Trans-Generational Memory: Narratives of World Wars in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland

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Abstract

People situate their personal lives in a macro history through crafting trans-generational narratives. Trans-generational historical narrative is simultaneously about personal micro interactions and emotions, and about the large process of macro history. It lies between 'small' and 'big' narrative spheres and plays an important role in the formation of the ethnic, national and cultural identities of individuals. By examining carefully this type of autobiography, collective social experience and large cause-effect relationships in social processes that are beyond personal will and control can be explored. This is what Charles Tilly encourages narrative researchers to do. This paper analyses World War stories told by two persons living in post-conflict Northern Ireland who were born after the end of the Second World War. It shows that the World War experiences of the storytellers' parents or ancestors, and the storytellers' own experiences during and after the conflict, are interwoven to form a macro historical consciousness. In these narratives, the past is evoked to become a basis for the storyteller's life to be re-interpreted. These are narrative practices in which an individual becomes a historical subject by telling his or her own life: in one sense, becoming subject to the macro memory framework, and in another sense, becoming a subject of the practice of crafting history.

Keywords: *Autobiography, Family Narrative, Trans-Generational Memory, Collective Experience, Post-Conflict Transitions, Northern Ireland, World Wars, Commemoration*

Autobiography: 'standard story'?

1.1 In this paper I contribute to the theme of this special issue, 'big structures, large processes, huge comparisons: narrative from minor to major', by examining stories that lie between 'small' and 'big' narrative spheres. World War stories transmitted from the parents' to the children's generation, which are narrated in a particular political-social context of post-conflict Northern Ireland, provide the case that I focus on. The data I discuss are individual autobiographies about trans-generational memory of historical experience. These stories are about a macro historical event of a national or international level, and simultaneously about the storyteller's personal experience and their micro interactions with their close relatives. The careful examination of these stories shows that individuals construct their view of the world by seeing their own lives as situated within a big social current, which is often beyond their personal experience and control. The analysis provided shows that personal life stories serve as appropriate data for examining narratives of collective experience.

1.2 In *Stories, Identities and Political Change*, Charles Tilly (2002) criticizes any sociology that relies too much on people's accounts of social life. He writes that most of these accounts can be categorised as 'standard stories', the focus of which involves independent and self-propelled characters. According to him, these stories can only grasp limited parts of social life and processes, and the limitations are serious, because he regards social processes as the product of inter-personal or inter-organizational interactions, the outcome of which can neither be foreseen, nor controlled, by the participants of the interactions. To overcome this problem, Tilly advocates what he calls 'superior stories', which include all major actors of the social process, illustrate complex and collective interactions, and pay attention to indirect cause-effect relations, thus avoiding solipsism (Tilly 2002: xiii).

1.3 Students of autobiography have to consider Tilly's criticisms seriously. Autobiography has attracted

many researchers: human identity, personal or collective, is often described as being constructed as an autobiography, a story which orders events that happened in the past to the main character on a temporal axis, and this narrative structuring gives meanings to human experience (Bruner 1986; 1991; Polkinghorne 1988; Hinchman & Hinchman 1997; Brockmeier 2001). Furthermore, this concept of the autobiographical self has a strong tendency to locate the actions and intentions of the main character as the centre of the story. Qi Wang and Jens Brockmeier argue that one of the most dominant types of autobiography is based on 'a deep rooted Cartesian mode' of thinking that emphasises 'individuality, autonomy and power in explicating and evaluating human lives'; and this thinking leads to the assumption that autobiography is 'a private, personal matter determined by intrinsic mechanisms such as personality and neurocognitive operations' (Wang and Brockmeier 2002: 47).

1.4 However, some interesting questions arise here: Does this principle of the 'story of the protagonist's free will' apply to every autobiographical self-perception? Do all people always construct their life story in the form Tilly calls a 'standard story'? Is a story about 'who I am' always limited in scope to the time in which the person lives? If we think of ourselves, it is not unusual for us to perceive a macro dynamics of national or global politics that impacts on our micro daily life. Standard stories may, indeed, be a powerful narrative mode of autobiography in today's society, and can seem sometimes more powerful than other types of stories. However, this may not be necessarily because people always shape their life into standard stories; it may also be because narrative inquiry researchers have spent much time extracting and analysing the 'standard stories' part of people's autobiographical perceptions, paying less attention to the remaining part.

1.5 Of course an individualistic type of autobiography is not a universal way of understanding the self, but a culturally specific perception of the modern West self (Wang & Brockmeier 2002; Nelson 2003). For Mark Freeman, even the lives of individuals in the modern West are based on the 'deep strata of history'. He writes: 'the modern self, for all of its countless autobiographies, is a self that is in large measure unconscious of its own historical formation' (Freeman 2002: 203). From this, he argues the importance of cultural memory for the study of autobiographical self. Citing Edward Shils, he writes: 'the individual as he [sic] perceives himself includes things which are not bounded by his own experiences', such as others' experiences he hears, and many other types of cultural texts we encounter in everyday life (Freeman 2002: 203; see also Brockmeier 2002). This aspect of cultural memory in personal autobiography becomes particularly visible regarding the experience of war and collective violence. In such a situation, political dynamics fundamentally condition personal lives and everyday micro interactions, and therefore leave a deep mark on people's self-perceptions. This is one of the reasons that Holocaust studies have provided rich materials for examining the issue of autobiography and collective memory (Neuman 1998; King 2000).

1.6 Tilly himself is well-aware that personal stories can have a macro historical and social perspective. In the same chapter as he defines 'standard stories', he lists several means to avoid the weaknesses of narrative studies. One means is to 'simulate and investigate what happens when participants in standard stories become aware of and respond deliberately to cause-and-effect relations that are indirect, incremental, interactive, unintended, collective' and so on (Tilly 2002: 31). While Tilly regarded the construction of superior stories as an obligation on social scientists, he also considered that the people who are research subjects can produce an account which is beyond the limited perspective of 'standard stories'. Narratives of memory transmitted over generations is an important example of this, I propose.

1.7 I go on to discuss memories of the two World Wars narrated in the social-cultural context of post-conflict Northern Ireland. These were originally collected as part of the data for my PhD research, which sought to examine the relationship between personal and collective memory in a case study of Northern Ireland. For this research, I conducted life-story interviews in 2006 and 2007 with 24 individuals, from both Protestant and Catholic communities. The majority of my interviewees had been involved in grass-roots community work, as were the two people whose stories are later examined. I chose people in community work as my interviewees because my interest was particularly in the family and community networks through which people cope with everyday difficulties and, more significantly, the collective stories that developed through these micro networks.

1.8 I was also interested in how individuals in Northern Ireland would talk about well-known historic events. The importance of history as a political tool in Northern Ireland is widely acknowledged in the scholarship on Irish culture and history. There are many studies of the politics of public commemorations in Northern Ireland (McBride 1996; Jarman 1997; Bryan 2000; McIntosh 2000), and similarly about the World Wars (Jeffrey 2000; Loughlin 2002). However, little research has empirically explored people's perceptions of historic events that have a deep association with a particular political symbolism. Through the life story method, my research is concerned with the way in which a particular historical memory achieves significance for individual lives.

1.9 These two interests, in everyday memory and micro networks, and in the historical perceptions of individuals, did not initially seem linked. However, they turned out to be in an important relationship during the course of analysis. To put it succinctly, my research found that a narrative about a historic event which happened a long time ago could come to be interwoven into individual autobiography through intimate relationships within a family. This is why I focus on family memory here as a way to examine narratives with a big social and historical scope.

'Echoes of the past' in family narratives

2.1 Our life stories are not necessarily only about ourselves, but also about others. Memories of the time we spent with our mother, father, siblings, grandparents, or other close relatives, can be important constituents of our childhood memory. Especially, relationships with parents can provide a vital basis on which personal identity is constructed. People revisit their childhood memory about their relationship with their parents retrospectively, to make sense of their later experience. Molly Andrews, for instance,

examines how people re-form the memory of their mothers so as to connect the memory to their political orientation and activities at a later life stage (Andrews 2002). In the field of literary criticism, Nicola King looks at how people explore their family past in order to reconstruct their own sense of selves, to find an origin of the self, or as an act of resistance (King 2000: 8-9). The importance of family history for individuals is also recognised in the field of psychotherapy: Anne Schützenberger comments that learning our family's past enables us to understand 'who we are and who we could be' (Schützenberger 1998: 3). Both King and Schützenberger note that the discovery of a previously unknown family past can drastically affect a person's views of life.

2.2 Parents' life stories can make their children aware of the collective history within which their life was situated. Stories about the historical experience of past generations, of war, political upheaval, immigration and so on, brings into light the family environment in which the child grew up (Waterston & Rylko-Bauer 2008). The life stories of parents are means through which somewhat abstract images and ideas of 'traditions' and 'cultures' become personified and graspable to their children. The family historian Ruth Finnegan, for example, did not recognise how the images of traditions she learned from her parents 'had moulded my own experience of the world until they were actually verbalized in my mother's autobiography' (Finnegan 2006[1994]: 178). The history of Irish people and their emigration to North America became meaningful to her when embedded in her mother's life story. As such, the narratives of parents can inseparably be woven into narratives of the self in multiple ways.

2.3 When people recollect stories of past generations, the subject-perspective of the original story is transformed. Earlier experience is re-interpreted, as an episode with a different emphasis and plotline, in order for a later life story to achieve more coherence. Nevertheless, the aim of this article is not in reconstructing older experiences; its focus is on exploring the narrative function that interweaves family pasts and personal self-perception. Hans Georg Gadamer comments that our parents lives are read as 'an echo of the past', a sounding around which we form our own historical consciousness (cited in Freeman 2002: 204). The narratives in this article show how an individual becomes a historical subject by telling his or her own life, in one sense, becoming subject to the macro memory framework, and in another sense, becoming a subject of the practice of 'crafting' history.

Public memory of World Wars in Northern Ireland

3.1 Each of the two stories analysed here is about the storyteller's interpretation of the history of the World Wars. Both stories reflect the idea of cross-community cultural reconciliation that became popular in the recent peace process in Northern Ireland. They both are constructed so as to make a contrast with older public memory of the Wars. I provide a brief overview of the social and political context of their act of storytelling, as well as the historical and cultural background of public war memory in Northern Ireland, to show why the memory of the Wars is so connected to their personal identity, and the complex meaning-making practice in which they are engaged through the storytelling.

3.2 The violent conflict in Northern Ireland lasted for around thirty years and met a political 'end' with the Belfast Agreement in 1998. When I use the term 'post-conflict', this means the physical violence that was excessive previously became rarely seen on the streets of Northern Ireland. Of course, the society of today's Northern Ireland does have other types of conflict. For example, emotional and symbolic frictions and tensions between different communities have been reported recently (Shirlow 2003). Nevertheless, despite deep-rooted distrusts between different social groups, the society as a whole is now seeking for ways to cope with the memory of past violence in order not to repeat it.

3.3 This reconciliation process has involved a reconsideration of public historical memory. From a national level to a micro community level, re-interpretation of historic events that have hitherto served as political symbols of either Irish republicanism or Ulster loyalism is now occurring, and these events include the two World Wars in the twentieth century. Historically, these wars, particularly the First, have been associated with the Protestant-unionist community in Ireland. The Unionist government, whose *raison d'être* was in claiming Northern Ireland to be within the British Kingdom, regarded the services of Ulster soldiers in the wars as a historical proof of the Britishness of Ulster, and it made the war commemoration a state-authorised political ritual in Northern Ireland (Loughlin 2002). In particular, the Battle of the Somme in 1916, in which thousands of Ulster Protestant soldiers lost their lives, achieved a significant place within the Protestant-unionist history as a myth of martyrdom (Hennessey 1998; Officer 2001). However, while the deaths of Ulster Protestant soldiers were commemorated by the state, those of many Irish Catholic soldiers in the British Army were neglected. They did not receive much respect after Irish Republicans seized power in the south of Ireland; Catholic ex-servicemen were symbolically contrasted with those who fought in the Easter Rising in 1916, which has been one of the heroic events in Irish republican history. Jane Leonard's oral history study shows Catholic ex-servicemen experienced a difficult ambivalence about their national identities in post-war Southern Ireland and recalled 'the fingers of scorn' pointed at them (Leonard 1997: 62). The political symbolism was even more polarised around the Second World War. While independent Ireland remained neutral, many Catholics in Northern Ireland fought as British soldiers. This widened the gap of historical experience between the north and south, making the national identity of Northern Irish Catholics more ambivalent. With this historical background, the World Wars came to be seen as symbolising Ulster unionism, Protestantism and loyalism during the conflict in Northern Ireland.

3.4 Nevertheless, with the development of the peace process of Northern Ireland, the First World War became seen as a shared experience between Irish Protestants and Catholics, and between Britain and Ireland. For example, a new war museum, the Somme Heritage Centre, emphasising Catholic Irish also experienced the Great War, was opened in the outskirts of Belfast in 1994. At an international level, the Irish Peace Tower, a memorial dedicated to the dead from two Irish divisions in the British Army, one was mostly Irish Catholics and the other Ulster Protestants, was built at Messines (Belgium). Its unveiling ceremony in 1998 involved Queen Elizabeth II and the Irish President, Mary McAleese. According to Phillip Orr, this commemoration event was:

the result of a reconciliatory Irish cross-border project that stressed the need to incorporate into modern public memory the shared experiences of those battle fields which were an equally dire place for all Irish soldiers and their families, irrespective of their political allegiances (Orr 2002: 185).

3.5 The stories now analysed were recounted in this particular political context, in which the hitherto firmly established political symbolism of historic events was being transformed. This transition of public memory provided two individuals with an opportunity to re-encounter their family history, and their own identity, alike.

Trans-generational and autobiographical memory

4.1 The interviews I conducted for my PhD research were all semi-structured. I asked the interviewees to talk about whatever they remembered well, about the period of violence, or their early childhood memories. I originally planned on asking a question about their memory of the World Wars if they did not speak about their perceptions of macro history. However, many of the interviewees mentioned family memory of the wars before being asked.

4.2 Anne, a woman who grew up in a predominantly Protestant working-class area, talked about her great-uncle who was in the Navy and was killed during the First World War. She regarded her great-uncle's death as an example of the sequence of war and conflicts experienced by every generation of her family: to her, the First World War was a part of her family history, although she had a rather sarcastic view of it. Another interviewee, Claire, also mentioned the World Wars when I asked about her family history. Her parents were a mixed-religion couple and her mother converted from Protestantism to Catholicism when they got married. Claire said in her home there were some photos of relatives who served in the Army during these wars, which gave her a sense that her family was connected to 'two cultures'. In this latter case, having family members who served in the British Army is considered to be part of the 'culture' of the Protestant community.

4.3 Nevertheless, for some Catholic interviewees, the memory of close relatives who fought in the World Wars raises thorny issues about their national identity. Eileen, a Catholic woman from a working class estate in Belfast, is one of them. Her story about the wars is filled with a mixture of complex emotions, such as anger, embarrassment, resentment, which in fact deeply echoes her difficult struggle to retrieve her personal self-esteem. Furthermore, because of the emotional projection of her own life onto historical memory, the new public enterprise of memory reconciliation at a post-conflict stage gave her a stimulus to reconcile the conflict within herself.

4.4 Eileen says her father was in the British Army during the Second World War. For Eileen, who grew up listening to her father's stories, the war is undoubtedly part of her family history. However, she had the feeling that her family was excluded from public war commemorations because they are Catholics:

A lot of people from the Catholic community were in the war, and died for... well, died in the world wars. But we don't recognise the Remembrance Day, the poppy and ... That's claimed by the other community. And we don't exist there.

4.5 In the politico-cultural context of Northern Ireland, red poppies, a symbol of the British war dead, have been associated not only with Britishness but also with unionism, Protestantism, and even with the Protestant (loyalist) paramilitaries that often committed sectarian attacks against Catholic civilians. To Eileen, the flowers symbolise the neglect of the deeds of the Irish Catholic soldiers. She recounted a story about why many Catholic soldiers joined the British Army:

Those people who died in the Second World War, and even in the First, in the Somme, there were a lot of Irish. Because they [Britain] put them into the front, also my father. [...] Somebody said if Irish joined and helped England, Ireland would be united. [...] And then Churchill was supposed to do something similar in the Second World War. He posted some kind of deal that if people joined up, there would be the unification of Ireland. So a lot of people joined thinking this is gonna help Ireland as well. And another reason was that there was no work for them, they joined the British Army and sent their money back home. [...] They did not join the Army for Queen and country or whatever. [...]

My daddy also joined the British army because there was no work here. And his brother was republican-minded. So that was a pretty hard brothers, they were only two of them, one was in the Army and one was a republican. So that a lot of family were like that on the Catholic side, because you are living here and you're attached to the two histories.

4.6 It does not matter much to the focus of this paper whether the 'deals' mentioned by Eileen were historical facts or not. More important is that a person who has a community background like Eileen's interprets the history of the wars as British 'betrayal'. This story of the betrayed Irish explains for her why so many Irish soldiers, including her father, fought as British soldiers while other Irish people fought against Britain for independence. Her story claims that these people did not fight for the British cause, but to help Ireland become united. Her emphasis 'they did not join the Army for Queen and country or whatever' shows her effort not to portray her father and other Irish soldiers as national traitors, understanding the two wars as two broken promises. Eileen also claims that the award of the George Cross and Victoria Cross to Catholics was never publicly recognized:

Now we started to do [recognize them] [...] but it was only a long after they died and we've never recognized them. Because he was a Catholic, he didn't count. And even now, people did brave things that just aren't recognized, because they were second class citizens. So

you just didn't count, you don't exist. So that was a whole history.

4.7 It is important to think *who* has neglected the Irish Catholic soldiers in Eileen's story. When she says 'we've never recognized them', it sounds as if she means the lack of acknowledgement of their deeds within the Irish nationalist community, or the Northern Irish Catholic community, under the influence of the Irish republican ideology. Nevertheless, shortly after that, she moves her focus to Catholics being treated as 'second class citizens'. In this context, those doing the treating here are obviously not Catholics themselves but those surrounding them, the Northern Irish state, the Protestant community, and the British state. Here, her anger and resentment wells up and disrupts the coherence of her story. What she claims throughout this story is that 'you's, meaning 'we' in her terms, have never counted and this is 'a whole history'.

4.8 This anger and resentment seems to resonate with her own life story. She says that she had always been afraid of showing her identity as Irish. Her estate, which has widely been regarded as a republican stronghold, experienced intense counter-insurgency operations by security forces in the 1970s and 80s. She herself has many violent memories of security searches: night-time house searches and body checks were daily phenomena, in which she felt she was treated as 'a scum'. Because of bad relations between the Catholic community and the security forces, especially in the early stage of the conflict, Eileen feels that Catholics have been the object of institutional violence. Interestingly, when she describes her anger towards the way in which British forces treated her community, the sense of being Irish comes out of embarrassment and resentment:

I could never felt proud to be Irish. [...] Everything was just degrading and so embarrassing. You grew up in your own area, and you haven't got anybody harmed, but they treated you like that. [...] You [British soldiers] came from England, you shouldn't be here, why you stop me on my own street, I live here... I should have been able to walk about this area without being stopped and searched, and so should people who live here. [...] I half understand why they do it. This is a high-risk area. We're in the same boat with those IRA people, with those who murdered police and murdered soldiers. So they were just on edge when patrolling. But the other half we think, why should we have been treated like that. We just live here like basically everybody else.

4.9 As I write in analyzing another narrative case (Sakai 2008: 7), the sociologist Thomas Scheff argues that self-esteem is constituted by a delicate balance of shame and pride (Scheff 1994). The sense of being humiliated makes people replay the original scene of embarrassment repeatedly in their imagination, 'thinking about what they might have said and done', for 'they are obsessed with the scene, and the obsession is compulsive; they cannot stop replaying it' (Scheff 1994: 289). Since damaged self-esteem makes a person feel vulnerable, shame is often covered over by anger or offensive attitudes towards others. Scheff also suggests that this emotional mechanism of damaged self-esteem, shame and anger can bring about repeated cycles of interethnic hatred.

4.10 My two interviews with Eileen were filled with stories about embarrassment and intimidation associated with security searches. She had clearly 'replayed' these experiences a number of times in her mind before, although it must have been a hard memory to recall. Eileen's words, 'you came from England [...] why you stop me on my own street, I live here', suggests that pride emerges together with the sense of being damaged: her identity as Irish arises as a restoration of the damaged self. This can be seen, perhaps, as an example of identity as 'becoming', not only being, as Stuart Hall (1990) discusses.

4.11 This nature of identity as a desire to achieve a stable ground – together with the sense of the lack of such a ground – is also seen in Eileen's feeling towards Irishness. She cannot be proud of being Irish, not only because she has not been respected as such by those who are not Irish, but also because she feels distant from what is normally considered as the representative of Irish people in Northern Ireland. During the interviews, she bitterly criticised the IRA ideology of military struggle. She says she 'halfly understand[s]' why people were orientated towards the armed struggle when feeling humiliated. Nevertheless, to her, armed struggle had only worsened the situation in her area. 'Because for one soldier shot dead', she says, 'two or three innocent people were killed for the retaliation for him'. She continues,

The tricolour has been in the IRA campaign [...]. I would never fly the tricolour here. I don't even like to see them here, because of the political, whole background to it. [...] In America, or anywhere else in the world, the tricolour means Irish, that is an Irish thing. But here it's a political thing because it's [...] war and blood and whatever. You have all the conflict and that kind of things with your own country. It's awful. You can't be Irish here, you can't be Irish here.

4.12 Being an active community worker, Eileen was once involved in a local skill-development project funded by the British government. Her personal belief was that the community had to rely on government funding, at least to some extent, in order to create its own future, for her children and grandchildren's generation. However she was accused from within her own community of being pro-British, which made her feel that her work for the community was not valued properly.

4.13 Eileen's story of the World Wars serves in her own life story as its metaphor. In her life story, she is not respected as a proper citizen outside her community, and by many British soldiers, as long as she claims herself as Irish. She works for her community, funded by the British government, to create a future for her children; however, in the community her work is tainted by this association. In her story about the wars, Irish soldiers joined the British Army to help their families, believing this would help Ireland be united. However their efforts were ignored by Britain, and furthermore, they were regarded as traitors against their own country, Ireland. As such, she forms the story of her own autobiographical self and a story of macro historical events simultaneously, making one a mirror image of the other. Just as she 'replays' the scenes

of embarrassment that damaged her personal self-esteem, she also 'replays' the historical scene of 'betrayal' by Britain that damaged the collective self-esteem of the Irish in Northern Ireland.

4.14 Her life story and this historical memory, however, found a way out from the cycle of resentment, self-denial and despair through the recent politico-cultural current of reinterpreting World War memory. Eileen watched the unveiling ceremony of the Irish Peace Tower in Belgium in 1998 on TV. She thought it 'lovely' that the Irish President McAleese was there, next to the Queen, officially commemorating Irish soldiers in the Great War. To Eileen, it was important that McAleese was from Belfast:

It gives me a sense of pride. 'Cause somebody from here is actually a president of Ireland. That's very ironic, [...] the president of Ireland actually came from Northern Ireland. It's not recognised as a part of Ireland. [...] So that's like you can feel of better Irishness. We're still able to claim I'm Irish.

4.15 Eileen's story contains multiple layers of ambivalence. Being embarrassed on the reason that she was from an 'Irish area' nurtured her strong sense of being Irish, as a complex emotional mixture of shame and pride. However, she could not fully sympathise with what has widely been regarded as the representative Irish voice in Northern Ireland, the IRA and Sinn Féin. Overall, she has felt that she could not be 'anything' in terms of nationality. With such a background, the vision of Mary McAleese alongside the Queen in the commemoration ceremony worked for Eileen as a restoration of her damaged ethnic identity, and her family history, simultaneously.

4.16 This is a process in which an individual becomes integrated into an official national framework of war memory. Perhaps Eileen was thinking of her own father, who fought in the Second World War, as watching the commemoration of the First World War. When she felt 'it was lovely' to see Irish President in the war ceremony, she welcomed that the Republic of Ireland giving national recognition to Irish soldiers in the British Army, including her father. Nevertheless her story reveals painful emotional conflict that continued for decades, lying behind the integration of an individual to macro historical discourse. This kind of ambivalence is I suggest invisible in the analysis of the macro politics of national war commemorations.

4.17 The second narrative is Sean's. Sean is a man in his 50s who has been working with a community reconciliation organization. In the interview, Sean shows his enthusiasm for fighting against sectarianism. He repeatedly said that the main problem of the society is that there are always two different versions of stories, that of unionists and that of nationalists: both Protestant and Catholic communities have considered themselves just as victims, attributing all the cause of the conflict to the other side alone. He further stated that most people have never been touched by the other version of story: the main cause of sectarianism is misunderstanding and the lack of interaction between two communities. He sees his work as to bridge the two divided stories.

4.18 Sean clearly states that his own perspective is by no means neutral. He was born in a working class Catholic family, and himself was influenced by republicanism in the early stage of his life. However, when it comes to the political attitudes of his own family, he spoke somewhat ambiguously. He says his family members were enthusiastic supporters of the Provisional IRA, which he is not. He regards 'old-fashioned republicanism' is biased just as the unionism is. He comments: "well, my father was anti-British, but he was not anti-Protestant."

4.19 During his interview, Sean recounted his recent experience related to the Great War. A year before the interview, when involved in a cross-community history learning project, he was invited by some project participants to visit with them the battlefield of the Somme in Belgium, a site of pilgrimage for many Ulster Protestants. In the build-up to this trip, he unexpectedly discovered a family fact that had been kept secret for ages and which he had not even imagined:

That was unique in some way, because I come from the Roman Catholic background, and this was a group of loyalists who actually invited me to go with them, to visit the Somme. And on the month prior to me going I said to my father...and my father died in April last year. And I was going in April to the Somme. So in March of last year, I said to my father, I may have happened to say to him, 'I am going to Somme'. And I said 'we hadn't got anybody killed at the Battle of the Somme'.

And I am now 59 years of age, so 58 at that time, OK? So he said 'actually we had'. And I said 'what?' He said he had a great uncle killed because he joined the British Army. His family completely disowned him. They were never allowed to talk about him. And I said to him, 'you've never talked to me about this'. And he said 'but you've never asked me'. I don't talk about the British Army to him, and he didn't. But then he told me about this great-great uncle of mine.

4.20 For Sean, who had believed that his family members were all enthusiastic republicans for generations, it was a great surprise that one of them had joined the British Army and fought in the Great War. Later, he found out that his great-great-uncle's name had been inscribed on the public war memorial of the city, which none of his family members had ever mentioned before. He was shocked by the depth and length of the silence, all of his life. What impressed him was the coincidence that he found out the hidden family story just a month before his father's death. If his father had died before telling this story to Sean, there would have been nobody who knew about the existence of the great-great-uncle. Learning that his great-great-uncle was only 16, and his body was never found, Sean felt great sympathy for him: the boy who died young, far away from home, and had never been talked about even within his family. 'Armistice Day every year now has got a completely different meaning because I now entered in memory of that guy', Sean says. He goes on,

Here was a family who chose not to talk about anything British or some of their family, which made a conscious decision to see someone who joined the British force... to see him as a traitor or whatever.

4.21 This experience had a particular importance for Sean because for him it demonstrates that his belief is right, that 'there are two stories going on here', both of which are more or less biased, and which have caused hatred and sectarianism. 'It demonstrates for me a lot of misunderstandings about the communities', he says. What he thinks is that the 'two stories' hide something which does not fit, and beneath what is openly told are buried clues to help community reconciliation. The example of his great-great-uncle demonstrates this for him.

4.22 This discovery led Sean to re-interpret his family history. 'The conscious decision' to delete the boy from family memory, conceivably out of their republican belief, felt too cruel to Sean. Afterwards he wrote a poem dedicated to his great-great-uncle, in which he implored the dead man for forgiveness. However, this experience made him also imagine the pain beneath the family's determination to keep silent. The reason he thought lay in the macro historical circumstances surrounding the family at that time. He narrates how the British Army suppressed the republican movement, leaving a deep scar between the local pro-treaty and anti-treaty groups; he says,

What happened in 1921 in its historical aspect is that the Irish government, the new government set up in the 26 counties, walked away from the people of Northern Ireland. Then the Stormont Government, which was under the sovereignty of the British government, [...] their will was to keep a unionist control a majority in Northern Ireland. Now, Irish government knew what was going on, the British government knew what was going on, and both governments decided to do nothing. [...]

It [the story of his great-great-uncle] demonstrates how passionate they were about being anti-British. This was what's emphasized here, it's anti-British rather than being sectarian against Protestants. It was just a feeling of Irishness against Britain. And that's about what Britain did in Ireland down through centuries [...] as well as the Irish government. That led what happened to six counties.

4.23 Sean's story about the discovery of a family member from a Catholic background who was in the British Army reflects the socio-political trend of post-conflict Northern Ireland. Sean happened to be invited to the trip to the Somme in a cross-community reconciliation programme, and this type of programme can be located in the macro-social currency of cultural reconciliation in the post conflict era. It is also parallel to the national reconciliation politics between Britain and Ireland that I described in Eileen's life story. However, Sean does not see his experience as part of the national reconciliation between Britain and Ireland. Although there was a 'republican influence' on Sean when he was young, his story must not be equated to any de-personalised, abstract political discourse. His story of the First World War is inseparably connected to his emotions about his family. Weaving together the political culture of his community, and his wish to understand the experience of his family, he finds the tragedy of a family who suffered because of the macro national politics.

Conclusion

5.1 The two narratives discussed in this paper are about events that the storytellers did not experience themselves, but heard about from their parents or grandparents. This sort of memory does not appear to have as much significance and richness as the memory of one's own experience. However, in the cases discussed, memories of distant historical events were re-encountered, as a mirror of the storyteller's own experiences of later political violence, or as a trigger to reconsider the storyteller's family background. As such, they become an integral part of their own autobiographies.

5.2 In both storytellers' cases, the macro memory politics in post-conflict Northern Ireland has had a significant impact on their perceptions of their own lives. In Eileen's case, the public revision of national war histories around the changing British-Irish relationship eventually gave her, at the micro sphere, a chance to reconcile her internal identity conflict. This reconciliation happened on the grounds that Eileen had projected her resentment from her social experience onto her understanding of the historical process surrounding the World Wars. This emotional projection was only possible through trans-generational memory: the emotions that Eileen located within her war narrative were her resentment and anger on behalf of her father. That is why a macro historical narrative, which she herself did not live, felt very personal to her. In Sean's case, he unexpectedly discovered a hidden, silenced family past, which again would not have been possible before today's peace process. Together with this discovery, he came to notice and understand the pain endured by his family for several generations because of the macro national politics. Here, Sean's interpretation of history around the First World War is intimately connected to his memory of the relationship between himself and his father. As such, trans-generational memory works as an important medium through which a big story of a national historical level becomes an essential constituent of the small story of an individual at a personal level.

5.3 The concept of collective memory over-homogenises, according to Susan Sontag, who also proposes that 'all the memory are individual, it will die with each person' (Sontag 2002: 76). The memories examined in this paper will die with the two interviewees. These have personal, unique meanings attached to them and those are never reproducible outside the person's autobiography. In this sense, these stories may not fully overcome Tilly's (2002) criticism of standard stories, that social processes are reduced into individual consciousness. However, there is no story, small or big, that does not have an in-built particular perspective: this is an essential condition for a sequence of events to become a narrative, and for us to understand the sequence as human experience (Bruner 1986; Polkinghorne 1988). Within a particular, personal perspective, trans-generational memory provides a 'superior story', an interpretation of complex,

often indirect interactions in history whose scope is far longer than the lifetime of an individual. What has been discussed in this paper has resonance with what Gadamer writes in *Truth and Method*, that 'history is made private once more' through self-reflection and autobiography, and 'in fact, history does not belong to us, but we belong to it' (cited in Freeman 2002: 204). To weave our personal family relationships into a narrative is to understand our lives as belonging to history.

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