

A Report by Healing Through Remembering's Commemoration Sub Group on its Round Table Event at the Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University Belfast

AT THE END OF THE DAY...

Commemoration - Forward thinking into the Past

June 2008





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Sub Group on its Round Table Event held in January 2007
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The views expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect the personal views of all members of Healing Through Remembering.

To be ordered directly from
Healing Through Remembering
Alexander House, 17a Ormeau Avenue, Belfast
Tel; +44 28 9023 8844 Email: info@healingthroughremembering.org



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This report was commissioned by the following members of the Healing Through Remembering Network of Commemoration Sub Group:

Roberta Bacic
Julitta Clancy
Doris Rohr
Roy McClelland
Geraldine Smyth
Oliver Wilkinson

Compiled by:
Martin Beddeleem
Lainey Dunne
Julie McCaughan

Project Co-ordinator:
Kate Turner

Support staff:
Elaine Armstrong
Sara Templer

Overseen and supported by the Board of Healing Through Remembering:

Marie Breen Smyth
Sean Coll
Claire Hackett
Brandon Hamber
Alan McBride
Roy McClelland (to September 2007)
Jackie McMullan
Dawn Purvis
Geraldine Smyth
Oliver Wilkinson

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Brandon Hamber

Chair

Healing Through Remembering

Foreword

This report has been called “At the End of the Day” for a few reasons. The term is frequently featured in the Northern Ireland vernacular or dialect, and can be paraphrased as ‘when all is said and done...’ or ‘when the arguments are over’.

‘At the End of the Day’ also refers to the acts of commemoration which take place around the world, at the end of each day, to commemorate various conflicts. For example, at Arlington Cemetery in Washington DC, or at Ypres in Belgium, where to this day, a lone bugler plays the Last Post in commemoration of those who lost their lives in World War One.

This report collates the content of a one day Round Table event which was organised and hosted by Healing Through Remembering’s Commemoration Sub Group, and took place on 19th January 2007 in the Institute of Irish Studies, Queen’s University Belfast. Over a year on from that event, the Commemoration Sub Group is considering its future within the Healing Through Remembering structure (in terms of how to avoid duplication of work and how to sharpen focus and enhance diversity of contributions).

It is timely, therefore, that a detailed record of the content of the day is collated and published, including the presentations of the Sub Group’s commissioned research; of the international context for commemoration; and of the issues raised in group and general discussion.

This report is intended to present some of the key issues and concerns surrounding commemoration in Northern Ireland. It is hoped that it can be used as a basis for further community based outreach and discussion – to expand the debate on how, where, when and why the conflict in and about Northern Ireland should be commemorated.

At the end of the day, may it still be possible to lay down our burdens to recollect and allow ourselves to trust in another tomorrow.

Geraldine Smyth, Chair of Healing Through Remembering’s Commemoration Sub Group

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Section 1: Introduction

- **The event**
- **The initial proposal**
- **Original recommendation**
- **Network of Commemoration Sub Group**
- **Commissioned research**
- **Round table event**
- **Objectives**

1.1 The Event

Healing Through Remembering's Network of Commemoration Sub Group held a Round Table Event at the Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University Belfast on 19th January 2007.

This report provides a record of that one day event, which included presentations on two pieces of research (by John Nagle and Sheila Fitzgerald) commissioned by Healing Through Remembering to examine the issue of commemoration (see sections two and three). This was followed by group discussions (see section four).

In the afternoon, an international perspective on commemoration was presented by Jude Lal Fernando from Sri Lanka (see section five). Dr Gareth Higgins was the appointed 'rapporteur' – tasked with summarising the content of the day. This included outlining the parameters of commemoration, the importance of sharing and learning lessons on commemoration from other contexts and reflecting on what now needs to be done (see sections six, seven and eight). The event was chaired by Brandon Hamber.

This one-day round table event with a total of 37 participants covered a lot of ground. There was considerable value in the group discussions. Many difficult and challenging issues were tackled, giving rise to increased insight and understanding shared throughout the day.

The presentations provided overviews of the complexities of commemoration both within Northern Ireland and internationally.

And at the end of the day... more questions were created than answered. These questions will encourage the debate and discussion around how to commemorate the conflict in and about Northern Ireland, in a way that does justice to the depth and complexity of the underlying issues.

However, before delivering the body of the report, it is important to provide some background into the Network of Commemoration Sub Group, and its objectives for the day.

1.2 The Initial Proposal

The original proposal for a 'Network of Commemoration' was one of the six key recommendations made in a report published by the Healing Through Remembering Project in 2002.

Healing Through Remembering – a cross-community project made up of a diverse range of individual members with different political perspectives and experiences - was formally established in 2001. It was charged with examining how people should remember the events connected with the conflict in and about Northern Ireland, and in doing so, make a contribution to healing the wounds of society.

The Healing Through Remembering Report (2002) was a landmark publication for the organisation. It was the result of a lengthy and detailed consultation process, resulting from over 100 submissions.

The six recommendations included:

- A network of commemoration or remembering projects
- A collective storytelling and archiving process
- A day of private reflection
- A permanent living memorial museum
- A process of acknowledgement and a truth recovery process
- A Healing Through Remembering initiative to take forward and implement the recommendations contained in that original report.

In 2003, Healing Through Remembering established five sub-groups to examine and develop each of these recommendations. The Commemoration Sub Group was one of these five core groups.

1.3 The Original Recommendation

It is essential to clarify the context for the Commemoration Sub Group's Round Table Event by setting out in this report the original recommendation made in the *Healing Through Remembering Report* (2002). It stated that a network linking together the diverse forms of commemoration and remembering work should be established to:

"... Learn from past and present initiatives, facilitate information exchange, and improve access and activity between those involved in commemoration and remembering work and society at large" (HTR,2002).

The original recommendation acknowledged that there existed numerous initiatives aimed at commemoration (including books, songs, murals, artwork, commemorative gardens, local history projects, ceremonies and commemorative events such as religious ceremonies or lectures, for example).

It indicated that there would need to be a strong educational value underpinning the work of the commemoration network. This would be required to serve both the collective and individual understanding of the past. It would also aim to increase mutual and shared understanding through exposing the work of others.

Furthermore, the original recommendation proposed that the commemoration network would link together the many different initiatives of commemoration and remembering, while facilitating the exchange of information and increasing public involvement in commemoration work across political divides.

1.4 Network of Commemoration Sub Group

In August 2004 Healing Through Remembering established its Network of Commemoration and Remembering Projects Sub Group (also referred to in this report in its shortened form – '*the Commemoration Sub Group*').

The Sub Group recognised inherent difficulties with this concept of a *Network of Commemoration and Remembering Projects*. The reality is that such projects tend to be predominantly single identity and inwardly focused.

The Sub Group decided that it should return to basics first and foremost. Therefore it decided that it needed to commission research into the concept of commemoration.

The brief was that the commissioned research should consider:

- What is commemoration?
- What are its parameters?
- What are the key underlining values and issues?
- What lessons can be learned from other contexts?
- What are the challenges in the local context (in relation to commemoration)?
- What is the role of commemoration – specifically in societies emerging from conflict?
- How can commemoration be undertaken and strengthened as a way of addressing the past?
- How can commemoration be undertaken as a means of healing and building relationships?

1.5 Research Commissioned

Following the tendering process, Sheila Fitzgerald and John Nagle were commissioned to carry out the research, according to their respective research bids.

1.6 Round Table event

The Round Table event was organised by the Commemoration Sub Group following the completion of the two research papers. It took place on Friday 19th January 2007, attended by 37 participants from various backgrounds.

The event was chaired by Dr Brandon Hamber, who at the time was Healing Through Remembering's core consultant, and is now HTR Chairperson.

1.7 Objectives

The objectives of the event were to:

- Outline the parameters of 'commemoration'
- Outline the key values and issues in the 'commemoration' debate
- Engage with the challenges of tackling issues of commemoration in relation to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland.
- Identify the practical issues faced by the different participants.
- Explore whether and how commemoration can be used or strengthened as a mechanism for collectively addressing the past.
- Ask if commemoration can heal and build relationships.
- Reflect on what needs to be done by Healing Through Remembering, by the Commemoration Sub Group and by others.

The Sub Group structured the day so that it would contribute to further discussion, dialogue and debate on this important aspect of dealing with the past.

Section 2: Research - John Nagle

- **Introduction**
- **Individual and collective healing**
- **Modern forms of commemoration**
- **Oklahoma City Bomb Memorial**
- **Templates of commemoration**
- **Ten functions of commemoration**
- **Commemoration in societies emerging from conflict**
- **Educational aspects of commemoration**

2.1 Introduction

Dr John Nagle presented the findings from his research. It included:

1. What is commemoration?
2. What is its role in societies emerging from conflict?
3. Does commemoration overlap with other processes of dealing with the past?
4. Provision of a framework for commemoration.
5. What questions need to be answered?
6. What practical steps should be taken if commemoration is to be used as a mechanism for collectively addressing the past, plus healing and building relationships?

Challenging Issues

In his introduction Dr Nagle explained that there are a number of distinctly challenging issues concerning the function of commemoration, and its role in healing and reconciling societies that have experienced civil conflict.

“Countenancing healing is distinctly awkward in a society where notions of historical truth are disputed. For this reason, a holistic approach to commemoration is sought – one that doesn’t strive to endorse commemoration as confirming hierarchical notions of victimhood,” he said. “The fundamental test for practitioners and sponsors of commemoration to begin with, is HOW to reconcile the competing interests and memories of groups.”

Difficult but not impossible

Although John Nagle explained that this process is extremely difficult, he said it needs to be restated that it is ‘by no means impossible’:

“Examples of commemorative strategies in places like contemporary Chile, USA, post-war Germany – with varying degrees of success – show that commemoration has played a key role in re-establishing functional relationships between the opposed groups, and can reconcile conflicting views of the past,” he said.

2.2 Individual and collective healing

Nagle found that commemorative practices can evoke what he called “a timeless continuity with the past”, but the flip side of this is that commemoration can simultaneously “serve as a rite to signify rupture from tradition.” Commemoration could, therefore, advocate redress, heal and repair, and become a mechanism to confront the wounds of the past, while offering a new and inclusive future. Commemoration can:

“... mark and then refashion the boundary separating previous identities which perpetuated generations of acrimony and division with a new identity proclaiming reconciliation.”

Applying healing powers to communities is extremely complicated – as is identifying which individuals require therapeutic commemoration to heal their hurt. For example, Nagle stated that:

- The conflict in Northern Ireland was unevenly distributed
- Some localities or communities were almost entirely immune from violence while
- Others were immersed in violence on an almost daily basis.

Collective Trauma

The notion of any group or community being 'collectively traumatised' is 'erroneous and unhelpful'. Nagle used the term 'the broadband application of trauma', which he said served to further obscure, rather than clarify what one person's trauma might have in common with someone else's trauma.

Nagle referred to findings of Jay Winter in *Sites of Memory and Mourning (1995)* which indicate that, in respect of the Great War, it is traditional modes of commemoration and remembering which have the best ability to heal. According to Jay Winter, such traditional modes of seeing the war "while at times less challenging intellectually or philosophically, provided a way of remembering which enabled the bereaved to live with their losses, and perhaps to leave them behind"(Winter:1995).

2.3 Modern Forms of Commemoration

During his presentation, Nagle described many modern forms of commemorative practice, which he said, work best when they include a space in which the bereaved can make a symbolic exchange and gift-giving with the dead – for example, Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans' Wall which allows the bereaved people to see and touch the names of the dead as well as leave messages.

Acts such as touching the names of those who have died inscribed on the memorial helped the bereaved in their ritual of mourning.

'Symbolic Exchange'

'Symbolic exchange' here includes 'flowers, flags, letters, poems, photographs, teddy bears, dog (identity) tags, wedding rings, high school yearbooks and other offerings (Doss 2002:66).

Nagle described such 'symbolic exchange' as being the defining feature of contemporary commemorative practices. For example – at the site of Princess Diana's death; at the gates of Belfast City Hall following the death of George Best; and the 'Memory Fence' as it became known in the immediate aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing.

Historical and Political Realities

When referring to the Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial during his presentation, Nagle referred once again to the work of Erika Doss, and her argument that fixating on the therapeutic, cathartic and redemptive aspects of commemoration can ignore the uncomfortable political causes and historical realities that created the bereavement.

The 'Symbolic Memorial' in Oklahoma features 168 bronze, stone and glass chairs etched with the name of a victim of the bombing.

The formal entrance to the Oklahoma Symbolic Memorial is called the 'Gates of Time' and features words from the Memorial Mission Statement: 'comfort, strength, peace, hope and serenity'.

Doss, said Nagle, argues that the Symbolic Memorial for the Oklahoma City Bombing is "*anaesthetic, because the historical and political context of why these deaths occurred has been effaced.*" (Doss, 1997: 78). It eludes any reference to conflict and politics, thereby focusing entirely on the healing facet of commemoration.

Nagle stated that this offers a superficial closure, to annul any sense of the political and historical causes of conflict. "Such an emphasis can more likely provoke forgetting than healthy remembering," he asserted.

2.4 Templates of Commemoration

Nagle asked which templates of commemoration help with mourning and closure? Which best embrace the relationship between commemoration and healing?

For example, some Remembrance Day commemorations begin with a procession leading to a definitive site of memory, such as a Cenotaph. In most instances, there is an oration followed by the laying of wreaths at the foot of the Cenotaph. The commemoration concludes with a performance of the 'Last Post' by buglers, closing with a period of silence and reflection.

Alternatively, more permanent commemorative practices – particularly statues and monuments – can help the mourning process by capturing and containing the sense of grief.

However, Nagle stated that the use of physical memorials can also be problematic. Attempts to 'objectify' death through commemoration are both psychologically complex and problematic for the survivors and victims.

2.5 Function of commemoration?

In terms of 'collective healing' how can we define the function of commemoration? This was one of the central questions in Nagle's presentation.

He insisted that a fundamental starting point for any study of commemoration is to note that it would be a mistake to 'dismiss commemoration as merely reflecting social relations and cultural beliefs. Instead it is a practice which essentially moulds these forces.'

This recognition, said Nagle, allows for a positive sense of commemoration. It can provide both a sense of reverence for those that have died, and a creative space where it is possible to imagine ways to help the process of reconciliation in divided societies where the past is disputed.

Commemoration, he said, can be:

"negotiated and contested; forgotten, suppressed or recovered; revised, reinvented."

Key Dimensions of Commemoration

In his presentation, Nagle stated that commemoration is an 'action that is replete with multiple functions, emotions and contrasting life spans. He identified ten dimensions of commemoration:

1. Commemoration can inspire a sense of awe and pride by providing a model of past glorious action.
2. Commemoration can articulate feelings of collective shame or resentment (on behalf of real or metaphorical ancestors).
3. Commemoration can provide the glue to hold a community together. It can unify sentiments and redress corrosive conflict. This type of commemoration can be important because of its capacity to strengthen social identity and people's sense of social location or community.
4. Commemoration can be a source of division and contention. Competing groups can try to control the meaning of the commemoration. In so doing these groups can attempt to exclude others (i).
5. Commemorative objects and people participating in commemorative acts can be the target of defacement, desecration and violent attack (ii).

6. In places characterised by violent conflict and division, commemoration tentatively and humbly offers the opportunity to end ancient grievances by advocating redress, healing and reparation – a mechanism to confront the wounds of the past and offer a new and inclusive future.
7. Commemoration can be faced with feelings of apathy, rather than inspiring veneration and reverence.
8. Commemoration can facilitate forgetting and amnesia as it can consign certain realities to the dustbin of history, largely ignored and deemed irrelevant and obscure.
9. Acts of commemoration can wax and wane in popularity depending on current ideological requirements (iii).
10. Finally, to remember can be an enjoyable pastime, an activity that excites the senses and allows us to relive happy and memorable experiences. The proliferation of archives, heritage centres, the popularity of genealogical research and the obsession with anniversaries are all ways of compensating for the loss of an organic relationship with the past.

2.6 Commemoration in Societies Emerging from Conflict

Partial Accounts

Nagle claimed that commemorative practice for societies coming out of conflict typically involves a 'dynamic of collective remembering and forgetting'.

"In terms of 'monumental' forms of societal remembering, commemoration remembers and venerates the victorious deeds of the triumphant and all-powerful state over its adversaries, whether external or internal". (Leersen: 2001).

"Controversially, monumental commemoration can demand amnesia and forgetting from those vanquished by the state". (Leersen: 2001: 217)'.

Thus, in many societies in conflict transition, respective forms of commemoration have largely been partisan. "Very rarely have there been national forms of commemoration that jointly remember both sides' losses," said Nagle.

He referred to an overview of memorials in societies affected by Civil War by Jane Leonard (1997). She found that civil war commemorations in USA, Ireland and Spain were not aimed at promoting reconciliation, but at upholding factional and sectarian views of history.

Holistic

"There is a strong sense, however, that failing to commemorate the past in a holistic fashion can store up trouble for the future by failing to adequately heal the wounds which caused the conflict.

"Many societies thus become caught between acts of commemoration and forgetting as a means to 'bring closure' to the years characterised by civil violence.

"If there is a concern that to forget past atrocities is to risk their repetition, equally the fear is that an incapacity by both sides to forget historical grievances is at the root cause of the conflict."

National Narrative: Memories of 'Both Sides'

However, Nagle stated that alternatively, in a society where the past is highly contested, the ability to create a national narrative that can accommodate the memories of opposing groups could determine the success of reconciliation efforts:

“The task of reconciliation is to re-establish functional relationships between the opposed groups and reconcile conflicting views of the past. This is necessary to construct a history which is compatible with the memories of both sides.”

Attempts to achieve this include tribunals into unsolved events, truth commissions and days of reflection. Nagle said that what to forget and what merits remembering are central to the process of ‘putting the conflict to bed’:

“Such modes of reconciliation are problematic in the local context. Unlike countries which have suffered under repressive, totalitarian governments and which now have a consensus that one side was disproportionately unjust in its past actions, these islands have no such unanimity.”

2.7 Education aspects of commemoration

The pedagogic – or educational – aspect of commemoration invites the key questions - what should be remembered – and why? How should the events and their commemoration be taught?

Nagle proposed “As a pedagogical form, commemoration incorporates a set of evaluations that structure which memories should inform our social imagination as well as offering a detailed, structured set of operations for presenting and engaging historical representations.

Shared Commemorative Forms

“We should look towards shared commemorative forms that might allow citizens to critically consider how to change the conditions that contributed to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. Commemoration should provide an educational function.

“Commemoration – for instance holocaust commemorations – not only urges us to remember the dead, but leaves such an effect that the story of its victims must be told to prevent future repetition.

“Similarly the civic function of war memorial art is to remind of a sacrifice which must never be allowed to happen again.”

Nagle described a ‘twin-track’ approach which involves:

- a. A pedagogic, educational element
- b. A space for mourning in the form of symbolic exchange or gift-giving.

Nagles says this pedagogical/educational element forces people into confronting the past – to learn about it and learn from the historical and political context of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

“Although much of this pedagogy would be in the form of information presented to the viewer – the educational aspect could be transmitted through forms which upset, shock and dislocate the normal conventions of commemoration.”

In this way the symbolic-exchange/gift-giving aspect would help the mourning and therapeutic aspect of commemoration.

“As bereavement and mourning are not expressed in a universal way, people would be allowed to leave, within reason, whatever objects they deem fit as tokens of their grief.

“In the form of Maya Lin’s Wall, we could have an alphabetical list of all those who have been killed in the conflict.

Non-Hierarchical

“In a non-hierarchical way, this allows the bereaved to touch and see, as well as to have their loved ones recognised.”

In summary, and as a point of closure, Nagle said that both aspects – pedagogy (or learning) and healing can only work if they are linked together.

“To discount one approach is to ignore the fact that commemoration works best when it combines pedagogy with healing.”

Notes:

- (i) Paul Connerton (1989) notes that the mental enslavement of the subjects of a totalitarian regime begins when they have their memories taken away.
- (ii) For example, the attack on the Remembrance Day service at Enniskillen in 1987 or the destruction of Wolf Tone’s grave in 1969, as well as the numerous times plaques and murals which commemorate dead civilians have been destroyed.
- (iii) For example commemorations of the 1641 massacre of Protestants at the hands of the rebellious native Irish were observed by the state for over two hundred years after the event as a narrative of betrayal and death; and yet by the mid-19th century in Ulster, little folk-memory of the event remained with Protestants (Walker 1996:3).

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Section 3: Research - Sheila Fitzgerald

- **Introduction**
- **What is commemoration?**
- **Role of commemoration in societies coming out of conflict**
- **Forms of commemoration**
- **Framework for commemoration?**
- **Summary and recommendations**

3.1 Introduction

Sheila Fitzgerald, as commissioned by Healing Through Remembering on behalf of the Commemoration Sub Group, had been briefed to address the same key areas as John Nagle, but from her chosen perspectives.

The key questions posed for Sheila Fitzgerald's research centred on the following:

1. What is commemoration?
2. What is its role in societies emerging from conflict?
3. Does commemoration overlap with other processes of dealing with the past?
4. Provision of a framework for commemoration.
5. What questions need to be answered?
6. What practical steps should be taken if commemoration is to be used as a mechanism for collectively addressing the past, plus healing and building relationships?

'Least said, soonest mended?'

Presenting her research at the Round Table, Fitzgerald noted in her introduction: "Some people feel that the only way to heal is by forgetting the past, and allowing the memory of it to fade into obsolescence.

"The old saying 'Least said, soonest mended' implies that if we repress our memory of events or occurrences, we will soon forget that anything ever happened.

"Northern Ireland is living proof that commemoration is anything but repressed. Every town, every village and every group in Northern Ireland was engaged in some level or type of commemoration.

Commemorative acts as local relationship

"While this may be slightly exaggerated, it is nonetheless true that there are hundreds of organised commemorative acts and events occurring every year. They are often happening in an organic way in the community, although some are more centrally and formally organised.

"In a speech to Dáil Eireann in 1995 to mark the 150th Anniversary of the Irish Famine and her celebration of the Irish Diaspora, former President Mary Robinson said:

'And so, the weight of the past ... in my view, points us towards a single reality in this country to those who have felt it is a moral relationship. We have too much at stake in both not to be rigorous.'

3.2 What is commemoration?

Commemoration can be defined as *'The act of honouring the memory of or serving as a memorial to someone or something.'*

In addition, commemoration can be viewed as *'something that honours or preserves the memory of another'.*

The term 'Commemoration', explained Sheila Fitzgerald, serves as an umbrella term for all forms of remembrance and memorial, and it encompasses all aspects of any act or activity of remembering.

Commemoration as personal

Fitzgerald defined personal commemoration as the process that people establish to remember on an individual level. "These private acts can be a personal memorial, thought or reflection, or some other form of action in memory of an event related or unrelated to the individual concerned.

"When we look at deaths due to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland, we need to remember that traumatic death robs people of the normal routines and process of grieving.

"Significantly", she said, "No one can dictate or determine how, when or if personal acts of commemoration should occur.

"There are clear indications that sometimes individuals absent themselves from the shared commemorative acts and events for various reasons.

"When families mourn the loss of their family member who died, they do not necessarily want to be involved or associated with a larger group effort to share the identity of the group.

"Some individuals feel the need to keep their grief and mourning separate and private from others who share a similar experience.

"We cannot assume a commonality based solely on a shared event or experience."

Community and group commemorations

Fitzgerald indicated that the 'ownership' of the commemorative process becomes more pronounced at a community or group level.

"This is where both the tensions associated with oppositional identities may come to the fore, as well as disagreement with groups hoping to commemorate a common event.

"Some groups see themselves as more worthy than others. In the local context, some groups will determine that they are unable to commemorate with others who have previously been engaged in oppositional activities to them."

She referred to Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's report which stated that:

"Many people feel strongly that any person engaged in unlawful activity that is killed or injured in pursuit of it is a victim only of his own criminality and deserves no recognition for it." (i)

Single identity commemoration

Fitzgerald pointed to the intrusion of ideology into some commemorations in an effort to advance a political cause.

She referred to the work of Leonard who states that: "In Ireland politicians and local communities have endeavoured to replace partisan character of existing war commemorations with more inclusive, generous forms of acknowledging the Irish past", Fitzgerald, however, argued that "we still see evidence of the opposite and this point remains relevant when assessing the impact of commemorative events."

Mixed identity commemoration

Fitzgerald described commemoration of the victims of the 1998 Omagh bomb as an example of 'mixed identity' commemoration.

Omagh ' provides an example of how dissatisfaction and disagreement can emerge – even where all of those affected have been through the same occurrence. Differences of opinion have occurred in many areas of

consideration – for example the wording of memorial stones, the location of the memorial garden, the frequency of memorial services, the size and nature of the garden and the marker on the site of the bomb.¹

Societal commemoration

Underlining this key area, Fitzgerald observed that tensions were likely to take on additional features of public debate, where ideas and ideology will be contested:

“It is also the area where public agreement will need to be reached before any type of joint commemorative practice can be accommodated. However, a greater degree of control can be imposed on societal commemoration as opposed to private, community or group-led activities.”

Fitzgerald referred to the debate as to whether or not a ‘society’ can be traumatised, and whether a clear measure of communal trauma can be obtained.

“This argument,” she says “has force - particularly when one considers the different ways that individuals experience trauma, loss and recovery.

“Society is composed of many different individuals who will all respond in their own way. A collective response is difficult to interpret or make assumptions about.”

3.3 Role of Commemoration in societies coming out of conflict

Fitzgerald went on to reflect on the lessons and experiences of societies that have emerged from conflict. “It is not always important to mirror the Northern Ireland situation and/or experience,” says Fitzgerald.

“There has been no agreement on the exact nature of the violence we have witnessed. The convenient escape has been to call this period ‘the Troubles’.

“Some will variously prefer the term ‘Civil War’, ‘Guerilla War’, ‘Terrorist Campaign’, or ‘War of Collusion’ – depending on their political view or what they believe has taken place in and about Northern Ireland.

“To some of those on one side of the conflict, there are heroes. These same people are terrorists to people on the other side. This remains a key feature in any conversation about joint practices.” Fitzgerald remarked that this issue came up with almost all of the representatives she spoke to over the course of this research.

“It is important to remember that any situation of conflict in the world will have unique features, so similarly, the process of resolution and commemoration will be unique to that area.”

Insights from Other Conflicts

However, Fitzgerald said it had been useful in her research to examine other areas of conflict and conflict resolution to inform our process and our understanding. She referred to Jane Leonard’s work on commemoration in 1995, where Leonard noted that:

“Commemoration in other societies has festered rather than cured civil war divisions.”

However, Fitzgerald observed that this view can be contested with some of the material provided in her research, and noted there are examples of both division and healing as a result of commemoration. For example, in the case of the Vietnam Memorial, according to Herman (2001):

¹ It is a tribute to the triumph of shared humanity over sectional interests that those involved did struggle to find consensus on a subject fraught with painful memories and touching upon the raw wounds of deep personal loss.

“Probably the most significant contribution to the healing process of these veterans was the construction of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington DC. This monument that records simply by name and date the number of the dead, becomes by means of this acknowledgement, a site of common mourning.”

Such experiences from the Vietnam commemoration illustrate instances where a public or societal gesture can be critical in the journey through individual traumatisation, says Fitzgerald.

“Vietnam provides an interesting example in that there was a feeling of apathy at the least and hostile negativity at worst, among the general public about the war and America’s involvement in it.]

“There are multiple factors involved in the causes of high levels of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and poor resettlement among the veterans of the Vietnam War. The feeling of not being welcomed home as heroes in the manner of prior returning soldiers is recognised as having been a major factor.

“There were other factors that are now known to have contributed to the higher rates of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

“There was also a lack of acceptance of the war itself that transmitted itself to a lack of acceptance for the combatants. This certainly impeded the re-connection to society for them as they lacked the homecoming and welcoming ceremonies that had become traditional.

Validation

“The erection of the monument provided some level of validation and recognition within society. The monument is recognised as being a turning point in the healing process for many veterans. It also gave a national focus for the war and began to lend legitimacy to this unpopular period in American history.”

3.4 Forms of commemoration

Fitzgerald asserted that if a comprehensive base of information is to be collected on commemoration in Northern Ireland it would be important to be able to categorise commemorative acts and events in a meaningful and organised manner. She suggested seven categories (in no particular order):

1. Fixed and semi-fixed physical monuments –

Physical monuments can take a range of forms. These include memorial stones, stained glass windows, plaques, roadside markers, gardens of remembrance, dedicated buildings, spaces or park benches.

2. Memorial services and timed remembrances –

Memorial services likewise can take a variety of forms. They can have either a religious or non-religious basis. ‘At present there is no established Day of Reflection in Northern Ireland, but as work progresses in this area, it deserves to be included in any catalogue of remembrances being compiled. *(Note: Healing Through Remembering facilitated the first Day of Private Reflection, which took place on 21st June 2007. Healing Through Remembering repeated this Day of Private Reflection on 21st June 2008. This followed publication of an independent evaluation into the first Day of Private Reflection in 2007).*

3. Marches, parades and associated objects –

In Northern Ireland there are about 3,200 parades and marches each year. These marches commemorate a variety of events – for example The Somme, the Battle of the Boyne, The Feast of the Assumption and St Patrick’s Day to name a few. There are fewer specifically dedicated to the ‘Troubles’. However there are certainly some that do so, either annually or on special anniversary dates, said Fitzgerald.

(Note: The Parades Commission was established in 1997 to oversee matters relating to parades and they have a comprehensive database that details the type of parade and the event or person being commemorated).

4. Murals -

An extensive database of murals is kept on the CAIN website (Conflict Archive on the Internet – see <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/>). However, Fitzgerald observed that this is a difficult and challenging area to catalogue. “In some areas, every gable wall has a mural or several. These are liable to change depending on political changes in the broader arena.”

On this evolving pattern, Fitzgerald noted: “Murals are to some extent a vibrant and changing reflection of the communities where they are situated, and can be very powerful and emotive.

“The nature of many existing murals is changing quite rapidly. There is a purposeful move away from those associated with paramilitarism. The shift is towards a more focused community message – such as anti drugs or promoting positive behaviour.”

5. Music and songs -

Music and song are among the oldest forms of artistic expression. There is a universality about commemorating a person or event in this manner. Certain songs become emblematic of events and situations, she observed.

6. Art work, storytelling, and other expressive forms -

Reflecting earlier points about the organic nature of commemoration that is currently happening in Northern Ireland, there are numerous examples of groups, individuals and communities finding expression through art, story telling and related work. Sometimes this is facilitated by an artist or other person who prepared the participants for their work. They are invited to express their feelings openly and freely, using a variety of media.

7. Endowments or commemorative organisations

The establishment of endowments or other commemorative organisations, which are seen by some as a positive and creative way of attempting to change the circumstances that led to their loss.

3.5 Framework for commemoration?

Is there a framework for how the field of commemoration can be thought about, understood and mapped?

Fitzgerald outlined four suggestions:

1. A Network of organisations

The original recommendation from Healing Through Remembering concerned the establishment of a ‘network’ of individuals or organisations involved in commemorative work. However, Fitzgerald observed that while this is still an excellent idea, the sheer number of commemorative projects under way may be a factor in making a decision on the establishment of any actual physical network.

“Another factor to be considered when deciding on the nature of a network is the willingness of all organisations to come together on such a project.”

2. A Memorial Book

A different approach might be the creation of a list, book or web-based record of commemorative projects and activities, along with a Memorial Book listing them as they exist in a one-year time frame, suggested Fitzgerald.

“This approach might be seen as a first step in the direction of a more inter-active and fluid network. “A project of that nature could not only detail the factual aspects of each commemorative approach, but give case histories, backgrounds to projects and illustrations of existing commemorative processes.

“In time, the network may be able to evolve into a physical group that could meet on a regular basis or even in an annual convention format” explained Fitzgerald, although she added, “It would not be

envisaged that this would happen in the immediate future; but it would be seen as a step towards a desirable outcome.”

3. A Permanent Living Museum

An alternative approach would be to select examples of commemorative practices from among the many types available, she suggested.

“This approach would achieve the aim of being able to present a comprehensive sampling of commemoration.”

However there are a number of pitfalls to this approach, explained Fitzgerald.

“Although it would be approached in a fair and balanced manner, it would inevitably be viewed from the hierarchical perspective. Groups might be inclined to weigh the importance according to their commemorative practices.

“It would pose many difficulties in practical areas – such as choosing which memorial garden is to be represented, or which stained glass window.

“It would also lead to further segmentation of events and practices.”

4. A Web Archive

The ‘web’ offers a new and innovative means of keeping an active and up-to-date archive of commemorative practices. It would require an initial piece of work, identifying each commemorative act and project; and collating it using the framework outlined above, or something similar. Doing justice to such a project would require on-going maintenance to keep the information up to date and accurate.

“A physical space for the collection and cataloguing of commemorative acts and processes in and about Northern Ireland is also worth considering,” she said.

3.6 Summary and Recommendations

Two main areas of commemoration were identified by Fitzgerald in her presentation:

1. Those occurring at a community or group level and
2. Those that can be organised or instigated by government or local authorities.

“In respect of the events occurring at community level, they are being led and managed by the people within the community and will continue to occur. No collective record is presently being made of these events,” said Fitzgerald in her closing remarks.

“It would be fitting and appropriate to form some record of the work being done to commemorate the conflict in and about Northern Ireland.

“A network of organisations involved would also be a useful means of sharing experience with practice” although in her opinion it was unlikely that such a group could be formed at the present time.

“An interim measure would be the establishment of a virtual or written record of all of the agencies involved and the events being held.”

Fitzgerald said that there does not appear to be any active movements by the governing powers to erect a memorial to the ‘Victims of the Troubles’ at present.

“While this will undoubtedly be a positive step forward when it occurs, experiences from other societies suggest that the time has to be appropriately chosen for such an occurrence.”

Timeframe

However, John Paul Lederach (i) sets out a timeframe for various intervention options and approaches to dealing with the past.

He distinguishes between immediate action (2-6 months); short-range planning (1-2 years), decade thinking (5-10 years) and generational vision (20+ years).

“While this is obviously more relevant to acute conflict transformation, perhaps we could view our approaches on commemorative acts in such timeframes.

“Certain stages of work could be completed and we would welcome the kind of progress we can make in this time – while laying markers for the kind of progress we would wish to see in the future, as well as the ultimate goal we would wish to see achieved.”

She refers to what’s termed by Dolan (ii) the ‘statuo-mania’ of 1950’s Ireland in respect of commemorating the Irish Civil War:

“There was the sudden realisation of men and women in their fifties, sixties and seventies who wanted their stories told, their comrades remembered.

“Age has brought urgency, a familiar and almost desperate human response: the plea to posterity before death.”

A Moral Act

In closing her presentation, Fitzgerald said:

“One message remained clear wherever in the world it came from. Commemoration is a moral act and an abiding responsibility.

“It can provide space for personal healing and some will argue that societies can resume the normalisation process once an acknowledgment of past hurt has been made.”

Fitzgerald comments that perhaps it is our duty to commence commemorative work before it becomes an urgent need. She quoted Brian Walker (iii) that:

“Commemorations then, not only mark important historical occurrences or individuals, but they reflect current attitudes, and a study of them can tell us much about the society which commemorates the occasion and about changes in how that society views its own history.”

She concluded by stating that “The moral burden falls upon this generation to decide if we have matured sufficiently to accept each other and commemorate a less tolerant episode in our recent past.

“If we haven’t matured sufficiently to do so, then perhaps we can lay down markers for the future. At the least we can ensure that we preserve a record for posterity of the kind of work being done and acknowledged today in the field of commemoration.”

Notes:

(i) Lederach, John Paul (1997) *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*: United States Institute of Peace Press: Washington DC

ii) Dolan, Anne, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War, History and Memory 1923-2000*, Studies in Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare, Cambridge University Press (p81).

(iii) Walker, Brian (1996) *Dancing to History's Tune: History, Myth, Politics in Ireland*. Belfast: Queen's University Belfast

References:

Sir Kenneth Bloomfield KCB (April 1998, Belfast: The Stationery Office), p14

Herman, Judith *Trauma and Recovery* (London 2001) p33

Leonard, Jane *The Culture of Commemoration; the Culture of War* (Dublin: Cultures of Ireland 1996), p21

Section 4: Plenary Discussion

A plenary discussion followed the presentations from the two commissioned researchers. This allowed participants to offer their initial views and opinions. It provided an opportunity to question the two researchers directly. The main issues raised are included here in summary form:

- **Allowing the debate on commemoration**
- **Aesthetics and symbolism in commemoration**
- **Non-physical space of commemoration**
- **Dangers of commemoration**
- **Preparing the ground for the next battle?**
- **Memorials are reminders**
- **A 'sacred place'**
- **Generational aspects**
- **Socio-economic factors of commemoration**
- **Diversity in commemoration**
- **Commemoration is about the present and future, not just the past**
- **Commemorations as markers**

4.1 Allowing the debate on commemoration

Some participants felt that commemoration processes were inspiring debate – but asked what sense of memory do they facilitate?

Others felt that commemoration sparked contests – especially in pluralistic, democratic societies – therefore it is increasingly difficult to build homogeneous memorials that represent everybody.

Three types of commemoration were referred to:

- i. Permanent types of commemoration such as murals or statues which provide a sense of permanency and legacy.
- ii. Performative commemoration – such as parades, marches and music – which are also important because they allow people to externalise their creativity.
- iii. The third type of ‘open space’ memorials – such as heritage centres and veterans’ walls. In such spaces, people are allowed to mingle and have debate about the nature and layout of the memorial.

It was suggested that the prospect for future commemoration needed to come up with as many templates as possible.

4.2 Aesthetics and symbolism in commemoration

A strong topic of discussion in this plenary session was that of abstract memorials. Some felt that making a memorial totally abstract failed to provide any clear meaning or sense of narrative.

This can either be a positive or a negative thing. It can unite all the various memories into one abstract memorial. Abstraction, however, can also close the debate.

Some participants highlighted the need for pedagogy and context in commemoration, raising questions such as:

- What were the times and the conditions?
- What were the processes that created conflict?
- Have these been addressed in the commemoration?

The point was raised that there should be a dual strategy: a symbolic participation/gift-giving where people can participate, along with pedagogic learning where people can open ways to understand the context of the conflict.

4.3 Non-physical space of commemoration

Some felt that monuments were not particularly helpful, but that a great play or novel would open up space to see what has happened.

The creation of non-physical space can offer people the possibility of entering the world of the other side, and the possibility of moving on.

The point was stressed that what is important is the possibility of exploring and reflecting rather than monumentalising.

4.4 Preparing the ground for the next battle?

A participant made the point that one function of combatants in the conflict, whether they are paramilitaries or state agents, is not only to remember the people who died, but to turn them into 'glorious dead'. This they said, can result (in an under-stated way) in "the ground being prepared for the next generation who will be made willing to join in the next round, the next war, the next battle.

"We must be wary that the memorialisation process is sometimes 'war by other means' and not a sign of the peace process."

4.5 Memorials are reminders

Although the discussion indicated that the above point was a possibility, the other aspect of commemoration is to remind future generations of what happened (which is precisely what World War II memorials are about).

They are physical reminders to people that it is worth working to avoid having to add further names, or create another stone.

The point was made that encouraging and welcoming people to visit each other's 'processes' could be constructed more easily than a great play or novel.

4.6 A 'sacred place'

It was suggested that a 'sort of sacred place' was needed – where all these stories could be gathered: "That's how people realise all our stories are similar".

4.7 Art and birth connection

'Good commemoration' should focus on the next generations – as this directs it towards hope. Some felt that a number of artists had already embraced the concept of 'making peace with the past' – where enemies come face to face with each other. Such works of art can have a 'usefully disruptive' effect – by provoking debate, providing a pedagogic or learning function – which connects the past, the present and the future.

The time factor was felt to be important: "It took fifty or sixty years for the survivors of the Holocaust to speak about their experience or for the Irish Civil War to be openly debated and commemorated," said a participant.

4.8 Socio-economic factors of commemoration

Physical commemorations of the conflict are indicative of 'where we are today'. The point was made that "If we catalogue all the existing memorialisations of individuals killed during the conflict, virtually all combatants are commemorated in some way, compared to only 30 per cent of civilians."

Commemorations tend to take place at interfaces and areas of high social deprivation. They also tend to be male dominated.

There has been an increase in commemorations since the 1998 Agreement, along with a proliferation of so called single-identity work.

4.9 Diversity in commemoration

Individuals who need support are grouped – in either residential or partisan groups – that provide necessary support and healing. In discussion, the point was made that it is easier to provide pre-formatted commemoration – but “people need diversity in commemoration to prevent their grief being articulated in partisan ways.”

4.10 Commemoration is about the present

Commemorations are more about our current issues than about representations of the past. One participant felt that “Purely physical commemorations may close off debate, and somehow do the remembering for us”. It was generally felt by the group that finding ways to engage with everybody was needed.

‘If commemoration is more about the present, can we bequeath a commemorative legacy for the next generation – for them to re-imagine how they view the conflict?’

4.11 Commemorations as markers

The final point in the plenary session was that some victims want to see a permanent mark of the conflict – to leave a definite marker. However, for many this cannot be in a collective space but rather needs to be a place particular to a group or organisation.

Section 5: International Experience – Sri Lanka

Guest Speaker: Jude Lal Fernando

- **Introduction**
- **Setting the political context**
- **Importance of an alternative interpretative perspective**
- **Commemoration and education for peace**
- **The situation in Sri Lanka**
- **Commemoration in Sri Lanka**
- **Commemoration and political space**

5.1 Introduction

In recognition of the wealth of experience and knowledge other countries have in respect of commemoration, Jude Lal Fernando was invited to provide this round table event with an international perspective.

This section of the report covers the presentation made by Jude Lal Fernando. Before going on to discuss the situation in Sri Lanka regarding commemoration, he spent some time explaining his own perspectives of commemoration, and setting the political context for his presentation.

Jude Lal Fernando's opening point was that although the issue of commemoration could be addressed on many different levels – there was one underlying principle:

How best can we correlate the person with the society?

5.2 Setting the political context

“Technically speaking, the word ‘post-conflict’ can at times mislead our perceptions of societies in conflict,” he said.

“North of Ireland or Northern Ireland is supposed to be in a post-conflict era, but Sri Lanka is not.

“On the one hand, we agree without any conditions that there is an imperative for politically negotiated formal agreements – these are necessary. The word ‘post-conflict’ has gained its currency through such formal political agreements.

“However the term can also undermine other political, social and cultural aspects that constitute the conflict.

“Most political agreements are reached as a provocative statement out of pragmatics,” he said. “But politics is not everything and everything is not political.

“In that sense, the conflict here has passed one stage, but we find it difficult to implement certain areas in the political agreement itself because we are not focusing enough attention on the social, cultural and economic fields that reflect the political field.

“It is in this latter respect that the role of commemoration is more important.”

5.3 Importance of an alternative interpretative perspective

“Collective commemorations that cross the borders of communities are one of the main ways in which we could reduce community polarisation. This needs to be recognised.

“However, commemoration needs to make links between different fields, without limiting it to the individual and communitarian memories of survivors.

Diversity

“It is only by seeing the diverse fields that constitute the conflict that the inter-relatedness of suffering can be perceived. This will halt the polarisation caused by sectarian commemoration.

“Developing an interpretative perspective of the commemoration is of the utmost importance,” he said.

5.4 Commemoration and education for peace

Jude Lal Fernando described 'commemoration and education for peace' as an innovative way in which commemorating the 'Troubles' can play a vital role in conflict resolution. He said:

"I need to emphasise that commemoration is not a single act or a single event, but a process that should be accompanied by continuous programmes of education.

"Education is necessary to broaden the social space that has been narrowed or closed down by the certain religious and cultural ideologies that have an enormous impact on individual and community memories.

"It is through a historical process of generations in conflict that such religious and cultural ideologies were constructed.

Wider perspective

"Commemoration needs to be placed in the wider perspective of an educative process. Education in this respect does not mean imparting cognitive knowledge about the roots of the conflict. It means an educating process that involves the whole person in relation to society.

"This is not to under-estimate the personal suffering of individuals in conflict. Rather it means to initiate a process of awareness by which the inter-relatedness of the suffering of each person and each community – entrapped in the conflict – is recognised.

Beyond victim rhetoric

"It is only such a process which could overcome the rhetoric of victimisation: we have been victimised and therefore we have the right to victimise the other".

Pre-requisites

Therefore, according to Jude Lal Fernando, the pre-requisites for collective commemoration are:

- (i) Acknowledgement of the already existing individual and communitarian memories.
- (ii) Development of an inclusive interpretative perspective. (This needs an attempt at connecting psychological and socio-psychological trauma to the political field. Jude Lal Fernando suggested that trauma is not only psychological but also political. "We cannot undermine the personal traumatic experiences at any cost – especially in highly politicised cultures").
- (iii) Concrete actions in collective commemoration.

"The objective of the process is to create space for solidarity of the suffering. Such 'solidarity in suffering' would need to cross constructed borders that have been created by the interplay of diverse fields".

Change

"It is commemoration of the past, carried out in the present, which has the potential to change the future.

"Memory with an inclusive perspective is an act of healing, which extends an invitation for a commitment to follow a different path," he said.

5.5 The situation in Sri Lanka

The politically agreed ceasefire between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE) could not hold ground because of the other social, cultural and economic factors that had not been addressed adequately.

“Today” he said (*referring to the date of the round table event- 19th January 2007*) “it has totally collapsed – even though none of the parties has officially withdrawn from it.

“Sri Lanka is a clear example of the limitations of formal agreements - sometimes made out of pragmatic political reasons – but without the substantial backing of a socio-cultural movement for peace. Nonetheless, even for pragmatic reasons, we have to prefer a ceasefire agreement in order to reduce escalation of violence that ultimately costs lives.

“My work in Sri Lanka has been to promote more and more collective commemorations within the context of fierce fighting.

“Constructions of ‘otherness’ has led to violent conflict being furthered, with a process of exclusivist memories of suffering being perpetuated.

“This process blinds each group towards the suffering of their counterparts. Therefore the work of commemoration involves reconnecting with ‘the other’. This is needed to halt violence and initiate negotiations.”

5.6 Commemoration in Sri Lanka

Peace in Sri Lanka is treason for some. Agreements are betrayal, said Jude Lal Fernando. He went on to explain the situation there:

“Peace for the Buddhist community is ‘churchy’. I come from a Christian background, but my forebears had been Hindu or Buddhist.

“There is the issue of crossing borders that have been historically constructed. Basic, simple commemorations have been (through faith-based groups – especially the Catholic churches) to remember the deaths on both sides... in a situation where both sides pray for their mothers, their heroes and soldiers.

“This was difficult sometimes, because during heavy military operations carried out by the government, we must also pray for the soldiers, for the security of our nation.

Post-colonial period

“There is a dominant discourse which rules the majority. However there are other discourses emerging, coming from a post-colonial period where Christians were told that they represent the nation. That is how we were taught.

“We were told to pray for the soldiers that protect the nation – which demands a great deal in a third-world country in a post-colonial era.

“So we found it improper to pray for the soldiers: the role of these soldiers fitted with the nationalist dominant discourse. But there was another discourse, whereby we recognise that he is a soldier, an unemployed youth, the son of a father and a mother, a lover with personal dreams of the future.

“Therefore we try to introduce this new dimension in our faith based group, through prayers: praying not only for the soldiers, but for the sake of inclusiveness, for all those who have been killed.

“The month of November is important in Sri Lanka: it is the month when traditionally the dead are commemorated. And so we have been organising processions, candlelight ceremonies, inviting both the Tamil and Sinhalese refugees, parents of the soldiers and Tamils who have lost their houses and their families.”

Seeing each other's tears

“I remember there was one procession in which almost all the people cried. They were narrating their stories and for the first time, they saw each other's tears.

“After the Sinhalese student revolts of the 1980s, both groups of survivors were coming to commemoration services with their photos, or with a dress, or with something the person had loved, or with a child in the procession. When this took place in a village which was polarised, it was the first time that they saw each other. They all called for a new breath during the service.”

Truth recovery

“Sri Lanka doesn't have a mechanism like in Chile or South Africa to recover truth from the perspective of the grassroots – those who have suffered or are suffering.

“The truth is coloured by dominant interpretations. Even in a context where 60,000 people were killed, there isn't a mechanism to recover truth.

“The faith-based groups entered into a wider relationship with other communities. We used innovative language – we used 'humanist' language without undermining the cultural and religious forms of expressing stories. However 'humanist' language cannot encompass the entire range of experiences.”

Storytelling

“We collected sample narratives from both communities. The process of collection and publication was important,” explained Jude Lal Fernando.

“For a country like Sri Lanka, the post-colonialist national identity crisis is very dominant. It is important how we justify our credibility as Christians. It is also important how we promote people's initiatives without depending totally on the West.

“The process of publishing the cross community sample of narratives was most important. It cost us 20,000 rupees (150 euros). It took three full months to complete the book with those interested in the inclusive approach.

“It is called SANVEDI which means SENSITIVITY, and is published in both Sinhalese and Tamil.

Bus Stop commemoration

“We can see in Sri Lanka – in every bus halt – someone is working on this project of commemorating. You would see this dynamic way of commemorating also in places like Rwanda and Bosnia. Almost seventy per cent of bus stops are being renovated. They are being re-named after many thousand so-called national heroes. Some of them didn't even have an identity in their own villages. Most of them were unemployed, but became 'somebody' in a huge militaristic machine.

Campaign

'We went from bus station to bus station and from railway station to railway station speaking about this. We asked people in bus stops and at train stations to spare one minute of silence to remember somebody. It was a campaign.

"So commemoration is not a static thing. It is a dynamic process. We are on a tight rope because working for peace and adopting an inclusive perspective can be seen as a betrayal; a treason'.

Commemoration of 'Black July'

Jude Lal Fernando explained that his faith based group had initiated within the Sinhalese community, the commemoration of 'Black July': It is estimated that between 400 and 3,000 Tamils died at the end of July 1983.

"It had only been the Tamils who commemorated this event. We invited the Tamils as well as the Sinhalese to commemorate together, to be more inclusive.

"We've had a ceasefire agreement for the last five years. It is important to notice that we knew the agreement would collapse because the political, social, and economic conditions were not right. It had not created a democratic space for a political agreement.

"So our way of commemorating was to facilitate a negotiated political agreement by creating a democratic space. Commemoration isn't an isolated event."

LTTE Event: World Tamil Cultural Day

The cultural section of the LTTE organised a commemorative event in 2004. It was in memory of the deaths of eight civilians who were killed by the Sri Lankan police in 1974 during the World Tamil Cultural Day in Jaffna (the northern Tamil city of Sri Lanka).

"What was new was that in 2004 Sinhalese activists had been invited to this event – which was held 25 years after it happened.

"It became a collective commemoration in which new relationships were built and new paths for a greater understanding were opened amidst an otherwise continuous process of militarization.'

People's movements

"As a group of Sinhalese, we have participated in events of the Tamil Rising Day (i)," explained Jude Lal Fernando. "The dead are remembered and a huge artificial military boot is burnt with a vow taken to end government oppression.

"Each time this act was conducted the Tamil commentator used to say: 'This is not against our Sinhalese brothers and sisters; it is against the oppression which we have been going through for decades'.

"When we organised events inviting the Tamil activists to the Sinhalese community, they adopted the same inclusive perspective by remembering all the dead.

"There are several public events that we have been organising with the participation of activists from the two main communities, including religious, regional and gender diverse representations.

"These events have been educational, cultural and commemorative."

5.7 Commemoration and political space

“We can’t commemorate things in a dry neutral space,” said Jude Lal Fernando.

“It is political; because people are contemplating feelings, emotions and deep traumas because of these experiences.

“In order to heal, there needs to be a common inclusive process that includes a political dimension, but also a theological one where the psychological, social, cultural and political issues are also seriously taken into account.

Monuments

“Physical monuments are also important because people need material spaces to celebrate. But the process of creating a monument is the most important.

“Are they sourced from political funds or coming from a different discourse? There is one monument in Sri Lanka that cannot be dominated by sectarian party political interests because it was funded and built by the survivors themselves.

“Last October we had a commemoration where we could represent Tamil and Muslim memories. My whole emphasis is that Sri Lanka needs a different type of a movement where the social tensions are in a way reduced and a democratic space could be created so that a true political agreement can take place.

Integral approach

“What happened both in the history of political agreements in Sri Lanka and Northern Ireland is that social, economic and cultural fears have not been addressed sufficiently.

“They need to be an integral part of political negotiations.”

Section 6: Small Group Discussions

- **Introduction**
- **Key issues and values in the commemoration debate**
- **Challenges in tackling issues of commemoration and the practical issues faced by different participants**
- **Practical steps regarding commemoration by Healing Through Remembering, the Commemoration Sub Group and by others**

6.1 Introduction

Following the presentation on the Sri Lankan experience of commemoration by Jude Lal Fernando, the participants moved into small groups to consider three specific questions in relation to commemoration:

1. What are the key issues and values in the commemoration debate?
2. What are the challenges in tackling issues of commemoration and the practical issues faced by different participants?
3. What practical steps might be taken regarding commemorations relating to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland, by Healing Through Remembering, the Commemoration Sub Group and by others?

Brief summaries of the issues raised during the discussion around these three questions are included below:

6.2 Key issues and values in the commemoration debate?

VALUES

Healing and commemorating

The link between *healing* and *commemoration* was highlighted. It was suggested that healing and commemoration needed to be connected so as to prevent commemoration from hindering the healing process.

However, it was also felt that commemoration might 'box' people and thus hamper development or healing by perpetuating ideas belonging to one or another community and its narratives and traditions, without reaching out or maturing in an interactive or integrated manner.

Right to remember

The 'right to remember' and the creation of spaces for the full diversity of memories to be heard was discussed. It should include underprivileged voices, victims groups and civilians.

It was suggested that there was a need for all voices to have a space where they could express their right to remember and also their right not to remember.

Commonality

One of the strongest threads of discussion amongst the small groups was in terms of the need for a sense of commonality.

It was suggested that symbols and memorials could use a common message (for example, anti-violence). Further discussion raised the possibility of creating a new symbol with which all communities could identify (for example, a broken rifle), or that highlighted shared humanity rather than political differences.

It was stressed that the communication of what is common should be done not by 'inviting' others to commemorate but rather by having the other community as an essential element of the commemoration. This concept was supported by the idea that the personal experiences of those from both communities are very similar.

Essential values

Values identified which should underpin commemorative practice relating to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland included respect, inclusiveness and openness to the future.

Educative dimension

A further challenge recognised in relation to commemoration was the educative role of commemoration. The dilemma raised was how to educate while at the same time not prolong antagonistic politics – but promote healing.

A number of participants suggested that commemorative acts should not be expected to achieve education, but that they could form part of the wider process of education.

It was also felt that educational dimensions ought to be included in any memorial activity.

Other issues and other questions

One paradox that was raised is that generally people felt that the 'other' community do not want to commemorate the actual individuals that are precisely the ones being commemorated.

Commemoration is too judicial

One of the dangers within the local context is that commemoration seems to be frequently allocated to judicial means (for example, the Saville Inquiry, Cory Inquiries etc). There is no real encouragement for other processes to be commemorative.

Some participants were wary that people may not have the human, economic or emotional resources for the processes of truth recovery (PSNI, Historical Enquiry Team etc) which Northern Ireland has embarked on in recent years.

Polarisation and attitudes

The issue of polarisation was raised and some felt it was a problem of 'structures' (that is, both plans for commemoration acts and for actual physical sites of commemoration).

The example of the regeneration of the Maze/Long Kesh was given – as there have been very mixed reactions to the plans. Some thought these processes tended to polarise attitudes.

However, it was generally felt that you couldn't get away from the fact that people will be commemorating within whatever political or social contexts. The suggestion was made that private commemoration might be the best way forward for engaging in commemoration without causing offence.

Participants were aware that as conflicting views were co-existing and no political consensus or shared narrative had been reached, then the types of common commemorative practices possible were limited. Another possible danger raised was that by encouraging the discussion in this area we will create a mentality of 'If I don't commemorate in a certain way, then I am not behaving like victims in Northern Ireland should behave'.

It was also recognised that commemorative acts might be therapeutic for some but not for others. There could be a danger that, in highlighting difficult situations or difficult events, intra-community divisions could be instigated.

One of the issues was the possible situation where 'my closure is brought about by the intensification of your guilt'. Can commemoration be done in a creative way so as to avoid this type of pattern evolving?

Memorials as political statements

It was stated that memorials can be seen as political statements to continue to legitimise the past. It was felt by some that most of the existing forms of commemoration are of an exclusive nature, and used to promote political agendas with non-shared narratives.

The question was asked: 'How do we engage with the political voice behind it?'

It was suggested that much reflection was needed on how history is written. Furthermore, it was suggested that commemoration and decisions around commemoration have a role to play and a responsibility in this regard as people become more aware of how historical realities can be manipulated and revised.

6.3 Challenges in tackling issues of commemoration and the practical issues facing different participants

Is it too soon?

The issue of timeliness was one of concern. Any type of commemorative act may still be premature. It was acknowledged that commemoration could just be another way of continuing the conflict, and this ought not to happen.

Safe spaces for commemoration

One of the main challenges identified was the creation of places where symbols exist and people can talk to each other. Many people have never discussed who or what they are, what they believe – even among their friends.

It was suggested that such conversations may provide the opportunity for people to get to know themselves and one another.

The issue of preparation in this regard was highlighted. People needed to prepare themselves and needed to be 'prepared' before they encounter 'the other' in – for example – a commemorative space.

A suggestion was made that perhaps public bodies could be asked to create centres where different groups could memorialise at the same time. It could be a way whereby one community memorialisation could engage with another.

How to commemorate certain groups

A lengthy discussion was had among the small groups on how commemoration of groups occurs. Issues raised during this discussion included:

- Who is doing the commemorating?
- Who and how are they commemorated?
- Are there gaps in who is commemorated – (for example – informers and suspected informers are frequently not commemorated with other members of certain organisations)?
- Is the commemoration of civilians being politically hierarchised?

How to consider the feelings of those already represented?

In discussing the issue of the impact of current memorials and commemorations, a number of issues were raised. For example:

- The need to talk to those represented and seek their perceptions of the commemoration event: Has the memorialisation helped or not?
- What is their opinion of how their loved ones are represented? Not everyone is commemorated and memorialised and some people are forgotten in the process. Some people may want to be forgotten; some may not.

Acts and process

Commemoration can be less about the various acts than about the process involved in getting to the point where we can carry out an act of commemoration.

Political level

One participant said that he was getting e-mails from people asking if the peace lines were coming down in the 'aftermath of the Agreement and ceasefires'? He had to reply that, 'No, they were in fact getting longer and taller.'

It was suggested that since the 1998 Agreement, commemoration had become more politicised and that commemorations are used to construct political narrative and communal solidarity, but also some antagonistic narratives.

'Single' identity commemoration

One participant felt that there was more commemoration-type activity going on since the signing of the 1998 Agreement, with people now feeling the 'space' to acknowledge that which had been repressed for so long.

'Singleness' however could be a false concept in relation to identity. Another way of naming this concept was needed, some said, like 'insider' identity for example.

The example of the Irish Civil War

Some people raised the case of the Irish Civil War and the process of how people initially moved on following the end of the war. It was suggested that perhaps the level of co-existence is the best that can be hoped for at this stage.

Attacks on memorials

One of the ongoing challenges of commemoration and memorialisation, is the attacks on memorials. This begs the question as to whether perhaps the different parties are ready to accept each other's narratives?

6.4 Practical steps regarding commemoration by Healing Through Remembering, the Sub Group and others

Political generosity

The following question was raised: Who do we commemorate and why – should it be the survivors or the dead? Ambiguity could become an issue. However it was suggested that political representatives could ‘do’ acts of generosity that will make inroads towards ‘inclusion’ – for example symbolic gift-giving to the community.

Proposed memorial

One participant mentioned an example of a holocaust memorial of seventeen anonymous, featureless, wood carvings. It was suggested that 3720 figures – anonymous - and not identifiable as belonging to any group or side – could be placed in a shared space, such as outside the Waterfront Hall. The suggested title was “This must never happen again”.

Memorial parks

It was highlighted that the mapping of memorial parks was already taking place. To acknowledge conflicting voices, it was suggested that a website could encourage people to engage, rather than meeting face-to-face at this stage.

Role for Healing Through Remembering

It was suggested during the discussion that Healing Through Remembering could fulfil the role of ‘bridge builder’. It has the ability to connect various groups and create space for them to engage in dialogue, said one participant.

One member of the group suggested that Healing Through Remembering’s Commemoration Sub Group could become an activist group – lobbying for inclusive memorialisation.

One group suggested that HTR could learn how to ‘tap into’ those acts that are taking place, but which are not being carried out by identifiable victims’ groups or community groups. Certain acts such as ‘good neighbourliness’ and ‘the ethic of being respectful’ were mentioned.

Hear different voices

One point made strongly during the discussion was the importance of keeping and preserving the multi-vocal nature of commemorations. Everyone has a story to tell. Everyone needs to be represented. “If we do nothing, the voices of the unheard may never find a voice”, said one participant.

Databases and permanent records were suggested for preserving such details and stories. One suggestion was that a site, such as the Maze, could feature the stories from different perspectives – for example prison officers, loyalists, republicans and so on. However, it would be essential to ensure that one narrative was not allowed to dominate another.

Community-level action and tolerance

It was proposed that encounters with organisations on a community level could encourage sensitivity around acts of commemoration. To illustrate the point, one participant provided the example of a woman who lays a wreath at the spot where her son was killed. Without fail, the wreath is thrown away (probably by people who know the history of the precise place and what happened there). She constantly replaces the wreath – and expresses the wish that people would ‘just learn the good manners to leave the wreath where she lays it.’

Section 7: Rapporteur's Round Up

- **Introduction**
- **Outlining the parameters of 'commemoration'**
- **Sharing and learning lessons on commemoration**
- **The challenges of tackling commemoration issues**
- **Reflection – what needs to be done?**

7.1 Introduction

Gareth Higgins is an academic, writer, broadcaster and researcher. He was invited to act as rapporteur for the event – to provide a summarised account of the day.

In his introduction, he said it was worth stating that the diversity represented by and in Healing Through Remembering (HTR) gives it credibility. This needs to be both affirmed and acknowledged.

There are diverse forms of commemoration, he said, yet the very strength of HTR is indicative of the challenge of commemorating the conflict – and its costs – in a way that does not further contribute to division.

7.2 Outlining the parameters of commemoration

Gareth Higgins referred to Sheila Fitzgerald's definition of commemoration as the 'act of honouring or of serving as a memorial to someone or something; something that honours or preserves the memory of another' and to her mention of three levels of commemoration:

1. Personal – which cannot be dictated
2. Single identity group
3. Mixed identity group

Some of the key values in the debate – as highlighted by John Nagle, are that holistic approaches to commemoration are to be sought, rather than forms of commemoration that continue to divide or that remember only exclusively.

The best kind of commemoration should be able to help us to *understand* the past as well as to *mark* it. It should have the purpose of saying something like 'we honour the old chapter, but a new one has begun.' What is needed, says Higgins, "is combining both the *educational and healing* aspects of commemoration."

7.3 Sharing and Learning Lessons on Commemoration

Gareth Higgins continued his summation.

There are various forms of commemoration:

- Fixed, semi-fixed and non-fixed
- Services and timed commemorations
- Marches, parades and paraphernalia
- Murals
- Music and song
- Artwork, storytelling and expressive forms
- Endowments and commemorative organisations

Other possible forms of commemoration include:

- Memorial book – a one off production over a year of commemorative events
- Record of examples of good practice
- Web-based archive
- Physical space for collection of material such as quilts, stories, artwork or other expressive material

Gareth Higgins drew attention to some stimulating examples of practical steps taken elsewhere, as presented during the day. This included stories from Sri Lanka about the use of print media and the composition of songs. Commemoration in places like Rwanda and Germany has included substantial educational dimensions.

The US AIDS quilt was also mentioned. He suggested that it was recognised as a good template for the different kinds of contribution that commemoration can make. It was used as an opportunity for:

- People to contribute to it
- Consciousness raising
- Community building
- Public mourning
- Political awareness

The opportunity for people to participate in the process of remembering was mentioned: for example gift giving, placing of photographs and artefacts at memorial sites. However he mentioned that the concept of 'gift-giving' could be a subversive one in Northern Irish society, and that HTR could have a role to play in outlining good practice in commemorative 'gift giving'.

7.4 The challenges of tackling commemoration issues

The complex challenges around commemoration were highlighted by Gareth Higgins in his continuing summation. For example, while virtually all combatants are formally commemorated, only thirty per cent of civilians have been commemorated.

There are class, gender and other social factors that affect the commemoration map, he said. Therefore, it is possible that the key issue is the question of shared memory and shared commemoration.

He provided examples of commemoration to illustrate the challenges of tackling commemoration:

- 'Easy' or 'simplistic' commemoration, such as the almost immediate commemoration of the Oklahoma bombing, can serve to 'close off' a debate that, while difficult, can contribute to longer term reconciliation.
- Some people may feel uncomfortable about seeing their loss made into a concrete or tangible form.
- Who has the authority to say which names are and are not included?
- There are often delicate complexities to be teased out: for example, memorialising the victims of the Omagh bomb includes the involvement of local politics, the location of the physical memorial and even questions around the status of unborn children.

It may be that in some contexts there are two or more commemorations for the same event. It is not advisable to make assumptions about shared values and perspectives. How we conceptualise trauma varies – not everyone is affected in the same way. People deal with their experiences of conflict in different ways.

If commemoration is handled incorrectly, it leads only to a closure that is superficial and ultimately to no closure at all.

7.5 Reflection – what needs to be done?

Some feel there is deep resonance with the Irish Civil War as a parallel for commemorating the recent conflict in and about Northern Ireland. This is both in terms of what the war may be believed to be about, and how difficult it is to commemorate it.

Higgins said that in the transitional space we find ourselves in – where no agreed commemoration on a societal level seems likely any time soon, we need to ask ourselves how to be 'usefully disruptive'?

He highlighted one participant's reference to the production of Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden* at the Belfast Festival in 2006 as an example. The production interacted with issues that resonate here without the alienation that sometimes arises from looking 'head on' at our own history. It responded to comments

about a multi-vocal approach to memorialisation. Suggestions that a great play or novel would open up space for people to think about what has happened, has some validity. If such a work gave people the opportunity to enter the 'other side' and to explore what they feel about the conflict, it may also offer a genuine possibility of strengthening empathy."

"How can we give people the opportunity of exploring and reflecting rather than monumentalising the conflict?"

"Having said that, given the scenes at David Ervine's funeral last week² we may be closer to a form of social commemoration than we think. There are at least some tragedies that many of us can agree about".

The final theme highlighted by Higgins was of a contributor's citing of an image from Hannah Arendt: perhaps mortality is not the reference point for commemoration. Birth is a more creative possibility. As humans we are all born – there can always be a new beginning. In society too, newness is possible.

Section 8: At the End of the Day...

- **Questions and issues**
- **Final word of caution**

8.1 Questions and issues

This event has raised important questions and issues around commemoration which need to be addressed if not answered at the end of the day, summarised Gareth Higgins.

- Is it worth asking who may NOT be involved in the process?
- How does commemoration interact with other dimensions of Healing Through Remembering?
- If my closure means the opening of your wound, then how should the Truth Recovery and Acknowledgement Sub Group of HTR operate?
- How do we make this debate accessible to the general public – especially the educational/pedagogic elements of commemoration?
- A key question is ‘what exactly are we remembering?’
- Given that it took almost a hundred years before there was any official commemoration of the Irish famine, is it possible that we may need to make a commitment to explore commemoration over a very long term?
- What is a ‘network of commemoration’? This needs to be clarified and/or established.
- ‘Houses are for the living, memorials are for the dead’. Economic necessity is often considered far more important and pressing than commemoration.
- Will it be impossible to come up with mutual forms of commemoration? While commemoration can be used towards healing, it has become ‘politically correct’ to say that all truth claims about the past are equal, although this may be inaccurate.
- How do people feel about the commercialisation of commemoration – for example political sight-seeing tours around Belfast?
- Does commemoration reinforce victimhood? The Vietnam memorial in Washington DC is still surrounded by veterans who feel ignored by society. It will not be long before major cities in the US have Iraq war veterans, with missing limbs, wandering disenfranchised around the streets. How can we avoid commemoration in Northern Ireland becoming a vehicle for the further victimisation of people who have already suffered enough?
- How can we ensure that commemoration is used to prevent this or the next generation from spiralling backward? There is a danger of memorialising in such a way that it would prepare the ground for a future generation of conflict.
- How can we prevent commemoration from becoming war by another means? Or is that precisely what’s necessary as a transitional stage towards conflict resolution?
- Many victims and survivors of the conflict are not involved in ANY kind of support groups. Many of the functioning victims/survivor groups are partisan. Some people have had no space to make a marker of their grief except in a partisan context. So how do we constructively challenge this and open an inclusive space?
- It took some holocaust survivors half a century to write about their experiences – how do we hold in tension the need to move forward and the fact that addressing human suffering may take more time than any of us have?
- How do we share memories with people we currently don’t yet even talk to?

8.2 Final word of caution

Gareth Higgins rounded off the one day HTR Commemoration round table event with a word of caution:

“You may remember that thirteen years ago (1994), Steven Spielberg’s film Schindler’s List swept the board at the Academy Awards. The constant refrain – all night long – at the ceremony was ‘ We do this because we must never forget, so we can prevent this happening again.’ The world seemed united in commemoration of the Holocaust, its concern for the survivors, and its determination that never again would anything like this be allowed to happen.

Within two weeks of the Oscars ceremony, the Rwandan genocide began.

My hope, and indeed my confident conviction is that the kind of process we have engaged in will produce something more meaningful than Hollywood platitudes.”

Appendices

- **Programme**
- **List of participants**

HEALING THROUGH REMEMBERING Commemoration Sub Group – Round Table Discussion

Considering Commemoration as a Way of Healing through Remembering

Date: Friday 19 January 2007
Venue: Institute of Irish Studies
Time: 10:30am – 4:30pm

Chair: Brandon Hamber
Rapporteur: Gareth Higgins

The objectives of the day are:

- Outlining the parameters of ‘commemoration’ and key values and issues in the ‘commemoration’ debate.
- Sharing and learning lessons on commemoration from other contexts.
- Engaging with the challenges of tackling issues of commemoration in relation to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. What are the practical issues faced by the different participants?
- Exploring whether and how commemoration can be used/strengthened as a mechanism for collectively addressing the past and healing and building relationships.
- Reflecting on what needs to be done, by HTR, this Sub Group and by others.

PROGRAMME

10:30	Arrival and Coffee
11:00	Welcome
11:10	Introduction to the work of the HTR Commemoration Sub Group
11:30	John Nagle – HTR Commissioned Researcher
11:50	Sheila Fitzgerald – HTR Commissioned Researcher
12:10	Discussion with the researchers
12:30	Lunch
13:15	Jude Lal Fernando – Sri Lanka / Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin
14:00	Discussion groups
15:00	Tea/Coffee
15:15	Plenary
16:15	Summary: Dr Gareth Higgins – Rapporteur
16:30	End

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Katie Adams	<i>ISE Student</i>
Roberta Bacic	<i>Independent Consultant & HTR Commemoration Sub Group</i>
Anne Bennett	<i>Quaker House</i>
Kris Brown	<i>Institute of Irish Studies & HTR</i>
Dominic Bryan	<i>Institute of Irish Studies</i>
Colin Caughey	<i>QUB Student's Union & HTR Commemoration Sub Group</i>
Julitta Clancy	<i>Meath Peace Group & HTR Commemoration Sub Group</i>
Maurna Crozier	<i>Community Relations Council</i>
Rev Dr John Dunlop	<i>Former Moderator Presbyterian Church</i>
Jude Lal Fernando	<i>Irish School of Ecumenics</i>
Sheila Fitzgerald	<i>HTR Commemoration Researcher</i>
Dr Tom Fraser	<i>INCORE</i>
Rebecca Gower	<i>ISE Student</i>
Brandon Hamber (Chair)	<i>HTR Core Consultant</i>
Tom Hartley	<i>Belfast City Councillor</i>
Dr Gareth Higgins (Rapporteur)	<i>Independent Consultant</i>
Roy McClelland	<i>Chair of Healing Through Remembering</i>
Aideen McDonald	<i>ISE Student</i>
Sara McDowell	<i>INCORE</i>
Susan McKay	<i>Independent Journalist</i>
Rev Dr Johnston McMaster	<i>Irish School of Ecumenics</i>
Michaela Mackin	<i>Community Relations Council</i>
Martin Melaugh	<i>INCORE – CAIN</i>
Martin Murphy	<i>NOVA/Barnardos</i>
John Nagle	<i>HTR Commemoration Researcher</i>
David Robinson	<i>Belfast City Council</i>
Doris Rohr	<i>Interface & HTR Commemoration Sub Group</i>
Geraldine Smyth	<i>Irish School of Ecumenics & Chair – HTR Commemoration Sub Group</i>
Dr David Stevens	<i>Corrymeela Community</i>
Dr David Tombs	<i>Irish School of Ecumenics</i>
Irwin Turbitt	<i>HTR Truth Recovery and Acknowledgement Sub Group</i>
Elisabetta Viggiani	<i>Institute of Irish Studies</i>
Oliver Wilkinson	<i>Share & HTR Commemoration Sub Group</i>

Kate Turner	<i>HTR Project Co-ordinator</i>
Lainey Dunne	<i>HTR Communications Officer</i>
Sara Templer	<i>HTR Event Administrator and Organiser</i>
Martin Beddeleem	<i>HTR Intern</i>



Contact Details

Healing Through Remembering
Alexander House
17a Ormeau Avenue
Belfast
BT2 8HD

Tel: +44 (0)28 9023 8844

Fax: +44 (0)28 9023 9944

Email: info@healingthroughremembering.org

Website: www.healingthroughremembering.org