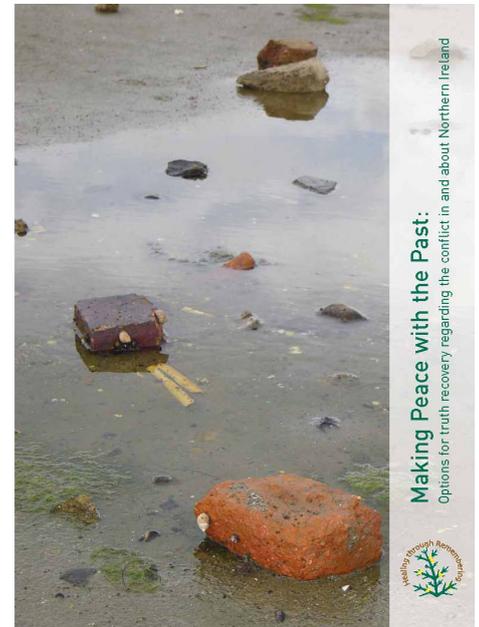




CAN TRUTH RECOVERY HELP MAKE PEACE WITH THE PAST?



Members of the HTR Truth Recovery & Acknowledgement Sub Group at the launch in Belfast



Making Peace with the Past: Options for truth recovery regarding the conflict in and about Northern Ireland was launched at the end of October 2006 at a press conference in Belfast and with parliamentary events in both Westminster (London) and Leinster House (Dublin). The publication of the report was the culmination of almost 18 months hard work, deliberation, discussion and debate.

Making Peace with the Past was written by the Truth Recovery & Acknowledgement Sub Group and Kieran McEvoy, Professor of Law and Transitional Justice at Queen's University Belfast. The Sub Group comprises a diverse range of individuals, acting in a personal capacity, from loyalist, republican, British Army and police backgrounds, as well as individuals from different faith backgrounds, victims and community groups and academic institutions.

The report aims to increase public debate on the important issue of truth recovery, and the wider question of

dealing with the past, to ensure a better future for all. It was written as the Sub Group felt there was a need for an open, honest and inclusive debate as to how the issue of truth recovery should be dealt with.

In addition to the report offering a comprehensive overview of the issues related to truth recovery and outlining five possible options for the local context, *Making Peace with the Past* also looks at the issue of truth recovery, trust and political generosity.

The question of how to deal with the past in relation to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland evokes strong and conflicting feelings and in such a conflicted situation, with high emotional, social and political stakes, it can seem threatening even to discuss these issues. However, without movement towards an agreed process of how to deal with the legacy of the past, not precluding the option of drawing a line under the past, the suffering and conflict will not be acknowledged, still less resolved.

The publication of *Making Peace with the Past* is the result of such an agreed process. Individuals with very different political perspectives and social experiences found the space and the will to discuss many options for truth recovery, to reach agreement on five possible options and to identify ways in which the various parties involved had to change and build trust and confidence with opponents. That such a diverse group was able to discuss and agree on alternative ways forward suggests that society as a whole may be able to engage in a purposeful consideration of these issues.

Across all sectors in society there is a widespread consensus on the desirability of processes and structures which prioritise the needs of victims. If we accept that many victims want to know the truth about what happened to their loved ones and why, then there is a moral imperative for society as a whole to engage seriously in a debate on truth recovery.

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SPOTLIGHT ON ... COMMEMORATION

Considering Commemoration as a way of healing through remembering

Sub Group and 2002 Recommendation

In August 2004, a Network of Commemoration Sub Group was formed to further explore and examine the recommendation which had been outlined in the 2002 Report. The recommendation stated that a network be established that would:

- link together the diverse forms of commemoration and remembering work,
- 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.

The group, like the other Sub Groups of Healing Through Remembering, met regularly but struggled to identify the direction the group should be taking to further examine the 2002 recommendation. There was a lack of clarity about the remit of the group - to form a network or to be a network?

Foundations and Research

Having struggled with this over the course of many meetings the Sub Group returned to the foundations of the recommendation and asked itself what is commemoration? To help inform its thinking on the issue research on commemoration was commissioned on behalf of the Sub Group. Two research papers looked at what is commemoration, what are the parameters and key values of commemoration, what lessons can be learned from other contexts and what is the role of commemoration in societies emerging from conflict in healing and building relationships?

Roundtable

The papers - by John Nagle and Sheila Fitzgerald - were presented at a well-attended roundtable event, "Considering commemoration as a way of healing through remembering", which was held in the Institute of Irish Studies at Queen's University Belfast on Friday, 19

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Making Peace with the Past is presented as a tool to help broaden and deepen the public debate on the issue of truth recovery. To help facilitate and stimulate this debate a series of public meetings are being arranged (see page 4 for details).

HTR and the Truth Recovery & Acknowledgement Sub Group encourage and welcome contributions to the debate and feedback on both the report and the issue of truth recovery as a vehicle to making peace with the past. Comments and feedback can be sent to HTR Offices, emailed to truthrecovery@healingthroughremembering.org or posted on the HTR website forum on www.healingthroughremembering.org

Copies of *Making Peace with the Past*, a short summary and a legal opinion on the viability of prosecutions based on historical enquiry can be downloaded from the HTR website or ordered from the HTR offices.

January 2007. The roundtable also featured guest speaker, Jude Lal Fernando, a Sri Lankan student at the Irish School of Ecumenics, who spoke of his experiences of commemoration in the international context. The event brought new views and opinions into the Sub Group debate and addressed issues and challenges relating to commemoration.

Key themes and issues in relation to commemoration which were raised at the roundtable event include:

- Inclusiveness
- Commemoration and education
- Relationship between commemoration, healing and perpetuating further conflict
- Good practices in commemoration
- Creation of space
- Commemoration as a political act
- Narratives and sectarianism

Future Plans

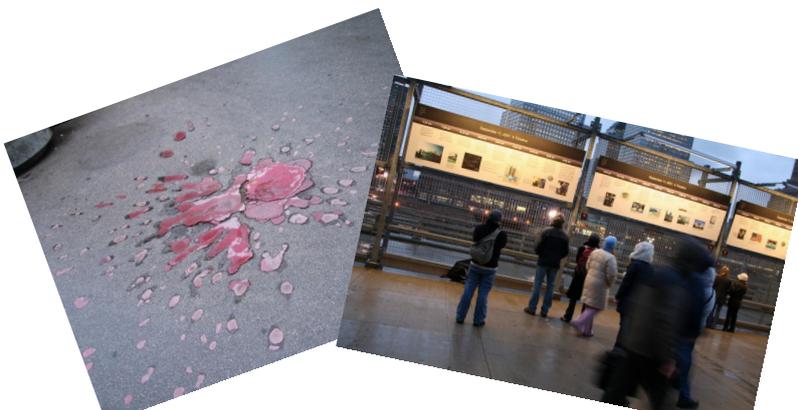
A report of the roundtable and the research papers will be available shortly. The Sub Group is also considering its direction and its role within the wider work of HTR.

Other Projects

The Sub Group also runs film screening for members of HTR. The first two screenings were *Bloody Sunday: A Derry Diary* and *State of Fear*. More details on the film screenings will be available on www.healingthroughremembering.org once confirmed.

If you are interested in the work of the Commemoration Sub Group and would like to discuss further please contact the HTR offices either by telephone or email.

Photos clockwise from top left: Saravejo Rose; Viewing Platform at Ground Zero New York; Memorial Sculpture at the Kigali Memorial Centre, Rwanda



OTHER VOICES

A place where a diversity of views are expressed

HOW SOON IS TOO SOON?

by Dr. Debbie Lisle

From the very beginning of our current debates about how to commemorate the troubles, there has been a constant refrain that it is somehow “too soon”. That somehow the inhabitants and participants in Northern Ireland’s recent political history are too fragile, too traumatized, or still too involved, to even consider confronting the past.

I remember hearing this argument at the public meetings over what to do with the Maze/Long Kesh, and I have heard it repeated many times since. My initial (and often frustrated) response has been to point out other communities who have begun to commemorate as soon as a peace process is underway. These include the roses of Sarajevo that were painted on the streets to mark the dead while the conflict was still going on, the viewing platforms at Ground Zero which were constructed only 4 months after the attack, and a number of memorials in Rwanda which were in operation well before the 10 year genocide commemorations in 2004.

Why, then, does the “too soon” argument continue to flourish in Northern Ireland? Why are we so special? Or indeed, so fragile? It can’t be because the troubles were the most horrific instance of ethnic violence ever, because they weren’t (and besides, who wants to get into the game of comparing trauma, as if “my wound is bigger than yours” answers anything). And, continuing community tensions aside, it can’t be because the peace process hasn’t had time to bed down, because it has been developing for well over a decade. So what is it? Why are we so afraid of commemoration?

On some days – on good days – I think we use “too soon” as shorthand to signify the difficulties inherent in any commemoration process. It suggests that our discussions in Northern Ireland mirror some of the debates over Peter Eisenman’s controversial Berlin *‘Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe’*, or the arguments over Michael Arad’s *‘Reflecting Absence’* memorial currently being built at Ground Zero. This reading makes us rather sophisticated – we nod approvingly at James Young’s assessment that monuments and memorials are inherently authoritarian. In this sense, we use “too soon” to resist forms of architectural oppression and fulfil Young’s claim that it is better to have a thousand years of memorial competitions than to resolve the problem of commemoration once and for all (see Young’s “To Build a Monument” at <http://www.volumeproject.org/plain/object.php?object=819&year=&num>)

But on most days, to be honest, I think we use “too soon” to put brakes on the entire process of commemoration, especially when it forces us to confront irreconcilable differences. This reflects an entirely negative politics that stubbornly blocks all debate, dialogue and discussion over antagonistic issues. In this reading, silence reigns – it is not just “too soon”, it is also “too much, too loud, and too difficult”. “Too soon” here signifies an unwillingness to confront the radical changes that have taken place in Northern Ireland over the past 10 years. “Too soon” allows us to speak for victims, or worse, to falsely claim victim status ourselves. It encourages us to opt out

of the awkward process of reconciliation and continue to frame the universe through familiar binaries and tired categories.

I realize that the claim of “too soon” can be used as a coping mechanism to shut out painful memories. But this assumes that traditional forms of commemoration can’t do justice to those memories, or provide an appropriate space to explore and engage with hidden trauma. My point is that it *is* possible to create such a space, and that we would do well to learn from the post-Apartheid museums in South Africa, and the genocide memorials in Rwanda. I am not denying that the troubles were horrific. Nor am I suggesting that the process of commemoration is pain-free. Certainly not. But what I am saying is that we should all take note when we hear ourselves, or someone else, use the phrase “it is too soon” in an effort to stop discussions of commemoration from taking place. In the end, “too soon” gets us nowhere.



Dr. Debbie Lisle is a Senior Lecturer in international politics and cultural studies at Queen’s University Belfast. Her current research focuses on the relationship between tourism and conflict.

If you are interested in contributing to future editions of the HTR Information Bulletin please contact [Lainey Dunne](mailto:Lainey.Dunne@healingthroughremembering.org) — newsletter@healingthroughremembering.org

Copies of previous other voices columns are available to read and comment on in HTR Forum - www.healingthroughremembering.org

This is an opinion column, the views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of all members of Healing Through Remembering.

AT A GLANCE ...

Storytelling

The Storytelling Sub Group continue to explore and discuss the values, definitions and principles of storytelling with the view to producing a good practice guide.

Day of Reflection

The Day of Reflection Sub Group are considering all feedback received to the proposal for a Day of Private Reflection to be held on 21 June.

Living Memorial Museum

Following the tremendous response to the Open Call for Ideas the Sub Group are now considering all the submissions to decide how best to display them. The *Belfast Telegraph* ran a substantial feature on Dr. Kris Brown, the research fellow conducting the audit of artefacts relating to the conflict, on behalf of the Sub Group.

Miscellaneous

The Independent ran a lengthy feature

on *Making Peace with the Past* on 29 November 2006. Visit <http://tinyurl.com/y6c6d2> to read the full article.

Forum

The HTR Forum on www.healingthroughremembering.org is fully functional again. It is a place for you to express your opinion and views on both the work of HTR and other related issues. Log on and join the discussion.

PUBLICATIONS AND EVENTS

HTR EVENTS

MAKING PEACE WITH THE PAST - OPEN MEETINGS

HTR's series of open meetings on *Making Peace with the Past* restart on Monday 5 February 2007. Dates and venues as follows:

- Mon 5 Feb Belfast
An Culturann @ 7pm
- Mon 12 Feb Armagh
St. Patrick's Trian @ 7pm
- Tues 20 Feb Newry
Newry Arts Centre @ 7pm
- Tues 27 Feb Dungannon
Community Relations Council @ 7pm
- Mon 5 Mar Ballymena
Seven Towers Leisure Centre @ 7:45pm
- Tues 13 Mar Omagh
Tara Centre @ 7pm
- Mon 19 Mar London
Friends House, Euston Road @ 1:30pm
- Tues 27 Mar Monaghan
Corcaghan Community Centre @ 7pm
- Tues 3 Apr Derry/Londonderry
St. Columbs Park House @ 7pm
- Tues 17 Apr Lisburn
Island Centre @ 7pm
- Tues 24 Apr Lurgan
Town Hall @ 7pm
- Mon 30 Apr Dublin
Liberty Hall @ 7pm

Please visit www.healingthroughremembering.org for further details.

EVENTS AND INFORMATION FROM OTHER ORGANISATIONS

International Women's Day Conference

3 March 2007

Glencree

For more info contact womensgroup@glencree.ie

Beyond the Box Seminar

"Racism ... the new Sectarianism?"

6 March 2007

The Junction, Derry/Londonderry

More details from earlstorey@hardgospel.net

The Two Sides of St. Patrick

A weekend retreat led by Fr Laurence Freeman and

Brendan McAllister

16-18 March 2007

Corrymeela

More details can be found at www.corrymeela.org

Intercultural and Anti Racism Week

19 - 25 March 2007

For more details on events, information updates etc please visit www.nccri.ie

Making Visible, Giving Voices - Creative Strategies in Social Context

31 May 2007

Interface, University of Ulster

Interface is keen to hear from potential presenters for this event. Please contact Doris Rohr - d.rohr@ulster.ac.uk for further discussion

Report of the Police Ombudsman - Operation Ballast

Now available to read and download in the publications section of www.policeombudsman.org

Support for Victims and Survivors - Addressing the Human Legacy

Final report of Bertha McDougall (former Interim Commissioner for Victims and Survivors)

Now available to read and download on www.cvsni.org

If you have any events you would like included in the next issue please email them to newsletter@healingthroughremembering.org

HTR REPORTS TO ORDER

Copies of all reports produced and published by Healing Through Remembering are available to order direct from the Healing Through Remembering offices or online in the publications section of the HTR website

www.healingthroughremembering.org

New publications now available to order:

Acknowledgement & Its Role in Preventing Future Violence

Making Peace with the Past: Options for truth recovery regarding the conflict in and about Northern Ireland

The Viability of Prosecution Based on Historical Enquiry



Editor: Lainey Dunne

with thanks to the HTR Newsletter Sub Group