Naming and framing victims: identity, ‘usable’ victimhood, and the spectral turn in transitional justice

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Micheál Hearty
Ulster University, UK

Kevin Hearty
Queen's University Belfast, UK

Abstract

Drawing from the literature on victimology, memory studies, and transitional justice, this article critically examines how representations of victimhood in post-conflict memory activism are rooted in contemporaneous claims-making. Using the collective remembrance of the events of August 1969 in Belfast as an empirical case study, it argues that memory activism centres on 'usable' victims whose victimhood can be seamlessly mapped onto preferred interpretations of the past in furtherance of post-conflict claims-making. Acknowledging the recent 'spectral turn' in transitional justice, the article explores how selective remembering and forgetting and the instrumentalization of selected identities through memory activism can transform otherwise problematic spectral figures into 'usable' victims. Once they have become 'usable', these victims become embedded in grassroots memory activism because they speak to claims-making over post-conflict truth and justice, the causes and consequences of past violence, and the post-conflict treatment of certain constituencies.

Keywords

Victimology, collective memory, transitional justice, commemoration, political violence

Introduction

The prolonged transition of Northern Ireland (NI) out of political violence has seen a rich memory activism premised on remembering loved ones, demanding truth and/or justice, preventing the recurrence of past abuses, and promoting ideological interpretations of past violence (Booth, 2009;

Corresponding author:
Micheál Hearty, Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University, Belfast BT15 1ED, UK.
Email: Hearty-M6@ulster.ac.uk

Brown, 2012; Dawson, 2005; Graham and Whelan, 2007; Hearty, 2020; Lundy and McGovern, 2016; Rolston, 2020). There are few sites where remembrance, commemoration, and the memory of conflict are as heavily 'festishized' (Smyth, 2017: 4), albeit that the post-conflict 'memory boom' remains deeply enrooted in competing narratives, identities, and understandings of victimhood (McDowell and Braniff, 2014). Its rich and contested memory activism evidences the intrinsic link between the construction of victimhood, the instrumentalization of identity, and post-conflict claims-making (Booth, 2009; Lawther, 2021). The 'representation of victimhood' in memory activism there is more about political and moral claims-making over the contested past than it is about individual suffering (Rosland, 2009), meaning that such commemorative claims-making necessitates what Olick (2007b: 19) calls a 'usable past': 'a retrospective reconstruction [of the past] to serve the needs of the present'.

A 'usable' past, though, is contingent on 'frames of remembrance' (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994: 5) successfully establishing a limited range of permissible meanings for the past. While this can be most simplistically achieved through initially selecting certain events and actors to 'remember' and others to 'forget' (Hyun-Lim, 2016; Irwin-Zarecka, 1994; Rausch, 2022), environmental change brought on by societal movement out of conflict can see 'forgotten' memories being rearticulated rather than silenced (Passerini, 2003: 238). The re-emergence of problematic figures and/or events to complexify dominant narratives has led transitional justice (TJ) literature to take a recent 'spectral turn'. Granted, demands for justice, truth, and accountability that pervade TJ are, by their very nature, inherently attached to spectral figures that 'unsettle' the post-conflict present (Lawther, 2021), yet the 'spectral turn' is born of a more general scepticism with master narratives and a desire to critically examine representation, invisibility and silence (Lorek-Jezinska and Wieckowska, 2017). Studies on the blind spots in official discourses produced by truth commissions (Bevernage, 2012), the subaltern voices and experiences expressed through grassroots arts and theatre (Bell, 2014), and the hidden horrors lurking in the archives (Harris, 2021) all converge on the common theme of *something* or *someone* returning to 'haunt' dominant post-conflict narratives. Naturally, the 'spectral turn' has percolated into studies on TJ and memorialisation (Lawther, 2021; Willems, 2021), with a growing awareness of, and receptiveness to, the 'memory holes' (Brewer, 2020) that previously forgotten, silenced, or denied victims return to fill as 'spectres'. These 'spectres', the TJ literature notes, have a disruptive potential to unsettle claims-making in the present by resisting state power and official 'truth', demanding acknowledgement and accountability, and stretching the victimological boundaries of dominant narratives (Hite and Jara, 2020).

Likewise, in expanding our purview beyond narrow retributive approaches like trials or restorative approaches like truth commissions, the 'spectral turn' and its nexus with memory activism reflects recent attempts to 'thicken' understandings of TJ (Kent, 2012; Quinn, 2021: 1). 'Thicker' TJ, just like the 'spectral turn', recognises the nuances and relevance of what remains 'hidden' during and after transition whenever we lazily reach for the predominant retributive and restorative instruments that comprise the 'TJ toolkit' regardless of their fit or efficacy: the limitations of retributive and restorative interventions in repairing past harms, the differential acknowledgement they afford to certain victims and harms, and their inadequacy in providing comprehensive insights into different perspectives on what happened in the past (Quinn, 2021: 7).

Merging insights from victimology, memory studies, and TJ, this article uses a case study of how the events of 14 and 15 August 1969 in Belfast have been collectively remembered to argue that the 'spectral turn' in TJ exposes the nexus between the 'usable' past and 'usable' victimhood in post-conflict contexts. Noting key differences in *how* and *why* certain victims are remembered,

it posits that previously ‘forgotten’ victims only gain traction within collective memory *if* and *when* their victimhood becomes ‘usable’ in post-conflict claims-making. Methodologically, the analysis merges two approaches taken in existing studies on victimhood and memorialisation in the North of Ireland: a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of speeches delivered at commemorative events and/or of other published accounts of the conflict (Hearty, 2020) and a textual ‘reading’ of non-written sources like murals and monuments (Robinson, 2018; Rolston, 2020; Viggiani, 2014). CDA interrogates the nexus between language, power, and ideology that underpins the language choices actors make when constructing and communicating their narrative (Fairclough, 1995: 23), while the ‘reading’ of memorials involves critically examining how their location, physical form, and inscriptions are predicated on promoting certain interpretations of the past (Young, 1993). Empirical data sourced through online searches included local and national media coverage of anniversary events and commemorations; physical and non-physical memorialisation via murals, monuments, oral history accounts, and data bases; and official reports. As previous studies on victimhood and memorialisation have shown, whether critically examining what is said (or not) at commemorative events (Hearty, 2020) or what is inscribed (or not) on murals and monuments (Robinson, 2018; Rolston, 2020; Viggiani, 2014), the nexus between language choices, meaning making, and how victims are framed in accordance with post-conflict claims-making duly emerges.

The article opens with a theoretical overview of collective memory, unpacking how a ‘usable’ past is carefully constructed through processes of selective remembering and forgetting. It further interrogates how the ‘usable’ past frames in-group victims in a way that reduces real-world complexity to an easily consumable conflict narrative. A brief discussion of collective remembrance in the North of Ireland then follows, critiquing how the absence of any agreed narrative on the past has seen competing interpretations expressed through grassroots memory activism and debates on victimhood. The events of August 1969 are then discussed before critiquing how the spectral figure of Hugh McCabe has been collectively remembered by various constituencies. Echoing the core argument that a ‘usable’ past necessitates actors with ‘usable’ victimhood, the article critically examines how McCabe as a ‘spectre’ has emerged from obscurity to underpin familial demands for truth and justice *and* become ‘usable’ in the claims-making of the Nationalist community of West Belfast and of disillusioned British Army veterans.

Collective memory and conflict narratives

In his seminal work on memory, Maurice Halbwachs (1992: 52–53) argued that in order to ‘properly understand’ how individuals interpret the past, we must ‘connect the individual to the various groups of which he is simultaneously a member’. This argument has been subsequently developed by other scholars seeking a deeper appreciation of how group membership influences what individuals remember or forget. Zerubavel (1996: 286), for example, argues that through a process of ‘mnemonic socialisation’ social rules of remembrance outlining ‘what we should remember and what we can or must forget’ become established within the groups to which we belong. Likewise, Irwin-Zarecka (1994: 4) argues that ‘frames of remembrance’ use ‘carefully chosen presences’ and ‘carefully chosen absence’ to create a permissible range of meanings that guide collective remembrance. The selective remembering and forgetting that underpins the construction of collective memory creates a ‘correct memory’ (Zehfuss, 2007: 37) from which group members should not depart. Although premised on a subjective version of the past rather than on any objective historical ‘truth’ (Arboleda-Ariza et al., 2020; Bar-Tal, 2007), a carefully constructed collective memory

can strengthen and solidify bonds within the group by fostering a sense of sacredness around certain aspects of a shared past (Gillis, 1994; Savage, 1994; Schwartz, 1982), guiding future aspirations (Bilali and Ross, 2012; Schwartz et al., 1986), and identifying enemies of and threats to the group (Bar-Tal, 2007; Bull and Hansen, 2016; Liu and Hilton, 2005). Whether those within the 'community of memory' (Sivan, 1999) subscribe to it on the basis of shared lived experience or through transmission from their elders (Zerubavel, 1996), collective memory can reduce a complex and contested past into a 'usable' past that speaks to the interests and concerns of group members today (Olick, 2007b).

The need for a 'usable' past heightens in contexts of protracted political conflict where various narratives seek to legitimise one's own violence and delegitimise the violence of one's opponents (Bar-Tal, 1990, 2007; Frank, 1967; Rosland, 2008), project a positive self-image of the in-group (Baumeister and Hastings, 1997; Mijic, 2021; Tajfel and Turner, 2004), and cultivate a collective sense of victimhood that positions the in-group as the primary victims of conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007; Bar-Tal and Halperin, 2013; Lynch and Joyce, 2018; Mijic, 2021). While in reality, political conflict is inherently 'messy' on several levels, conflict narratives selectively draw from the past to create a 'black and white picture' that replaces such messiness with a 'parsimonious, fast, unequivocal, and simple understanding' (Bar-Tal, 2007: 1436). Although there is an inherent tension between the 'sacred' and the 'profane' in any collective memory (Olick, 2007a: 12), 'frames of remembrance' can carefully excise those aspects of the past that threaten its usability for the group. Problematic events and/or actors can be 'blanked out' and 'dis-memorised' in collective memory via deflecting attention to more favourable events and actors (Rausch, 2022). What emerges is a 'victimological memory' (Lemarchand, 2006) premised on the collective 'remembering' of the wrongs committed *against* the in-group and the concomitant collective 'forgetting' of wrongs committed *by* the in-group. Victimhood thus becomes tied to an ethnic or political identity, with little narrative space to acknowledge the victimisation of 'others' (Ballinger, 2004).

The nexus between memory, identity, and victimhood means that the framing of in-group victims must align with the larger interpretive environment that reaffirms a partisan conflict narrative (Rock, 2002), particularly where and when the notion of victimhood is premised on social constructions of innocence and blamelessness (Borer, 2003; Bouris, 2007; McEvoy and McConnachie, 2013; Meyers, 2011; Walklate, 2007). For example, the purity of 'ideal victims' (Christie, 1986) is particularly useful in projecting in-group innocence and indicting out-group wickedness; hence, conflict narratives are often centred on such victims. Likewise, the gallantry of 'heroic victims' that stand against injustice (Meyers, 2011) is of similarly high currency in 'usable' pasts of historic struggles for national liberation and emancipation. Other commemorated figures might reflect what Schwartz (2009: 125) calls 'oneness' whereby they become celebrated as 'one exceptional individual' that encapsulates the virtues and values of the group while others are 'ignored'.

However, the victimological messiness of political conflict (Bouris, 2007) and the fact that individuals lead multi-layered and complicated lives (Verdery, 1999) means that some in-group victims are more difficult to fit within permissible 'frames of remembrance'. In furtherance of a 'usable' past, a process of 'unremembering' the contradictory and problematic ways in which they might be interpreted occurs (Hyun-Lim, 2016: 428). These figures can be subjected to 'dehumanisation', whereby their memory becomes detached from the complexity underpinning the circumstances of their death (Robinson, 2018). Likewise, a victim's 'resumé' (Verdery, 1999: 29) can be sifted through so that characteristics supporting the conflict narrative are frontloaded in collective remembrance while their less-desirable characteristics are consigned to the 'shadow world' (Connerton, 2008) and subsequently 'forgotten' in collective memory.

The discussion that follows exposes how the process of 'dehumanisation' and 'resume' manipulation enables spectral figures to be subsumed into the 'usable' past in furtherance of post-conflict claims-making. The case study of Hugh McCabe shows how aligning spectral figures with a 'usable' past makes their victimhood 'usable' in claims-making and transforms them into 'usable' victims like 'ideal' victims, 'heroic' victims, and those enjoying 'oneness'.

Contesting August 1969

The pursuit of 'usable' victims that map onto a 'usable' past can be seen in contemporary NI where the peace process of the late 1990s may have brought an end to physical conflict yet did not produce a shared understanding of the root causes of the conflict. This has been further compounded by the continued absence of a 'joined up' TJ approach whereby separate yet inter-linking processes and mechanisms would offer society a more rounded view of what caused and sustained political violence, offer victims some degree of truth, and keep alive the prospect of justice through legal accountability. Memory has attained increased importance within this context; on one hand grassroots memory activism has been integral to campaigns for truth and justice where formal truth recovery continues to elude (Rolston, 2020), yet on the other hand, it has been at the epicentre of a sustained 'meta-conflict' over the causes, nature, and consequences of the conflict (Bell et al., 2004; McGarry and O'Leary, 2006). A transition from 'legitimacy politics' to 'memory politics' has taken root (Hearty, 2017: 55), with narrative framing shifting from legitimising the current use of violence to validating contemporary socio-political positions based on past experiences of violence.

Perhaps the most illustrative example of this is how conceptions of victimhood remain inseparable from competing narratives of the past (Lawther, 2021). An exhaustive account of the various perspectives on political violence in the North of Ireland is beyond the ambit of this paper, but for the sake of brevity, the following summary should suffice (Hearty, 2017: 55): for Irish republicans within the minority Nationalist community in NI, the conflict represented a 'national liberation struggle after years of institutional exclusion birthed by colonialism'; for the traditionally more powerful Unionist community, it grew out of a 'terrorist' plot by a minority within the minority community who always wanted to destroy 'the NI statelet from within'; and for the British state, the conflict was a matter of 'law and order' whereby the British military played a supportive peacekeeping role to a 'much maligned police force unable to hold back the violence of the "terrorist" on "both sides"'. Because each of these narratives offers diverging interpretations of the *causes* of the conflict, they naturally frame particular victims killed during the conflict in very different ways. For instance, those deemed 'legitimate targets' of political violence (Hearty, 2017) in the Irish republican narrative (i.e. security force members) are conversely seen as 'deserving victims' in alternative narratives forwarded by Unionists and the state. Likewise, the victims of state violence that underpin the Irish republican narrative are deemed to be less-'deserving victims' in Unionist and state narratives (Jankowitz, 2018). Here, group identity and the construction of victimhood intertwine in terms of attributing blame (lessness) for the devastating human *consequences* of political violence.

These various perspectives on the conflict have led to separate and competing hierarchies of victimhood emerging (Jankowitz, 2018), with those victims whose victimisation reaffirms and legitimates certain narratives being placed at the apex of the hierarchy, while those who expose 'blind spots' (Lawther, 2013: 164) in partisan narratives are positioned near the bottom. Hierarchical

approaches to victimhood have suffused debate around which acts of violence should be subject to public inquiry and/or truth recovery (Rolston, 2020), which victimisers should face legacy case prosecutions for past violence (McGovern, 2019), which victims should be compensated for severe injury and/or bereavement (Jankowitz, 2018), and which victims should (not) be commemorated through public remembrance (Hearty, 2020). These debates are, of course, simply a corollary of more general failure to achieve consensus around who or what a 'victim' is in the NI context, with the inclusivist definition laid out in the Victims and Survivors (NI) Order 2006 being commended for recognising the complexity of victimhood during political conflict and criticised for equating 'innocent victims' with those who were killed or injured during the commission of political violence in equal measure (Jankowitz, 2018:11).

Different perspectives on the past also point to different interpretations of *when* conflict began. A narrative that favours struggle against colonialism and discrimination would reach back to the imposition of partition on the island of Ireland–if not before that; a narrative that interprets conflict as growing out of minority community subversion would draw the line back to the emergence of the civil rights movement in the mid-1960s; and a state narrative would posit the deployment of British troops as the natural starting point. Although different narratives might take different temporal views of the *causes* of the conflict, there is nonetheless a consensus in *all* these narratives that the events of August 1969 represented an epoch in the descent into political violence. Even here, though, explanations of what happened are enmeshed in the 'frames war' between political actors competing for narrative control over why violence broke out and who the aggressor was (Lord, 2020).

Notwithstanding this, the following is a brief chronology of the events of August 1969. Long-standing tensions over civil rights demonstrations and how they were policed came to a head on 12 August when Nationalists clashed with the predominantly Protestant police force – the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) – and Unionist mobs following a contentious parade by a Protestant fraternity in the predominantly Nationalist city of Derry, where civil rights demonstrations had previously drawn a violent police response. This violence would last until 14 August before spreading to Belfast. The Lower Falls district of the largely Nationalist West Belfast area became the epicentre of violence, with three local residents losing their lives in the subsequent 48-hour period following an armed police incursion into the area and attempts to burn Nationalist homes in Bombay Street. British troops were deployed to the streets of Belfast as the violence worsened, with the causes and nature of political violence being contested from this point forward: the events of August 1969, depending on which narrative one prefers, represented the British state moving to violently prop up a discriminatory colonial statelet; or it represented a breakdown of law and order that exposed the true violent intent behind minority community demands for civil rights; or it marked the onset of a peacekeeping mission to keep warring factions apart.

Among the fatalities in the Lower Falls area during the 14 and 15 August 1969 was 9-year-old Patrick Rooney. He was killed by a stray police bullet while sheltering in a bedroom inside his home after the RUC fired indiscriminately into the Divis area (McKittrick et al., 1999: 34). As the quintessential 'ideal' victim and the first child to be killed during the conflict, Rooney assumed a central role in the Nationalist narrative of events. Also killed in the Divis area was 20-year-old Hugh McCabe, a local British soldier home on leave from Germany. The exact circumstances of McCabe's death have been disputed; the RUC claimed he was shot dead in a firing position on the top of Divis Flats during an armed confrontation with police, while the Scarman Tribunal would later hold that the firing that killed McCabe was justified because the RUC had come under fire

from that area. Local eye witnesses, both at the time and ever since, have disputed this version of events, maintaining that McCabe was shot dead as he went to help an injured man (McKittrick et al., 1999; Target, 1969: 38). The fact that representatives from the British Army attended McCabe's funeral, that his regiment sent a wreath, and that the Ministry of Home Affairs subsequently paid out £8,000 to the McCabe family without accepting liability casts further doubt upon the official version of his death (McKittrick et al., 1999: 38).

Away from Divis, violence had also erupted in the Clonard area of the Lower Falls where armed Unionists had made an incursion into the area to burn down Catholic homes. As locals tried to repel this attack, a 15-year-old member of the IRA's youth wing – Na Fianna hEireann – Gerard McAuley was shot dead. As the quintessential 'heroic victim' who died in defence of his community, McAuley, just like Patrick Rooney, quickly became synonymous with the Nationalist collective memory of August 1969.

While the events of August 1969 remained deeply contested through grassroots memorialisation and commemoration, it was not until the publication of a Northern Ireland Police Ombudsman (OPONI) report in May 2021 that the deaths of Rooney and McCabe were formally addressed. The OPONI report concluded that investigative inadequacies on the part of the RUC at the time resulted in a failure to hold anyone to account for their deaths (OPONI, 2021). It further held that the RUC's decision to use machine guns in response to the disturbances in the Divis area was 'disproportionate and dangerous', while it also held that the relatives were justified in believing that their loved ones had died 'without good reason'. Although the report expressed 'grave reservations' about the level of gunfire used by the RUC in relation to the death of McCabe, it nonetheless fell short of declaring his killing unlawful. The report also revealed that due to the lack of evidence, no prosecution would be taken against the surviving police officer involved in McCabe's death.

This article will now critically examine how the framing of Hugh McCabe has evolved in various collective memories of August 1969. Reflecting how collective memory is constructed with one eye on the past and the other on the present (Hobsbawm, 1972; MacDonald, 2013; Schwartz, 1982; Zerubavel, 1994), it interrogates how McCabe as a 'spectre' has emerged from the 'shadow world' as changed socio-political constellations in the North of Ireland transformed him into a 'usable' victim that could be leveraged by various constituencies in post-conflict claims-making.

Framing Hugh McCabe

West Belfast

The Nationalist community of West Belfast has engaged in grassroots memory activism of August 1969 as a 'traumatised community' whereby place, identity, and community frame collective remembrance (Dawson, 2005). Inasmuch as those killed in August 1969 represent dead sons, brothers, and fathers, they also represent dead neighbours, friends, and members of the wider West Belfast community *and* the 'imagined' Nationalist community in the North of Ireland. Given that apolitical remembrance of community members can often overlap with more politicised commemoration (Hearty, 2020), the 'frames of remembrance' that underpin Irish republican memory activism within Nationalist communities are relevant too. Here victimhood has been framed through martyrdom and imprisonment for cause and community (Graham and Whelan, 2007; Rosland, 2009). While this represents a counter-memory corrective to the state narrative that willfully overlooks the experiences of Nationalist West Belfast (Rolston, 2020), even this localised grassroots

memory activism remains defined by silence, absence, and power dynamics (Lundy and McGovern, 2008). Here, as Elisabetta Viggiani (2014: 101) has noted, 'what is "forgotten" . . . is as important as what is remembered'.

Perhaps the most illustrative example of this is how Hugh McCabe has traditionally been a more marginal figure in the collective memory of August 1969 than Patrick Rooney and Gerard McAuley have. Unlike both of the latter, McCabe's status as a British soldier – albeit off-duty when killed – has proven problematic because it is incongruous with a 'frame of remembrance' predicated on sacrifice and struggle *against* the British Army, and it obscures the 'oneness' of the Nationalist community in West Belfast. By contrast, Patrick Rooney's status as an 'ideal' child victim of state violence is in accordance with the Irish republican 'frame of remembrance' and infinitely more 'usable' in claims-making about the causes and consequences of the conflict. With the power to define the victim also granting the discursive power to frame the victimiser as morally flawed (Ewald, 2002), the memory of Rooney as the 'ideal' child victim offers a damning indictment of a sectarian state intent on violently suppressing the minority Nationalist community. Unsurprisingly, then, Rooney has been afforded greater prominence in the collective memory of August 1969 than McCabe has.

For example, while an article on the 30th anniversary of the event in the Irish republican newspaper *An Phoblacht* saw local people mention Patrick Rooney being shot dead and Gerard McAuley dying in defence of the area, there was *no* mention of McCabe by name. Instead, the end of the article simply noted that six people were killed in violence across Belfast over the 2 days (Friel, 1999). Little seemed to have changed by the 35th anniversary, with an article again discussing Rooney and McAuley but merely listing McCabe at the end as one of the people who also died in August 1969 (*Irish Republican News*, 2004). Even if McCabe has emerged from the 'shadow world' to at least be named, as a problematic figure that grates with the 'frame of remembrance' and communal 'oneness', he remains little more than a footnote in the collective memory of Nationalist West Belfast at this point.

Gerard McAuley, however, has long been a central figure in the local collective memory of August 1969 (Viggiani, 2014: 102). On the one hand, this reflects the tendency of Irish republicans to commemorate combatants more than they do non-combatants (Brown, 2012), yet on the other hand, it also reflects how McAuley's 'resumé' fits seamlessly within the Irish republican 'frame of remembrance'. Having died in defence of his local community, the physical memorialisation of McAuley within West Belfast has been premised on remembering him as the 'risen victim' who fell in defiance of a discriminatory state (Rosland, 2009). A plaque erected by local ex-prisoners informs that McAuley was 'killed while defending the people of Clonard on the 15th August 1969'.[1] Likewise, a local mural duly recognises him as a member of Na Fianna hEireann,[2] while his name is included on the Clonard Martyrs Memorial Garden dedicated to locally deceased republican activists.[3]

McAuley's status as a communal defender has been further reinforced during local commemorative events. For example, the speaker at a 40th anniversary event spoke of 'the bravery of Fian Gerard McAuley who fought with his bare hands against the guns of the unionist mobs' (*Irish Republican News*, 2009). Unlike the 30th and 35th anniversaries, Hugh McCabe *is* mentioned by the speaker, and he *is* even acknowledged as 'Trooper McCabe home on leave', yet he remains a peripheral figure in the narrative that revolves around '15-year-old Gerard McAuley . . . [who] died as he bravely fought to repel the incursion' (Murray, 2009). Through memorialisation and commemoration, McAuley has been transformed from 'the dead' into 'the patriot dead' and made the focal point of collective remembrance in West Belfast (Booth, 2009). McCabe, with his more problematic 'resumé', remains on the periphery of collective memory as a local who also happened to be killed during the violent onslaught that seen McAuley sacrifice himself for cause and community.

By the 50th anniversary, however, Hugh McCabe had become more visible in collective remembrance. Unlike on previous occasions, McCabe was now a named victim who occupied a central position alongside Rooney and McAuley (Fitzmaurice, 2019). A plaque erected in Divis reads: 'This plaque is dedicated to the memory of Patrick Rooney aged 9 Hugh McCabe aged 20 who were murdered in this vicinity by the RUC on 15th August 1969'.[4] What is noteworthy here is not simply what has been *included* in this inscription – that is, McCabe's name – but also what has been *excluded* from it – that is, his membership of the British Army. Similarly, a mural dedicated to the pair on the occasion makes no mention of McCabe's British Army background but does inform that they were 'murdered 15th August by the RUC'.[5] Granted, McCabe might be a named victim by this point but his naming and framing is assiduously in line with communal 'oneness' and the local 'frame of remembrance'. Although McCabe has been duly placed into the 'deathscape' of West Belfast that connects the dead with their local neighbourhood and community (De Young, 2018: 94), the prevailing identity driving this is that of the local victim of state violence rather than off-duty British soldier. Indeed, this has persisted beyond the 50th anniversary events, with the failure to bring prosecutions over the deaths being later criticised by a Sinn Féin spokesperson as the failure to deliver justice for 'the 1969 fatal shootings of civilians Patrick Rooney and Hugh McCabe'.[6]

Inasmuch as McCabe has emerged within the collective memory of Nationalist West Belfast, this has only been after the 'dehumanisation' process culled the more problematic aspects of his 'resumé' from collective memory. To fit with the local 'frame of remembrance' and notions of communal 'oneness', the identity of McCabe as a local and as a victim of state violence takes precedence, while his more problematic background as an off-duty British soldier is consigned to the 'shadow world'. The belated collective remembrance of McCabe within West Belfast therefore rests on two pillars. On one hand, successfully framing McCabe as a local victim of state violence gives rise to a communal moral obligation to remember local victims (Booth, 2009) and to keep alive their memory until truth and justice for state violence has been obtained (Rolston, 2020). On the other hand, remembering McCabe as a victim of state violence that has not yet been adequately addressed also makes his victimhood 'usable' in political and moral claims-making over the causes and consequences of the conflict. It is thus the case that as an unarmed local victim of early state violence McCabe's victimhood is 'usable' in West Belfast memory activism but as an off-duty British soldier it is not.

Where West Belfast memory activism is concerned, then, we see McCabe emerge as a 'spectre' that challenges the official state narrative of the events of August 1969. Yet in belatedly gaining recognition within West Belfast memory activism, McCabe as a 'spectre' has also expanded the victimological boundaries of the Nationalist narrative beyond the 'ideal' and 'heroic' victim. Rather than complexify that narrative, however, McCabe has been rehabilitated from spectral figure to 'usable' victim through the primary emphasis on his identity as a local victim of state violence at the expense of his identity as British soldier.

The British army

The (non)commemoration of McCabe by the British Army reflects both the state narrative on the conflict *and* its reluctance to publicly commemorate security force members killed during it. According to the British Army's official report on Operation Banner, a regiment was deployed to 'separate loyalists and nationalists' as the RUC became overwhelmed following the 'spread of violence' from Derry to Belfast in August 1969 (Ministry of Defence, 2006: para 212). British

soldiers who served in the North of Ireland have therefore identified as members of a peacekeeping 'third community' with no personal or political interest in the violent political disagreement between domestic actors there (Jenkins and Woodward, 2016: 101). The need to maintain this self-image as a neutral peacekeeping force has meant that the commemoration and memorialisation of British soldiers killed on duty in NI has been largely confined to closed spaces and notably more muted than that of non-state actors (McBride, 2017). For Graham and Whelan (2007), the decision to memorialise British soldiers killed in NI at the National Memorial Arboretum in Lichfield, England, has geographically and discursively decontexualised their memory from their actual deaths. This merely highlights the difficulty in publicly commemorating British soldiers killed on duty in NI as the fallen war dead whenever the official narrative denies that any such war had taken place.

Somewhat paradoxically, McCabe is both present and absent in the British Army's collective memory of NI; he is there, but not prominently or obviously so. For instance, he is listed in an online search of the British Army's Armed Forces Memorial database and the Armed Forces Roll of Honour,[7] while his name is also included on the Armed Forces memorial at Lichfield (Wharton, 2008). Yet he is conspicuously absent in the British Army's official report of Operation Banner. This report notes that 'ten people were killed and 899 injured in the violence in July and August 1969. The figure included 368 policemen injured' (Ministry of Defence, 2006: para 214). Remarkably, the report fails to mention that one of those killed was an off-duty British soldier home on leave. Instead, the report erroneously states that 'the first British soldier to be killed in the Troubles died on 6 February 1971' (Ministry of Defence, 2006: para 218). The invisibility of McCabe in the official British Army narrative was further evident during the 50th anniversary commemorations for Operation Banner in August 2019. Despite the event also coinciding with the 50th anniversary of McCabe's killing, the event focused on criticising ongoing legacy case prosecutions being taken against military veterans who had served in NI without once mentioning McCabe (Ferguson, 2019). Hugh McCabe, then, seems to have fallen into a 'memory void' that deemed him irrelevant in the British Army's official narrative (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994: 117).

The invisibility of McCabe has created the misperception that Gunner Robert Curtis – shot dead by the IRA on 6 February 1971 in Belfast – was the first British soldier to be killed during the conflict. Curtis, rather than McCabe, duly became the reference point for the 'British soldier as victim' in NI (McGarry and Ferguson, 2012: 126). For example, in the aftermath of Curtis' death, a public fundraising campaign on behalf of his pregnant widow and unborn child was launched (Symon, 1972). This victimological advantaging of Curtis over McCabe continues even today, with the NI Veterans Commissioner's Office posting a memorial notice to mark 'the 50th anniversary of the first soldier to be killed by a direct terrorist action during the Northern Ireland troubles'. The occasion was, according to NI Veterans Commissioner Danny Kinahan, one whereby 'we rightly pause to remember the family and comrades of Gunner Robert Curtis'.[8] There seemed, though, to be little imperative to remember the McCabe family on Hugh's 50th anniversary.

Several factors may have coalesced to favour enshrining Curtis, rather than McCabe, at the victimological epicentre of the British Army narrative. Unlike McCabe, Curtis fits the 'oneness' of the British 'imagined community' that collective remembrance relies upon. Concomitant to this, the British 'imagined community' have been more receptive of and responsive to Irish-related political violence whenever it victimises soldiers from their own cities and towns than when it remains confined to Irish victims (Hazley, 2021). An English-born soldier killed by the 'terrorist' and leaving behind a pregnant widow, then, better fits the 'oneness' of the British 'imagined

community' and the peacekeeping 'third community' 'frame of remembrance' than a Belfast-born soldier shot while home on leave by the very police force that the British Army were subsequently deployed in support of less than 24 hours later. McCabe's identity and 'resumé' are complex whereas Curtis' are simplistic and premised on an easily consumable and socio-politically resonant binary between the British soldier and the 'terrorist'. The cumulative result of this is that while the memory of McCabe is a problematic one that gets 'side lined' (Viebach, 2019) in the British Army narrative, the neater fitting and more 'usable' memory of Curtis is what becomes 'stuck' in collective memory (Rigney, 2021).

Although absent in the official British Army narrative, McCabe has emerged as a spectral figure in grassroots memory activism by military veterans. An NI veterans organisation, for example, have included a memorial post to him on their website – albeit stating that he was 'killed by friendly fire'.[9] He is also mentioned in an oral history project based on the accounts of former British soldiers who served in NI, but again his death is attributed to 'friendly fire'. This account even states that McCabe was 'merely observing the rioting' in Divis when he was killed by a 'stray' bullet (Wharton, 2011). Although McCabe is present in this grassroots memory work, the problematic nature of his death remains shrouded in a 'tacitly shared silence' (Connerton, 2008). Acknowledging that McCabe was indiscriminately killed by the police authority contradicts the 'frame of remembrance' constructed by the 'third community'; hence, his memory must undergo the 'dehumanisation' process that removes it from its proper context. This represents a direct inversion of how McCabe has been framed in West Belfast; for former British soldiers it is McCabe's *identity as a British soldier*, rather than the *circumstances of his death*, that is integral to the 'frame of remembrance'.

It is the primacy of McCabe's identity as a British soldier that makes his victimhood 'usable' to the veteran constituency. At the same time that remembering McCabe might be an act of 'care taking' to ensure that a comrade is not forgotten (Viebach, 2019), it is also an act of 'mnemonic resistance' (Ryan, 2010) against the official narrative that has deliberately 'forgotten' him. The changed socio-political constellation that transition out of conflict brings appears to have precipitated this pushback against the official narrative. The overlooking of McCabe is, according to the oral history account previously mentioned at least, symptomatic of an official narrative that deliberately misrepresents the reality of service in NI (Wharton, 2011). Remembering McCabe as the first British soldier to die in NI might therefore be seen as an expression of the increasing frustration among military veterans that the reality of conflict in NI was too embarrassing for the UK Government and the British Army to admit to (Jenkins and Woodward, 2016). There is, then, a wider backdrop to this 'mnemonic resistance' whereby discontented veterans have been left feeling unwanted following a campaign that the establishment would rather 'forget' (Brewer and Herron, 2021: 124). This disillusionment has grown in the intervening years as military veterans face the prospect of criminal prosecution following police reinvestigation of controversial cases from the conflict. Those who have faced prosecution have been framed as the victims of a post-conflict 'witch hunt' being driven by former 'terrorists' intent on vilifying the peace keeping 'third community' through abuse of police investigations, public inquiries and civil litigation that have defined the TJ process in NI (McGovern, 2019; Rolston, 2020). Against this backdrop, McCabe's victimhood as the 'forgotten' British soldier becomes 'usable' in claims-making over how military veterans are being (mis)treated today.[10]

Like in West Belfast, then, McCabe as 'spectre' is useful in resisting political elites. However, in contrast to West Belfast where McCabe's memory is used to underpin demands for a more

critical post-conflict re-examination of the role of the peacekeeping 'third community', for the veterans' constituency McCabe is a 'usable' spectral figure that underpins their demands for abandoned and forgotten about veterans to be afforded greater protection in the face of the legacy 'witch hunt'.

The McCabe family

While Hugh McCabe has been belatedly named and 'remembered' as a spectral figure in the collective memories that underpin the claims-making of Nationalist West Belfast and discontented British Army veterans, he has also been remembered by his extended family too. For them, though, 'remembering' him has been premised on the moral obligation to remember kith and kin (Blustein, 2008) *and* on the belief that 'bearing memory' represents a means of 'doing justice' (Booth, 2006: xiii). Although familial remembrance often begins as a private endeavour, it can later be subsumed into collective remembrance as the boundaries between remembrance and memory activism blur in pursuit of post-conflict truth and justice (Viggiani, 2014: 13). The necessity to use grassroots memory activism to 'do justice' here arises from three concomitant factors: the family's persistent rejection of how his death has been presented in the official narrative of August 1969; the relative invisibility of victims of state violence in official narratives of the conflict (Jankowitz, 2018; Rolston, 2020); and – at least until the OPONI report in 2021 – the failure of truth recovery mechanisms to address the events of August 1969. Indeed, victims of state violence in NI have long merged engagement with legalistic truth recovery mechanisms with grassroots memory activism in their campaigns for truth and justice (Lundy and McGovern, 2016; Rolston, 2020).

The desire to 'do justice' was discernible in a local newspaper interview with the McCabe family to mark the 50th anniversary of his death. Rejecting claims that Hugh was involved in an armed confrontation with the police, they maintained that he was shot dead while trying to drag an injured man to safety. According to his cousin:

> The locals rallied to protect their families and homes. They had no protection as the RUC had chosen the side of the aggressor. Trooper McCabe, my cousin, was not operating any kind of gun as was stated at the time. He was not on the roof of any building in the vicinity – he was only guilty of caring for others. If he was doing what the RUC accused him of how did he sustain the wounds he had? (Quinn, 2019).

Contrary to the official account, then, the McCabe family maintain that 'Hugh died a hero helping others' having been killed 'doing an act of charity'. Believing that the events of August 1969 had been misrepresented for 50 years, the family saw local commemorative events within West Belfast as expressing the need 'for answers, for truth' into the deaths of McCabe, Rooney, and McAuley (Quinn, 2019). In connecting demands for truth about McCabe's death with truth for the deaths of Rooney and McAuley, familial remembrance and collective grassroots memory activism thus merge in furtherance of 'doing justice' for those killed in August 1969.

The importance of truth to the McCabe family became apparent following the OPONI report that concluded that there was no evidence that he was armed when he was killed. In response to this finding, McCabe's daughter stated that 'the Police Ombudsman has correctly quashed the false record in the Scarman report . . . that discredited report no longer has the last word about my father's killing' (Relatives for Justice, 2021). However, the family were nevertheless 'extremely disappointed' that the report did not rule his death unlawful (McParland, 2021). Speaking of the

failure of OPONI to declare his killing unlawful, McCabe's daughter argued 'he was himself a soldier, on leave from his regiment. Some of his senior officers attended his funeral, something they would never have done if he had been firing on police' (O'Neill, 2021). Whatever the OPONI might have concluded, McCabe's family 'remain convinced that my father was an innocent victim of unjustified RUC fire' (Relatives for Justice, 2021).

Because 'doing justice' is ultimately about establishing the truth around McCabe's death, rather than staking moral or political claims about the conflict more generally, his family can instrumentalise *all* of the various competing identities that other constituencies fail to recognise. This allows them to draw on what are otherwise 'undiscussables' and 'unmentionables' in the more politicised 'frames of remembrance' (Zerubavel, 2006: 3). The familial 'frame of remembrance' therefore converges with, yet also departs from, other 'frames of remembrance'.

Like the West Belfast frame, McCabe's family acknowledges him as a victim of state violence and recognises the need for truth around events in West Belfast. By doing so, they clearly locate McCabe within the boundaries of the West Belfast 'traumatised community', allowing them to leverage an identity that is 'usable' for 'doing justice' due to demands for collective truth and justice. However, in asserting that 'Hugh died a hero helping others', the familial frame couches McCabe in an agency that diverges from his portrayal as a passive and marginal figure in the West Belfast 'frame of remembrance'. Similarly, the familial 'frame of remembrance' shows the same recognition of McCabe's identity as a British soldier that the British Army veteran 'frame of remembrance' does. However, it is differentiated from this frame by locating his death within broader state violence against the West Belfast community rather than attributing it to 'friendly fire'. It is, though, McCabe's identity as a British soldier that is 'usable' for 'doing justice' as it helps to challenge claims that he was involved in violence at the time of his death. 'Doing justice', then, relies on embracing *all* of the identities that underpin his 'resumé' rather than selecting *some* of them and consigning the rest to the 'shadow world'. This reflects how, from the familial perspective, McCabe is a 'spectre' that demands acknowledgement and repair rather than being 'usable' in underpinning particular ideological or politicised narratives on the past.

Conclusion

The belated emergence of Hugh McCabe in collective remembrance of August 1969 speaks to the 'mnemonic stocktaking' (Rigney, 2021) that allows more problematic figures that jar with collective 'frames of remembrance' and communal 'oneness' to regain visibility. While this may stem in part at least from the moral obligation to 'care take' for the memory of a comrade and/or community member (Viebach, 2019), at the same time, it speaks to the ability of spectral figures like McCabe to discomfit commemorative 'hierarchies of worth' (Flesher-Fominaya and Barberet, 2018) that privileged certain victims over others. In accordance with competing narratives on the causes and consequences of the conflict in NI, these hierarchies favoured those whose victimhood is the most 'usable'; the 'ideal' child victim of state violence like Patrick Rooney, the communal defender like Gerard McAuley and the peacekeeping 'soldier victim' like Robert Curtis. By contrast, more problematic figures that grate against collective 'frames of remembrance' and communal 'oneness', like Hugh McCabe, slip into invisibility, often going unnamed and/or unacknowledged. It is, then, the case that 'not all pasts are created equal' (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994: 16) – nor is all victimhood equally 'usable'.

However, as the ‘spectral turn’ in TJ literature has increasingly shown, such spectral figures invariably return to ‘haunt’ and ‘unsettle’ the post-conflict present, whether through keeping past injustices alive, demanding acknowledgement, or broadening our victimological worldview (Hite and Jara, 2020; Lawther, 2021; Willems, 2021). When confronted with these spectral figures, transitioning societies are forced to either ‘welcome’ or ‘reject’ them (Lorek-Jezinska and Wieckowska, 2017). Although various constituencies initially opted to ‘reject’ McCabe in favour of more ‘usable’ victims because of his complex identity, whenever it became possible to map McCabe onto post-conflict claims-making these same constituencies decided to ‘welcome’ him into their collective memory. This post-conflict rehabilitation from spectral figure to ‘usable’ victim was admittedly predicated on these constituencies making McCabe’s victimhood ‘usable’ by ‘dehumanising’ the context of his death and/or selectively drawing from his ‘resumé’. On the one hand, this involves a civilianising of McCabe’s memory in West Belfast where his primary identity is that of local victim of state violence, yet on the other hand, it also involved British Army veterans frontloading McCabe’s British Army membership yet overlooking the problematic circumstances of his death. For his family, however, McCabe represents a more complex ‘hero-victim’ figure (Hearty, 2020; McGovern, 2019), whereby he can be remembered as *both* a British soldier and a victim of state violence.

Regardless of how exactly Hugh McCabe is differentially framed by various communities of memory, the decision to ‘welcome’ him into competing collective memories in furtherance of post-conflict claims-making demonstrates how spectral figures can become focal points for transformative action (Hite and Jara, 2020). McCabe’s memory has thus emerged from the ‘shadow world’ to ‘unsettle’ the post-conflict present by becoming central to mobilisation by Nationalists in the meta-conflict, to veteran grievances with the ‘dealing with the past’ process, and to a familial campaign for truth and justice. Ironically, then, the complexity of McCabe’s identity in life ultimately rendered him a spectral figure that eventually became ‘usable’ in claims-making over the causes and consequences of political violence in Ireland, over the post-conflict treatment of military veterans, and for truth and justice for state violence.

Notes

1. See ‘Gerald McAuley plaque’ available online at https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/victims/memorials/static/photos/932.html (accessed 28 March 2022).
2. See ‘End apartheid’ *Extramural Activity*, 5 September 2019, available online at https://extramuralactivity.com/2019/09/05/end-apartheid/ (accessed 28 April 2022).
3. See ‘Clonard Martyrs’, *The Historical Marker Database*, available online at https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=134620 (accessed 15 June 2022).
4. See: ‘Rooney and McCabe plaque’ available online at https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/cgi-bin/AHRC/photos.pl?id=936andmon=556 (accessed 28 March 2020).
5. See: ‘The pogrom of August 1969’, *Extramural Activity*, 19 August 2019, available online at https://extramuralactivity.com/2019/08/19/the-pogrom-of-august-1969/ (accessed 28 April 2022).
6. See: ‘Families should not have to wait 50 years for truth and justice’ – Dillon’, *Sinn Féin*, 30 July 2020, available online at https://www.sinnfein.ie/contents/57583 (accessed 28 March 2022).
7. See http://veterans.mod.uk/roll-of-honour.php?SerialNo=X8329 (accessed 28 March 2022).
8. See: ‘Anniversary of first soldier killed in NI’, *NI Veterans Commissioner’s Office*, 6 February 2021, available online at https://www.nivco.co.uk/anniversary-of-first-soldier-killed-in-ni/ (accessed 28 April 2022).
9. See: https://www.nivets.org.uk/ROH/certs/M0717.pdf (accessed 28 March 2022).

10. At the time of writing, the indications are that legacy case prosecutions will end if/when the UK Government's Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill currently passing through the legislative process becomes law as expected.

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