

> can look at this maybe in a clearer environment, more settled, more
> mature way with them and not get hung up on wordings. (Interviewee 10,
> 2019)

Although the language here is ambiguous, it clearly is not the goal or responsibility of

this interviewee to offer a vision of how and when storytelling outputs should be

gathered and used to interpret the conflict, or the extent to which a storytelling

narrative should be wielded to publicly engage with the meta-conflict. What is clear, is

the continued commitment to gathering. This also serves to emphasise the line in the

minds of many storytelling facilitators, between the gathering of stories, and what is

then done with them. Facilitators engage with this question to varying extents – while

this interviewee was intentionally more focused upon the gathering of stories, other

facilitators were happy to venture more detailed visions of how stories should be

shared, and its relationship with the SHA. Finally, it is important to note that

storytelling's capacity to tell stories at risk of loss that are intrinsically and historically

valuable are even more significant when they are told by groups who have otherwise

been marginalised by the conflict.

6.2 – Storytelling gives a voice to the marginalised

Facilitators overwhelmingly spoke about the need to give voice to the marginalised, and in many respects this commitment is a continuation of the broad goals and philosophies, which seek to establish the storyteller as central and authoritative in the process. In this section, the pattern follows the contention that storytelling can be seen as beneficial both in terms of individual catharsis and a broader societal healing (see Dybris McQuaid, 2016; Heatherington & Hackett, 2005; Hackett & Rolston, 2009). After initially exploring the practical implications this approach has for story-gathering, it is argued that commitment to either approach requires the facilitator to allow storytellers to engage with stories that challenge the meta-conflict.

Some storytelling facilitators emphasised both the social and individual healing that storytelling could potentially offer, echoing explanations of storytelling's purported benefits in Dybris McQuaid's (2016) research:

> It was a free book that travelled widely. It's on the reading list at Yale in America, which is pretty good. But it's the fact that it didn't matter who heard these stories, it was the fact that the women gave them. That was the overriding factor, and everything was that the women finally spoke. (Interviewee 14, 2019)

Here, the benefits of a project are defined not just in its capacity to heal locally, but also its international appeal. But the interviewee is keen to emphasise the significance of historically marginalised women being able to speak. They continued:

> There was one story in there that did make the front page - that was the woman that survived Greysteel, and her admission that she just felt forgotten about afterwards made the front of the Irish news, because she had never spoken about it before. (Interviewee 14, 2019; see also McKinney, 2016)

Other facilitators emphasised the personal healing that comes from empowering a victim to speak about their experiences:

> Because families are empowered to make those decisions and tell the stories in their own words, that's why it's become so important for them. […] For some families they've reflected that that experience has been as equal and, in some cases, more cathartic, or more important, or more special in terms of their dealing with the past - dealing with the circumstances of their loved one's death. (Interviewee 16, 2019)

There is not enough space here to fully return to the catharsis debate already touched upon previously, but there is at least a sense in storytelling that giving a voice to an unheard group has the *potential* to offer a release or relief of some description. As intimated previously, there is surely an opportunity for further research for someone with access to storytellers to test these claims in the long-term.

While catharsis was a theme for some facilitators when discussing giving voice to the marginalised, most related it to the broader aims, such as addressing an imbalance in the narrative or generally promoting peace.

> I think there is a motive for people about a sense of having been *silenced during the conflict*, and so wanting to break through that and so contribute

> to the historical record. That feels to me like one of the main motives. Having said that, I don't ask people, it's just that might come out in conversation. […] So, that's a stronger motive than people thinking that they're going to feel better after it. (Interviewee 6, 2019, emphasis added)

In this case the way in which story gathering critically engages with the meta-conflict becomes clear – the mere existence and rationale behind the contributions to storytelling projects (and certainly this particular project) is to address a perceived "silencing" during the conflict. Interviewee 6 was not alone in this interpretation of storytelling's potential to address uneven narratives:

> I felt that too many of the stories that have been told already, have come from people who were directly involved with the Troubles. And I do feel that there has been a neglect of ordinary people who have had to live through the Troubles. (Interviewee 2, 2019)

This quote reinforces the notion of storytelling challenging the meta-conflict, in the way that its mere existence is a response to a perceived imbalance that needed to be addressed. It is also worth returning to the argument presented in the previous chapter, that story-gathering does indeed allow storytellers to engage with the meta-conflict due to a commitment to presenting a platform that is non-partisan. Combined with this commitment to giving voice to those who have otherwise been silenced, these projects can be seen as ideologically committed to recording whatever stories the storyteller wants to tell.

Commitment to the principle of giving voice to the marginalised was expressed by most storytelling projects, and indeed most identity groups agreed with the idea.

> Diversity Challenges, through its work in dealing with the past, recognised that those who had served the state, whether they be police or army, were least likely to tell their stories than those who were either paramilitaries or were affected by the conflict as members of the general public. (Interviewee 5, 2019)

Taken together, these quotes suggest universal appeal to the idea that certain groups that cut across the identities of Northern Irish society were excluded from peacebuilding discourse. Interviewee 5 continued to explain that there were contextual or technical justifications for their claim:

> The fact that if you're in a formal structure like the police or the army, there is the whole thing of not talking about what you do, not telling your family what you do, and there is also the further thing of the Official Secrets Act. But we realised that [...] *if storytelling and oral history was going to assist in healing, it was important that stories from as many different backgrounds as possible were heard*, and that is why we specifically went to try and collect stories from those who had served the state. (2019, emphasis added)

Storytelling tends to operate on the baseline assumption that all 'ordinary' people from across the divides have been marginalised to some extent. This sentiment is captured by Wing in an account of a locally constructed 'commemoration trail' in Ballymurphy in the absence (at the time of her writing) of action surrounding the massacre (2010). Whether there are personal or specific views they may personally hold to (i.e. working specifically with one community or another for practical or personal reasons) their storytelling work tended to be committed to contributing more broadly to diversity and complexity:

> I would tend to emphasise the opportunity to include gender perspectives, hitherto hidden stories, rural perspectives; to really helpfully complicate and broaden out the canvas for dealing with the past. (Interviewee 3, 2019)

In short, the storytelling community interviewed has a core respect for the story that the storyteller wants to share, and is committed to reaching marginalised groups across the spectrum of identities. To return to Wing's research, which suggested a somewhat narrow reaction to marginalisation, storytelling today seems to be the fulfilment of the initial 'important steps' in terms of acknowledgement and 'setting the stage' for more rigorous peacework (2010: 35). The difference and progress made is in the commitment to ethical standards devised as a community, and overarching philosophical commitments to the centrality of storytellers across the region.

To overlap with the previous theme, there is a historical significance in capturing these otherwise unheard narratives of the conflict. A broad definition of storytelling is deployed in this research, but often there is an appeal to oral history methodologies within the network of facilitators. While this is not universal, it is perhaps an explanation for this commitment to recording stories that may otherwise be lost, or to correct the injustice of them going unheard.

There is a challenge at this point, but worth touching upon here; the fine line which facilitators must walk in terms of ensuring that otherwise marginalised voices are heard, without adopting a staunchly exclusionary perspective to an otherwise apparently 'dominant' voice in the post-conflict narrative. Typically, the approach would be to

actively seek marginalised groups, but simultaneously ensure that it is not at the exclusion or detriment to any other group:

> I do believe that you can and should work hard at reaching out and actively trying to see what's already been done, where should we perhaps at least in this early stage concentrate our energies, and so on. But not to the point of exclusion, of saying we will ruthlessly privilege these narratives and that somehow other groups or categories of individuals. Not least am I against that because I think, having been involved in oral history I am acutely aware of the fact that we all fall into multiple categories […] and I think rightly most of us are resistant to pigeon-holing and labelling. So in that sense I'd be open to making a concerted effort to reach out to people who for one reason or another haven't had a chance to tell their story and want to tell their story, but would stop shy of any kind of exclusionary approach. (Interviewee 3, 2019)

This is not the only challenge to collecting stories from excluded groups. Other storytelling facilitators reflected on times where it was a struggle just to get the story from the individual storyteller. An initial challenge has been alluded to, in that even convincing someone that they had a story to tell could sometimes be a struggle. In other cases, storytellers may be all too aware that their story is important or valid, but find it difficult to actually put their experience into words:

> There were a lot of times where you had to eek the story out of them. I mean we knew this was the only chance […] There was a woman we sat with for five hours. You had to just wait and see what came out and then try and do whatever they said justice. To accurately reflect what they went through. So, it could be a very long process, I think there was one where she hadn't said anything much within about 2 hrs and our normal interviews would be an hour and a half. [*Redacted*] would go with me for them so it's not just me, you know sometimes just to get them friendly and relaxed, drinking enough tea, having a bit of craic - before you even turn on a Dictaphone. You know you had to really warm them up in that respect. They're not just sitting singing their story. It can be very hard to tease it out of them, coax it. (Interviewee 14,

2019)

Given the content of storytelling, this should perhaps not come as a surprise. Capturing the story of a marginalised individual, about traumatic (and potentially unresolved) events is always likely to be challenging. The significance here is that it serves to underline storytelling's benefit in challenging the meta-conflict. Sharing divisive and emotionally charged narratives is a real difficulty in any post-conflict setting; an immediate benefit of storytelling is that it manages to give voice and record these meaningful and complex accounts of the conflict, but in perhaps a less traumatic way than formal transitional justice mechanisms such as truth commissions. While formal mechanisms may afford a deeper sense of acknowledgement, it is far from guaranteed, while a storytelling project offers agency (Hackett and Rolston, 2009) and safety.

Trauma is not restricted to those who lived through the conflict itself; many facilitators emphasised the importance of the transgenerational dimension to post-conflict stories, and how storytelling could serve a group that has suffered the effects of a conflict they either do not remember or were not alive for:

> I think it's whether it should be made available publicly... But I think it should be, because we're now into at least a second generation, maybe even third generation now, who haven't lived through the Troubles. But they're living with the legacy of it. And I think the more that's kind of made open and made available for people to navigate, to negotiate, the sooner the better... Doesn't have to be forced, doesn't have to be pushed down people's throats. It's there, it's a resource; it's up to teachers, community leaders, parents, etc., to think about how... and, of course, curators, to think about how it's best used and what circumstance. (Interviewee 7, 2019)

In this case there is a clear overlap with the arguments outlined previously regarding the historical significance of storytelling projects, in enshrining the principles of breadth and diversity to create a toolkit for future generations to understand the conflict. In this sense, the quote underlines the importance of understanding the way in which the collected stories are then communicated or shared. The means by which this could be achieved are vague or even non-committal in this quote, but it should be emphasised that Interviewee 7 gave specific examples about how to use some of the collected stories, and how to communicate these in pursuit of peace or knowledge; this is explored further in chapter 8. Transgenerational trauma is a complex and contested issue, with gradually developing body of evidence; Hanna et. al draw together the varied evidence and conclude that both the Troubles and the concurrent 'silence' has contributed to a sense of transgenerational trauma in the region (2012). This characteristic of silence regarding transgenerational trauma underlines the role that storytelling can play in breaking the silence (with many projects paying reference to silence in their titles, e.g. *Stories from Silence*, *Unheard Voices*).

Other facilitators spoke about how unresolved stories tied in with the transgenerational aspect of post-conflict narratives:

> We haven't even talked about transgenerational impacts or stories, but like it is…families do say, "I'm fighting, and if I die, my sons already said, he's going to pick it up…or my nephew said he's going to take up the case", and that's…I hate the fact that my job is actually needed…to be honest, I

>   do. […] I love my job, I love what I do, I love the families that I work with, but it's sad that you actually need groups like us. (Interviewee 16, 2019)

If the previous quote is ambiguous and open-ended about the relationship between storytelling, transgenerational effects of conflict and challenging the meta-conflict, this statement offers a little more clarity. The significance of addressing intergenerational trauma is further underlined by research into marginalised groups in other contexts, for instance the use of narrative work known as Emotional Emancipation Circles to address transgenerational trauma in Black communities in the USA (Barlow, 2018). In above case, a local NGO is the platform through which individuals and families can challenge the 'case', by gathering information and challenging narratives, failures of law or other injustices; it addresses the meta-conflict for people at a local or even individual level, and the publicization of these efforts also act as a form of broader dissemination. Critically, it shows how storytelling mechanisms protect groups that are marginalised not only through structural or historic injustices, but also later generations that may otherwise be forgotten about. The extent to which this pattern continues will only be understood as time unfolds. As Ferrara (2015) points out, the passage of time is a necessity in some respects, since successive generations and the embedding of democratic practices are needed for the impact of transitional justice (specifically truth commissions) to be felt. In the case of Northern Ireland and advocacy groups like the one Interviewee 16 works for, time and the establishment of both a fulsome approach to legacy, and elites less engaged in zero-sum politics than the current Stormont assembly, will be significant.

One interviewee neatly summed up the nature of storytelling giving voice to the marginalised, and how it can be both cathartic for the individual and provide societal healing:

> Some of those people have been smeared, their whole communities have been smeared, and they've been accused, you know, people in Derry who were shot unarmed were accused for years with it was their own fault, they were violent, they were this, they were involved in the IRA - and they weren't. So that's another need I found with some people, to kind of exonerate themselves because they'd been smeared, or the media hadn't represented it well - there's a whole load of stuff going on. But it's really about validation I think, and respect and communicating to somebody that their experience and their narrative of that experience is something incredibly important and valuable to society. (Interviewee 18, 2019)

The desire to 'exonerate' perhaps captures both the sentiments of storytelling striving to achieve personal and intergroup healing simultaneously. To achieve this, storytellers have to critically engage with the meta-conflict, since the goal is so explicitly to address narrative injustice.

6.3 - Contact hypothesis and the meta-conflict

In this section, the ways in which storytelling promotes intergroup contact are explored in relation to challenging the meta-conflict. Specifically, it argues that storytelling helps challenge the meta-conflict by providing opportunities for contact between groups, which happens in person, remotely (or 'vicariously', see Pettigrew et al., 2011) and also spatially, in terms of the areas participants must enter in order to participate with projects. The challenges and complexities of the contact hypothesis are also considered; while there is cause to be optimistic about the benefits from intergroup contact that some (not all) storytelling projects offer, it is neither universal nor without its problems.

While there is extensive literature on contact hypothesis (or intergroup contact theory), that cannot be fully explored here, it is helpful to briefly define the contact hypothesis:

> The contact hypothesis is a broad generalization about the effects of intergroup contact on prejudiced opinions and discriminatory behaviour. The idea is that more contact between individuals belonging to antagonistic social groups (defined by customs, language, beliefs, nationality, or identity) tends to undermine negative stereotypes and reduce prejudice, thus improving intergroup relations by making people more willing to deal with each other as equals. (Forbes, 1997: ix)

It is also helpful to note that meta-analyses across multiple studies of contact hypothesis suggest that prejudice is indeed reduced by intergroup contact (Pettigrew et al., 2011). While there is not space here to explore the contestations that exist within contact

hypothesis literature, it is important to emphasise the generally positive effect it is seen to have in terms of peacebuilding.

For some facilitators, promoting contact was an explicit aim or design element of their projects

> The trick is then to move from beyond single identity collections of stories, which are fine and very important and will certainly form an important part of history, social and otherwise. *But to tell those stories and to let other people from different communities, what we sometimes refer to the 'others' or 'them ones', let them hear what the stories are of a particular community.* Of course, equally important is to listen to their stories so that they get a better view of where everybody's coming from. We maybe develop a little bit more empathy than we do in this very troubled part of the world and understand why people made certain decisions in the past that possibly I wouldn't have been comfortable with. (Interviewee 12, 2019, emphasis added)

Interviewee 12's association of empathy with intergroup contact is a familiar one, with contact hypothesis research often aiming to explore the extent to which empathy or forgiveness is achieved through contact (Voci et al., 2015). Interviewee 12's work would sometimes involve live events where storytelling projects would share stories or publications before a mixed group, but the contact hypothesis is also applicable in a 'remote' sense too:

> I think the goal for our project was to encourage people to hear the story of "the Other". In that, we filmed in 2006 and '7, we're talking about, let's say 9 years after the '98 Good Friday Agreement. We kind of all knew stories of our own community, what was starting to emerge, but there wasn't a great abundance of it, was the story of "the Other". So, our purpose was to make it inclusive, so that while the popular narrative, whether it's cinema or the media or whatever, tends to be the Republican narrative, because of those big events like the Hunger Strike, or the largest escape in British penal history. We knew we wanted the other stories; we wanted the complexity of it. (Interviewee 7, 2019)

Contact hypothesis is not exclusively about physical contact, and exposure to 'vicarious contact' (Pettigrew et al., 2011) can also improve relations. Interviewee 7's approach to project design is fully consistent with this and overlaps with the above aim to represent marginalised voices, in that it seeks to disrupt conventional narratives by capturing and sharing stories that 'the Other' may not have heard.

Physical intergroup contact through storytelling is achieved in a number of ways. For some projects it is hard-wired into their methods, for instance TUH's use of talking circles means the audience is the general public as opposed to a single constituency; it also makes use of intergroup panels:

> Members of the Glenanne Gang killed [*redacted'*s] father. […] So, he's telling that story and the two witnesses, one was a former member of the RUC and one was a former Loyalist paramilitary. So, the task for them is to communicate empathetically with…So, you can see the, the kind of energy that could generate there. (Interviewee 15, 2019)

The emphasis on empathy here suggests that storytelling projects that encourage intergroup contact challenge the meta-conflict. Where identities and narratives are ossified to the extent that no progress can be made, intergroup contact may encourage the first conversations that challenges these divisions. Empathy has been important in other storytelling contexts; for instance a storytelling project (*To Reflect and Trust*) run at Ben Gurion University that facilitated contact between Jewish and Palestinian students found that stories with themes that students could empathise with were much more likely to resonate – e.g. shared experiences of rootlessness and oppression (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004).

For other projects, intergroup contact was less guaranteed - for instance, it should be

noted that it would be unusual to have intergroup story-gathering processes conducted

as described above:

> Whatever community it is, it can be a geographic community or an identity
> community or an organisational community, *tell their own stories,*
> *probably first within their own groups where they're most comfortable*. For
> instance, the RUC George Cross Foundation stories were recorded by
> retired police officers or certainly people that had a lot of attachment to
> policing. That ensured that the person telling the story was feeling more
> comfortable in a climate where being a police officer is still something that
> a lot of people shy away from declaring. (Interviewee 5, 2019, emphasis
> added)

It is significant to note that this is not exclusive to ex-police storytelling projects, but

projects of any community would typically follow this pattern. However, other phases of

storytelling often involved intergroup contact – Interviewee 6 describes how Dúchas

piloted the Pieces of the Past project (2014), an intergroup storytelling project in Belfast:

> We designed a project which was working with about five or six other
> community groups, including two groups from Shankill which is Unionist,
> an area which was very… structured opposition there in terms of the
> experience of the conflict. A group in East Belfast, also a Unionist group
> and some other groups from within this community. So, we brought
> together several groups in a partnership, we trained people to do
> interviews and then what we were saying was… "you can deposit your
> interview with your local group and also with Dúchas. We would like you to
> put it with Dúchas, but we recognise that needs to be your choice to do
> that." That was recognising that people might see us as not the most
> natural place for them to put their interview if they were a Unionist.
> (Interviewee 6, 2019)

In this case intergroup contact was through project design, training and general

collaboration. Although the initial training came from Dúchas, the fact that the

facilitators shared a common interest and commitment to storytelling conforms to what

Allport describes as the conditions of 'positive factors', equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation and support from authorities (see Pettigrew et al., 2011; Allport, 1954). While these factors are not seen as essential, they have been observed to improve prejudice reduction (Pettigrew et al., 2011).

While this collaborative working arguably contributes to peace through contact and prejudice reduction in a broad sense, it also helps challenge the meta-conflict. This argument is speculative to an extent, because interviewees pointed to examples of intergroup contact that presumably challenged the meta-conflict, but it is difficult to test how this unfolded without being able to speak to the participants involved over an extended period. In the example below, the blossoming of unexpected friendships poses many questions about how the women involved navigated the contested narratives between them:

> But there were a few women that had changed their lives here. There was one who had never come across to the city side in twenty years because she thought she'd get her head kicked in. And she made friends with a dissident woman who's a woman who still believes in Ireland's struggles. She made friends with her from Creggan and they met at the peace bridge and walked over together, and they were best friends. So that really matters. Two totally opposing…. One of them is a real staunch loyalist and one of them is dissident republican, and they became great friends. (Interviewee 14, 2019)

How did they resolve the contested narratives and ideological positions between the two of them; how did the loyalist reconcile with the republican? What conversations took place to establish a mutual understanding? Or did they perhaps choose to ignore their differences and accentuate the similarities? In many respects, their relationship is

a metaphor (admittedly a simplistic one) for the journey that Northern Ireland must take towards positive peace. Some further insight into how the unlikely friendship comes from another interviewee, who may very well be speaking about the same women since they are referring to the same project:

> I saw a woman from very staunchly royalist areas, like Bond Street and the Waterside, even coming to Creggan, it was a really big step for them. But the woman found that there was… This sounds like such a cliché, but they had more in common than what divided them, because they were talking about things like how they're worried about their grandchildren getting involved in the wrong crowd, or they were talking about being parents and mothers, those kinds of things. *And it's then, in that kind of environment, that somebody was able to talk about – for example, one of the Protestant ladies was able to talk about the time that they were burned out of their house. And the Catholic woman who was taking part was able to listen and take on board their experience, and vice versa, you know?* (Interviewee 17, 2019, emphasis added)

This implies that storytelling can challenge the meta-conflict by providing the basis and environment in which it becomes acceptable to share stories that are potentially controversial, and in this case, face to face with the 'other'. By having the initial contact, the storytellers were able to move to more complex and 'risky' stories. It is important to emphasise the fact these women would have shared commitments and values, in that they were prepared to engage with the project in the first place; research suggests that in Northern Ireland intergroup contact cannot cut through pre-existing deeply entrenched group identity and conflict experiences (Voci et al., 2015). This pattern plays out in other contexts, where mixed dialogical storytelling projects only work if certain conditions are present, such as a willingness to listen and learn, a safe space and a continued reflective process (Chaitin, 2014). These conditions were very much in place

with the project that interviewees 14 and 17 mentioned. The importance of intergroup relationships was emphasised in Derry (the above example) but also present in Belfast-based projects. When asked about what storytelling had contributed to peace in the area, one interviewee answered:

> I would say continuing relationships. There's something about understanding the length of time all this sectarianism and oppression (and also the conflict) went on for… you just don't fix it in a year or two. It's about, for me the relationships that have endured. Some have, some haven't and certainly the people who have continued to work together. That has to be… I know on the Dúchas project they brought people over from East Belfast, who had never been on the Falls Road or hadn't been on the Falls Road since they were children. (Interviewee 2, 2019)

Another recurring theme is around territories within the cities; venturing into areas that once would be considered unthinkable. Another interviewee described how in Derry the women from different communities walked through the Creggan together to a community centre, some with their remembrance poppies on, with no difficulty (Interviewee 14, 2019). The intergroup contact opportunities created by storytelling help to physically challenge the meta-conflict, by shattering myths around certain spaces in Northern Ireland.

A criticism that may follow the claim that storytelling participants challenge the meta-conflict and enjoy some sense of 'reconciliation' would be the relatively limited reach, since only a small proportion of Northern Irish society has participated, and even smaller in terms of intergroup contact. However, storytelling facilitators are quick to emphasise the significance of the process itself, and how it in turn is perceived:

> It's about the process as much as the product. It's the process of telling stories, the process of police officers and Sinn Féin and ex-paramilitaries sitting down and talking to each other, it's about the optics that provides to wider society. (Interviewee 12, 2019)

Storytelling, in terms of peacebuilding or transitional justice, must also be understood in relation to how it is shared with or received by a wider audience. In this example, the claim is that storytelling sets an example in terms of the dialogue that is occurring between historically opposed groups – even at closed, gathering-specific stages of a project. Other facilitators sought to foster 'vicarious contact' through their outputs, in this case the website for the PMA:

> One of the things you'll notice on the current website is that we don't give the person's constituency. So, it's just a name; we don't say if it's a Prisoner, or a Prison Officer, or anything. In some ways that's part of that idea of encouraging people to listen to the story of "the Other", because if you're from here and you're told that the person speaking is a Republican or a Prison Officer or a Probation Officer, you immediately start to frame that potential narrative around that person. We wanted to encourage "the Other" to watch everyone and not just the people you might identify with, by anonymising their constituency. That works, and it produces some surprises. (Interviewee 7, 2019)

This approach was not universal, but the underlying aim of surprising audiences with the shared experience of conflict is something that occurred elsewhere, for example the design of the Pieces of the Past and Dúchas publication *Living through the Conflict* (2014) places testimonies from diverse identity groups side-by-side under shared thematic headers. This approach draws on threads identified across the literature of storytelling for peacebuilding, such as the goal of promoting complicated and diverse narratives side by side (Hamber & Kelly, 2016) and grouping accounts to elicit empathy through

shared characteristics (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004). Not all storytelling projects are published or consciously designed to present the views of the Other, whether grouped under shared themes to emphasise common ground or otherwise, which is explored further in Chapters 8 and 9.

The contact hypothesis is also somewhat problematic in that it assumes a relatively simple state of societal division; namely a neat PUL and CNR divide (along with state forces), and attempting to reflect an equal divide in the process of storytelling would be a mistake:

> You're either sanitising, or you're not allowing the complexity to come through. So, there's no doubt there are two broadly identifiable communities - Unionist and Nationalist. There are some folk that don't consider themselves either. There are some folks that are a little bit of both. It's complicated. So, it's not to deny the primacy of that debate, but it has to be a bit more complicated in terms of what choices do people make. (Interviewee 19, 2019)

The contact hypothesis is not as simple as bringing together two homogenous groups; in reality, there is great diversity even within a community that may be externally pre-judged to be unified in its identity and outlook on the conflict. This was apparent even when carrying out the fieldwork, as interviewees rarely conformed to unhelpful stereotypes – one interviewee was raised a Catholic but converted to Anglicanism later in life, another found oral history through left-wing feminism and came from the CNR community; other identities were unclear during the interview or conversations, while some were noticeably proud of their group identification and yet were still committed to dialogue with the 'Other'. The concept of being 'purely' one identity group or another

is unhelpful and inaccurate, since both groups have intermarried so extensively despite

a long history of discrimination against Protestant-Catholic families (NIMMA, 2012) and

that 42% of the country do not identify as PUL or CNR (Wilson, 2016).

A further final complication to intergroup contact is easily missed if one fixates on binary

identity groups. Storytelling also helps promote vicarious contact between wealthier

classes and the working classes, the latter so often most immediately affected by the

conflict, and often caught up with negative associations attached to paramilitary

activity:

> So there's a class thing going as well, I think I felt when I was doing
> [storytelling] that there was a kind of ethical dimension of saying; look it's
> no use othering and smearing people in deprived circumstances on
> estates, and just listen to unbelievably courageous they are, how forgiving
> they are of dreadful things and how unbelievably intelligent they are in
> their solutions - and can we stop being so prejudiced on a class basis as
> well as anything else. (Interviewee 18, 2019)

This provides another overlap with the design of storytelling to give voice to the

marginalised. Storytellers are given a platform not only to share their experiences, but

also to challenge perceptions entrenched through the meta-conflict of these deprived

parts of Northern Ireland as tribalistic and insular, and provide contact and visibility

which challenges this misrepresentation to otherwise ignorant groups locally,

nationally and further afield. It also echoes Miller's sentiments that the conflict was a

propaganda war, fought in the media through calculated representations to build

legitimacy (1994). Storytelling facilitators see themselves as addressing the cleavages

created by these representations, and creating 'contact' with the Other can include the classic identity groups but equally the maligned working classes.

It has been argued in this section that storytelling helps challenge the meta-conflict through opportunities for intergroup contact; it does so in person, vicariously and spatially. It is not without its challenges, in that group boundaries may be simplified to an unhelpful degree, and it also has to play a part in addressing unhelpful class prejudices. The delicate balance of challenge and opportunity presented by intergroup contact is perhaps best captured by a reflection of an interviewee on the positive intergroup contact that exists within the storytelling network:

> I think [redacted] would agree that she and I come from different sides of the equation. We treat each other with respect. We have reached an accommodation. [She] has been up here and I think it's a great tribute to herself that she did, came around our garden with others. We talk sensibly about oral history. *We've never listened to each other's story*. (Interviewee 10, 2019, emphasis added)

6.4 - Conclusion

Facilitators broadly emphasised the themes of historical significance, marginalised voices and intergroup contact, and although there is nuance in how they see this as contributing to peace, these were undoubtedly the clearest and least contested themes of the fieldwork. Critically, all three aspects allow for the possibility of challenging the meta-conflict in a constructive way. A historically rigorous account will allow the storyteller to address grand themes of sectarianism, discrimination and structural

inequality. Giving voice to the marginalised as a goal is in itself is a challenge to the meta-conflict; it is by design an intervention to correct imbalance in the post-conflict narrative. This is similar in intergroup contact, since it is driven by the assumption that the distance between groups is what fuels the meta-conflict and acts as an obstacle for meaningful discourse around the conflict.

Chapter 7 – The challenges of using storytelling to promote peace and challenge the meta-conflict

The following chapter is a brief exploration of the challenges faced by using storytelling as a peacebuilding or transitional justice intervention. It demonstrates that storytellers are free to challenge the meta-conflict, but it is mindful of the difficulties associated with the process of story-gathering (although there are some inevitable overlaps with story-sharing). It is important to acknowledge the difficulties due to the heterogenous nature of the storytelling community, but to underline the relatively unified approach demonstrated in the story-gathering approach.

The chapter begins by mapping out the dangers of exploitation in storytelling – both the potential for storytellers to exploit projects for their own ideals, or to be exploited by other parties such as the media.

The second half of the chapter explores the steps taken to protect storytellers. This includes the use of ethical guidelines, ensuring that storytellers are not misled about therapeutic benefits, avoiding the retraumatisation of victims and ensuring that storytellers do not implicate themselves or others.

The chapter is included to give an overview of the practical demands, risks and measures related to a storytelling project designed to contribute to challenging the meta-conflict.

7.1 – Storytelling – an exploitable platform?

This section examines two ways in which storytelling may be exploited; the way in which storytellers may attempt to exploit the process to suit their own political views, and the way in which storytellers may be exploited by external forces, particularly the media. To clarify what is meant by exploitation here storytelling facilitators typically saw it as the use of a project to rewrite history or further a particularly divisive narrative. To compare with other contexts, Chaitin (2014) describes testimonies that undermine peace as either being calls for revenge (i.e. remaining heavily politicised with specific goals attached) or victim-centred without the will to listen to other statements of victimhood.

Although storytelling could be exploited in order to further extreme political views, the reality is that these more insular projects tend to be just that – insular – and as such the message is only circulated and entrenched within their own community. This risk is largely avoided as the storytelling facilitators were committed to peacebuilding and cross community work, owing to the ethical guidelines which broadly prevent storytelling being exploited in this way. In the second half of this section, consideration is given to the ways in which the media may exploit storytellers and the way in which facilitators seek to protect them. Running throughout this section is the fine line between storytelling encouraging a diverse range of narratives that can challenge the meta-conflict, and projects that simply entrench existing divides or outrage different constituencies. This is a theme the thesis returns to in future chapters.

7.1.1 – The exploitation of storytelling

Some storytelling facilitators expressed concerns about the way that storytelling potentially reflected the interests of ex-combatants:

> I probably have a personal problem with ex-paramilitaries telling their stories - I do have a personal problem with it. [...] And I've said it at meetings – it hasn't gone down very well. I'm of the mind that, unless you're sorry for what you did, then I don't want you bragging about it. And a lot of the stuff that's been written by people who were involved [...] the vast majority of the stories that have been told are about them. So, they've got in first. There's been quite a lot of revisionism (Interviewee 1, 2019).

Interviewee 1 was also quite clear that this was a personal interpretation, and not necessarily one that was shared universally within the storytelling community. They also reflected that this was a difficult position to occupy, since the line between storytelling facilitator and storyteller is sometimes blurred, as is the line between victim and ex-paramilitary. At times it is hard to be sure who is telling what story, and for what reason.

Although maybe not stated in such explicit terms, other facilitators were also conscious of the potential for storytelling to be exploited or appropriated:

> It also very easily could be, in fact, a means of furthering discord. I mean, the stories of what people were told on their granny's knee about the Others very often was not… could be negative and could be a further form of discord. So, the storytelling could be beneficial but also can be harmful and therefore, particularly if you're dealing with it in a legacy situation, *when you're dealing with a conflicted past and a conflicted present, one needs to be careful as to how one uses it.* (Interviewee 5, 2019, emphasis added)

Although the first part of the quote seemingly corroborates some of the concerns that Interviewee 1 raises - about the potential for storytelling to be exploited in pursuit of historical revisionism or furthering an agenda, the final sentence perhaps best captures the sentiment of the storytelling community. Caution, ethical guidelines and principles (see HTR, 2009) and the aforementioned commitment to a non-partisan platform means that, while *aware* of the risk, storytelling facilitators (at least for projects associated with the interviewee sample) largely did not see their projects as susceptible to narrative exploitation. Beyond Interviewee 1's reservations, at worst some facilitators indicated that certain projects maybe did not live up to their own expectations of what constitutes a well-run storytelling project:

> It's not about being restrictive about how people want to approach it, but they do need…it needs to be done under certain principles. Ethical principles, around informed consent, control of the story, and all of that. And I think that we have probably, in a lot of ways probably, in a sense raised standards, I think. Of how people should go about some of it. And a lot of that is done informally, like [*redacted*] probably is inundated by…any time I hear of a project, they're thinking about doing something, I say "go and speak to [*redacted*]". Because there are people that know what they're doing. And then you've got these innovations like where [*redacted*] is doing more training around it and publishing around it. So, there's a little more kind of professionalisation. But there will always be projects that just go…record some stories, we'll put out a little booklet, a little publication. (Interviewee 11, 2019)

This would suggest that exploitation is reduced by virtue of a close-knit community of experts who have filled the need for codification and guidance as storytelling has proliferated in Northern Ireland. Although this interpretation may be optimistic, Interviewee 11 also hints at how storytelling's grassroots may have affected its potential for exploitation. The 'raised standards' are in relation to the earlier stages of storytelling

projects, that sprung up in the absence of other peacebuilding or transitional justice initiatives. Storytelling remains relatively "unregulated" in the sense that these are still projects that emerge at a local level, with no direct state involvement until the SHA is enacted. Other storytelling facilitator's reflections corroborate the claim that standards were raised, in that they say that their involvement with The Stories Network (through which the guidelines would be disseminated) resulted in their exposure to ethical guidelines for the first time (Interviewee 10, 2019; Interviewee 19, 2019 among others). Similar could be said for the impact of guidelines released by Derry-based TUH (McMaster and Higgins, 2011) particularly for organisations outside of Belfast.

That a grassroots movement, with an informal set of principles for self-regulation, has sprung up in a divided society with no transitional justice or peacebuilding mechanism is arguably a remarkable achievement. The closest that storytelling has to any kind of top-down regulation is perhaps the requirements for EU PEACE funding, which has placed requirements on projects such as the necessity for inter-community project design or reconciliation work (cf. Dybris McQuaid, 2016; Interviewee 11, 2019) which in itself will go some distance to reducing the number of projects that could be accused of furthering a singular or divisive narrative. This is not to naively paint the storytelling community as the finished article – as Stanton (2018) points out, there are tensions regarding the professionalisation of grassroots peacebuilding and a lack of certainty around how best to utilise the expertise of such a movement.

While the top-down element imposed by EU PEACE funding may (in theory) promote cross-community work, it is not to say that single community projects are a thing of the

past –other small projects continue with the goal of addressing a perceived gap in the overall narrative of the conflict:

> So, I'm thinking particularly of a group in Fermanagh and there's a group in Tyrone that have both said that they've been doing story recording work. And have come out with a publication or two, but not really distributing it very widely. But that is very much because they feel that's a story that wasn't being heard. But they're not at a place, and I don't think they're necessarily being encouraged to be at a place where they want to reach out. *Trying to be diplomatic*. (Interviewee 11, 2019, emphasis added)

The final sentence is telling here – there is perhaps a sense that some smaller projects occupy a slightly different space to the projects that were captured during this research. While most of the interviewees were professionalised by compliance with the Ethical Principles (HTR, 2009) and by virtue of their membership of the stories network, other projects are implied here as perhaps less professionalised and more likely to seek to purely serve the needs of a local community. While these are not necessarily to be denigrated, since they represent the first steps in forming meaningful peacebuilding work in an area (see Wing, 2010) it also demonstrates the diverse characteristics of projects in such a grassroots-driven context and the possibility that some projects are not designed with the aim of contributing to peace.

While exploitation of storytelling projects may seem a real risk for a divided society still entrenched in the meta-conflict, the reality is very few storytelling facilitators seemed concerned that their projects were potentially platforms for furthering discord through revisiting entrenched and divisive narratives. While this might seem complacent, to them the design of the project, the commitment to broadly accepted ethical values and increasing professionalisation of the work means it is harder for polemical storytelling

to emerge. The ethical principles adopted include an emphasis on societal healing and prevention of recurrence (HTR, 2009: 5) which immediately precludes more damaging testimonies that may arise – e.g. stories that call for vengeance, or remain fixated on victimhood alone in Chaitin's dichotomy (2010).

Finally, it is important to note that one of the main reasons storytelling facilitators do not see their projects as vulnerable to exploitation stems from the very goal of the project itself (see Roulston, 2017). An increased emphasis on professionalisation and oral history approaches helps introduce rigor, and reduce the risk of instrumentalization concurrently (Bryson, 2016). As already described, many projects seek to give voice to marginalised groups, and to tell stories that would otherwise perhaps go untold. In this sense, many see their storytellers not as vulnerable to exploitation but indeed already the exploited party in the equation, and the storytelling project exists to rectify this historic exploitation. Even in cases where storytellers may have faulty recollections of events, oral history values these contributions since the inaccuracies and subjectivities reveal as much about the meaning and experiences of storytellers as a water-tight account may do (Thompson, 2017).

7.1.2 - How storytellers may be exploited

Although it may be partially explained by the sense of responsibility to the storytelling facilitator's constituency, a personal attachment to the community(ies) represented by

the project in question or a victim-centred philosophy to the project, most interviewees were much quicker to emphasise the vulnerability of storytellers themselves. This section specifically focuses on the opposite side of the concerns outlined above, by focusing on how involvement in storytelling may result in the exploitation of the storytellers or the accounts they offer.

Interviewees were quicker to emphasise how a storyteller might have their own story exploited, than vice versa. To return to the topic of ex-paramilitaries, one highly representative example reflected on tabloid exploitation of a storyteller:

> He and the colleague from the other side of the peace line, a couple of years ago, created... (there's some trouble around the peace line with kids, teenagers - young teenagers, at that) and they produced an anti-sectarian workbook for local families' community leaders. […] And it was in the local tabloids, Sunday tabloid - Sunday World, I think it was. And there were Republicans and Loyalists standing side-by-side with the little workbook photograph that was taken, and the headline underneath was, "Killers tell us how to behave." (Interviewee 7, 2019)

The implication made here that despite efforts to address social unrest around Belfast's peace lines, ex-paramilitaries are sometimes framed in terms of their past activities, rather than current peacebuilding work. While the comment is illustrative of the ongoing division in society, it is also a continuation of a theme identified by Cooke (2003) -framing paramilitarism is an enormous challenge for the media in Northern Ireland, since paramilitaries rapidly transitioned from terrorists to legitimate authority figures (due to the BFA and formation of associated political parties) in a handful years.

Victims also find themselves exploited by the media in a number of ways. One interviewee recounted a range of common issues with victim treatment at the hands of the media:

> Somebody who supported the family, they had edited two sentences of their contribution, so it sounded like they were making a massive…blunder in terms of the…geography of the area etc, like a factual error […] Or it's misrepresented in some way. They spell the name wrong, or they get their facts wrong about the date… (Interviewee 16, 2019)

> So, say there's a new piece of information that's came to light and they go in, and they say that, you know, "please don't be asking me about that" [*details regarding the death of a family member*]. Sit down, and the first question is, "So tell us about the night that your Father was shot dead in front of you? What age were you and how did that make you feel?" […] And the person goes…they're horrified…because they're there to talk about one thing, and they're being asked to talk about something that's deeply personal. (Interviewee 16, 2019)

In both these cases, journalistic insensitivity and even manipulation is further implied. This was a significant concern for a number of storytelling organisations, but particularly those with a victim-centred approach or character, since part of their mandate along with storytelling was also the legal representation of the victim's interests. It is tempting to speculate as to why the media engages in this behaviour, but first it is worth adding some more complexity to the discussion, since it would seem at least some journalists are keen to maintain particular frames and narratives to the conflict:

> I've had examples of journalists ringing me and saying, I need…I'm making this programme about victims or the legacy or the past, and I'm trying to speak "to a female victim or republican violence that lives outside of Belfast." And…it's like a list, and if you have like a male victim of state violence but, "no we've too many of those, we need some of this to balance it". And you know that kind of…criteria. And you go, well, not everybody

> fits into a box. You know, we work with families, we work with Protestant families who live in the Republic of Ireland whose loved ones were killed by loyalists, where do they fit? Or…Catholic families who lost their loved one to the IRA violence, or…an Orangeman who was killed by the parachute regiment in the Shankill Road. Where I've actually had a journalist come up to me, when we had the shoes on exhibition and say, "Right, where's the Protestant victims? Can you point out the Protestant victims to me?". And you go, "I can't". We don't go, there's the Protestant victims, there's the Catholic victims. (Interviewee 16, 2019)

The implication here is that at least some journalists reporting on the conflict will seek to frame events in a particular way. It is quite possible they are simply aiming to cover what they *perceive* to be a diverse set of accounts or cover a checklist, but the above quote would suggest that sometimes the accounts are being simplified and narrowed by failing to appreciate just how complex some stories are. Whether this is to make for an easier to digest narrative of the conflict in order to sell a product, or appeal to a market which is drawn from one of the two dominant identity groups of Northern Ireland, is too hard to tell from these quotes alone. There are echoes here of Rolston's (2007) argument that a series of BBC documentaries focused on the ideal-type victim at the expense of a more diverse programme.

Despite Interviewee 16 providing some of the most damaging examples of poor journalism in relation to victims of the conflict, they were also the Interviewee to provide access to a journalist who both sought to address some of the goals of storytelling in their journalism, but had also worked as part of storytelling projects – essentially an interviewee with a foot in both camps. Their comment on journalism in relation to the conflict is a relevant follow up to the above:

But, from what I know, the vast majority of journalists I know are genuinely trying to do a good job and they're trying to do it under often difficult circumstances. And sometimes things like those best practice guides are maybe put forward by victims' groups, who have their own set of priorities and their own perspective. And that's important, too, but maybe it doesn't reflect the realities of daily news gathering. I mean, that's not an attempt to defend some of the things I'm aware of, that have happened with families, but I know, by and large, most journalists are trying to do their best and often under huge pressure, with very little resources. Increasingly, people in broadcast or in print are under pressure to churn out multiple stories per day. When you're dealing with complex things to do with the past, to do with who said what, to do with what was actually said about an inquest at the time, vis a vis what the family say now, vis a vis what the MD says. (Interview 17, 2019).

The arrangement of the interview itself is proof in its own way of the sentiments expressed above, and that certain journalists retain the trust of storytellers and storytelling leaders. There is not the space to fully consider the relationship between journalism and storytelling here, but it is perhaps fair to conclude (in the context of this chapter) that storytellers are at least at risk of being exploited indirectly by the structural challenges faced by journalists (see Shoemaker and Reese, 1996), leading to occasionally simplistic, insensitive or inaccurate practices. Other forces are also at play to try to control this process, e.g. the recent release of guidelines for media interviews by the *Victims and Dealing with the Past project* (2019) in conjunction with the Commission for Victims and Survivors Northern Ireland and Susan McKay, a journalist who has also led recently updated storytelling projects (WAVE Trauma Centre, 2020a).

It is also worth briefly acknowledging that the question of exploitation and storytellers cannot be answered in binary terms, and nor is it helpful to represent storytellers as the

exploiters or the exploited. This downplays the agency of storytellers, and it is important to recognise the agency and awareness that these individuals possess:

> People in Northern Ireland - they have had the media crawling all over them for decades. They know about journalists; they know about the media. They are very media savvy people in those working-class areas where all the Troubles really happened. (Interview 18, 2019)

This should not be confused as a statement arguing that the people most deeply affected by the conflict should simply be left to fend off revisionist ex-paramilitaries or invasive journalists while simultaneously campaigning for answers, justice or otherwise; but an acknowledgement that they are not passive in the process.

7.1.3 – Conclusion: the challenge of preventing exploitation and challenging the meta-conflict

Storytelling projects are open to possible exploitation, since they aim to explore stories related to the conflict in a democratic and open way. They do so in a vacuum of regulation, formal transitional justice or peacebuilding and subsequently there is a chance they can be exploited to represent particular views, but ultimately, they tend to be protected by the adherence to locally agreed ethical guidelines. Storytellers and the projects themselves may be exploited by external forces, notably the media and local elites; however, it is also simplistic to accuse the media of being a purely exploitative

force. There are journalists who seek to represent the storytellers as carefully as they can, even in the face of systemic pressure and meta-narratives that shape their own work. The challenge in storytelling is the balance of preventing exploitation and challenging the meta-conflict. In other words:

> The position can be that, yes, that storytelling can provide a platform for people to propagandise, but if there are other stories out there, which frankly, actually are, to an extent, maybe giving a different viewpoint or pointing out that there is another view to that story. (Interview 5, 2019)

The real issue in terms of critically engaging with the meta-conflict is the 'platform', i.e. the public space that storytelling offers for people to share and communicate their stories. If the story is shared in a private or distinctly intra-group setting, then exploitation is much less concerning as far as the research questions presented here are concerned.

7.2 – Protecting storytellers

This section aims to explore some of the risks that storytellers take in order to share their stories, and the steps that facilitators take to protect them. It focuses mostly on the story-gathering side, and so some of the more complex or contested approaches to protecting storytellers as stories are shared, discussed and begin to truly become part of the narrative is discussed later. However, story-gathering is still an important part of the process of critically engaging with the meta-conflict. This section shows that storytellers are broadly free to discuss what they wish, due to the importance of their agency in the process and the protections offered by facilitators. The protections that are discussed include the importance of ethical guidelines, storyteller ownership, and a commitment to ensure that storytellers are not mis-sold storytelling as therapy. A great deal of space is afforded to the risk of retraumatisation, which is a complex issue for storytelling – broadly it is mitigated by care, preparation and associated counselling services, but the traumatic nature of some of the content discussed means the risk is never fully obviated. Finally, the way that facilitators protect storytellers from legal recriminations is also considered.

7.2.1 - Ethical Guidelines and Ownership

Ethical guidelines have been formed by the storytelling community to ensure that storytellers are protected during the process. These guidelines would relate to all of the themes explored in this section, such as avoiding re-traumatisation and implication (i.e. the inference of involvement in a crime, either of the storyteller themselves or others). Some projects would develop their own guidelines based on publications by other umbrella organisations:

> We dealt with it by, first of all, agreeing a set of ethics and a set of codes as to how we were to undertake the storytelling, and that was based on training which I received and other received [from] Towards Understanding and Healing […] they have a training manual on oral history and storytelling, and I went through that training, and we used that training to develop the ethical process that we developed for Green and Blue. (Interviewee 5, 2019)

An area that comes from the ethical guidelines, and ultimately underpins many of the themes discussed throughout this section, is the centrality of storyteller ownership. This is not just ownership in a tokenistic sense; it is central to the process of story-gathering, since without it there is no sense of trust or perceived benefit for the storyteller, not least because of the risks which are explored below. It is critical not only in terms of the philosophies of local ownership, grassroots peacebuilding or transitional justice and giving voice to the marginalised, but also the protection of storytellers within the project. Without it, projects simply do not exist:

> As filmmakers we learned a huge amount from storytelling and oral history, because if you're going to have a criteria or a protocol of co-ownership, it gives people trust; and in fact, Prison Officers said if we didn't give them that co-ownership, if they didn't have the right to withdraw, they wouldn't have taken part. Then like storytelling, it shares agency; they set the agenda on what they want to speak about and what they don't want to speak about. (Interviewee 7, 2019)

Agency is a recurring theme throughout this section, since there is a delicate balance between protecting storytellers and empowering them. There is also variety between project, facilitator and storyteller, in that some storytellers in certain projects are considerably more vulnerable than in other ones. Underpinning this diversity and the different ways in which storytellers are protected, is one simple fact – that storytellers have ultimate say over the content of their story, and the right to withdraw at any time.

> I was involved in going and collecting a story and going and speaking to the person and agreeing what they were going to say and discussing the nature of it, collecting the story then getting the transcript, getting it transcribed from audio to typed, going back, agreeing the edits of the story, went through that, which was probably about three weeks work, and I arrived home and everything was OK. I was rung up the next morning by the person who told the story, and said "I've changed my mind." And I said, "Well that is the contract I have with you, I will destroy everything that you did." Now I did go out into the yard and issue several expletives into the air, but that was the contract that I had given, that's what was necessary so that, in the process, the storytellers were made to feel – not made to feel – the storytellers are the key person, it is them who is in charge. The collector is only a facilitator of the process. (Interviewee 5, 2019)

Although a storyteller retains this most basic of protections throughout the process, and it is critical in securing stories, it will not protect them from all of the risks that they encounter during the process of relating to their story. For example, it cannot protect them from the risk of 'becoming the story', as they are simply reduced to a single tragic moment in their past, to the exclusion of all their other traits, experiences and qualities:

> I think the other danger is that, sometimes people can become the story. In other words, they stop being Mr X or Mr Y or Mrs Y, they become the person … I mean I've heard this said, "my life was more then what happened for two minutes in 1972". "My life can … my life is more than this specific thing, I'm also a father, I'm also a mother", or whatever it happens to be. There are dangers in that point as well. (Interviewee 5, 2019).

This comment resonates with Dawson's arguments surrounding the pathologising of identity and narrative in post-BFA Northern Ireland; the constant reduction of individuals to victims and the state to one of trauma has the potential to rob individuals of meanings and emotions that exist outside of the Troubles (2017).

7.2.2 - Taking care not to oversell therapeutic benefits

While storytelling literature has sometimes described catharsis as a goal for projects (see Heatherington & Hackett, 2005; Dybris McQuaid, 2016) many storytellers were wary of overselling the benefits of the latter to their participants. In short, a protection of storytellers that facilitators felt compelled to make, was the emphasis that storytelling did not guarantee psychological healing or therapeutic benefit:

> We need to be very mindful that we are not going around flogging a kind of a therapy or that we are have some kind of pseudo psycho-powers, and basically I would always be very careful about… and that's a link to the whole mantra about managing expectations […] one of my many bugbears is that we never go back and ask, so one of the reasons why I'm hesitant about selling the therapeutic and healing dimension, whether at an individual or a societal level, is that - does anyone ever go back and ask? (Interviewee 3, 2019)

However, that is not to say that it is not a possible outcome of participation in a storytelling project, simply that there is not enough research into the therapeutic effects of storytelling projects to present it as a benefit of participation to storytellers. Even if there was sufficient research, the diversity of projects would make it difficult to make sweeping statements about therapeutic benefits:

> I wouldn't undersell it either, I do believe, because from direct personal experience especially when I haven't solicited it, people have got in touch to say, 'That means so much to my family.' And perhaps it has encouraged them to take maybe steps to move on in a positive way from the harm that was inflicted upon them. So that can happen on an individual level, but it's different for everyone, every project is different so it depends on the person interviewing you, it depends on the way the project's set up, it depends how mindful people have been of ethical issues and so on. (Interviewee 3, 2019)

For example, certain types of interviews, in a setting that is appropriate and covers certain content has been shown to have a cathartic effect; but given the circumstantial nature of the example, it simply is not enough to state it is a guaranteed benefit.

> But there's other benefits to it, as well. I remember one person's story, which went on for about three or four hours, actually, for another project, and at the end of it that person said "[*redacted*], I find that very cathartic". What's that about? And he said, "It was the first time anybody had really sat down with me and listened to my story", albeit in a semi-formal way. "And the first time I've ever felt able to tell my story". *And there was nothing controversial in those three or four hours. But certainly, it was just everyday life of what it's like to be a police officer for maybe thirty years here. And the person had a great memory. I went back to the time before they joined, why they joined, and the time after they left as well*. So, there's a cathartic element to it. (Interviewee 12, 2019, emphasis added)

In short, catharsis may be an outcome of storytelling, but it is not designed specifically to do so. As Interviewee 6 (2019) explained, 'there have been a couple contributors that have said to me that they have experienced a release feeling out of it, but that's not what we design into it' and as such storytellers have then be reminded in a process of 'managing expectations' (Interviewee 3, 2019).

7.2.3 - Retraumatisation of storytellers

The risk of retraumatisation of storytellers was something that facilitators reflected on both broadly (across almost all interviewees) and in depth. The professionalisation and commitment to ethical guidelines perhaps explains this in part, particularly since academic literature has indicated the danger of testimony-based transitional justice projects to retraumatise participants as they relive their experiences (see Mendeloff, 2004; Hayner, 2011). However, awareness of the dangers of retraumatisation, and means of mitigating this risk, may be more intuitive than a case of adopting formal guidelines for facilitators. For example, some interviewees followed a personal code of not following tragedies or "ambulance chasing":

> There's one recording I got recently with a widow in Derry who lost her husband of about six months, and she'd previously lost her brother. And it's really hard. But I thought that, if that lady was prepared to tell her story, that would be quite big of her… of the hurt. And it's hard. *But I shy away from making a… usual venture to follow the hurt of the victims* (Interviewee 10, 2019, emphasis added).

Other interviewees alluded to personal traits that are simultaneously intangible and yet common sense in terms of story gathering. Trying to capture stories of immense suffering is incredibly difficult, particularly against a backdrop of others (e.g. the press) acting less sensitively – for many interviewees, it was a case of empathy and appreciating the human at the centre of the story:

> A journalist had come and had interviewed them and, so they said, had written all these things that were wrong. And there were all these mistakes and they found it very hurtful. They decided that they were never going to speak to anybody again. And I just said 'look, I understand' and I said 'I don't know who that journalist was. I don't know how that… I can't comment on that. I'm sorry that you were put through that. I understand how difficult that was for you. This is what I want to do. This is what I would like to talk to you about. This is what the book is for. Why don't you go away and think about it? And if you'd prefer not to, that's completely fine, and if you would like to then I would love to talk to you.' And I was just… Again, it's about treating people like human beings. (Interviewee 17, 2019)

Other storytelling facilitators described how they perhaps possessed innate qualities, experiences and interests that predisposed them to the work of story-gathering, which resulted in gaining the trust of the people they worked with and beyond:

> People soon get to know and then you get asked to do it again and again. 'Oh, I know that you have interviewed prisoners', so you end up… I just managed to build a lot of trust in quite vulnerable communities. And I think it might be because my brother died at twenty-two and that is probably one of the reasons I wanted to go to Northern Ireland, because I did find that in England I was quite young, and people are really embarrassed by death. In England they do not know how to talk about it, and I remember people crossing the road to avoid talking to me, so that they did not have to talk about my brother dying at twenty-two. […] I think that context helped enormously but the fact is that even before I did [*redacted project*] I already had access to some very vulnerable people. Northern Ireland is a very small place and if you screw somebody over, people soon find out, or

> if you are a journalist who is doing it for your CV and you do not actually really care, people soon know that. (Interviewee 18, 2019)

It should perhaps come as no surprise that people who have continued to work or associate with storytelling, and refer to each other in their research, share common traits of empathy and sensitivity. But the complexities of the stories being told require awareness of the dangers of retraumatisation, as well as strategies in place to cope with this possibility or eventuality:

> For the cathartic element, you've touched on it earlier on there, but you can also re-traumatise folk if not handled in the right way or if you're speaking to the wrong person. Certainly, I've no qualifications in counselling, but like I was properly lucky with that person, it was quite a cathartic experience. But it can bring back bad memories. And that needs to be handled. We need to have support mechanisms in place for some folk as you go on. (Interviewee 12, 2019)

This quote is fairly typical of the storytelling facilitators interviewed; most do not identify as or have formal qualifications in counselling, so the process is one of ensuring that they are equipped with contacts or associated services to act as follow-up to the initial story-gathering phase. Likewise, an emphasis on the grassroots and co-ownership design negates some of these risks; outside of storytelling, similarly participatory approaches have been demonstrated to reduce the risks of retraumatisation, e.g. photo visual methods to give voice to internally displaced persons in Colombia (Weber, 2019). Interviewee 12 made a further helpful observation; in that they emphasised the agency of the storyteller again. They have chosen to participate:

> But storytelling's not something they'd force people to do […] storytelling is something where you volunteer. You put your head above the parapet or the trench or whatever and say: "I really do want to tell my story". (Interviewee 12, 2019)

A counterpoint to the above (although in the previous quote Interviewee 12 does emphasise how different interviewees will react differently, and the importance of counselling procedures) comes from a project where the interviewee was very vulnerable. Although they had chosen to share their story, clearly it came at great personal cost to do so;

> Some of them had never spoken to their families even about stuff that had happened to them, and one woman insisted on drinking during her interview, and that was one of the toughest interviews we had done. And by the end of the interview we realised she hadn't even told her own children, but she'd told us, so that was the next step then - was she had to actually tell her children what had happened to their Daddy, and that was so tough. I remember having to stop in the middle of the night, drink wine and watch cartoons to get that story out of my head; that was a particularly tough one. (Interviewee 14, 2019)

One can only speculate how this particularly storyteller arrived at the conclusion the story's worth outweighed the trauma of revisiting it, but presumably, for them, it did. Naturally, access to such a vulnerable storyteller, and to explore their motivations in this case, was impossible for this project. But in response to the above, although this storyteller had agency, the right to withdraw and all the necessary protections, it was still a very traumatic experience for them. It is also significant to note the closing

remarks here; retraumatisation is not just a risk for the storyteller, but also the storytelling facilitator. As Interviewee 15 explains:

> The work that we're doing is not pulling pints or driving a bus. You know it's… part of my work is talking about things like, "at the end, they shot him dead" […]. So, one of the things I need in my work is I need the resource of a clinical psychologist that I go to. I also go at my own expense to a counsellor, because in a way there's an immersion in heavy duty material. (2019)

Storytelling facilitators may also be at risk in terms of how different communities may perceive their work, particularly if they seek to cross divides and work with the "other".

> So, it led to that story, and even more tragic was he then said that his son was bullied as in, "We didn't get your Dad that time, but we'll get him. Don't you worry. We didn't get your Dad that time, but we'll get the fucker, don't you worry. We didn't get your Da, but we will." And the son took his own life. I cried when he told me that, I cried. I was facilitating but I cried. So, that can be used both to elicit stories and to promote community dialogue. And someone from the Catholic community, I've heard people say, "See [*Interviewee 15*] has been involved in creating a DVD about the UDR. And the UDR were collusive and involved in killing so, therefore [*Interviewee 15*] is colluding with killers." (Interviewee 15, 2019)

> I didn't hear it directly from him, I heard it second hand where he's alleged to have said, "[*Interviewee 15*] seems to be fascinated by what happened, those poor Protestant people, what about us?" As if there's a bias towards hearing the Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist story. (Interviewee 15, 2019)

These comments came despite Interviewee 15's involvement in cross-community projects and a general commitment from their associated projects to cover as broad a range of identity groups as possible. This risk is important to note, and one that is explored further in terms of the way stories are shared and communicated once

gathered in later chapters. Somewhat surprisingly, few storytelling facilitators suggested that storytellers themselves were concerned by risks posed by other identity groups, at least at the story-gathering phase. This may be a reflection of project design, since many projects had to balance encouraging contact with the "other" against ensuring storytellers felt comfortable giving their accounts. Typically, storytelling facilitators were drawn from their own constituencies with this in mind, e.g. ex-police officers interviewing fellow ex-police officers, and working-class Belfast Catholic nationalists interviewing within their own communities also. Even if the projects also had an inter-community element, the story-gathering was primarily in-group to ensure a sense of security for the storyteller.

A final and sobering note on the difficulties of retraumatisation relates to a specific example around the burden storytellers place upon themselves, when protecting their own communities from retraumatisation. Storytellers will be acutely aware of the impact their testimonies may have, and it will affect their decision around sharing their story (e.g. whether the community is in a time and place where it can collectively "handle" the account now). The responsibility of deciding if or when to tell this story places a burden on the victim over an extended period:

> She was at a disco near Derry. There was an IRA bomb because it was a place where lots of soldiers would go drinking, and she had never really been able to talk truthfully about her experience because what she saw around her was her friends, neighbours and loved ones dying in agony. Decapitated, arms and legs blown off, screaming, and she could never ever say that, because she lived among the community and family members of those people would have got to know, and she felt every responsibility not to make their trauma any worse by revealing what had actually happened. And I found that really terrible really, it's something I haven't thought of somehow until she said it to me, until she explained, that she's had to

> spend all these years, you know lying really, not telling them. That was just a side thing that seems an enormous burden, on top of the fact that she has injuries that had affected her for the rest of her life. It seemed like a really enormous burden to have to carry. (Interviewee 18, 2019)

Accounts like these underline the value of storytelling, and further extended research into the area. It also resonates with the notion that while transitional justice is represented as a force for change and reconstruction, victims are not always the focal point of mechanisms (Robins, 2017). In this case, despite the absence of mechanisms in Northern Ireland, it underlines the failure of the state to provide an opportunity for people to process such traumatic experiences. While storytelling provides an opportunity here, it is also uncertain whether it would have been the most effective long-term solution for this individual and their immediate community. Transitional justice literature is typically limited (historically speaking) by short-term research and a lack of longitudinal studies (Brahm, 2007). Although this is starting to change, with more longitudinal research emerging into areas such as the long term impact of the Chilean Truth and Reconciliation Commission (see Ferrara, 2015), more longitudinal research into such instances would inform discussions around the suitability of mechanisms for carriers of such tragic burdens.

7.2.4 - Implication and legal issues

Storytellers and facilitators are acutely aware of the risk of implication (of themselves or others) particularly in recent times due to recent developments; specifically, the SHA's potential to make use of testimony for other transitional justice mechanisms or the aforementioned Boston Tapes crisis:

> And the new Stormont House Agreement is still on the cards. They had an oral history element to that but again that is absolutely weighed down in controversy because they said anything you could say in the Oral History Strand of the Stormont house Agreement could be given to the police and could be used as evidence. so, who's going to talk? Nobody. They've just killed it straight way, do you know what I mean? And that's because of the Boston tapes in America. People are afraid to say anything and that has dented the reputation I think of storytelling. (Interviewee 14, 2019)

This means projects are currently operating in a context characterised by uncertainty about implication. Having said that, storytelling facilitators develop projects with a great deal of transparency around implication, and are clear from the start with storytellers not to implicate themselves or others:

> That you can't – if you are collecting a story and somebody tells you about an incident that has not gone through the courts and has not been fully resolved then whatever appears in your process could be used in a further court case, or in a court case. Similarly, if someone tells you a story that deals with an issue of abuse, you are required by law to tell the authorities that you have been informed about this abuse or this potential abuse. So those were, if you like, the most difficult things. So in other words […] we were dealing with police officers who clearly were dealing with difficult incidents, incidents of death and incidents of our conflict – so in the training we had to make it clear that no issue of confidentiality could be given if someone mentioned it. So what we had to do was to ensure that

> people did not talk about it – so we talked through with the interviewee beforehand what they were going to talk about, and we made sure that what they were going to talk about did not include any incidents that had not been - that were not in the public domain. The story collector was under the instructions, if someone veered off that, they were to stop the recording, because if you were told something, you cannot be un-told it. (Interviewee 5, 2019)

The above two quotes paint a picture which suggests it is very difficult to successfully critically engage with the meta-conflict, or attempt in a meaningful form of post-conflict truth recovery for fear of implication. However, the idea that it is an either-or choice when considering truth recovery and trials (or more broadly speaking, the debate of restorative versus retributive justice – see Hayner, 2011) should be resisted here – storytelling is simply sensitive to the dangers, but for reasons outlined above and in previous chapters, is a method dedicated to capturing the story the storyteller wants to share. Contentious issues are not off the table, but simply have to be handled with care:

> For people who were in Special Branch […] we had to be particularly careful there that nobody talked about any specific incident, that they talked about scenarios that they would have been in and what those scenarios would have been like. So I think storytelling can look at those broader, contentious questions, a lot of contentious questions, but obviously, the more contentious the questions, the more careful you have to be about the legality of what you are doing and that you do not end up, either with writs against you or, indeed, that your project becomes involved in evidence gathering. (Interviewee 5, 2019).

Although this suggests that the meta-conflict can be critically engaged with despite the obstacle of implication, in other ways it presents obvious limitations. One that came to light during interviews was the way that language can become constrained by the threat of implication:

> You can say…if your loved one was killed as a result of loyalist violence or a as a result of republican violence, that's never lawful, that's always murder, do you know what I mean? It's always murdered by the IRA; it's always murdered by loyalists. If it's the army, there's a presumption that it was lawful, unless there's a subsequent investigation or prosecution, and the person's been prosecuted for murder. So, I've seen families been interviewed and they say, "my son was murdered by the army". "Stop, I'm sorry, you can't say they murdered". And they ended up having a row…the contributor ends up having a row because "how dare you say I can't say murdered?" And legally, they can't. And there's certain exceptions where we've seen it, for example, around Bloody Sunday, because of Saville they do use the term murdered. (Interviewee 16, 2019)

This means that anything entered into the public domain will have to be censored somehow in order to avoid legal challenges further down the line, and implies a limitation upon the families who want to be able to challenge the official narrative. There are echoes here of post-genocide Rwanda, where a strictly defined state discourse in the interest of peace restricts freedom of expression around identity and conflict (Bentrovato, 2017) although the restrictions here are perhaps not quite as far reaching. This conversation in itself demonstrates that the meta-conflict is still being critically engaged with at the point of story-gathering – because families and storytelling facilitators are working together to present their story with as much depth and as little filtering as possible. The limitation, which is explored later, is the way in which this can be shared or explored in the public domain.

Legally complex stories can also result in tragic outcomes for storytellers, in the sense that complicated and *potentially* cathartic stories may prove to be unpublishable for fear of incrimination.

> So, by then there was more than that. There were a few we didn't use in the book for legal reasons they were just too messy. And I feel really bad for those women. After them telling us their story and we didn't use the story, that really had me hurt […] I think she [*a storyteller who could not be included*] was a bit heartbroken and the other woman was a bit heartbroken too […]. It was a great story, but because he [*her husband*] could be identified…They pulled the story. I was willing to doctor the story in any way to give the woman her voice […] but they just decided "this, this, this and this aren't going". (Interviewee 14, 2019)

Given the risk of storytellers take in terms of retraumatisation and implication, it is perhaps a risk to storytelling's continued proliferation if there is a risk that sharing a story results in nothing. However, storytellers do the best they can to address the disappointment; 'I gave them a copy of the story in a wee folder and said "this is your story, I'm really sorry it didn't make the book, I'm really glad I ever heard it." Try and make a fuss of them that way. That's important.' (Interviewee 14, 2019). Caution over legal uncertainty is also understandable, particularly given the climate created by SHA and the Boston Tapes (see Havemann, 2012).

7.2.5 - Conclusion – Protected storytellers are free to tell their story

This section has outlined the risks storytellers face. Although it is acknowledged that there are problems with storytelling, the risks are often well controlled by storytelling facilitators, whose increasing professionalisation, adherence to grassroot ethical guidelines and natural aptitude for the process combine to guarantee the centrality of

the storyteller's narrative in the process. Projects generally accept catharsis as a happy coincidence rather than an expressed goal, and this is communicated to storytellers as part of a continual process of managing expectations. The risk of retraumatisation is addressed through preparation and access to counselling, although as some of the examples indicate, it may not be avoidable. However, this is not state-mandated peacebuilding, and the storyteller's agency has to be respected. The risk storytellers take is the other side of the coin of placing them front and centre of the process. This agency is also true of ensuring storytellers do not implicate themselves or others, but facilitators also take steps to ensure that they plan what they intend to cover, and tell a story with due care and attention to such risks. As such, storytellers are free to share the story that they want to share. Whether this story is a relatively straightforward career in the police force, or an account of a particularly horrific bombing, storytelling facilitators are ultimately committed to reducing the risks associated with sharing these stories.

Chapter 8 -Story-sharing and the meta-conflict

This chapter marks a departure from the theme of story-gathering, and switches focus to story-sharing. To reiterate, the distinction is imperfect, since some projects will merge the processes through 'live' events.

This chapter is split into two main sections; the significance of story-sharing, and the importance of context-sensitivity when sharing stories. The significance of story-sharing is explored in reference to its aims, its victim-centred philosophy, the practicalities and the overall benefits of story-sharing. Story-sharing and contextualisation is discussed in relation to issues of trust between facilitator and storyteller, and the challenge of engage audiences. The chapter then delves deeper into the issue of contextualising stories appropriately for audiences and framing or othering the collected narratives. Finally, the chapter addresses the subtleties of knowing an audience, and knowing when that audience is ready to receive particular stories.

Throughout the chapter, it will become clear that while interviewees were relatively unified in their approach to story-gathering, the process of story-sharing is more contested and varied. This section demonstrates the arguments and methodological differences between interviewees, and how storytelling lacks a unified approach to story-sharing.

8.1 - The significance of story-sharing

Story-sharing is an important part of the storytelling process, since without communicating the stories to a broader audience, the process only affects a relatively small number of people. Although the effects (e.g. catharsis or intergroup contact) can still be important and profound, it is in the sharing and communicating of stories that participants are able to address the imbalance of narratives, find validation of their account and ultimately challenge the meta-conflict by providing diverse accounts. Since this thesis has focused upon the methods and philosophies of storytelling practitioners, reflecting on how an interviewee saw their role in story-sharing helps frame the following chapter:

> The telling of the meta-narrative by using sound bites of people's personal experiences. It can be…it's very powerful, whether it's the Dúchas Project are pulling out some of their stories, or you have an official oral history archive, or [redacted] has got one hundred but you can only use five [in a film]. Those are arbitrary decisions being made. They're not arbitrary, they're considered decisions that are being made. But you hope that they're being made by somebody that is considerate of what the implications of that will be. (Interviewee 11, 2019)

Facilitators are grappling with challenging decisions in terms of how the content they share influences the meta-narrative in Northern Ireland. This section explores the aims of story-sharing, followed by the importance of maintaining a victim-centred approach; it then outlines some of the practicalities of story-sharing. It finishes by considering some of the benefits of story-sharing, particularly in order to demonstrate how story-sharing can critically engage with the meta-conflict.

This section serves as an introduction to story-sharing, emphasising the diversity of thought within storytelling as to how to share stories. While the means of story-gathering are relatively agreed upon (given the heterogeneity of the storytelling community), this chapter argues that there is far less consensus regarding the sharing of stories.

8.1.1 - Aims of story-sharing

While there is some commonality to the aims of story-sharing for facilitators, there is markedly more variation in this respect than in terms of story-gathering. For instance, some facilitators were quick to emphasise the importance of gathering a story, rather than the eventual audience:

> I do not think of who is going to read this that's not my... obviously I'm thinking... I'm thinking let's get your story told. Let me hear your story. My first thing isn't... is there somebody who's going to be offended? Or do we have to watch what we say? (Interviewee 4, 2019)

Other facilitators emphasised how the story-gathering and sharing processes were linked, and so ultimately found themselves considering the final audience more keenly than the above:

> But as I said to you initially, as a journalist instinctively I have a duty to the listener, so I'm not just thinking about the person I'm talking to, I am thinking about them, but I'm thinking about how can we get this across to

increase understanding or deepen understanding for the listener. And I think that they're kind of intertwined really, because if people know that they're telling their story because it's actually now going to be showcased and it's going to be out there and it's going to become part of public narrative, I think that's actually very validating. So, it's a double-edged sword, they're intertwined and they're not independent of each other; they're interlinked. (Interviewee 18, 2019)

This is not to say that both interviewees would then fundamentally disagree about how to share stories, or whether they should openly challenge the meta-conflict, but their starting points on the matter certainly differ. Differences are unsurprising, considering the understandable anxieties that some communities feel about the sharing of stories (Kent, 2016). While there is disagreement as to how to do so, there is a reasonably widespread acceptance that the stories that are gathered by storytelling projects should be shared with a wider audience:

There's no point in having our stories or history archive if it's just for our use. If it just sits there. And the danger is that it is just sitting there at the moment. *There's no point in having it if you don't have an audience or it's not used in some way*. (Interviewee 10, 2019, emphasis added)

Well that's been the bee in my bonnet for a long time. And it's a conversation we have had a lot in the Stories Network which is...recording the story per se is...in terms of stages, is an experience between the story recorder and the storyteller. And that's...can be a very important encounter. A very important process. But it's very limited. *The next stage of that is putting that story out into the wider audience, and with that vulnerability of somebody challenging your story. Or accepting it. And some of that is being managed I suppose often by the story gathering project*. (Interviewee 11, 2019, emphasis added)

The emphasised extracts indicate the focus of this section – the means of story-sharing. It is worth briefly noting that story-sharing methods vary wildly, and include (but are not limited to):

- Archives
- Websites
- Books
- Reports
- CDs
- Films (distributed digitally and physically)
- Plays
- Art
- Education Courses
- Music
- Talking Circles
- Talks/Guest Speakers

This section focuses upon the way that storytelling facilitators aim to 'manage' the process of sharing and exposing stories to wider audiences, and navigating the risks and opportunities this process presents, before moving onto the context-sensitivity of such processes.

8.1.2 - Story-sharing as victim-centred

Much like story-gathering, one area of broad consensus is the protection of storytellers. Vulnerability of storytellers is a key theme for facilitators when managing how they share their stories. In some cases, it was a simple case of being sensitive to requests, and perceived risks of identification:

> The other thing was, we offered – some people just wanted to tell the story and didn't want it published, so we offered that, and they had that for their family, for them, and that was perfectly OK. Others wanted it published but were not prepared to put their names to it and that was OK. (Interviewee 5, 2019)

These victim-centred philosophies of storytelling are the same as those that ensure storytellers are able to tell the story they want during the story-gathering stage of the process. This victim-centred philosophy can be challenged when the victim themselves potentially wants to engage with a process that is not necessarily in their best interests:

> Myself and a number of other people had really, strongly objected to the idea that you could do a Truth Commission as a TV programme. But Archbishop Tutu was very engaged with the BBC on doing this from his own experience of being involved in the Truth Commission in South Africa. […] And a number of us were debating this format and I remember, at the time, there was a feeling that some of the participants very much wanted to engage in this because of […] the reputation and the work of Archbishop Tutu, and the chance for him to be involved in their experience. But, if they had had the choice between doing this in private and doing this in public, would they have gone for it as a private experience? But they didn't have that option, the way they had to do it was as a public experience. (Interviewee 6, 2019)

Interviewee 6 is referring to the BBC documentary, *Facing the Truth* (BBC, 2006). The concern here also indicates the broad duty of care that storytelling facilitators feel for those they represent, and is a continuation of the theme of storytelling giving voice to marginalised people. Although this platform gave those people a voice, it was not necessarily the one that facilitators would pick, because they saw it as perhaps narrowing the choices of participants (see Rolston, 2007) and ultimately exposing them

in a way they would not choose to. Other facilitators reflected on this vulnerability within the victims and storyteller populace:

> You get into tricky ethical issues, as well, about the extent to which people can actually consent, knowingly, to what they're saying and the potential implications of things. I would argue that if somebody in the public eye said something controversial, I think there's a good public interest to that being put out there. A private individual, if you know it's going to do them harm, I think maybe less so. (Interviewee 17, 2019)

It is important to remember that these are people who have in many cases experienced a variety of traumas, making them vulnerable in terms of the ability to make an informed decision about how to engage with a potentially volatile post-conflict meta-narrative. It is also important not to overstate this point, since storytelling is ultimately seen as an empowering process for the participant (Kent, 2016).

8.1.3 - Practicalities of story-sharing

Practically speaking, sharing a story is a very tricky area for storytelling facilitators. Projects evolve, or maybe intend to incorporate a story- sharing component at a later date, but are unsure as to what it will be. They also have a diverse range of storytellers to protect with myriad interests and concerns, and facilitators have to design a consent and withdrawal process that means that everyone is happy with how their stories are used after the initial story-gathering phase (see Ethical Principles for an example, HTR, 2009). In many cases, the means of story-sharing is driven by the storytellers themselves,

perhaps unsurprisingly given the bottom-up philosophies of storytelling facilitators:

> Now that felt risky to us at the time, I think in the beginning we thought we'd design a booklet for each particular group. But actually, our steering groups said, 'no put them all together in one group' and I was thinking, I applaud your ambition but oh my goodness this could… will this be ok for all of the contributors? But actually, if you design the process right, most of them did agree to be in that book. (Interviewee 6, 2019)

Another dimension to consider in terms of attitudes towards sharing stories is the general 'newness' and diversity of storytelling. Although the social importance of telling a story, or oral history as a concept is not new (see Maiangwa & Byrne, 2015), its position in a post-conflict society with little in the way of top-down peacebuilding or transitional justice is new. The aforementioned heterogeneity of storytelling projects is explained by their grassroots origins, and while there is commonality in broad philosophies and approaches to story-gathering, the diversity of projects and the novelty of the approach results in a range of attitudes to sharing stories. Some projects were set up from the beginning with the explicit aim to move beyond storytelling and story collection:

> In terms of more formal storytelling projects, if I'm honest we never really talked about it or thought about it in straight storytelling terms. We […] are really looking at further understanding human behaviour in terms of conflict, and particularly the troubles. (Interviewee 19, 2019)

Interviewee 19 worked on a project where the storytelling component had a particular thematic focus which would be transformed into an educational resource for schools. In this case, the project had a clear communicative aspect from the outset; other

storytelling projects also had a clear goal in terms of sharing their work, albeit a different one:

> It was about actually trying to influence people. Trying to remind people of the stories here and of the… I think I was trying to remind people of the untold stories here […] but how many more are out there? And that is a very valid question here. Probably tens of thousands of them who could also tell stories like that, so it was also to highlight the fact that there's still people that are really traumatised here. (Interviewee 14, 2019)

This is perhaps no surprise given the previous exploration of storytelling as a means to give voice to marginalised groups, but the first part of the quote is striking; the aim is explicitly to influence people and casts storytelling as a tool with the potential to promote particular messages when it comes to story-sharing. This is distinct from the story-gathering aspect of the process, which is arguably less inclined to any particular ideological disposition, other than acting as a platform for historically silenced groups. On face value alone, the quote above would appear to support McGrattan's assertion that storytelling could potentially reinforce identity divisions (2016), although it should be noted that the aim of the project in question was to give a voice to participants from a variety of identity groups.

8.1.4 - The benefits of story-sharing

Story-sharing is important for the reasons outlined above, and there are other benefits to sharing stories for both participants and wider society. For one interviewee, the creation of published work was valuable in subtle and surprising ways:

> What happened was they printed the interviews, and they grouped it, and they had them beautifully bound. And they had an artefact and that artefact was so important. It was evidence, it was almost like this is our history and our streets. And the value of that couldn't… it was all the time that was going between the process and the product, which was the most important, but they both were so important. That there was an actual, physical artefact. Okay, there were the interviews, but the physical artefact was really, really important. (Interviewee 2, 2019)

This suggests that storytelling publications carry a symbolic value that goes further than the interviews alone; it represents collaboration, agency and dignity in the communities that participated. A similar view is expressed in Lundy and McGovern's (2008) seminal work on the Ardoyne Community Project, in which the residents of the Ardoyne area of Belfast recorded their experience of the conflict in a grassroots 'truth recovery' project. Here, the sense of community participation and local agency in developing their own was highlighted as a particular strength (Lundy & McGovern, 2008: 290).

It is helpful to outline an example of what story-sharing tackling the big issues of the meta-conflict looks like. Educational courses show how the narratives from storytelling projects can be implemented to critically engage with the meta-conflict, but also the complexity and scale required for such a project. Educational courses that were

associated with the Forthspring *Five Decades* storytelling project highlight both the

potential and challenge of such projects:

> So, the course is made up of a set of sessions. I think it's six sessions. Which look at the troubles from a variety of different angles, including each decade of the Troubles. The dress that people wore. The fashions. What was happening in different parts of the world. Pop music at the time. The big headline events that were happening, internationally. And what was happening at Northern Ireland at those times. And also, allowed people opportunities to reflect on the big things that were happening here. Whether it was the Good Friday agreement or the hunger strike, or the UWC strike. Or all the different things that happened here in the Troubles. (Interviewee 13, 2019)

This shows how a storytelling project as broad in scope as the Five Decades project could

potentially help pave the way for controversial discussions, but in order to do so it

required a sequence of sessions, which themselves incorporated a wider focus – i.e. it

was part of a broader consideration of history, rather than an explicitly conflict-focused

storytelling education project. This is consistent with a number of approaches that do

manage to critically engage with the meta-conflict through story-sharing, since careful

contextualisation and audience sensitivity are so central to successfully tackling

historical flashpoints. For instance, Roulston explains the care taken by the PMA to

present footage thematically rather than by identity group to ensure stories are

considered with in a less prejudicial fashion (2017). On the topic of storytelling education

projects, Interviewee 13 continued:

> The night before everybody had been arguing about the significance of the civil rights movement. And for him, that was exactly what he wanted. Lots of conversations about that kind of thing. […] A good example would be the hunger strike. The Republican hunger strike, if you like to put it that way. So, that the Catholic Nationalist and Republican experience of that

> hunger strike was completely different to the Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist experience of a hunger strike. And the end of project, from his point of view, was to let people see those things. (Interviewee 13, 2019)

This indicates the enormous potential of storytelling projects to open up controversial areas of meta-narratives in divided societies – but given the above, it is important to note the planning and potential cost and time required for such a project to be implemented on a grand scale. This is not to dismiss the obvious accomplishments of such a project, but to underline how storytelling as peacebuilding requires time, funding and expertise, despite often being unfairly cast as a 'soft' or easy option (Hackett & Rolston, 2009; Bryson, 2016).

8.2 – Context, story-sharing and the meta-conflict

The following section emphasises the importance of context and considering its implications for story-sharing that challenges the meta-conflict. To be more specific about the importance of 'context', the section divides into further subsections which deal with ways in which storytelling facilitators have to be mindful of the contexts within which they operate. It begins by considering the importance of trust and safety for story-sharing to be possible, particularly between facilitator and storyteller. Following this is an analysis of the importance of understanding the broader context in which the stories must be shared – issues such as audience engagement, and properly contextualising complex narratives so that they can be understood by audiences. Next, the section

considers how to avoid framing and othering in the way that the stories are presented. The final two sections are closely related in that they consider knowing the composition of the audience, and the audience's 'readiness' for challenging content.

8.2.1 - Trust

Storytelling facilitators universally emphasised the importance of trust in the sharing and communicating of stories. This was true for any project, even deceptively straightforward proposals of centralised archives such as the OHA:

> I think it's extremely important that a mechanism that has custody of these stories, people have every reason to distrust people that they're handing over their stories to. Even how we operate, you worry what's going to happen to my recording, who will see my transcript, who will it be transcribed by, you know, all of the things. Part of what I will be doing is trying to help people think through all of those issues that they need to be aware of before granting their trust or investing their trust in an organisation that is taking custody of their story. So it's extremely important, both in terms of the ability to garner trust right across the board, and also in terms of ensuring that there aren't fears about, as you hinted at, the selection of stories being skewed in one direction or tinted or tainted by some kind of political agenda. (Interviewee 3, 2019)

Trust is significant, as without it stories cannot be used to challenge the meta-conflict; they would be withdrawn by storytellers who feared the possibility of their own narrative being wielded to expound an interpretation of the conflict they do not agree with. There are also safety considerations, in terms of self-incrimination much like in the Boston Tapes scandal (see Havemann, 2012) or fear of recriminations within their own

communities. Trust can be seen as a fundamental resource in the process of challenging the meta-conflict through storytelling, and since there is such diversity in Northern Ireland's storytelling community, this trust is generated and wielded in an equally diverse way, depending on organisation and method.

Trust is also paramount in forms of storytelling that are perhaps more dynamic or 'live' – where storytellers may actively share their own stories, or participants may make use of the shared stories to engage in education and debate around the conflict. These types of processes will actively allow for the challenging of the meta-conflict, but require careful consideration from a facilitator to ensure participants feel secure within that conversation:

> Well, I'm not saying there wouldn't be a process of selecting where to do it…I suppose from my experience, it'd be more a process of selecting how you'd go about it. How you would agree an agenda. How you would agree what to do if it goes pear-shaped. What reassurances people would have that it's not going to turn into a shouting match. And what reassurances they would have as to what would happen if it does, that kind of thing. Those are things that people need some comfort, in advance, if we intend to something like that. (Interviewee 13, 2019)

Although a very different method of using stories to challenge the meta-conflict, the process cannot begin without trust. The importance of interpersonal trust is unsurprising, since it is a dimension of post-conflict or transitional societies that has attracted significant research – for example Kenworthy at al.'s (2016) assertion that cross-group friendships increased intergroup trust. Once again, it is clear that storytelling facilitators must tread a fine line between challenging the meta-conflict, and simply causing damage to an already fragile peace. That said, credible grassroots

organisations are uniquely positioned to generate that trust and promote the cross-group friendships prescribed by Kenworthy at al., and then capitalise upon it as it develops, as Interviewee 13 continues:

> Those two courses, the only two that have been delivered so far, one was delivered to a predominantly Protestant bunch of people. The other to a predominantly Catholic bunch of people. And when each group heard about the other, they wanted to join. And they did. And I suppose that's the advantage of having that flexibility. You can just decide to do something like that, if people want to go with it, you can respond. Which would probably be more difficult to do if it was some other vocational course. Or something in a University. It mightn't be as easy to mix and match like that. (Interviewee 13, 2019)

Since storytelling in Northern Ireland is a grassroots process, it is able to generate this trust, in contrast to top-down attempts that are either a different form of peacebuilding or transitional justice (see Lundy & McGovern, 2008 for the other sensitivities that bottom-up transitional justice can offer) or the aforementioned OHA. This also makes it easier for projects to adapt and create more engaging content:

> There's a lot of people that aren't going to read a four-hundred-page book you know. And now there's a documentary. […] The main thing I would say throughout all of our engagements with the families, whether it's on an individual basis in terms of the RoLMA project or in terms of the shoes, or in terms of Lethal Allies, or the Unquiet Graves, is the only reason that that's even a possibility is because we have such a relationship of trust with individuals, and that is something that any storytelling initiative, that's at the heart of it. And if that is missing, it just can't work. (Interviewee 16, 2019)

Even with trust, story-sharing is not an entirely risk-free process. Safety is a concern that extends beyond relationships of trust between facilitator and storyteller. Although interviewees looked to sidestep the dangers of story-sharing that they identified, the

risks and their means of ensuring safety varied significantly. For instance, the PMA was faced with the challenge of ensuring that people were protected from the content they encountered in online video archives:

> The problem with the internet, and this is a risk that we are not quite sure how to ameliorate yet, but we'll have to do research on it: what if a Prison Officer is sitting at home watching something like that? Comes across it. So, that's why the site itself has to have some trigger warning, some sense that what you're going to watch here may upset you or may - we will have to put up a phone numbers for NHS trust mental health services or whatever. Public records office have twenty-four stories over there, and, in fact, they're not trained, and one of them - and this came out in our last joint meeting with them - one of their staff members said she was approached by a prison officer who came across stuff and was really upset and angry, and she said, you know, we explained the broad principles of that but I'm not sure he left any happier than when he came in. (Interviewee 7, 2019)

To put this into context, it is worth remembering that the PMA has been celebrated for its measures to mitigate risk in story-sharing (Roulston, 2017). Equally, although also celebrating the PMA's potential to present new narratives and disruption of dominant themes, Mairs-Dyer (2020) also points out that the risks of re-traumatisation do not disappear entirely, with some participants expressing concern that negative stories run the risk of not letting people simply forget. Once again, the fine lines between meaningful, democratic discourse, re-entrenching existing divides and banality are highlighted here.

These are the dangers of any kind of open-access, online storytelling project. In contrast to the aforementioned 'live' settings, these kinds of approaches cannot forewarn participants or react to the audience as the story-sharing unfolds. The audience itself is

also entirely different, since a course or an event tends to create a filter of sorts in that the attendees actively chose to be exposed to challenging content – online material is there for anyone to 'stumble' upon, be sent a link or even have the material taken out of context by other oppositional actors. What is clear from the above, is that the interviewee is not deterred – after all, reaching a wider audience has potentially more far reaching benefits for peacebuilding, even if it carries risks that smaller-scale approaches lack – and at the time of the interview was working on ways to reduce the risks posed by sharing these stories. For other interviewees who were more inclined to the approach of live talks or courses, there is sometimes a different approach:

> Interviewee: I have gone with people to areas where I wouldn't necessarily have gone before and told the story and… you go okay: "Shit, got away with that didn't I?! I'm alive."
>
> Interviewer: So, any particular areas where that's happened?
>
> Interviewee: No.
>
> Interviewer: No?
>
> Interviewee: Leave it out.
>
> Interviewer: Ok. Fair enough.
>
> Interviewee: No, I will go as far as to say that I've gone out and spoken at events where there are people in the background, that are looking after my welfare.
>
> Interviewer: Right ok. Right. But you can't say what events that…
>
> Interviewee: I'm not prepared to. I'd rather not. (Interviewee 10, 2019)

While it is tempting and perhaps appropriate to contextualise this in relation to the section below on knowing when your audience is "ready" (and indeed knowing when facilitators are ready), it is also important to acknowledge the very real threat that could be posed by sharing the wrong stories, with the wrong groups, at the wrong time.

Although minimalist peace holds in Northern Ireland, paramilitarism of some description remains (see Whiting, 2015), even if it overlaps with organised crime and has fragmented and ambiguous goals compared to the past (Gallaher, 2007). Challenging the meta-conflict has to be done with care, and different lessons about managing these risks emerge from the above examples depending on methods. Even if personal safety is unaffected by challenging narratives with potentially incendiary content, there remains the threat that it could stoke up grievances and thus threaten the peace (see Gurr, 2000; Stewart, 2012) – in this sense, challenging the meta-conflict can have consequences in both building and degrading the peace if not done so carefully.

8.2.2 - Audience Engagement

For storytelling to truly challenge the meta-conflict as a form of peacebuilding, they need to reach an audience beyond the participants and perhaps immediate social groups; at this point, audience is crucial. Some projects exist in a predominantly archival form, and although these are sometimes accessible in various formats, it will not necessarily translate into a broad audience:

> Then the other bit is designing… recognising that not everybody is going to come in. There are thousands of hours of narrative in the archive in there, so sometimes getting an audience to engage with it is about creating a sound recording, or a book, or something like that. (Interviewee 6, 2019)

The archive above did publish a book, but due to phases of funding is still waiting to be able to share its stories in the form of an archive. Part of the challenge in publication and engaging an audience is the commitment to preserving the storyteller's narrative in its unfettered entirety, as one designer who worked with storytelling projects reflected:

> We try not to interpret too much. We can convert it from format to another and try to present it in a way that's interesting, but we try not to rewrite or edit. That's done by the practitioner or the people who own the materials. […] A lot of the oral history projects, they try not to do too much editing or interpretation of it. (Interviewee 8, 2019)

Moving beyond publication in the traditional print sense can allow some freedoms, but may require some form of adaptation of the original content; for example, Interviewee 18 reflected on the need to cut sound bites for a website down to four minutes for practical reasons (2019). Other facilitators also identified the need to adapt the 'raw' interview transcripts into something that would attract a broader audience:

> To an extent that's why we actually went and did the play, because we saw the play gave the potential of getting a greater audience than people who would go and look at a website or read a book. The people who read the book or go on to the website were more likely to be those who were already involved in other oral history work, or who themselves were from a policing background and had an interest in policing. […] The other important thing about the play, and it doesn't have to be a play, maybe it could be a film, it could be other ways of doing it, is that because it is an actor standing on a stage saying something, not the actual storyteller, it's a place removed. So it is easier for someone from a different community, from a different background to be able to hear what is being said because it is an actor than actually having a former police officer standing there in front of them, because the fact is that the person is a former police officer, therefore they may already have a view as to what that person is going to be like. (Interviewee 5, 2019)

Not only does this approach serve to highlight the ways in which facilitators seek to engage broader audiences, it is also significant in terms of how they might safely challenge people's perceptions of the conflict, in highlighting the advantages of using actors who place distance between audience and storyteller. This overlaps with the philosophies discussed previously by Interviewee 15 in relation to live events, and managing the extent to which they may be 'unsafe or uncertain' (Interviewee 15, 2019). This philosophy seems to draw from therapeutic social care approaches (Mason, 2019) which explore, for example, how therapists may implement methods that take conflicted families into safe but uncertain spaces in order to challenge misconceptions within the family unit.

Although it might be tempting to infer from the previous quote that story-sharing through video and film is a problem-free and straightforward form of audience engagement, it is anything but. Some storytelling projects make use of film as their principle means of story-gathering, but subsequently have to find a way of organising and framing the information to make it engaging:

> But we're working on the next stage. We will completely replace that website with a new one, which is interactive. Technology is now available that wasn't years ago, and that means you can start to choose. Instead of a Blue Peter "here's something we did earlier", you can become a codirector almost, and *I think that idea of participatory filmmaking and oral history that we're involved with, where people co-own their own material, we're hoping that viewers themselves can start to co-create their own little films*. So, you could put in, for example, "prison officer", "female prisoner", "female prison officer", "1976", "No Wash Protest", and it would gather that stuff together, and you would make your own little mini-documentary. That's the idea of trying to make it much more accessible. (Interviewee 7, 2020, emphasis added)

This outlines the future of story-sharing, and it is particularly interesting how the facilitator has drawn upon the philosophies of co-ownership and storyteller-centred approaches that also drive the gathering of stories. But this form of story-sharing is both hypothetical (for the time being) and underlines the diversity of approaches in challenging the meta-conflict, since not all projects are engaging with technology in this way, perhaps because non-video oral history projects are likely to be more difficult to convert into storytelling for Web 2.0. The interesting challenge for this method would be ensuring the emotional safety of a viewer when "co-producing" their own documentary.

A final note on audience engagement is determining exactly who the audience is. This was not necessarily a specific focus of the questioning during the research, but some facilitators reflected upon when discussing audience. It is important in terms of challenging the meta-conflict, since audiences themselves need to be receptive – Chaitin found that audiences need to exhibit a 'willingness to listen, learn and develop' (2014: 480) for narratives to promote peace rather than further division. The goals and the targeting of story-sharing are of increased significance as a result.

Some projects are explained in relation to how important they are to the participants in terms of autonomy, dignity and having a record of their experiences (cf. Section 6.2 and Lundy & McGovern, 2008). Facilitators reflected on communities that felt they were overlooked by broad storytelling projects, but not necessarily in a position where they wanted to share their stories with wider society (Interviewee 11, 2019). Other projects wanted to share their stories for the benefit of society in Northern Ireland, and others still sought international recognition for their participants:

> We have aimed to give it to senators in America, we have aimed to give it to foreign affairs in Dublin, we have aimed at extending all around England, we did. We got that book out everywhere you know - but it was more as an educational tool like 'here have a read of that' and it was a shock factor thing, that we gave it to every politician that visited. […] The Irish Taoiseach was here, and someone handed him a book. So, they are always handed out generally to any dignitaries or anything and they always and then they take that away from them and I think that's important. (Interviewee 14, 2019)

Sharing stories on such a grand scale requires the aforementioned pillars of safety and trust to be in place – which was very much the case with Interviewee 14's project, since it was developed out of a broad and long-term community project bringing together women from different parts of Derry. Other projects will have a potentially global reach, if not purely due to the globalised world we now inhabit, since books and DVDs can be ordered, or websites accessed with ease. This also reinforces the importance of the principles of trust and safety, but also points to the recurring theme of heterogeneity among projects.

8.2.3 - Challenge of contextualisation

Contextualisation poses a huge challenge for facilitators, since it is significant in terms of communicating the significance of the narratives they are trying to share. Stories that sit purely as the gathered accounts of the conflict, without contextualisation (textual or otherwise) are simultaneously less engaging, and less likely to challenge any entrenched narratives if the manner in which they disrupt the meta-conflict is not made

clear. Likewise, even understanding their significance in relation to the broader conflict can be challenging for a global audience, or even younger generations without the background knowledge in the conflict:

> Maybe now for a new generation that haven't lived through it they, might need more signposting. But in the sense of the stories that tell the macro-narrative by telling their micro-story. But that does require you to understand a little bit more about the macro-narrative to get the subtlety of what is being said, I suppose. So, maybe if you were thinking about the power of the story, if there was a project explicitly trying to do something which is about- let's not call it reconciliation, but educating people more so that they gain a different perspective, they take a different view, you may need to contextualise it. But that, by its very nature, is going to be subjective as well… (Interviewee 11, 2019)

Some projects include some of the signposting mentioned above in terms of forewords, preamble to stories, or in the form of a glossary. Interviewee 14 reflected on the challenge of writing introductions for storytellers:

> I remember those introductions took me forever because you had to be so careful what you were saying, and you had to be sure that it was an RUC beating, and you had to be sure that it was an IRA… so researching background and all that is really important, even for the intro bit, because it was so concise. It was three lines to get a story across, and then the women's voices take over. (Interviewee 14, 2019)

The challenge did not stop here for interviewee 14. Since the publication also contained a glossary of key terms specific to Derry; these also had to be 'As concise as anything, so nobody could pull you up on it' (Interviewee 14, 2019). The challenge of contextualisation can be related to the meta-conflict, since it is the contested nature of events that creates this climate of fear for storytellers and facilitators in sharing stories.

While there is a 'fear factor' acknowledged in existing literature related to issues of confidentiality due to the Boston College Tapes project, much of this reflects on story-gathering and subsequent archiving (Bryson and McEvoy, 2016). There is less research into the way that publishers and facilitators try to shape and narrate the collections they present. Interviewee 14 shows that it is possible, but that it is perhaps necessarily limited to the most basic and raw facts, and that it is the narratives themselves that ultimately challenge contested narratives, as opposed to the context-setting. Once again, variety was the theme when discussing contextualisation in story-sharing, with other projects choosing to opt out due to the scale of the challenge:

> My big kind of thing, […] is that those stories just sit there without any context or explanation of the conflict, and that's something that I think we would not have not been able to do, without a much longer process with the steering group to actually devise an introduction, which would contextualise the conflict and contextualise these stories. I'm not saying it would have been impossible. Actually, I think we could have done it with our steering group, but we would have needed a longer time to do that. So that's the kind of thing that's complex, but I do think there is things in terms of engaging audiences… *I think there is something about that, about bringing stories together from very different perspectives and there's something about that work. Something very interesting could be done.* (Interviewee 6, 2019, emphasis added)

Time and resource limitations are a recurrent theme in inhibiting facilitators from sharing stories. The steering group referred to would have been drawn from multiple constituencies across Belfast, and it is inferred here and within the broader interview that it would have been able to negotiate the challenges of contextualisation, but at great cost in terms of time. The second part of the quote hints at the possibilities that exist for storytelling, especially in relation to Interviewee 11's comments regarding

macro-narratives. As a peacebuilding methodology, storytelling has the potential to engage audiences by placing the complex stories against a backdrop. This is not just to help increase audience engagement in what would otherwise be a vast swathe of impenetrable text, but also to offer comment on the discourse, such as shared experiences across divides, or challenging false narratives in circulation. Some projects may seek to do this through their initial design; while the project Interviewee 6 worked on was arguably oral history or storytelling in its 'purest' sense, other projects made use of oral history methodologies to create educational resources that addressed particular themes. One example is *Upstanding: Stories of Courage from Northern Ireland*, an educational DVD developed by Corrymeela that thematically focuses upon stories of people rejecting discrimination across all of Northern Irish society (Corrymeela, 2013).

8.2.4 - Framing, Othering and Challenging Perceptions

Some projects are beginning to be able to create the type of projects alluded to by Interviewee 16, and are starting to demonstrate ways in which story-sharing can challenge the audience's perceptions or ways in which they may frame the other. It is worth emphasising again how this is varied in its execution across storytelling for multiple reasons, such as time and resources (see above), but also how delicately balanced (between being meaningful and damaging) such interventions are. Some interviewees explored what the ideal means of story-sharing would involve, and

referenced similar projects in different contexts that successfully complicated audience

perceptions of the other:

> Robi Damelin, who lost her son as an Israeli soldier, but she works a lot with
> Palestinian members who'd also tell their stories. So, they're going to do
> something educational and come together to tell those stories. But also,
> to kind of speak to the wider issue, as well. So, it becomes very
> dichotomous. But I think sometimes that works because for the audience
> member, they're not just hearing those two individual stories, they're
> hearing "Oh my God, this is actually really complex" You know, "I can see
> two different sides and it's very personal" So I think…ways in which you
> can curate stories so that you can hear the human element of both, but
> coming from different perspectives, I think opens people up to the
> humanity of it. And I think that often, the reconciliation agenda, really, is
> about people being able to temporarily walk in each other's shoes a little
> bit more. And that's a way of doing that. (Interviewee 11, 2019)

There are obvious overlaps here with the methods deployed by TUH in their own

Testimony events (Interviewee 15, 2019). The significance here is how facilitators want

to challenge audiences to see shared experiences that emphasise shared experiences

across divides. While this approach generates empathy, it does not necessarily tackle

challenging political themes of the conflict, or reach broader audiences if it is confined

to a 'talking circle' setup. This is not a criticism as such, since this is a logical limitation

of such an event – equally, coverage of such events and the pro-peace discourses that

unfold from within them can help reach a broader audience, such as reports on *Parent's*

Circle (Hanley, 2004) or the 'optics' it provides to society (Interviewee 12, 2019). Other

projects that lack the immediacy of a talking circle project may be able to reach broader

audiences. In some of these cases, projects are able to guide audiences to the content in

a way that circumvents any pre-existing bias:

> One of the things you'll notice on the current website is that we don't give the person's constituency. So, it's just a name; we don't say if it's a Prisoner, or a Prison Officer, or anything. In some ways that's part of that idea of encouraging people to listen to the story of "The Other", because if you're from here and you're told that the person speaking is a Republican or a Prison Officer or a Probation Officer, you immediately start to frame that potential narrative around that person. We wanted to encourage "The Other"; to watch everyone and not just the people you might identify with, by anonymising their constituency. (Interviewee 7, 2019)

This is another instance of technology and medium providing immediate opportunities to challenge the meta-conflict in creative ways. The result here is that audiences encounter narratives without bias; but they also encounter narratives they are not necessarily expecting:

> The second thing is that the concept we didn't want to set up, again, the obvious, so the people will go to The Escape, or go to The Hunger Strike, or go to what they already know a lot about, we wanted to play around with preconceptions. (Interviewee 7, 2019)

Challenging preconceptions is undoubtedly a means of challenging the meta-conflict, since people are exposed to narratives that they may reject on identity grounds alone – and the examples mentioned above fall into the category of contested aspects of the conflict. However, Interviewee 7 reflected that this was the benefit of a relatively small-scale story-sharing website or archive; the planned move to a more exhaustive archive with PRONI meant that the PMA would ultimately need to label videos to make a vast selection more manageable, and as such some of that challenging of preconceptions is lost. This links to an advantage of Northern Ireland's grassroots peacebuilding landscape – these smaller projects have the flexibility and reduced scale that that enables them to share their stories in imaginative ways, that a more substantial state-

level project may struggle with. A similar pattern plays out in other transitional societies, for example Arriaza & Roht-Arriaza's (2008) argument that decentralised Guatemalan transitional justice initiatives tend to be more sensitive to local requirements than state-level efforts.

8.2.5 - Knowing your audience

Beyond the pressures of audience engagement, storytelling facilitators also have to be mindful of who the audience is when they are sharing stories. Storytelling projects have diverse content, from the everyday to the politically incendiary, and Northern Irish society consists of diverse identity groups, far more so than the reductive CNR and PUL distinction – for instance, only 58% identify as either Unionist or Nationalist, with the other 42% identifying as either 'Neither, other or don't know' (Wilson, 2016). This again reinforces the diversity and lack of consensus as to how to share stories, since it hinges on audience, story, context and resources. This section aims to outline how storytellers have to carefully consider both the stories they wish to share, and the audience(s) with which they wish to share them, and how it relates to the aforementioned diversity of thought on this matter within the storytelling community. To connect this new theme with the above, it is helpful to consider how a journalist might approach the issue of audience awareness:

> I think, as a journalist, and you're talking about audience, your audience are people who buy the newspaper. Again, in my context, the Irish Times is an all-Ireland broadsheet, so you're very mindful that, while we're very caught up in this here, somebody who's sitting in Cork, or Waterford, or somewhere, maybe doesn't know that much about it. So, you're conscious of writing a story in a way that will connect with people. And in a way that makes it clear why it's relevant to them. This can't just be a bad thing that happened in the north, however many years ago. You're making clear why this is relevant to them. (Interviewee 17, 2019)

For a broadsheet journalist also involved in storytelling, audience awareness is understandably closely related to the above concerns of audience engagement; failure to do so would result in a failure in your duties as a journalist to make explicit how these stories reflect your own reality and warrant continued interest. This may be true across storytelling, particularly in relation to some of the above reflections on helping audiences understand the context as a generational shift. However, storytelling in the pure sense of projects explicitly established to encourage the telling of stories related to the conflict may have to consider their relationship with the audience in a different way, particularly if they are spatially and thematically closer to the more controversial aspects of the conflict:

> The variety of stories that are related to in the RUC's collection would vary from everything from just what it's like to live in a police station in the 1950s and all the pressure that put upon the family in a time of relative peace, towards maybe being involved in a more controversial incident in the 70s and 80s. Certainly there's a place for that, very much so, when we come to the history of the country here. But I think from the point of view of particularly talking to certain communities, you wouldn't want to let them hear about an incident that occurred in their area 30 or 40 years ago, that is maybe still under investigation, or that is something that could bring back bad memories to people that are there. Now that can be done with certain groups okay, but certainly in relation to a normal traditional group or a community group, maybe not something you really want to put out there. So, it tends to be more what it was like to be a police officer

working in Lurgan in 1976 without going into the big details about particular incidents. (Interviewee 12, 2019)

This kind of content may not challenge the meta-conflict specifically, but it potentially creates the circumstances where it can later. Discussing and understanding the mundane aspects of the Other's role in the conflict and increasing contact paves the way for more challenging content. This is consistent with Voci et al.'s findings regarding outgroup friendships in Northern Ireland as being strongly associated with forgiveness (2015), and other projects which used similar methods, such as Interviewee 14 who described how the prelude to the oral history component was bringing together women of Derry across the divide in an initial community engagement project (Interviewee 14, 2019). An initial contact and relationship can create the conditions necessary for the more complex conversations ahead.

When facilitators do share stories that challenge the meta-conflict, they are often reliant on locals who may serve as opinion leaders or moral authorities within the room or the community as a whole. This is most easily observed in live event settings, where documentaries are screened with space for discussion, or guest speakers. One facilitator reflected on the dynamics of showing a DVD about Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) stories in Derry:

> Some people would reckon about that DVD that it, it's simplistic and naïve. Because it doesn't show UDR as sectarian, it doesn't show UDR as being involved in collusion and killing. I'm not stupid though. I know the UDR were involved in those things. But these are the stories from this particular area. And I guess from whom we got the stories are not going to say, "We were sectarian". But one of the things that happened in that dialogue session after showing the DVD is a woman who lost her brother in Bloody

> Sunday was there. And she said, "You know the way I see it, everybody's got a story. And everybody deserves to be heard." And because, I think, of her, if you like her moral status in the room, because people would know full well her brother was killed, it led to kind of, to even the UDR people deserved to be heard. (Interviewee 15, 2019)

Despite being a particularly challenging watch, the DVD's reception was altered by the presence of someone with significant moral status acknowledging the worth of views that run contrary to that particular community. Other facilitators reported similar instances when sharing films:

> One woman in the audience, and it was mostly women in the audience on the nationalist side, said "that Prison Officer doesn't talk about the violence; she's whitewashing the violence done against those prisoners". Another woman in the audience who had two sons in the Maze Prison said, "hold on a minute here, we don't have to agree with everything she says, we don't have to ask her to say what we want her to say. The whole point of where we are at the minute is hearing stories of the other people and I want to hear her story; doesn't mean I have to agree with it". What was really validating for us was that it was unanimous, apart from that one woman who objected at the beginning, everyone agreed with the second woman. I think that shows that just because you're over here, it doesn't mean you can't get there or meet in the middle. I think people's readiness for storytelling is conditional on where they're at and their circumstances. (Interviewee 7, 2019)

Two points resonate here – an individual being prepared to argue in favour of the sharing of stories that may be the opposite of her own, and the importance of audience readiness. Due to the lack of research, it is difficult to say with certainty whether an opinion leader or facilitation is more important than an audience being "ready", which in itself is a concept too abstract to easily define in this context, except with reference to literature where this has been explored in other contexts emphasising a willingness to

listen learn, among other characteristics (e.g. Chaitin, 2014). Even then, the characteristics are broad and would benefit from further research.

This is a challenge for deploying storytelling as a means of peacebuilding. Given the importance of audience, there is some relevance in audience studies in relation to media, such as Katz and Lazarsfeld's (1955) two-step flow of communication, which emphasises the importance of opinion leaders in mediating the flow of mass media influence from outlets to a wider audience. Another approach is Hall's (1980) assertion that audiences decoded media messages, assuming either a dominant (i.e. accepting the preferred message), negotiated or oppositional position. Although these models relate to mass media, and the examples above are relatively small-scale, there are plans for storytelling to reach larger audiences (see SHA, or PRONI's hosting of the PMA) as well as historic nationwide broadcasts such as BBC's *Legacy* (2008). When story-sharing is considered in relation to these theories, it underlines how little is known and how much more research is needed in understanding the peacebuilding potential of storytelling, particularly in relation to audiences. Put more succinctly, 'Above all, there is no easily available blueprint that can indicate the best way in which to realize the potential benefits of storytelling in transitional societies' (Hackett and Rolston, 2009: 372).

8.2.6 - Knowing when an audience is ready

Further avenues of research aside, it is helpful to return to interviewee 7's second point regarding audience readiness. Many facilitators agreed that context-sensitivity was key to determining the approach of sharing stories, and emphasised the different states sections of Northern Ireland are in:

> *Some of the audiences may be more open to being challenged than others.* For example, we were down in Lurgan about 3 years ago in an area called Taghnevan, I would have been a police officer in Lurgan in 1976 and certainly Taghnevan would have been an area of Lurgan that the police wouldn't have been particularly well received in for a variety of historical reasons. Going back there 40 years later plus I was wondering what sort of a reception are we going to get there. We brought along the CDs, we spoke to what I perceived as a very nationalist republican audience and the CDs would have been selected in such a way that they wouldn't have been particularly controversial because it was a very controversial area for policing, and indeed other things throughout the history of The Troubles. (Interviewee 12, 2019, emphasis added)

Tailoring the experience and careful consideration of audience was something that many facilitators agreed upon, with others outlining occasions where misjudging an audience's readiness could actually hamper peacebuilding:

> The release of the film went to a group of ex-service Police, Army and Prison Officers, and it had the opposite effect. We only went because we were invited by the Chair of that group and he misunderstood where they were at; he wanted them to start an oral history project and he thought this would be a good case study. They were nowhere near ready for that sort of storytelling because *Armagh Stories* has Prison Officers, but it's also got Republicans and Loyalists. The response was visceral, it was angry, some of the language about people in the film was abusive. The point to remember is that anger is the other side of pain and what was slipping out here was they had felt bypassed... In fact, it wasn't slipping out, it was very

clearly stated: they had sacrificed their lives, their colleagues had been killed to put these people behind bars, these terrorists behind bars and now they're in government. And he even knew one of them in the film. (Interviewee 7, 2019)

The concluding remarks here are interesting in that the feeling of being bypassed is highlighted – the audience needed to feel like they had also been given a chance to tell their story, for fair representation and balance. This links to extensive literature on hierarchy of victimhood which persists both in other contexts (e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina, see Mannergren Selimovic, 2015) and Northern Ireland itself, which reflect on themes such as the mobilisation of victimhood (Lynch & Joyce, 2018) or victimhood's relationship with attitudes towards legacy interventions (Brewer & Hayes, 2015). This means it is important, as Interviewee 7 reflects, for facilitators who want to share stories that critically engage with the meta-conflict to ensure that groups are ready to hear these stories. The challenge for facilitators is that they are not necessarily always peacebuilding experts, and establishing whether a group is in the "right place" becomes part of the puzzle if storytelling is to have a measurable impact upon peacebuilding.

As far as the key question for this research regarding the critical engagement with the meta-conflict is concerned, the case is that while storytelling facilitators are universally mindful of the need to be aware of these differing states, there is no unified means of dealing with the challenge of contextual sensitivity. Interviewee 7 continues:

There are different stages and we tend not to be proactive; what we do is respond to requests. We're an archive, we're filmmakers and we're about to employ an outreach worker, and their job will be to link with schools and community groups to see where we're at and what they might want. And we might start curating packages according to the needs of that community or constituency. It's a really interesting point, I don't think

> there is one stage that our society is at; some communities are there, and other ones are way, way over there. (Interviewee 7, 2019)

Story-sharing is not simply a case of a being an unexplored frontier where all facilitators agree that the means of sharing stories is contextually sensitive, but an intrinsically good thing to do. Disagreement about how or when to share contentious stories exists; there are also facilitators who question whether it is ever really their job:

> I will say, again on the level of oral history...I can't think of a forum really where I would want to endure or start a heated debate about the past. The rights and wrongs. Above my pay grade and all. I don't see any merit in that really. (Interviewee 10, 2019)

Although Interviewee 10 also expressed a curiosity in a well-managed exchange of stories, they emphasised the exclusion of 'political what-abouteries' and ultimately saw the sharing of challenging stories as a step too far. There are echoes here of Interviewee 15's emphatic rejection of stories that touched upon the broader political landscape. On the other end of the spectrum are facilitators who reject the notion that facilitators are entitled to say who is and who is not "ready" to be exposed to particularly stories:

> Who makes the judgement of whether society is or isn't ready for it? I mean, I think on two levels, so the person, certainly, or the person gathering the story or receiving the story, certainly there can be harm on an individual level. Or maybe for the organisation that represents, all those kinds of things. That's something that has to be weighed up. That's where things like, maybe, anonymity comes in. I think in the wider societal level, I do think we have a responsibility to be challenging. Again, it's back to what I said initially there, about who decides whether or not society is ready for that? I think you have to challenge. And censorship feeds into that. Say, in the course of the storytelling, you're doing an interview with somebody who has power or who has influence, and they say something that's particularly challenging and controversial, then I don't think you

> have… I would argue that you don't have the right to censor that. (Interviewee 17, 2019)

Between these views, the diversity of thought regarding how to manage the sharing of stories that challenge the meta-conflict somehow is demonstrated. On one end is the evasion of sharing challenging stories because it remains too dangerous; on the other, a commitment to challenging wherever possible to avoid accusations of censorship, and to fulfil a societal responsibility in terms of truth recovery.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the ambiguousness of some of the terms being discussed here – specifically 'readiness', and 'contentious' or 'challenging' stories. A binary definition could be attempted for both, but is not satisfactory. A group that is ready is one that actively chooses to view, read or participate with a storytelling event or publication. A contentious story is simply one that may contain a record of events that different constituencies within Northern Ireland would interpret differently. But both definitions would need to be a lot more robust in order to satisfy some of the more complex scenarios that are described above. 'Readiness' to engage with the meta-conflict may be varied within one group, or varied between different events and locations. One person's contentious story is another person's factual account of an event that happened. While there is research that comments on the readiness of Northern Ireland for a truth commission (see Smyth, 2007 or Duffy, 2010) and research into readiness for peace talks at the beginning of a peace process (see Pruitt, 2007), there is relatively little that explicitly determines how specific subsections of Northern Irish society (e.g. retired prison officers, ex-paramilitaries in border counties etc.) can be

identified as ready to begin these challenging post-conflict conversations towards maximalist peace.

The advantage that storytelling in Northern Ireland has in the face of this ambiguity is indeed the decentralised, grassroots structure that has unfolded out of necessity, which has resulted in such a variety of approaches to story-sharing (despite relative unity in terms of story-gathering). Facilitators are in a position to react to their own project and context's needs, in comparison with a top-down mechanism that potentially imposes definitions of 'readiness' and 'contentious' that may not be a best fit. This is not to say that storytelling can fill the void left by the absence of legacy measures in Northern Ireland – indeed, it is often argued that narrative work will need to be complimented by a suite of justice interventions (i.e. de Greiff's 'thick web', 2012). The best fit may be the facilitation of grassroot storytelling to the extent that it can continue to proliferate and professionalise, alongside a broader suite of legacy interventions – something that many interviewees emphasised - and is reflected in the Storytelling Network's response to the SHA (HTR, 2015).

8.3 - Conclusion

While approaches to story-gathering suggest a unified front within the storytelling community, story-sharing divides opinion. This chapter began by introducing the notion of story-sharing, specifically the diverse aims expressed by facilitators and the perhaps the one common ground of victim-centrality. It then considered the practicalities of sharing stories and considered the benefits in order to show the ways in which story-sharing can potentially challenge the meta-conflict. Critically, this chapter has drawn attention to the complex relationship between context, story-sharing and the meta-conflict. This section argued for the importance of trust, which while agreed upon was gained and wielded in diverse ways for the sharing of stories. Audience engagement is also considered, and while agreed that it was important, was achieved in myriad ways reflected in the diversity of story-sharing methods. Contextualisation of published work is also emphasised; with facilitators agreeing it was potentially helpful but very challenging, in practice the extent to which it is actively implemented is varied. Similarly, framing and avoidance of othering is also considered as a means to ensure that audiences are well-equipped to engage with story-sharing aimed at peacebuilding. Finally, knowing an audience and knowing an audience's 'readiness' are explored – i.e. the ways in which facilitators have to consider an audience's interests and sensitivities, as well as whether they are 'ready' to be exposed to narratives that challenge their own. This final section was consistent with the aforementioned patterns of diversity, since Northern Ireland's complex society means there is no singular answer relating to

audience and 'readiness'. A final unifying theme among facilitators was a cognisance of the immense challenges story-sharing faced and (diverse) means of addressing them. However, these challenges are further exacerbated by structural challenges, which is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 9 - Obstacles to the successful sharing of stories

This chapter outlines the various challenges that storytelling faces if it is to share stories that helpfully and critically engage with the meta-conflict. The overarching argument is a simple one; that storytelling facilitators are prevented from (or seriously limited in) sharing the stories they have gathered by political and economic obstacles, and thus cannot make broader contributions to positive peace in the region by offering meaningful accounts of the conflict to wider Northern Irish society. This is not to say that story-sharing is non-existent, as the previous chapter demonstrates the wildly varying extents to which it occurs, but that it is seriously restricted by factors outside of the storytelling community's control. The factors discussed here are Brexit, the absence of devolved government, costs and funding and finally the SHA. These are not presented in a hierarchical order, since each factor overlaps and affects the others.

This chapter first argues that Brexit inhibits story-sharing in diverse ways, many of which overlap with the other factors, e.g. the uncertainty around funding or its contribution to the stagnation at Stormont. Secondly, it argues that the absence of devolved government also inhibits the sharing of stories, both by compounding the effects of Brexit but also failing to implement legislation such as the Troubles pension or the SHA. Thirdly, it reflects on the cost of storytelling; while seemingly a cheap option, the sharing of stories is expensive and time-consuming, and funds are thrown into question by government paralysis, Brexit and a lack of progress on SHA or other legacy proposals.

Finally, it considers the SHA and recent developments which threaten the proposals. While the SHA is a flawed approach to legacy, it is a starting point around which much helpful debate and learning has already transpired. Facilitators find themselves faced with either preparing for the OHA (within the SHA) which itself requires further consideration before stories can be confidently shared with ease, or reacting to an unknown alternative. In short, a putative archive offers hope, but not without extensive labour and uncertainty. The complexity of the SHA warrants further discussion, and does so in three ways. Firstly, it is analysed in relation to recent changes proposed by the NIO, secondly the problems identified by interviews to the original SHA and concludes by considering the challenging relationship between storytelling and justice.

9.1 - Brexit

It is important to note the fieldwork took place between January and July 2019 – a period of uncertainty as negotiations surrounding the withdrawal agreement continued, and the UK government still lacked the majority needed to win the 'meaningful vote'. Fieldwork concluded around the time Boris Johnson was elected leader of the Conservative Party and Prime Minister (Centre for European Reform, 2020). Brexit was largely discussed by facilitators in relation to its potential to deepen division

in Northern Ireland, and thus increase the risks of a return to violence, although the extent to which interviewees felt this was the case was varied and nuanced.

The risks of stoking up old animosities were noted as part of the Government's worst-case scenario Brexit planning (see 'Operation Yellowhammer', UK Government, 2019), as were the risks of a hard border (Creighton, 2019) and the potentially uneven status of citizens depending on whether they have Irish citizenship or not (Driscoll, 2019). On the last point, identity politics were front and centre when some facilitators were asked about Brexit:

> Personally anyway, it's made me think far more about my Irishness than I would never really question before. Brexit is throwing us ever closer to a united Ireland, which nobody imagined. I bet the government didn't expect that. That the talk of a united Ireland is actually on the table now. […] It really could happen in our lifetime because of Brexit so I think it's going to backfire on them spectacularly if it happens. (Interviewee 14, 2019)

Other interviewees reflected similarly about the potential for Brexit to pose uncomfortable questions about Northern Ireland's relationship with the South, and the implications in terms of peace and a resumption of violence in the region. However, other interviewees were keen to place Brexit in context:

> The other point that I was just going to make, in regard to Brexit, is that… This may sound weird, but Brexit doesn't have a huge impact, in some ways, on legacy and victims and survivor's issues, because those are there anyway, whether or not there's Brexit. *So, if you were talking to somebody sitting in Creggan, who had a relative shot dead by the British army, it really doesn't change a whole lot on that and the workings of that, for them.* The reason that I say that is because every time something big happens here, suddenly all the focus is on Northern Ireland and 'could the Troubles come back? […] I would have done quite a lot of radio interviews, In BBC stations in England, or network stations and things like that. So, there was round

the time of Lyra McKee's murder and then we had the bomb outside the courthouse, in January. *The reason that that's in my mind is because, quite often, what you would get asked by presenters in England would be things like 'is this because of Brexit?' And no, it's not because of Brexit. It's nothing to do with Brexit*. And actually, at the time of the bomb at the courthouse, the police deliberately said, "this is nothing to do with Brexit". There is always this level of threat. This always happens. *This is about a hundred-plus-year-old struggle and It's about a lot more than that. This has been going on long before Brexit was ever on the horizon*. (Interviewee 17, 2019, emphasis added)

Attempting to understand Brexit's relationship with peace and storytelling from such radically different interpretations as the two quotes above is equal parts challenging and indicative of the contested nature of Northern Irish society. Bombs, murders and legacy issues would persist if Brexit disappeared tomorrow, but likewise Brexit affects the conversations regarding peace and Northern Ireland's future, since it poses new questions for how to pursue positive peace in the future.

The divisive nature of Brexit also has the potential to increase stagnation in the region. For some interviewees, the deepening of divides would make it even harder to encourage the participation of groups in the process:

Interviewee: Never mind the border issues... it's just this stagnation that's happening. It's awful for us. If there's a hard Brexit, it will up the ante, you know, so it's not a good thing and therefore, storytelling will become more difficult, I think.

Interviewer: Because people will...

Interviewee: Pull back.

Interviewer: Probably hide in their communities again as it were, and won't want to come back out?

Interviewee: Not all, but I think particularly... and the most vulnerable, in terms of oral history, is the Loyalist working class. It's getting ex-loyalist paramilitaries, prison officers […] getting the Unionist community to come

out to tell their story is a challenge. We found that it's a real challenge, and I think this will make it more difficult. (Interviewee 7, 2019)

The implication here is a simple and stark one – that Brexit has the potential to discourage those on the peripheries of the debate from sharing their stories - something that runs counter to the broad aims of storytelling in Northern Ireland. It is a side effect supported by recent research which suggests that the general election in December 2019 saw the rise of the middle - both as a vote to remain, and in response to Sinn Féin and the DUP's failure to govern together (Hayward, 2020) which may further compound the sense of isolation for groups that identify more closely with traditional identity boundaries in the region.

Facilitators differ on the impact of Brexit on storytelling itself, in a contrast as stark as the discussion around Brexit and peace more generally:

> Now, the only thing, the only impact that I can see it having on storytelling would be that if we end up on some sort of hiatus again and we have some sort of vote that brings us to the fore… the conflict, and that it's just, you know, one against another. You know, I doubt… I can't see that having any real impact. (Interviewee 10, 2019)

Other facilitators sat somewhere directly in the middle of the spectrum created by Interviewee 7 and 10's view of Brexit's immediate impact on storytelling:

> I don't think it will have any great impact upon- I think it will have an effect upon the peace process. It could undermine the Good Friday Agreement if it's handled very badly. As far as storytelling goes, I think people will always be prepared to tell their stories. But I would like to get the PUL community to tell- and I've been running that past them recently, and I think they've been thinking about it. Because unless a community tells their stories, and other communities are telling their stories, then they will suffer. Because if you look at the collective truth, they have no collective truth, then. They

> have nothing to offer. Whereas everybody, it can go on in an un-orchestrated fashion sometimes, are telling their stories. And therefore, the truth comes here because they have nothing to tell. […] I don't know if you've been speaking to anybody from the PUL community, but they really do need to start telling their stories as well. And Brexit has annoyed them, so they're less likely to play for a while… (Interviewee 12, 2019)

The above underlines the diversity of thought among storytelling facilitators in terms storytelling – both the gathering and sharing of stories. Interviewees argue that storytelling could discourage marginalised groups, while others see it as having minimal impact on storytelling as a practice.

When moving beyond the identity politics of hard borders and citizenship debates, funding is the most immediate threat to storytelling's future. While the EU has committed to fund initiatives in the region until 2020 in terms of PEACE projects (European Parliament, 2019) and has expressed a continued desire to continue to fund work in the region, the exact relationship and quantity is unclear. Understandably, this uncertainty is a concern for some storytelling facilitators:

> A lot of the good work over the last 10 or 20 years has been funded by Europe, and I think that is an issue but it's wider than just storytelling. That the valuable community work might be jeopardized because we don't have Europe anymore. Because England's not lining up to pay for it. (Interviewee 14, 2019)

Although on the one hand this sentiment can be qualified by pointing to the expectation that the UK pays part of the bill for PEACE, as was the case with match-funding through some national or local funds in the past (European Parliament, 2019), or to consider the extent to which the identities of facilitators may affect faith in the UK government's

capacity to build peace, this cynicism is also entirely justifiable. The government's historic failure to implement any form of systematic peacebuilding or transitional justice mechanism, or the recent (seeming) abandonment of SHA (gov.uk, 2020b), cynically buried beneath headlines focused on COVID-19 lockdown measures.

In addition to question marks over projects receiving enough funding is the complex relationship that is created by this funding arrangement in the first place:

> So, it's designed in Europe but it's very much with local influence. So, it's not completely like - it doesn't land out of the sky. […] So, there was a wider context. We'd had a period of devolved government. There was a hope that we could try and integrate external funding much more in line with government policy. Rather than it being; government is or isn't doing something here, and then we have all these external funders that are assuring other things that are going on. So, PEACE III was in the context where they were trying, rather than do things that were completely different from government policy, to try and begin to align them. The difficulty was that, as is still the case, we don't have a government policy on the past, and so they wanted to be able to fund the work because, like our research and other research that was coming out at the time was saying... one of the major areas that needs to be addressed if you're serious about reconciliation, is dealing with the past, and yet, we didn't have a dealing with the past process. So, the PEACE programme had to design something which began to look at that without becoming too contentious, so storytelling fitted that bill for them in a way, […] without it being super contentious - like, it wasn't getting into justice issues. (Interviewee 11, 2019)

The relevance here is that while it is tempting to panic over the potential for funds from Europe to dry up in the future, the reality is even more complicated. European funds do not simply fall into the hands of worthy organisations, but are dispensed by locally appointed experts, who are simultaneously trying to align projects with a non-existent UK government policy. Brexit is not the simple revocation of these funds, but another

political pivot point for grassroots peacebuilders to negotiate. The exact nature of this

negotiation remains to be seen, as negotiations between the EU and the UK continue,

although principally around questions of trade. What little has been stated is so vague

as to reinforce the uncertainty and anxiety already explored above:

> The UK also notes its specific ongoing commitment to delivering the PEACE PLUS programme. The UK will deliver the PEACE PLUS programme as part of the UK's unwavering commitment to uphold the hard-won peace in Northern Ireland. The UK will work with the European Commission and the Irish Government to shape the programme, maintaining the current funding proportions for the future programme. (UK Government, 2020)

The quote above is taken from negotiation documents published by the UK government

during the aforementioned negotiations. For such a complicated and challenging issue,

this does not offer clarity or reassurance, aside from regarding short-term financial

commitments. It is also consistent with another concern expressed by the majority of

interviewees – that Brexit serves as a distraction from progress in terms of legacy issues

in Northern Ireland.

Brexit is emblematic of the structural challenges that Northern Ireland faces in the

attempt to pursue a positive peace, particularly in terms of its potential to reignite

identity politics, the stagnation of local leadership and uncertainty regarding funding.

Current attitudes still seem to lean more towards negative peace, as suggested by some

interviewees:

> You look at the Brexit debate and the ignorance of most people in England in particular around the Irish border, the implications of changing the current way that works. *You can see all the reasons why you would just contain it*. Because you're potentially creating all kinds of mess. Any government is going to create a mess with it. *But the question for those*

policies, are they asking about transformation or are they containment? And nearly always the British government will go for containment and I understand why. And I don't think that will work in the long term. (Interviewee 19, 2019, emphasis added)

Brexit's impact on storytelling is broad, contested among facilitators and still has a long way to run. Interviewee 19 introduces the long-term impact that Brexit may have on the status of Northern Ireland, while other interviewees are concerned about the financial aspects of leaving the EU. The myriad complications are likely to encourage the UK government to further commit to containment or a minimalist approach, an approach already manifesting itself with the seeming abandonment of the SHA (UK Parliament, 2020) which is a far cry from a maximalist, transformative or transcendental culture of peacebuilding (Galtung, 2004) that most storytelling facilitators are trying to build.

9.2 - Political stalemate and absence of devolved government

Brexit also exacerbated the pre-existing political stalemate in Northern Ireland. No government sat at Stormont between January 2017 and January 2020 due to the DUP's handling of a renewable energy scandal (McCormack, 2020), a subsequent demand from Sinn Féin for an Irish language act before restoring the executive (O'Neill, 2020) and mistrust over the DUP's handling of Brexit (Carroll, 2020). The latter point particularly owes to the DUP finding themselves forming a minority government with the Conservative Party as part of a confidence and supply arrangement (gov.uk, 2020a). This

lasted until January 2020, following the December 2019 general election in which the Conservative Party formed a majority government without support from the DUP. As one interviewee explained, the DUP's status in Westminster contributed to the paralysis in local government:

> Well, the problem with May's election, the last election, it gave the DUP access to the centre of power, and when they're at Westminster they have no real political motivation to resurrect Stormont. Why would they? You know, it's a kind of peripheral assembly; it's not important. (Interviewee 7, 2019)

While day-to-day governance fell to civil servants, they could not make decisions (McCormack, 2020; Carroll, 2020) or implement the policies required for story-sharing to flourish in Northern Ireland. Consultations regarding the SHA continued with civil servants, and indeed many interviewees released statements or attended meetings at Stormont during the period without government – but there was only so much that could be achieved without the executive:

> One of the problems is we've had no government for two years. We still have some levers of power within the state that could do things, but with the constant dealing with the past issues, your average civil servant isn't going to go any further than they need to. Particularly if they don't have any political backing. And the difficulty with any policy implementation here is civil servants are always stuck between a rock and a hard place in terms of who they risk pissing off if they do things in a certain way. (Interviewee 19, 2019)

Even with government restored, facilitators were cautious about the support story-gathering and story-sharing would receive:

> If we got an assembly up and running again, I think it would be very toxic for a number of years, unless there's some fundamental shift in

> relationships. […] It would cost a lot of money. And, in the consultations I've had over the past three or four years now, I've never been about to get anybody to say, "If you were going to establish this archive, just that alone, what kind of budget are you putting on it?" Because we have to work back from the budget. You know, you can't design a state-of-the-art archive that's going to do this, this, this and this, and it's going to collect this many stories, and it's going to do it this way, and all that, unless you know what your budget is. You're going to have to decide on your budget and work backwards, and a time frame, and none of those things have been agreed, so... [pause] I'm not optimistic. (Interviewee 11, 2019)

Toxic relations are a recurring theme in describing the government at Stormont, something that is reflected in literature related to the assembly, particularly given the tendency for consociationalism to foster extreme positions, minimalist peace and institutional instability (McCulloch, 2017). Despite the flaws in the system, Stormont has arguably functioned comparatively well for the ten years preceding its collapse (Haughey, 2019), although reform is needed, in terms of the veto vote or the manner of executive formation for it to move away from toxicity and stalemate (McCulloch, 2017; Haughey, 2019). The significance for storytelling, and peacebuilding more broadly, is that Stormont needs to be more than just a functioning executive – there needs to be a genuine will to address the past and a serious improvement in relations for storytelling projects to flourish. The government has the power to remove some of the structural obstacles that are described in this chapter, particularly the lack of funding, but its own shortcomings prevent this from happening. Other facilitators were also negative about the lack of direct support received from the devolved government:

> The government here could at least help financially, because any of these community projects, everything struggles for money, and then they're spending money on crazy stuff. So, I think their resources could be better

used, to address the historical issues and the legacy. (Interviewee 14, 2019)

Funding is one such major obstacle to story-sharing that local government can potentially remove, but is a problem for all projects. Funds are at the centre of a new row between Stormont and Westminster, with legal action threatened by victims' groups following the failure to provide the promised Troubles pension (O'Neil, 2020). If both devolved and central government cannot fund a mechanism that has been enshrined in law, there is comparatively little hope for peacebuilding and transitional justice measures that exist without such explicit legal backing.

9.3 - The cost of storytelling

Against the backdrop of uncertainty over EU funding in the long term, and tensions within local and central government undermining decision making and potential sources of income, it is important to consider the cost of storytelling. In some respects, it might be considered remarkably good value:

> Interviewee: I'd like to get into a situation where I can hand it over with somebody who can take it forward a bit. If I had time and I had a notion of bringing some stuff together and making a book of it or something. But it's alright. It's getting the time and the inclination.
>
> Interviewer: That's the impression I get from a lot of storytellers, that time and money are enormous limiting factors in what they're doing. Is this a

full-time thing for you?

Interviewee: No, no. I have to negotiate with [Interviewee's spouse]. I've got family. I've got extended family I look after; I have other interests. Apart from just sitting and reading and listening to music and wandering about the garden. And just living. It's not something that I get paid for.

Interviewer: So, it's completely voluntary?

Interviewee: Completely voluntary. (Interviewee 10, 2019)

This was an interview with an experienced storyteller who spearheads a project with hundreds of hours of recordings – not an occasional volunteer or well-wisher. This was not a unique phenomenon among those interviewed:

In fact, we're not being paid at all to do this. So, the work that that [redacted] and I do, even though we might use the archive in some of the work we do… all our work at the minute is cross community conflict resolution work of a different kind. I just hive off a bit of time to engage with some of the policy stuff around oral history […], to engage with Stories Network which is a group of practitioners. If we get people coming in and making enquiries, you try and create the time […] but none of it is funded at all, so every time we do that, we're kind of putting pressure on the rest of the work that we have to carry out. (Interviewee 6, 2019)

Again, this is in reference to an archive with hundreds of detailed accounts and has publications to their name, but at the time of interview that aspect of their work was quite simply unfunded and entirely voluntary. An obvious limitation to story-sharing becomes the finite resources of facilitators, if the existence of storytelling is dependent on their free time and good will. For many facilitators, the voluntary nature of storytelling was viewed as a strength, particularly when discussing the possibility of scaling up existing projects or centralising storytelling in the form of the proposed OHA:

> There's more genuineness involved when it's not an industry. Sadly, in Northern Ireland, there's a reconciliation industry. (Interviewee 1, 2019)

For Interviewee 1, there was a danger of over-professionalising the process to the point of storytelling losing its integrity, although they were also mindful of the importance of extending storytelling's reach if possible. Other facilitators reflected on the value of storytelling in its voluntary form:

> I remember at one stage [redacted] said "even if we don't get funding, we'll do this somehow because this is really important work", and I think that's evident in how they work. That was my experience of them. (Interviewee 2, 2019)

> I think the great thing about storytelling is that it's a relatively cheap project to undertake. We have collected about 350 stories in total, which sounds great and we've had academics from as far away as Switzerland who visited saying "this is amazing, the police don't tell their stories normally". (Interviewee 12, 2019)

The latter is certainly true for projects that prioritise story-gathering over story-sharing; volunteer storytelling facilitators can gather stories with little more than a recording device and free time. It is also less expensive when compared with formal transitional justice mechanisms like truth commissions or trials (McGrattan, 2016). The importance of time should be emphasised though – it would be overcomplacent to depend on the good will of locals to continue to gather stories, particularly in the face of some of the aforementioned risks attached to storytelling, such as retraumatisation, implication and the challenge of capturing a generation's perspective before they die. It is also important to note the growing emphasis on training and ethical guidelines (HTR, 2009), which is

likely to incur further costs in terms of both time and money, as well as overheads such as office space or data storage.

If story-gathering can potentially be done relatively cheaply, story-sharing is another matter. The process of preparing accounts for public consumption adds further time and technical requirements which nudges storytelling away from the voluntary and towards the professional:

> We have to digitalise everything. We've got a massive archive within the museum, about 20,000 items and artefacts and a lot of it is documents that came out during the campaign. (Interviewee 14, 2019)

While some variation between projects is inevitable, a fair summary would be that story-gathering is relatively 'cheap' process, but eventually sharing and communicating these stories to a broader audience is the point where storytelling becomes a more expensive process. For both sides of storytelling, the time and good will of volunteers is essential, since funds are finite, conditional or even non-existent.

Without embarking on a catalogue of associated projects, the projects discussed in the fieldwork tended to either be subsumed into a larger organisation from which it could draw its funds (such as charities and universities), dependent on external funding (from the EU or other external sources, such as the International Fund for Ireland), local or state funding, entirely voluntary and often a complicated combination of the above.

It is worth comparing some projects to illustrate the complex and fragile funding arrangements. After gathering over 250 interviews in Belfast, the Dúchas oral history project has an extensive archive (Dúchas, 2020) but (currently) no funding for developing public access to the collection. This can be compared with another EU PEACE III funded project, the Accounts of the Conflict – a project designed to act as long term store (where stories are formally deposited with the account) or cataloguing system for recorded stories (i.e. those that are stored elsewhere), acting as either an archive or signposting system (Accounts of the Conflict, 2019):

> What we managed to do was set up all that infrastructure, so it all exists, and we did manage to gather some stories and make a commitment to try and maintain those for prosperity. What we haven't been able to do is fund it and so it's not taking in any new stories at the minute, and that's a structural problem, both with the university and with the PEACE Program. They should never have funded something that they couldn't fund into the longer term, and that's a whole other debate. (Interviewee 11, 2019)

Despite the importance of EU funding for the mere existence of these projects, it is not necessarily a perfect model for sustained peacebuilding. Issues beyond failing to commit to funding in the long term aside, other researchers have also criticised the EU approach to funding local NGOs. Criticisms include over-committing to the liberal peacebuilding paradigm (Marchetti & Tocci, 2015), questionable levels of NGO self-sustainability and perceptions of overreliance on external aid (Khan & Byrne, 2016). The latter point regarding overreliance on external aid seems weak in relation to storytelling from a skills perspective, considering the extent to which storytelling projects seek to train storytellers as part of their project, which can be observed both in project design

(e.g. peaceprocesshistory.org, 2019b; Diversity Challenges, 2019) and storytelling research (Bryson, 2016). However, while it may be unfair to accuse storytelling of fostering overreliance, the pattern of conditionality seems to bear out across the literature (also see Stanton, 2018) and Interviewee 11's comment.

Survival outside of the PEACE ecosystem seems dependent on having access to alternative sources of income – in this respect, some of the projects that were better able to share the outcomes of their projects also tended to be part of a larger organisation that had the means to secure these funds, although this in itself is a full-time job:

> If you've got something like thirty different funders, at any point in time one project is about to end and another one is just coming on stream constantly. [gestures to a whiteboard] These ones in green are the reports, the ones in red are the applications, every time I do a successful application that's another green one, do you know what I mean? So that's just applications and reports, I've been doing an awful lot of other things besides those. These are the ones that all have deadline beside them, that's why they're there on the board. *So, I'm just kind of like … a hamster in a wheel, if you know what I mean*. (Interviewee 13, 2019, emphasis added)

Interviewee 13 had launched multiple community education projects that made use of the accounts gathered during a storytelling project – the cost of this level of engagement was a continuous cycle of grant applications and report writing. While the funds exist for these smaller projects, they also require someone to be the 'hamster in the wheel' – the aforementioned larger projects would likely require more funds in order to set up and maintain sophisticated archives. This shows the different ways in which stories might be

shared with a broader audience depends on the scale of funding and the intended size of the project – the 'hamster wheel' approach allows for focused community work that is cost-effective and suits the structure of local community groups, while projects that can be accessed nationally (or indeed globally) will need serious financial backing.

While these focused projects are undoubtedly important and critically engaged with meta-conflict, it is on a small scale in specific communities. Other interviewees saw this as important, but also emphasised the repeated failure to extend these projects to broader Northern Irish society:

> So, there's the Fresh Start deal which grew out of the back of Stormont House. And it's really focused on certain areas where there's particularly high levels of paramilitary activity. But again, I'll ask the question, what about the broader population? Where do they fit in? So, what you do is you take the problems, you hit more on those that are most vulnerable already rather than trying to tackle these things as societal issues. Not just issues for particular communities, groups, that kind of thing. So that's the problem. (Interviewee 19, 2019)

The Fresh Start Agreement emerged from negotiations following the SHA in 2015, with a view to implement the proposals of the SHA; in terms of peacebuilding, Fresh Start succeeded in areas such as legislation regarding flags and parades and a commitment to tackle paramilitarism, but failed to reach an agreement regarding the ambitious legacy proposals within the SHA (Devenport, 2016). Interviewee 19 argued that funding and commitment for all of Northern Irish society is crucial – and despite its flaws, the SHA is the closest Northern Ireland has come to a systematic and unified approach – as well as a potential platform for sharing stories with a broader audience, an otherwise

impossible dream for under-funded grassroots organisations.

9.4 - SHA on the brink

The SHA and proposed OHA within the agreement were important themes for most interviewees. The OHA proposed to establish an independent oral history repository, to store conflict-related stories from across Northern Irish society was of particular interest to storytelling facilitators, although they also had interest in the other elements of agreement (the HIU, ICIR and IRG). While the SHA was vague in design and many aspects were concerning or required more detail (see below), it was also the culmination of years of attempted (and failed) top-down transitional justice in Northern Ireland and an opportunity to broaden the reach of storytelling. It was featuring particularly prominently in the minds of most interviewees due to the ongoing public consultation regarding the agreement, which launched in May 2018 and concluded with the publication of consultation responses in July 2019 (NIO, 2019) and further oral submissions of evidence up to October 2019 (UK Parliament, 2019). Consequently, interviewees had much to say about the significance of the SHA for storytelling and peace, since many of them had either already responded or were mid-response to the consultation when the interviews took place.

The next section primarily deals with these reflections, since they are significant in terms of discussions regarding the future of storytelling, and any relationship it might have with top-down mechanisms. However, in March 2020 the UK government

announced a 'new approach' to legacy issues which seemingly distanced itself entirely

from the SHA and in particular the 'vexatious claims against veterans' (gov.uk, 2020b).

Despite this distancing and supposedly new approach, the press release also maintains

a commitment to 'information recovery and reconciliation as the overarching goal' – a

seemingly vague commitment to the ICIR and IRG elements of the SHA. As for

storytelling and the OHA, the press release continues:

> A central resource from all backgrounds – and from throughout the UK and
> Ireland – will also be created to share experiences and narratives related
> to the conflict (gov.uk, 2020b)

The implications for storytelling are baffling. Storytelling facilitators were certainly not

particularly optimistic during the consultation period, with some prophetic utterances

and concerns nearly 12 months before:

> There are all kinds of interesting and innovative things they could do
> around it that off the back of the consultation that I understand now is
> more or less ready to go. […] With the British government who knows when
> that's going to come out. But I very much doubt that there will be anything
> terribly dynamic in there. (Interviewee 19, 2019)

> I would be very surprised if they would push anything around
> comprehensive legacy process. I think we will see some movement in small
> areas like compensation for injured, I think can see movement around
> that… [pause] I would be very concerned that they would cherry-pick out
> bits of Stormont House to start to implement, like the oral history archive,
> without implementing everything at the same time. (Interviewee 11, 2019)

Little additional detail was available at the time of writing, not least due to the outbreak

of COVID-19, which also conveniently coincided with NIO press release detailing this new

direction. The main intention for the departure from the SHA seems to be the protection

of veterans from prosecution in the face of a perceived witch hunt narrative, as explained by McEvoy et al. (2020). The same report understandably focuses on this issue and calls for the reinstatement of the SHA as a more comprehensive and ECHR-compliant approach, offering a compromise on the matter of prosecutions by suggesting zero jail time for anyone who is sentenced for conflict related offences, in return for full co-operation with the ICIR (McEvoy et al., 2020). Less is available on the topic of the OHA and storytelling at the time of writing. The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee has launched an inquiry into the NIO statement, and at the time of writing is still taking written statements and oral submissions (UK Parliament, 2020). Victim groups have also voiced concerns publicly (WAVE Trauma Centre, 2020b), but its recency and the disruption of the pandemic makes responses at this point sparse, and McEvoy et al.'s swift rebuttal all the more impressive.

This press release distracts and confuses in equal proportion. While it seems to reject the SHA – a flawed but evolving approach to legacy issues – it also seems to indicate a desire to implement something along the lines of the OHA in the quote above. It presents yet another obstacle to the sharing of stories, since it has shrouded a potential platform and source of income in even more uncertainty than previous efforts.

9.5 - The challenge of centralised archives

The following section explores the views that storytelling facilitators shared during the fieldwork, since these observations will be significant whether the NIO follows McEvoy et al.'s (2020) advice and returns to the SHA, or presses ahead with its vaguely worded promises for an OHA analogue. It is helpful to begin by considering some of the reactions to the SHA, in the form of the public consultation that was still live during the fieldwork. Below is a summary of the reaction of the Stories Network, the group of storytelling experts which formed the starting point in terms of sampling interviewees during the fieldwork. The Stories Network:

- Welcomes the implementation of an Oral History component within the SHA

- Emphasises that collaboration with existing archives is paramount, and that more detail is required regarding how the OHA would interact with existing projects and archives

- Points out that current proposals focus on Northern Ireland only, which is not in spirit of the Belfast Agreement; the OHA would need greater collaboration between Ireland, mainland Great Britain, Northern Ireland and diaspora

- Conceptualises the OHA as a hub, with the technology to direct visitors to other projects or archives, rather than as a storage site for all existing stories to be turned over to

- Rejects the suggestion that the OHA be housed by Public Records Office Northern Ireland (PRONI), but welcomes its involvement in the process

- Emphasises the development of a clear mission and guiding principles for the OHA (The Stories Network, 2018: 2-6).

This is a necessarily brief summary of a 29-page response; the essential point to draw from this being that the OHA is welcomed for its potential to bring storytelling to the forefront of the reconciliatory process, but with serious qualifications in terms of its safe implementation. In terms of academic reaction, Hamber and Kelly (2016) suggest that the challenge of constructing an official archive be met by intentionally contrasting

inter-community stories, housing opposing narratives alongside one another, and avoiding the potential dangers of imposing a shared narrative. Bryson and McEvoy emphasise the importance of focusing on the existing bottom-up practices, by pointing to a drafted *Model Bill* in response to the SHA (2016).

While the apparent abandonment of the SHA has thus far been met with disappointment, it also posed challenges to the successful sharing of stories in Northern Ireland. A recurring challenge for facilitators is to make a project engaging across Northern Irish society:

> The OHA, in of itself, I absolutely don't disagree with. I was involved in the project that was trying to do that. But don't make a leap in assuming that it has some kind of reconciliatory power, just because it's there. It only ever is going to have reconciliatory power if it is somehow curated. Because very few people are going to, of their own volition, walk into PRONI, or wherever, sit down with some headphones and listen to hour after hour after hour of stories. Nor are they going to log onto Accounts of the Conflict and watch hour after hour after hour...and *so the process that someone like [redacted] is doing, is really important in that they're curating these stories to make them more accessible. And in some ways maybe palatable*. But they're trying to get them into bite-sized accessible stories. With that comes all sorts of challenges and difficulties. Because now it's been mediated by all these different people that have put their own perspectives on it. (Interviewee 11, 2019, emphasis added)

This statement touches on the key themes of this research. The issue is plain to see; an accessible archive has transformative potential in the way it communicates the stories it houses, but only if it is curated. Curation in this instance could mean the way in which stories are shaped for the public to engage with through editing, means of presentation (visual, auditory or in a physical setting) or even something as simple as how they are grouped, organised and accessed within the archive itself. But the curation itself has

implications for challenging the meta-conflict and the overarching narrative of Northern Ireland's contested past. Without implementation and the confusing new developments, much of this debate is hypothetical, at least at the top-down or broadly accessible level, for the time being. Dybris McQuaid (2016) draws attention to the question of how these archives might function, specifically how the narratives it contains are likely to be politicised and ultimately open about their view on the conflict, and emphasises that they should be viewed as a historical record of the peace process as it unfolds. The process of making narratives more 'palatable' is a fine line between editing to promote interest and reduce revulsion, while still retaining authenticity and meaning. Ultimately, the mechanics of such a process require more research and planning ahead of implementation.

Retaining a sense of "neutrality" – or at least, avoiding the danger of the archive being instrumentalised for a particular identity group – is another concern for parts of Northern Irish society:

> I think there is a genuine fear amongst unionism, or some parts of unionism, that the Oral History Archive will be manipulated, because[...] if you have the oral history archive sitting there, and all these different stories and bodies of stories about state abuse and state violence and collusion and how awful all the state was. That that will, knock things off and put a skewed concept, or view of the conflict, that's one of the fears. Whereas from our perspective, we have…there is a body of evidence there, and there is lot of experiences there of state abuse and state violence and collusion that hasn't been captured - and they should be. (Interviewee 16, 2019)

The introduction of a top-down mechanism emphasises instrumentalization as a major concern, since the prominence of the archive makes it a more appealing tool. Bryson

argues that it is the centrality of the victim in oral-history approaches that ensures they are not instrumentalised, but also cautions against over-selling the approach (2016) which underlines the need for careful reflection and design that places the vulnerable and marginalised at the centre of the process. The significance here is that OHA design must be cognisant of these risks and the need to encourage participation from a range of communities (Interviewee 12, 2019) so that diverse accounts can sit alongside the narratives that Interviewee 16 has to share. This necessary time and commitment would be challenging even if the SHA's future was certain, but the recent shift in policy implies that a well-planned OHA or equivalent is not imminent, and thus presents another structural obstacle to the sharing of stories.

More straightforward problems than striking such a fine balance in terms of curation and design can be found with the hosting of accounts in a space that is aligned with the UK government:

> [Talking about Accounts of the Conflict] I'm guessing that the reason that has worked is that it's just been at arm's length from government. So, if I was a Republican, how would I feel about my account of my experience of the conflict being housed within a government archive - not sure. (Interviewee 13, 2019)

Other interviewees echoed these concerns, suggesting that the best way around this was to host content away from the state and explicitly online only to avoid the bias of geography too (Interviewee 18, 2019). This was not always as obvious as perhaps Nationalists objecting to state-controlled archives, but even privileging Belfast over other parts of Northern Ireland and border communities was a concern for some:

> I don't like the idea that some oral history archive would be in Belfast. I would make the case that that there is access to it in the north west. (Interviewee 14, 2019)

Concerns about space extended from the physical into the conceptual, with other facilitators explaining how placing stories side-by-side with a narrative that is seen as so oppositional to their own that it is offensive that they potentially occupy the same virtual (or even physical) space:

> But there is a total nervousness of stories being included, and this goes across not just the Oral History Archive, but it's true of other storytelling projects, where they, if for example you're sharing a story about the loss of your loved one, and then another person is telling their story about why they joined for example, the IRA. They don't want those stories to be housed together, because they don't want stories where the justification or the use of violence is alongside stories of the victims as a result of that. (Interviewee 16, 2019)

Such an observation is potentially challenging for the preservation of an archive free from interference, or one that critically engages with the meta-conflict, if contested aspects of the conflict are immediately censored. It is also problematic for literature that emphasises the value of having contrasting accounts sat along-side one another (see Hamber and Kelly, 2016) but would need to be addressed through precise policy, since ultimately the OHA could not afford to censor or reject accounts. This is perhaps why some organisations have recommended the hosting of content off-site, so that the OHA acts as more of a signposting repository, and polarising content is housed (and continues to be housed) with the original grassroots project (The Stories Network, 2018).

Considering that the OHA would in theory both gather new content in addition to hosting existing material, other storytelling facilitators were concerned by a potential lack of faith or buy-in from the public:

> I welcome that inclusion, but I do have problems with it being a top down process […] I think everything about oral history is about it being a bottom up process, so I struggle to see how it can be done, I think that's my biggest struggle […] How will an institution like the Public Records Office get buy in from people? We're a community organisation based on the Falls Road, we don't have people coming in saying 'can I tell my story', so that's not going to happen. Nobody is going to roll up to the Public Record Office and say that… I don't think. (Interviewee 6, 2019)

If there is presumed reluctance or disinterest on the part of the average person to contribute to a proposed OHA, there was also the concern that the complexity and technical nature of the process needed some management:

> That team came together to say we want to work cheek by jowl with civil servants, and dabble in the same level of micro detail with every line and letter and ramification of each and every clause that would go into giving legislative reform to these mechanisms. And our reasons for doing that were two-fold I guess; one to ensure that we provided a workable, feasible model that was human rights compliant, so stress tested everything in light of human rights standards. And secondly, to ensure that the public and victims and survivors in particular, and interested parties, weren't only depending on that type of detailed legal analysis and policy analysis that was coming forth from government officials, that we would provide and help people to make a decision on these issues from as informed a view as possible. (Interviewee 3, 2019)

The second point is particularly interesting here, in that it emphasises the minefield that storytellers have to cross if they are to make an informed decision around participating in a project. Storytellers have to consider the extent to which their words may be 'curated', where their stories are held and if they even want to make the concerted effort

to contribute in the first place. Considering that the Boston College Tapes affair continues to raise questions around confidentiality (Havemann, 2012) the process of setting up a platform that will supposedly enable the communication of these stories to broader audiences poses as many questions about participation and story-gathering as that of sharing. In effect, the OHA brings the process full circle, and emphasises the importance of design and detail – hence the kind of accountability that Interviewee 3 wanted to offer.

If the OHA seems problematic to the individual storyteller, it is equally confusing when considered as a finished product and "message" to the population. Interviewees were concerned that there was potential for the OHA to be overly mindful of box-ticking in terms of its design:

> What I never did [referring to Accounts of the Conflict] was ever count how many Catholic stories there'd been recorded. People would often ask me "what's the gender balance of people whose stories have been told?" And I never sought that level of detail, because in some ways I think it's a bit arbitrary. So, what if there's 50% women and 50% men? That's only one identity that people have. What does it tell you about anything? I mean, yes, obviously you don't want particularly female stories to have been marginalised out of it, but it doesn't tell you anything useful. (Interviewee 11, 2019)

It is an understandable concern that, in the pursuit of "neutrality" the OHA ends up sapping the OHA of character and authenticity by placing limits and arbitrarily enforcing content balance – Interviewee 11 qualified this concern by discussing naïve questions from civil servants about how you can go about ensuring quotas of stories from different identity groups. Interviewee 16 elaborated on why this approach is so problematic:

One of the major concerns is that it would be… "right, for the interest of balance we need ten stories from Catholic victims, and ten stories from Protestant victims and ten stories from women and ten stories from"…and it would end up being regimented and not fluid enough to incorporate all the voices. And if you're trying to say, put everybody in their box. There are so many victims that don't fit into those boxes so - are they kind of left outside? And that goes back to marginalised victims and unheard voices. (Interviewee 16, 2019).

While the CNR and PUL designations are tempting, as described in 6.3 they are ultimately reductive, considering only 58% of Northern Irish society identifies as explicitly Nationalist or Unionist (Wilson, 2016). This is also only one aspect of identity that will intersect with others – and thus narrowing the constitution of the OHA risks the omission of the stories of the most marginalised, i.e. those that do not neatly conform to one side or the other. The OHA design challenge poses a question to the sharing of stories, since storytelling facilitators will need some confidence that the OHA's strategy will ensure that all voices are heard equally, not least because of the commitment interviewees make to marginalised groups.

9.6 - Justice, storytelling and the SHA

A final obstacle for the OHA and storytelling to overcome is its relationship with justice and the other components of the SHA (or any approach implemented in its place). Interviewees differed on their understanding of storytelling's relationship with justice,

and consensus would be helpful if the OHA is to sit alongside the other components in a harmonious and meaningful way.

McGrattan (2016) is sceptical of storytelling's inclusion within the SHA, arguing that the OHA component risks undermining the more forensic aspects of the SHA (e.g. the HIU or any alternative means that follows traditional law-and-order). Interviewees are aware of these criticisms or perceptions of storytelling's relative position:

> It can offer something important and something different, and I think very often it has been side-lined. So, it tends to be the last item on the agenda of meetings, it tends to be seen often as a soft add on, so it's memorialisation, the softer end of transitional justice. (Interviewee 3, 2019)

McGrattan's criticisms, such as the potential for storytelling to be politicised, or whether the HIU should act on incriminating testimony are reasonable concerns (2016) that are outlined throughout this thesis, and are indeed indicated by interviewees themselves. Interviewee 3 indicates part of the problem – if something as complex as storytelling is not given sufficient attention, then naturally problems may occur in its implementation. It is also important to remember that storytelling has emerged in the absence of any meaningful or consistent top-down transitional justice or peacebuilding in the region:

> The problem is that all work that's out there has been left up to the community and voluntary sector. In other words, there has not been any real, organised attempt to deal with the issues of legacy, whether it be storytelling or whether it be dealing with truth recovery or whether it being any of the six things that HTR identified as different ways of dealing with the Conflict. Because it has been left to the Community and Voluntary sector and is on the periphery, it's not considered as … it doesn't have that importance […]. Unlike other places who have had a Truth and Reconciliation Commission Centre, OK there are pluses and minuses with each of those, but at least in those places there was some official conscious

method of trying to deal with it. There hasn't really been an official, conscious method here at all. (Interviewee 6, 2019)

However, there are questions that persist over the implementation of an OHA, not least

due to uncertainty among facilitators about the exact relationship between storytelling

and justice. In some ways this is unsurprising, since justice is a nebulous and contested

concept, but a clearer shared vision as to what it is might be helpful. It is useful to

contrast some opposing views of how some interviewees saw the relationship between

storytelling and justice:

> Obviously, it's not justice in the sense of courtrooms but definitely if you feel you have not a voice and you're provided with a platform to say your story, that has kind of therapeutic value. I think that's fairly well-established. For some people that has been a very valuable personal experience in terms of moving on. Particularly where there has been a difficult story of being able to not let go but to move forward in a way because a stats base had been provided. So, without doubt it's a really important idea and I suppose part of that sense of dialogue and enable certain people's perspectives being heard and understood. Not necessarily agreed with. So yeah there's all kinds of justices. Social justice ramifications from storytelling. I have no doubt about that. And for others no, it is about the who what why where when, and prosecutions. (Interviewee 19, 2019)

> Obviously, we would say that the best way is to have the official mechanisms because it is so important to families that they have that official recognition, that official acknowledgement, the official apology, because that's the thing that's kind of on the record. For an example, a family who's loved one was killed by the army, and the next time in parliament it was announced an IRA man was killed in Derry last night. The fact that he was killed was not changed. The official record of him being an IRA man was something that was so important for the family to challenge, and they did, it took forty odd years, they challenged it, and they ended up with an apology. [...]. You can't underestimate the power of an official recognition and acknowledgement or justice through the courts, or the verdict of an inquest. (Interviewee 16, 2019)

While Interviewee 19 is emphatic about the sense of social justice that may emerge from

oral history, Interviewee 16 focuses on the importance of securing acknowledgement –

which raises questions about the extent to which there would be acknowledgement and

apologies from all sides as a result of OHA contributions. This is something that would

only become apparent in its implementation. Other interviewees saw justice in relative

terms:

> I think it's justice with a small "j" probably, rather than the big "J".
> Certainly, speaking to the victims of the Victims' Commission, it would
> appear that, once again, no one size fits all. Some are interested in truth.
> Just want the truth about whatever happened to their loved ones. They
> don't care about putting someone in the dock or not. Some people want
> justice. They want somebody put in the dock; they want somebody taken
> to court. And they want somebody made amenable for what happened.
> Then you have some people that are interested in reparations. You know,
> they've suffered, their family has suffered. […] And the fourth element is
> acknowledgement. They just want somebody to say "Sorry", excuse my
> language, "we fucked it up. Shouldn't have happened. There were rules of
> engagement for the army. We didn't do it right", or whatever the case
> might be. So, those are the four elements. There's no one size fits all.
> (Interviewee 12, 2019)

The diversity of justice requirements among the population is well explained here, and

broadly echoes and aligns with the diverse aims of transitional justice, as outlined by de

Greiff (2012; 2015). For a diverse society to move on after conflict, it is a set of justices

rather than one. Other interviewees rejected the use of the word justice in relation to

storytelling altogether:

> I suppose it can bring about a more… kind of like a writer, a more correct
> way of framing an experience or a narrative that is more respectful of the
> people who experienced that, if that's justice, and for the people who are
> hearing that, who maybe need to hear that, as in those examples I was
> giving of the Hunger Strike or the UWC strike or all the million things that

> have happened here that have been interpreted […] within one community from that perspective only, can bring about more balanced perspective, understanding of things that have happened or people's views about things that have happened. *So, if you interpret that as justice because I think in a way, if you don't mind me saying so, I think that I'm not sure justice is the right word.* […], Particularly just now, the Ballymurphy massacre trials just up the road from here, literally just up the road within walking distance. *People here are very sensitive to that word justice because a lot of that's still very live for people, still very raw and particularly a sense of injustice* so it might be better to use a different word, if you like. (Interviewee 13, 2019, emphasis added)

The ensuing discussion considered the different types of justice (e.g. restorative vs retributive) and touched on some similar themes to above interviewees, but the initial reaction underlines the difficulty of understanding how storytelling relates to justice.

The above is just a sample of some of the diverse interpretations of justice in relation to storytelling that emerged during the fieldwork. A selection are offered here simply to highlight the one element of McGrattan's (2016) criticism that does seem valid; the complexity of integrating storytelling into a suite of more legalistic mechanisms, particularly in the sense that facilitators differ so wildly on how storytelling relates to justice. It should be noted that this uncertainty is addressed by the storytelling community, with oral historians arguing firmly that oral history should be seen as helpful by broadening transitional justice (Bryson, 2016). Perhaps McGrattan's criticism also seems weaker with the benefit of hindsight, since in the intervening years there have been robust assessments of the OHA by the storytelling community (e.g. The Stories Network, 2018) as part of the public consultation regarding the SHA. The challenge for the storytelling community is to continue this engagement and formalise a position (as much as is practical) in terms of the extent to which storytelling both offers and relates

to justice, but must do so in the face of total confusion caused by the apparent abandonment of the SHA. Even if the SHA is to be implemented, ensuring that storytelling elements work seamlessly with the HIU, ICIR and IRG will be a significant and ongoing challenge, but one that that facilitators seem ready to meet.

9.7 – Conclusion

This chapter has argued that sharing stories is impeded by economic and political obstacles. These obstacles are Brexit, the absence of devolved government, the costs of storytelling and the SHA – both as it was proposed, and its perilous future. While the previous chapter demonstrates that projects develop story-sharing mechanisms to varying extents and have diverse views on the appropriateness of story-sharing, any attempt is also inhibited by significant obstacles. These obstacles are interlinked, and the separation presented here is to ease digestion – in reality, all these factors overlap significantly. To emphasise or argue one over another would be arbitrary, since resolving one would not lead to the resolution of all – although it would not hurt to inject funds into the process or commit to a refined version of the SHA. Much has changed since the fieldwork was carried out, and although this analysis has sought to incorporate those changes, much will change in the near future as questions over the SHA are resolved or local government resumes. For stories to be shared in the future, it will be important to fund them appropriately within a well-developed framework (ideally a substantially

improved formulation of the SHA in response to the numerous submissions), supported

by a functioning government with a clear policy on managing Great Britain and Northern

Ireland's departure from the EU.

Chapter 10 - Conclusion

The conclusion begins by returning to the research question with emphasis on the communication of transitional justice and peacebuilding, and the extent to which the meta-conflict is challenged by storytelling. Next, the conclusion outlines three contributions made by this research. Finally, further potential areas of research that have emerged as a result of this research are explored.

10.1 – How does storytelling challenge the meta-conflict in Northern Ireland?

The overarching area of enquiry for this research has been the communication of peacebuilding and transitional justice. As a relatively new field of research, transitional justice research has only recently shifted its attentions to the 'peripheries' (Sharp, 2013) by considering the significance of local interpretations and manifestations of transitional justice. A similar pattern has played out in peacebuilding literature. As the liberal peacebuilding paradigm is met with increasing scepticism (see Paris, 2010) hybrid theories (Mac Ginty, 2010a) have emerged. This in turn has shifted emphasis to understanding the overlap between civil society and peacebuilding, since it is local NGOs and civil society that drives these forces.

These developments in the evolving transitional justice and peacebuilding literature made Northern Ireland an important choice as a case study. The themes of locally driven peace and transitional justice work are particularly pertinent in the absence of any consistently applied, formal transitional justice mechanism (see Aiken, 2010) and the choice of storytelling, a narrative-based approach that has communication at the very heart of its approach. A set of further sub-research questions were developed to help address the overall area of enquiry:

1. How do storytelling leaders view storytelling's contribution to peace in Northern Ireland?
2. How is storytelling communicated to a wider audience in Northern Ireland?
3. How does storytelling critically engage with the meta-conflict?

In order to address the first question and understand the way in which storytelling contributed to peace in Northern Ireland, and more specifically its approach to the meta-conflict, storytelling facilitators were interviewed. Interviews focused on the design and approach of storytelling facilitators. The approach is rooted in the aforementioned emergent themes in the literature of emphasising the importance of understanding local contributions, and ensuring locals are involved in the assessment of measuring the efficacy of their own projects (see Mac Ginty, 2013). Storytelling leaders tended to have positive views of the contribution of storytelling to peace in Northern Ireland. While cognisant of the risks posed, storytelling leaders were able to articulate clear goals and philosophies related to story-gathering that cut across the

storytelling community, despite diversity in terms of identity and project approach. Facilitators were particularly keen to emphasise the importance of offering a platform to those who had historically been marginalised by the meta-conflict, although downplayed suggestions of contributing to reconciliation, mostly due to a scepticism around using the term to assess the impact of storytelling.

The second research question flowed logically from the broader area of enquiry – the communication of peacebuilding and transitional justice mechanisms. It quickly became clear that it was an important dimension of storytelling in Northern Ireland. In contrast to the philosophies that underpin story-gathering, story-sharing approaches varied significantly, from interviewees who saw it is as unnecessarily high-risk (Interviewee 10, 2019), to others who saw it as the end goal and used story-gathering purely as a means to share and use public peacebuilding initiatives, e.g. in educational settings (Interviewee 19, 2019). It also became clear that story-sharing operates in a peacebuilding landscape limited by the broader political developments and similarly limited funding opportunities.

The final research question stems from the analytical framework and considers the extent to which storytelling critically engages with the meta-conflict – the conflict or ongoing disagreement about the conflict (Bell et al., 2004). This became an area of increased significance as the research progressed, since it became apparent that storytelling facilitators had divergent views in this regard. It also became increasingly clear that the point of contention overlapped significantly with the previous question, in that while facilitators were united in creating an approach that enabled storytellers

to share stories that could critically engage with the meta-conflict, there was far less consensus regarding the use of story-sharing to challenge the meta-conflict.

The thesis presents an empirically focused response to these research questions, framed by a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. As mentioned above, the analysis divides along the lines of story-gathering and story-sharing. The thesis demonstrates the goal, philosophies and commitments made by storytelling facilitators, and introduces the ways in which story-gathering may help challenge the meta-conflict by offering a non-partisan platform to marginalised people. After introducing the approaches of storytelling facilitators, the thesis develops this idea, by exploring the subtle ways in which story-gathering may successfully challenge the meta-conflict – for instance, the historical significance of story-gathering, or how it relates to contact hypothesis. This research also explores the potential risks associated, but also demonstrates how mindful storytelling facilitators are of the potential pitfalls of story-gathering. While overselling therapeutic effects, retraumatisation and legal issues are significant, the professionalisation of storytelling (or at least increased awareness around standards and training) obviates many of these risks.

The thesis then explores the diverse ways in which storytelling facilitators approach the question of story-sharing. The significance of story-sharing to promoting peace in Northern Ireland is explored, as well as the practicalities of sharing stories from such diverse projects. The challenges that contribute to the varied approaches of facilitators are explored. These include the difficulty of audience knowledge and engagement, but also appropriate contextualisation and framing. After outlining the significant challenge

of designing a unified approach to story-sharing, the analysis concludes by considering the external obstacles to story-sharing. These are broadly political and economic in character, and include Brexit, a collapsed local assembly, finances and the SHA. The last point is particularly complicated with the SHA in limbo, a complex relationship between storytelling and justice and the challenges of implementing the various facets of the SHA.

10.2 – Key contributions of this research

This section outlines three contributions made by this research. The first contribution is a bottom-up account of local peacebuilding and transitional justice. Secondly the significance of considering the extent to which the meta-conflict was challenged by storytelling as a part of the analytical framework, by exploring the advantages of narrowing the focus away from the ambiguities of reconciliation. The final contribution relates to the overarching research question and the main line of argument presented here; that storytelling projects encourage and enable storytellers to challenge the meta-conflict in the story-gathering phase of a project.

The first contribution emerges from the bottom up approach of this project. It brings to light the perspectives of a wide range of storytelling facilitators in Northern Ireland. In doing so it confirms the views of the storytelling literature that shaped this project by finding a professionalising network of facilitators, with a commitment to broadening

the debate about Northern Ireland's past. Crucially, it supports these views by drawing data from across the storytelling community in a diversity of organisations – as opposed to previous research which has been in the form of an 'audit' with the intention of cataloguing the state of storytelling (Kelly, 2005) or based on single or double case studies (cf. Dybris McQuaid, 2016; Aguiar, 2017; Side, 2017; Anderson, 2019). The findings presented here strengthen the claims in the literature regarding storytelling's design and philosophy, particularly regarding story-gathering. While existing research into storytelling through fixed case studies may make use of similar methods as used here (e.g. Moloney, 2014) the focus in scope was slightly different, incorporating participants or multiple volunteer-facilitators from a smaller selection of storytelling projects.

This thesis answers the call for greater understanding of how bottom-up transitional justice projects can promote structural change (Sandoval-Villalba, 2017). Bottom-up processes are a means of empowering locals, ensuring that local peace and justice work is context sensitive and communicated clearly, since it is run by and for locals, but these assumptions require more evidence to inform this discussion. This research offers an up to date overview of the design approaches and views of storytelling facilitators. It offers broader insights into the approaches taken by storytelling facilitators and allows for some generalisations to be made about the characteristics of storytelling in Northern Ireland, rather than historic pieces which have a tendency to illustrate storytelling's potential with reference to a smaller selection of case studies.

The second contribution is the use of an analytical framework that offers an alternative means of evaluating peacebuilding and transitional justice projects. This research uses an analytical framework which focuses on the extent to which storytelling critically engages with or challenges the meta-conflict. In effect, it is an exploration of the extent to which facilitators were prepared to use story-gathering and story-sharing to try to move the contested narratives of the conflict forward, by balancing an overly cautious approach which avoids the "big questions" of the conflict around structural bias, injustice, causes and conduct (see Bell et al., 2004) versus the risk of descending into political 'whataboutteries' (Interviewee 15, 2019) that may further deepen the divided narrative.

The analytical framework has proven beneficial as an approach in this research, since interviewees expressed a reticence around using the word reconciliation. While the term was used in interviews, it was often deconstructed, qualified or dismissed (see 5.1.2). Interviewees subscribed to many of the arguments presented in the analytical framework regarding the pitfalls of applying a term like reconciliation to storytelling research. Framing the research in terms of the extent to which storytelling challenges the meta-conflict enabled the collection of data that can inform broader debates around peace, justice and reconciliation. It has also proved beneficial in terms of the analysis, where bold claims about promoting reconciliation are avoided in place of a more focused set of analytical outcomes; specifically, the demonstration that (in terms of design and philosophy) story-gathering offers the freedom and space for a participant

to critically engage with the meta-conflict, while story-sharing has the potential to do so but varies significantly between facilitators and projects.

A difficulty with this approach is that that challenging the meta-conflict is also a potentially intangible or subjective measure in the same way that reconciliation is often argued to be. Mapping out exactly what constitutes challenging the meta-conflict may be something that storytelling facilitators diverge upon, although this research has reflected that despite these differences, the universal commitment to the voice of the storyteller cuts across these variations. Compared with measuring approaches like storytelling in relation to reconciliation, analysis around challenging the meta-conflict also narrows these possible subjectivities, by limiting the focus to narrative. The insights drawn from this approach are still valuable in relation to the principle concerns of post-conflict research. For instance, establishing the way in which peacebuilding and transitional justice navigates post-conflict narratives will give a sense of the extent to which grievances have or have not been addressed, which in turn can inform grievance-based arguments (see Gurr, 2000; Stewart, 2012) about the likelihood of a resumption of civil conflict in the region.

It can also contribute to discussions around notions of maximalist peace, by measuring the relationship between narrative and group relations, or Galtung's 'transcendence' (2004) by assessing the extent to which storytelling contributes to moving away from the social conditions that gave rise to civil violence in the first instance. These are grand aims; the point is not that this research fully answers these questions, but contributes

to these broader approaches to peace by offering an alternative indication in terms of how storytelling addresses the meta-conflict.

The final contribution is a return to the overarching research question. It has been argued in this thesis that storytelling 's approach to the meta-conflict is best understood by distinguishing between story-gathering and story-sharing. This distinction is imperfect, but is offered since most projects differ in their approach to gathering of stories and testimonies, and then the way that these stories are shared or utilised.

The storytelling community is heterogenous due to the decentralised (Aiken, 2010) characteristics of peacebuilding and transitional justice in the region. The interviewees for this research represented local organisations who can be seen as reacting to an absence of clear or consistent top-down transitional justice for the region. This is another generalisation, since top-down forces still unquestionably play a part in the formation of these projects, whether in the form of external aid from the EU (cf. European Parliament, 2019; Marchetti and Tocci, 2015) or a reaction to the inaction from Stormont and Westminster. While their formation, design, goals and constituents may differ slightly, there is an underpinning set of goals or philosophies that storytelling facilitators commit to. A determination to give marginalised people a voice and 'victim centredness' (Bryson, 2016). A belief in accounts that are as unfettered as possible. Cross community action and a duty of care to the participants (*Pieces of the Past*, 2014). All of these allow for the gathering of stories that, if the storyteller wishes to, can freely explore aspects of the meta-conflict.

While there is consistency to the patterns above, there is less unity among facilitators in terms of how stories are to be shared in Northern Ireland, particularly ones that may challenge the meta-conflict. There are some common themes, such as an emphasis upon "complicating" the narrative by allowing a greater diversity of accounts to sit side by side, echoing Dybris McQuaid et al.'s, call to 'democratise' the post-conflict narrative (2019/2020) and Hamber and Kelly (2016) who argue for a diversity of voices to sit alongside one another in any future story archives. Interviewees also sought to emphasise the shades of grey or overlaps of the conflict, as opposed to the often binary and entirely oppositional narratives. While there is some shared ground, the means of achieving this vary, both in terms of what is currently offered, and what is planned. While some storytelling facilitators are keen to share stories that are challenging and complex, others see this as potentially dangerous and emphasise caution. Many fall between these positions in a spectrum of uncertainty that is unsurprising given storytelling's diversity and infancy as a peacebuilding or transitional justice tool. Both the present and future of story-sharing are significantly affected by political and economic factors, which place limitations on story-sharing, and add further complexity as facilitators navigate these differences.

10.3 – Future areas of research in storytelling

This section outlines three areas of further research, each following on from the contributions outlined above. Firstly, this section explores an opportunity emerging

from the bottom-up approach of this research. There are limitations to the generalisations that can be derived from a broader approach to sampling and the interview-based methods deployed here. While clear arguments emerge in terms of design approach, philosophy, goals and intentions of storytelling facilitators, measuring the extent of some of these findings is an avenue for future research. For instance, while this research demonstrates the commitment of storytelling facilitators to an open platform that gives voice to the marginalised - in which they may choose to freely critically engage with the meta-conflict and challenge contested narratives - the extent, exemplification and characteristics of how this happens is not addressed here. Future research could make use of Critical Discourse Analysis (see van Dijk, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2014) or Semiotics (particularly in the case of visual storytelling projects) to address the extent to which storytelling definitively challenges the meta-conflict, by analysing the contents of storytelling projects and cross referencing the outcome with the findings of this research.

There are further opportunities for research in the use of the meta-conflict to develop an analytical framework. This framework could be implemented in other contexts where bottom-up transitional justice and peacebuilding is also used in post-conflict divided societies. It may prove applicable in the former Yugoslavia, where contested narratives still abound (see Mannergren Selimovic, 2015). Local NGOs are also reacting to a perceived lack of transitional justice; as the proposed RECOM truth commission stalls over a lack of state-support (Milekic, 2019) activists are launching their own 'Book of the Dead' (Haxhiaj, 2020) in response. Analysing locally driven peacebuilding and

transitional justice in relation to the meta-conflict in this context would be appropriate given the parallels. A final opportunity may emerge from the research option outlined above – by researching the extent that peacebuilding and transitional justice challenges the meta-conflict through textual analyses, future research would have the worked examples required to further clarify what is meant by challenging the meta-conflict, and in the process enhance its precision as an analytical tool.

Further research opportunities exist around the SHA or OHA, should the UK government choose to enact the oral history elements of the SHA in some guise. If so, research into the extent of the sophistication with which divergent stories are shared, and the extent to the state choses to engage with the meta-conflict in its design of future legacy work will be useful areas of investigation. Given the scale and uncertainty of the proposed OHA, it may also be fruitful to consider audience reaction to challenging stories to properly appreciate the impact it could have on wider Northern Irish society. Depending on the mediums used in the OHA, some form of audience studies (see e.g. Hall, 1980) may provide a lens to evaluate the readiness of audiences for challenging accounts.

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Appendices

Appendix One – Interview Structure

Analytical framework focus	Core Questions	Follow-up Questions
	Invite candidate to offer a narrative statement to open interview, generally explaining their own background in storytelling.	
Locally driven measures of peacebuilding	1. What is the goal of storytelling?	a) How does successful storytelling look in Northern Irish society? b) What impact does it have on society?
	2. Has storytelling contributed to peace and justice in Northern Ireland?	a) How would you measure the contributions of storytelling in Northern Ireland? b) What does peace look like in Northern Ireland? c) How big a role can storytelling play in promoting peace and justice?
	3. How important is audience in storytelling?	a) Do you measure the audience of storytelling? b) Do you measure the impact of storytelling through audience response? c) How do you communicate with your audience? d) How do you structure any of your published materials? e) How do/would you measure the impact of your published materials on peacebuilding/reconciliation?
Meta-conflict	1. Does storytelling prioritise personal truths, or objective truths? (elaborate as required)	a) Would you prefer storytelling to address both? b) Which is more important for peace in Northern Ireland? c) (if one type of truth is privileged) why is that? d) Do materials published by this organisation privilege personal or objective truths?
	2. Should storytelling try to address the	a) If yes, why? b) If no, why? c) Is it feasible in a storytelling setting?

	causes of the conflict? 3. Does your project encourage participants to engage with the broad, political questions of the conflict? Does it shy away from these questions?	d) Can your approach to storytelling be modified to include this? e) Do you think this would contribute to peace, or undermine it?
	4. Should storytelling try to address the way the conflict was fought?	See above
Questions/themes **added early on in fieldwork**	1. How does the SHA affect storytelling? 2. Can storytelling offer (participants, readers, Northern Ireland) justice?	a) What aspects of the SHA are particularly helpful/problematic? b) Can storytelling offer justice in a more abstract sense than retributive justice (e.g. trials) c) How would you approach storytelling if you had the resources of the SHA?

Appendix Two – Participant Information Sheet

Communicating transitional justice and peacebuilding: How does storytelling in Northern Ireland promote reconciliation?

Jamie Pickering, PhD Candidate, Sociology

Date: ....

Invitation to the study

If you organise or participate in storytelling in Northern Ireland, I would like to invite you to participate in this research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask if there is anything that is not clear, or you would like more information.

Background on the project

This research is part of a PhD which asks how storytelling in Northern Ireland promotes reconciliation. Storytelling is broadly understood as any process which promotes the sharing of and listening to stories related to the conflict in Northern Ireland. The research has three key thematic areas, which will be addressed through interviews with participants and organisers, as well as analysis of published materials or collections arising from storytelling processes.

The first thematic focus is upon the way and extent to which storytelling addresses the broader causes and nature of the conflict. The second is on how the outcomes of storytelling are communicated to a wider audience, i.e. the population of Northern Ireland and beyond. Finally, the research is interested in how the leaders and participants of storytelling view its contribution to reconciliation.

Research - Interviews

The project will be conducted between October 2018 and May 2019. The research consists of semi-structured interviews with both the participants and leaders or facilitators of storytelling processes, past and present.

Interviewees will be asked broad questions about their experience of storytelling in Northern Ireland related to the thematic foci outlined above; more specific questions will follow depending on the direction of the interview and the responses given.

Interviews will be recorded digitally and transcribed shortly after. Interviewees are entitled to have access to this data and make corrections where appropriate (see consent form). The

interview transcripts will then be analysed alongside other relevant data, such as storytelling organisation publications.

Are there any risks associated with interviews?

There is a risk that you may find the experience of talking about conflict emotionally distressing. However, the focus of the interview is upon the experience of storytelling and its broader contributions to peace in Northern Ireland.

Other potential risks

Since you may choose to express political views about the conflict in the interview, there is a chance you may feel vulnerable to members of your community who disagree with your views.

To protect against this possibility, you will have the option to be completely anonymised (see consent form). All data relating to your interview will be stored securely (see below under 'Data gathered').

Informed consent

Should you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form before the study commences.

Withdrawal

Your participation is voluntary and you will be free to withdraw from the project at any time without giving any reason and without penalty. If you wish to withdraw, you simply need to notify the principal investigator (see contact details below). If any data have already been collected, upon withdrawal, your data will be destroyed, unless you inform the principal investigator that you are happy for us to use such data for the purposes of the project.

Data gathered

The data gathered will be your responses to the interview questions, both digitally and in the form of a transcription.

Identifiable data provided will be securely stored at Essex University, and accessible only to the members of the research team directly involved in the project. Confidentiality will be maintained.

Signed consent forms will be kept separately from individual interview data and locked in a drawer until the end of the project.

Findings

After the end of the project, the data will be used to write a PhD thesis. It may also be used similarly in other academic works, such as conference papers or journal articles.

I will be happy to provide you with a summary of the main findings and with copies of the publications if you express an interest.

Concerns and complaints

If you have any concerns about any aspect of the study or you have a complaint, in the first instance please contact the principal investigator of the project (see contact details below). If are still concerned or you think your complaint has not been addressed to your satisfaction, please contact the principal investigator's supervisors (see below). If you are still not satisfied, please contact the University's Research Governance and Planning Manager (Sarah Manning-Press).

Funding

The research is funded by Essex University.

Ethical approval

This project has been reviewed on behalf of the University of Essex Ethics Committee and had been given approval.

Contact details

<u>Principal investigator</u>

Jamie Pickering (PhD Candidate, Sociology)

<u>Supervisors</u>

Dr. Carlos Gigoux Gramegna, 5A. 206, School of Sociology, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, CO4 3SQ

Prof. Colin Samson, 5A. 310, School of Sociology, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, CO4 3SQ

University of Essex Research Governance and Planning Manager

Sarah Manning-Press, Research & Enterprise Office, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, CO4 3SQ,

Colchester. Email: sarahm@essex.ac.uk. Phone: 01206-873561

Appendix Three – Participant Consent Form

University of Essex

CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: Communicating transitional justice and peacebuilding: How does storytelling in Northern Ireland promote reconciliation?

Researchers: Jamie Pickering

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Information Sheet dated .... for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these questions answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without giving any reason and without penalty.

3. I understand that the interview may cover topics that are emotionally distressing or politically controversial, and I am prepared for this possibility.

4. I understand that the identifiable data provided will be securely stored and accessible only to the investigator and his supervisors, and that confidentiality will be maintained.

5. I understand that data collected in this project will be used to write a thesis and other academic publications.

6. I understand that this interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed at a later date, and that I have the right to access this and make corrections.

7. I agree to take part in the above study.

Yes   No

8. I would prefer to remain anonymous in any publications. A pseudonym will be used instead of my real name.

Participant Name   Date   Participant Signature

_____   _____   _____

Researcher Name   Date   Researcher Signature

_____   _____   _____