

Organised Innocence in the Paramilitary Museum.

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The great maxim of all civilised legal systems, that the burden of proof must always rest with the accuser, sprang from the insight that only guilt can be irrefutably proved. Innocence, on the contrary, to the extent that it is more than “not guilty”, cannot be proved but must be accepted on faith, whereby the trouble is that this faith cannot be supported by the given word, which can be a lie

(Arendt 1963: 87)

Questions of innocence and responsibility, whilst seemingly accounted for during peacetime by the court of law, are notoriously hard to mediate on a moral level in the aftermath of violent conflict. As Hannah Arendt (1945: 149) famously observed after the Second World War, innocence is particularly hard to establish in the wake of war, where ‘the boundaries dividing criminals from normal persons, the guilty from the innocent, have been so completely effaced that nobody will be able to tell [...] whether in any case he is dealing with a secret hero or with a former mass murderer’. Of course, when it comes to those wars which are contained within the borders of a single nation, the boundaries distinguishing the so-called guilty from the ‘innocent’ are even more blurred,

and frequently become the source of considerable contestation in the transitional period towards stability.

For citizens of Britain and Northern Ireland, such debates occupy a particularly prominent position in relation to the Troubles, where responsibility for the conflict is incredibly diffuse, and the decision to prosecute specific people for their participation in acts of wartime violence are guided more by contemporary political agitations, than any real desire to offer closure to victims of the Northern Irish conflict (Smyth 2000). Indeed, only in February 2017, Northern Ireland Secretary of State James Brokenshire invoked the so-called ‘victims issue’ in a speech to the House of Commons, where he lambasted the PSNI Legacy Investigation Team for their indictment of two ex-soldiers over the death of IRA commander John McCann. Declaring that government would ‘never accept any kind of moral equivalence between those who sought to uphold the rule of law and terrorists who sought to destroy it’ (*Hansard* 2017), Brokenshire’s appeal to morality was no doubt a shrewd political move, designed both to pacify those DUP ministers present at the debate, whilst also re-positioning the Conservative party as defenders of the British Armed Forces in the wake of other controversial prosecutions over the Iraq war (BBC 2017).

The issue of how best to deal with Troubles victims has long dominated Northern Irish society, where the very definition of victimhood has in itself

become the source of an intractable conflict amongst its citizens. Dubbed a ‘war by other means’ by Marie-Breen Smyth (2009: 35), attempts to offer a universally acceptable definition of a ‘Troubles victim’ have been continually frustrated by a range of special interest and political groups both in Ireland and Britain, with the result that twenty years after the signing of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, families of the deceased and those who were injured during the conflict have yet to receive appropriate financial or legal compensation for their losses. As a result, those living with the impact of the Troubles are more likely to be living in poverty, be in worse health, have lower life quality, and suffer from depression and suicidal ideation than those without direct experience of the conflict, and Northern Ireland as a whole now has one of the highest rates of PTSD in the world (Ferry *et al.* 2003; CVS 2011; Tomlinson 2013). Ongoing politicisation of the issue in Northern Ireland and mainland Britain means that the vast majority of perpetrators have yet to be brought to account for their role in another’s victimisation, whilst broader definitions of victimhood as advanced by the Eames-Bradley and Bloomfield reports have also meant that on a policy level, distinctions between perpetrators and victims are becoming increasingly obscure, making the process of developing a universal framework for restitution increasingly difficult (Brewer 2006; Brewer *et al.* 2011).

In lieu of an established definition, a number of researchers have observed that the lexicon of victimhood in Northern Ireland is becoming increasingly implicit and reliant on a hierarchical approach to victimhood that often invokes the language of guilt, innocence and responsibility to discern between those ‘deserving’ and ‘underserving’ victims of the conflict (Rolston 2000; Morrissey *et al.* 2002; Brewer *et al.* 2011; Breen-Smyth *et al.* 2015). Such language is increasingly present in cultural responses to the Troubles, and in this regard the informal heritage sector in Northern Ireland is no exception, with many of those working in the so-called ‘troubles tourism’ (*Cultural Tourism Strategy* 2006) industry often utilising the language of innocent victimhood in particular to validate their own historical interpretations of the past. However, whilst academic literature has sometimes drawn attention to the way these discourses manifest in Belfast and London/Derry’s oft-critiqued mural tours, or in broader landscapes of memorialisation (Graham *et al.* 2007; McDowell 2008; Goalwin 2013; Crooke 2016), the same discussions are often absent from the less-researched independent museum sector. Filling this gap, this essay seeks to address cultures of victimhood in Belfast’s paramilitary museums, drawing attention to the way that these sites draw on notions of innocence and responsibility to reinforce their own interpretations of the past. Paying particular attention to a recent orientation within museology towards the affective museum experience (Smith *et al.* 2016) this essay will touch on the intersections between the ‘ideal victim’ (Suski 2009) and the generation of empathy, arguing

that both chosen museum sites (the Irish Republican History Museum and Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre) appeal to this intersection as they develop their material for an increasingly incipient ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry *et al.* 2011) in Northern Ireland. Finally, arguing that both paramilitary museums are actively invested in the promotion of ‘organisational innocence’ (Jalusic 2007), this essay will speculate on the centrality of the tourist figure to the post-Troubles imagination, arguing that we need to be more honest about the role contemporary tourism plays in memories of the conflict, in recognition of the fact that what Debbie Lisle (2006: 27) calls the ‘two communities thesis’, is increasingly losing its relevance when it comes to scholarship on Northern Ireland (Conrad 2006; Nagle 2009; Croke 2014).

Methodology and case studies

The findings in this essay are derived from a three-year doctoral research project exploring the role of empathy in tourist interpretations of Troubles heritage in Belfast. As a field that is often dominated by socio-political theory and more ‘masculine’ approaches to conflict research (Dowler 1998) emotion has, as Sharon Pickering (2001: 485) notes, ‘been systematically excluded in most academic work on Northern Ireland’. Whilst this is more effectively addressed at the level of heritage studies, where a number of projects address the way that heritage is used to mediate traumatic memories in Northern Ireland (Croke

2001; Dawson 2007; Purbrick 2007; Crooke 2008; Bigand 2012; McAtackney 2013; McLaughlin 2016; Crooke 2016), the impact of researcher emotionality on Troubles heritage remains under-documented, with the result that emotion is often reduced to an ‘out there’ affect, rather than integral to the research findings themselves (Smyth *et al.* 1996; Rolston 1998; Finlay 2001). Such a position is of course an understandable reaction to working on a subject as divisive as the Troubles where, in an institutional culture that shudders at the idea ‘going native’ (Rolston 1998: 99), subjective reflections are discouraged in favour of a more ‘objective’ academic discourse, and where objectivity may also, as Sharon Pickering (2001: 490) notes, act as a form of ‘personal emotional protection’. However, one of the consequences of absencing researcher emotion from the work on Northern Ireland is also, as Pickering argues, that the opportunity to engage critically with these emotions (and thus use them as a source of knowledge) often goes amiss, and some of the more relevant insights that such engagements might bring to studies of difficult heritage are undermapped.

In response to this, within my own work I use what Leon Anderson (2006) terms an ‘analytic auto-ethnographic’ approach to Troubles heritage in Belfast, which further supplemented by the usual mainstays of museum ethnography, also makes use of participant-observation, semi-structured interviews with key heritage stakeholders, and what Sharon MacDonald describe as (2005: 123)

‘intelligent critical reading’ of visitor books. At first glance, the decision to take an auto-ethnographic approach to this project may seem unethical, given that critics of the method have sometimes accused its proponents of using subjectivity to re-centre, rather than deconstruct their own privilege within the academy (Tolich 2010; Tullis 2013; Lapadat 2017). Certainly, my provincial middle-class English background sits uneasily alongside these accusations, given the conflict’s geolocation within predominantly urban, working class communities (a factor which also made trying to interpret the impact that key heritage sites might have on local communities a precarious task at times). However, my position as an ‘outsider’ to these experiences, whilst often a barrier to full appreciation of what Troubles heritage might mean at a local level, was useful when trying to track the experiences of that other perennial outsider, the tourist. As a practice, analytic auto-ethnography extends the practice of traditional auto-ethnography (which its champions celebrate for its ability to ‘acknowledge and accommodat[e] subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on the research’ (Ellis *et al.* 2011: 2)), by engaging critically and self-reflexively with the researcher experience, using more traditional realist practices (such as interviews and observation) to unpack emotion and ‘refine generalized theoretical understandings of social processes’ (Anderson 2006: 385). Whilst not commonly used in museological contexts, there is some precedence for developing autoethnographic accounts of tourism, where proponents of the method often note its usefulness in tracking the

emotional complexity and continuity of tourist experiences (Sikes 2006; Noy 2007; Dunkley 2007; Noy 2008a; Mackenzie *et al.* 2012). By applying an autoethnographic account to my chosen paramilitary museums, I was therefore able to both sidestep some methodological challenges I found when trying to access actual tourist-visitors to the museum, whilst bringing my own emotional tourist experiences to the forefront of my discussions.

The museums that I will be exploring in more detail in this essay come from opposite sides of the political spectrum in Northern Ireland, and therefore offer some useful points of comparisons when thinking in more detail about the intersections between empathy, innocence and victimhood. Of the two sites, the Irish Republican History Museum (IRHM) is probably the most well-known to tourists to Belfast, where situated just off the Falls Road in the Conway Mill site, it encourages a reasonably steady flow of international visitors to its site, who come to the museum either as part of a black cab mural tour, or after viewing the famous ‘International Wall’. Established by ex-IRA Commanding Officer Eileen Hickey, the primary purpose of the museum (according to its volunteers) is to educate a new generation of visitors about the history of armed republicanism, and to preserve artefacts connected to the long history of internment in Ireland, and the site itself is filled with a variety of objects donated from both local families in Belfast, and supporters of republicanism from abroad. In contrast to this, the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre (ATIC)

occupies a much less frequented space just off the Newtownards Road in East Belfast, and although it does receive international visitors (often through pre-organised tours), it is, as its volunteer confessed to me, much more oriented towards these visitors, and ex-members of the UDA than the broader unionist or Protestant community. Set up by UDA commander Dee Stitt, the site opened in 2012 (five years after the Republican Museum) and was very much developed out of a growing awareness that the loyalist community weren't as effective at selling their past to an international community as republicans have been (ATIC Interview 27.08.15). Like the Republican Museum, ATIC receives the majority of its items from local donors, supplemented with purchases from eBay, and is operating on a shoe-string budget. The financial independence of both these sites, and their small-scale, DIY approach to museum curation make them perfect examples of what Fiona Candlin has described as the 'micro-museum'. However, where as Candlin (2016: 11) tends to bracket these museums into amateur ventures, suggesting that they shouldn't be 'judged within dominant paradigms of good practice', I argue that these sites still curate a 'museum effect' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991: 410) for visitors, which combined with the reductive expectancy of the tourist gaze (Urry *et al.* 2011), means that however haphazard it might be, the 'curation' of objects at these sites still merits critical engagement.

Exhibiting victimhood

As indicated by the Arendt quote that serves as an epigraph to this paper, one of innocence's more challenging features is that, whilst seemingly adjudicated by the justice system, on a social level it has inherited a kind of paradoxical unutterability which enshrouds any outright declarations of innocence with immediate suspicion. As such, Arendt (1963: 87) writes, innocence 'cannot be proved but must be accepted on faith', the issue being of course that questions of faith, or the belief in someone's inviolability, are themselves highly socially controlled, and subject to all the matrices of gendered, raced and classed logics. Nowhere has this been demonstrated more clearly than in relation to the Troubles where, as Bill Rolston (2000: xi) has observed, the mainland media campaign against the North was so powerful, that 'even the most obvious criterion of "innocence"', such as childhood, was dismissed in official accounts of state killings. In the years since the end of the conflict, these narratives have shifted considerably, and stakeholders at all levels have scrambled to enmesh themselves, and their organisations within discourses of innocent victimhood on both a cultural and political level (Morrissey *et al.* 2002). However rather than overturning the balance of power with regards to victims of violence in the North, more often than not, the most successful cultural re-imaginings emanate from those paramilitary organisations who were responsible for that violence in the first place, creating what Stephanie Lehner and Cillian McGrattan (2012:

39) have referred to as a ‘foundational power gap’ that separates those they consider to be ‘true’ victims of the conflict from those who represent victimhood in the cultural spheres.

As sites that are visited by tourists seeking a culturally authentic experience of Belfast (Jarman 1996; Murtagh *et al.* 2017), the Irish Republican History Museum and Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre are deeply enmeshed in both the construction of innocent victimhood, and the perpetuation of this foundational power gap. Both sites weave narratives of victimisation throughout their exhibitions, drawing attention to the fatalities and injuries inflicted upon members of the wider Protestant/Catholic community, often overstating the commonalities between republicanism/loyalism and these communities (McDowell 2007), and using these commonalities to justify their militarisation, thereby confirming Morrissey and Smyth’s (2002: 5) observation that ‘the violence of the victims is seen in the context of their victimisation’. At the IRHM, a memorial to female members of the IRA make use of what Brian Graham and Yvonne Whelan (2007: 484) have described as the ‘ritual rhetoric of volunteers’ used elsewhere in the republican memoryscape, whereby the volunteer’s cause of death is described in oblique terms as a ‘premature explosion’ or ‘shot dead’ by loyalist or state forces, without reference to any specific detail that might indicate the victim’s responsibility for, or collusion in the victimisation of others. At the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre, a similar

pattern emerges, whereby the justification for taking up arms is framed through reference to the ‘republican atrocities’ inflicted upon Protestant communities, and very little detail is given of the revenge attacks carried out by various loyalist forces. Asides from the distinct differences that emerge in terms of how the sites situate their members within broader genealogical histories, at first glance both museums appear to offer a similar expression of victimhood; ones which for the most part focuses on the violence inflicted upon them by others that is unmatched by ‘a corresponding willingness to own responsibility in relation to hurts and harms that have been done in their name’ (Smyth 1998: 37).

However, such contextualisations, whilst mirroring broader practices of memorialisation in Northern Ireland (Graham *et al.* 2007; McDowell 2007; Goalwin 2013) are an anathema to many of the artefacts on display in these museums, which contrary to attempts to subdue the inherent violence of paramilitary organisations, can evoke a vivid, and deeply affective reminder of their complicity in some of the conflict’s worst atrocities. Entering the Irish Republican History Museum for the first time, my initial apprehension and fear of being a body out of place in a republican enclave was initially confirmed when, trying to find some sense of continuity in my visit, and a clear narrative to latch onto, I was almost immediately confronted with the sight of a rocket launcher, which I noted seemed to be ‘casually hanging from the ceiling,

suspended above the heads of an unsuspecting couple' (Fig. 1). At the time of witnessing such a blatant display of militarisation I found myself mostly registering shock and disorientation, which was intensified by the cheerful gaelic music that was playing in the background at the time. A similar experience also presented itself at the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre where, before moving premises in 2016, a loose display of rifles, baseball bats and flails (resting on metal hooks without protective screening) greeted the visitor as they walked through the door (Fig. 2). On this occasion, even though my experiences at the Republican museum prepared me for displays like this, an underlying sense of their viscerality persisted, aided no doubt by the sensation that they could all too easily be removed from their resting points and handled by members of the public (something which the volunteer later confessed happened with some frequency). Although these weapons have since been moved upstairs to another room where they no longer present themselves to the visitor in the same way, the sheer accessibility of these items (not to mention some of the ominous stains on the baseball bat) still makes sharing a space with these items an emotionally challenging experience at times, and they are a testament to the object 'liveness' that Fiona Candlin (2016) notes micro-museums often draw out of their artefacts.

<Figure 1 here>

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Observing other visitors to these sites, it quickly became evident that the weapons on display were equally fascinating for tourists to the paramilitary museum. The average visitor to both the Republican, and Andy Tyrrie museums comes as part of a guided tour of the local murals, and whilst these tend to be more heavily concentrated around West Belfast (and hence closer to the Republican museum) the mural tourist has a significant presence at both sites. When it comes to the Irish Republican History Museum, once let loose by their guide, the average visitor will tend to spend no more than 30 minutes wandering around its room, weaving their way through its exhibitions, stopping only briefly to examine its contents. In the absence of explanatory labels or detailed contextual information, visitors (who most often come in pairs or as part of groups) will stand in front of these cases, murmuring exchanges, and occasionally pointing out items to each other. Without a doubt, the cases that always attract the most attention are those containing the handguns and petrol bombs, which people linger over for noticeably longer than the other cases (an observation also confirmed by multiple members of the curatorial staff). Occasionally I have overheard jokes being made about the weapons on display, but more often people's uneasiness is communicated through furtive silence, as they look at these objects, sometimes glancing anxiously around, clearly uncomfortable to be seen staring for too long. When young children come to the museum as part of a family trip they are invariably drawn to these cases, and

will be unabashed about spending longer periods of time gazing at the weapons on display. However, what was striking about these interactions with the cases, is that I rarely heard the children asking questions about the guns whilst in the museum, nor did parents particularly encourage them. The contrast between this, and their interaction with other objects on display was particularly notable in one case, where a mother and son, after spending a period of time silently looking at one of the gun cases, moved on to a handcrafted crib which immediately prompted the child to exclaim “Awh! That’s amazing!”. Listening to, and observing visitors milling around at the site it was clear that, like me, handguns and rifles were the object of fascination, and yet these fascinations were never reflected in the comments in the visitor books, which instead referenced the photos of injured children or rubber bullets that surrounded these items. This discrepancy between people’s engagements with the museum, and what they chose to publicly record, could suggest residual discomfit about expressing criticism in a space that doesn’t invite it. Indeed, it was not unusual to see tour guides standing by the guide books, directing their clients to add a comment before they left the museum. Under such conditions, it would hardly be surprising for visitors to feel restricted in terms of providing an honest response to the museum. However contrary to this, and as this essay will later explore, the specific quality of the entries into these guestbooks also suggest a tacit endorsement of republican claims to innocence on behalf of the movement.

The decision to exhibit items which might cause visitors to question these museums' claims to victimisation might seem an odd curatorial strategy, however for the volunteers I spoke to at both sites, the inclusion of guns seemed unproblematic, and was regarded as a matter of honesty. As the volunteer at ATIC responded when I asked about the weapons on display, 'we tell the truth. We don't try to hide the gangster element that happened' (ATIC Interview 27.08.15), suggesting a desire to be transparent about the organisation's past. Certainly, offering some degree of reflection on violent pasts is not unusual at sites such as the Andy Tyrie and Irish Republican History Museums where anything less would make them vulnerable to accusations of hypocrisy from their visitors and wider community, and in this sense the display of weaponry fits neatly into the practices of other memorial museums, which often exhibit objects that possess a certain 'sinister appeal' (Williams 2007: 31). However, such 'hot' objects, with all the emotional punch they possess, are also hard for curators to control at an interpretive level 'due to their high capacity for personification' (Williams 2007: 34). In this sense, displaying guns and other items that have already been made iconic through their appearance in media coverage of both paramilitary groups (and which most visitors, myself included, would take as evidence of their responsibility for the horrors of the past) is a risqué move, and one that suggests a particular level of confidence in the viability and power of their own narratives of victimisation.

Visitor books

Looking at the visitor books found at both the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre, and the Irish Republican History Museum, it is possible to see just how effective the narrative of victimhood is when it comes to reactions to the weapons, and other items on display at these sites. Sharon MacDonald (2005) and Chaim Noy (2008b; 2008c) have already drawn attention to the role that the visitor book can play in our understanding of the museum experience, with Chaim Noy (2008b: 516) in particular describing the visitor book's function as 'a *miniature stage*', on which visitors 'perform an act of documentation' (2008a: 513).

Certainly at the Irish Republican History Museum, the performative aspect of signing visitor books was evident in the diligent queues of tourists who often lined up to sign their names, and add a comment under the watchful eye of a tour guides. Although it wasn't always clear what the motivation was for getting clients to sign these books in this manner, the practice of the tour guide imploring their clients to sign the book before leaving was a frequently observable pattern, as visitors were requested to at least write a name and place of origin. From the volunteer's point of view, such a practice was useful in that

it gave them a means of tracking visitor demographics, which could then be used as bragging rights in an ever-competitive troubled tourism sector.

Certainly, staff frequently directed me to these books when I asked questions, and would often highlight some of the more complimentary comments to me. In this sense, both the signing and reading of these books were deeply performative, and controlled affairs, which seemed entirely appropriate given the space they were in.

Taking these coercions into account, it was hardly surprising to find across the ten years of visitor books at the Republican Museum, very little in the way of critique of the site, or suggestions for change (although to a certain extent this was still commensurate with the kind of reviews found on the museum's TripAdvisor site). The places where tacit disapproval was sometimes suggestive, were the gaps left next to visitors who had signed their names (presumably under duress) without leaving a comment, or a few cagier comments describing the site as 'ok', 'good', or the more neutral 'informative', although such omissions and comments may also have been the result of limited English, or time restrictions.

Of those who did leave comments in the books, most offered a variation on the usual banalities found in these mediums, with the site being alternately described as ‘interesting’, ‘excellent’, ‘brilliant’. At the other end of the spectrum, and in notable contrast to the comments found at the Andy Tyrie Centre, a number of signatories reported feeling ‘moved’ by the museum, describing the experience as ‘emotional’, ‘heart breaking’ and in some cases even ‘life altering’. Strikingly, such comments were expressed by people from a range of backgrounds (from London to Honolulu), and often written independently of the other comments in the book, were not part of the ‘collective production’ usually associated with visitor book entries (Noy 2008b: 517).

At the Andy Tyrie Centre, insights from visitor books were more limited given that the Centre only started keeping a record in the last eighteen months.

However, in contrast to the Republican Museum, where comments were usually brief and general in tone, responses to the Andy Tyrie Centre were much more developed, usually covering a sentence or two, albeit without the expressions of emotionality found in the books at the Republican site. Like the Republican Museum visitor books, the one at the Andy Tyrie contains all the usual platitudes of ‘brilliant’, ‘interesting’ and ‘very good’, however they also offer

additional notations, often from broader members of the UDA, expressing gratitude to the sites for ‘preserving our history’, in a nod to narrower audience for which the site was conceived. Also unlike the inscriptions at the Eileen Hickey, which tend to be more respectful and sombre in tone, there is an underlying jocularly and humour to some of the entries at the Andy Tyrrie Centre, with one particularly notable commentator writing ‘cheers for the lovely time UDA’.

These differences aside, what is striking across both visitor books is the way that visitors position themselves in relation to the material, and narratives of the perceived community that they see at both sites. Returning to those displays in the Republican Museum that condoned the weapons on the premise that they were ‘used to defend the nationalist people’, visitor absorption of these slippages between the suffering of the Catholic community, the aims of nationalism, and actions of Republicanism was evidenced through comments referencing the hurts issued against the ‘community’ or ‘the Irish people’, indicating a tacit acceptance (even if only performative) of the idea that republicanism in some way represents the general feelings and ideology of a broader (imagined) civilian community. Going further than this, a number of comments in both the Andy Tyrrie Centre’s and Republican Museum’s books

actually saw visitors using phrases associated with paramilitary forces, in an apparent gesture of solidarity with these ideologies. Whilst at the Andy Tyrrie, slogans such as ‘Quis Separabit’ or ‘QS’ were most commonly used by those who indicated belonging to some kind of loyalist brigade, at the Republican Museum, notes that finished with “Up the Ra!”, ‘Viva la Republique’ or “Go raibh maith agat” came from a range of actors from across the globe. Possibly this was the result of the museum’s broader audience, which receives double the number of visitors on any given day than the Andy Tyrrie Centre, and which is most heavily visited by those international tourists on a taxi tour of the city. Possibly also, it reflects republicanism’s wider success in importing its aims and ideologies to countries similarly engaged in conflict over their own colonial legacies (Lisle 2006; Rolston 2009). However, given that many of these comments also came from places without these legacies, such an explanation isn’t entirely all-encompassing, and responses such as one from an Italian visitor who wrote that ‘I feel more Irish now’ suggest something else is also going on at the level of visitor experience. On the one hand, these declarative expressions of (mis)identification with paramilitary ideologies is certainly encouraged by what Chaim Noy (2008b: 523) sees as being the visitor book’s performative element, through which the seasoned museum visitor use the book’s stage to demonstrate her understanding of ‘both how she is expected to

react, and how she is meant to *convey* her reaction'. However within this, the willingness to align themselves with a paramilitary ideology (however confusing the relationship between paramilitarism, and wider communities in Belfast might be), in the face of such concrete evidence of their violent histories attests to another kind of performance, one that is deeply enmeshed in what Vlasta Jalusic has termed 'organisational innocence' .

Organisational innocence

Writing on the questions of guilt and responsibility in relation to the Yugoslavian conflict, Vlasta Jalusic (2007: 1174) observes that understandings of how to talk about and understood 'the criminal past' were radically altered in the wake of World War Two. Noting that, following the Nuremberg Trials the possibility of denying collective responsibility for war crimes ceased, Jalusic suggests that those preparing for, or reflecting on criminal acts began to divert their attention away from the rhetoric of responsibility, and towards that of innocence and guilt. Out of this shift, Jalusic (2007: 1174) writes about the concept of 'organised innocence' , which she describes as 'an extended process of preparation' for 'a specific climate and mentality [...] created in order to prepare people to participate in, commit to, or tolerate' violence that is also a

‘preparation process for an enterprise of organised guilt, producing a situation of inverted human values, where unimaginable things become conceivable and people can easily renounce their personal and collective responsibility’ (2007: 1181). As a concept, organised innocence is heavily invested in an Arendtian interpretation of innocence and guilt that, stemming from the argument that only those excluded from the fullness of state participation are truly innocent, suggests by extension that all who benefit from the richness of national belonging (whether they are anarchists or not) must also admit complicity in that nation’s wrongdoing. Organised innocence, Jalusic (2007: 1180) writes, works to invert this truth, by first selling the lie that those belonging to a nation are, in fact, stateless, and secondly encouraging citizens to renounce their ‘basic political potential’ by developing this lie through the construction of artificial victimhood.

Organised innocence can clearly be seen at work in the rhetoric of contemporary loyalism and republicanism in Northern Ireland where the two traditions have essentially developed out of a reactionary fear about the disenfranchisement that the success of the other’s campaign would bring.

Within a museums context, such rhetorics become doubly potent and, alongside the visual evidence of the wounds that have been inflicted on both communities

(captured in the array of deeply affecting photographs of the injured and dead) are references to militarised resistance to this, in a way that naturalises the association between the two. At the Andy Tyrrie Centre, the most obvious manifestation of this militance in the face of disenfranchisement is found in the arrangement of photos on the display where amateur snapshots of various balaclava-covered UDA/UFF members, brandishing rifles in the disturbing familiarity of back gardens or countryside idyls, are situated alongside particularly graphic images documenting the stripping and beating of two young corporals, carried out by the IRA in 1988 in retaliation for the Michael Stone attacks three days before. The inclusion of this particular event, which actually occurred a decade after the formation of the UDA asks the visitor to make what was an implicit connection fully explicit; namely that loyalist violence emerged directly in response to this explicit assault on British soldiers, and therefore unionists' British identity. Notably on the opposite side of this same display are images taken of a protest march conducted between London/Derry to Belfast featuring banners emblazoned with the slogan "British citizens defend British rights!" that enable even the least discerning of visitors to pick up on this connection. Elsewhere, smaller, less obvious signs play into this ideology, with stickers subtly adhered to glass display cases with slogans such as "I am fully insured by AK 47" and calls to "Defend the Union". Such an interpretation is

also cognisant with how ex-UDA members use the space who, according to my interviewee will ‘come in, take a look around, at some of the atrocities that the IRA committed, and they’ll go, “you know what? Thank god that was on the wall because that’s why I did this. To stop these men from doing this”’ (ATIC Interview 27.08.15). In this way Jalusic (2007: 1175) notes that organised innocence is also retroactive, used to reflect on crimes that were committed so that they are ‘for the second time rendered into something righteous and are, accordingly, normalised’.

At the Republican Museum, this triangulation of militance and innocence is in some ways subtler than at the Andy Tyrrie, possibly in recognition of the fact that, thanks to the British media, the IRA’s international reputation for violence has already been well established around the globe. Perhaps in response to this recognition, violence is abstracted rather than embodied at the Republican Museum, and it contains very few images of actual IRA men dressed in their military gear, in spite of the fact that the Roddy McCorley Museum down the road holds a significant collection in this regard. Instead, embodiment takes the form of abject photos of beaten hunger strikers and Catholic civilians or conversely a series of mannequins dressed in the uniforms of the RUC, British Army and Prison Guard, thus reconfirming the injured as solely victims, and

never perpetrators of violence. Subtle allusions to the necessity of republican militancy can be found however, in labels that mark certain items down for their use ‘in the cause of Irish Freedom’, that avoids specifying against who, and when they were used. In this way, the Irish Republican History Museum becomes not only the publicly acceptable face for republicanism, but also the visual front for its display of organised innocence, into which the tourist is guilelessly invited to take part.

Because of course, as the distinction between the collections at the Irish Republican History Museum, and its more militant cousin, the Roddy McCorley museum show, investments in the idea of organised innocence are not only deeply performative (a fact that Jalusic herself also picks up on), they are also performed for very specific audiences who, often in the case of the paramilitary museum, are for a far broader community than the one immediately imagined through paramilitary membership. As an imagined community, who over the years have been characterised by precisely the kind of statelessness needed for the abdication of responsibility, tourists are themselves often guilty of acts of violence that are concealed behind the ‘veil of virtuous innocence’ (Regina da Cal Seixas *et al.* 2016: 161). Hazel Andrews (2016: 5) has accused violence of being ‘manifest in many aspects of touristic practices and encounters’, whilst

Julia Harrison (2003: 137) writes that ‘the innocence with which the tourist imagine their travels blinds them’ to the symbolic and real injustices that they may enact on the country and people that host them. Tourist declarations of allegiance with the IRA/UDA in the visitor books also need to be interpreted in this context, and in light of the debates around organised innocence, not least because as Jonathan Harden (2010) has identified, violent acts in Northern Ireland have always been framed around a certain performativity, in which witnesses play a crucial role as not just spectators but also performer and potential victim through the very diffuse nature of violence in the province. Of course for most tourists, admitting responsibility for the perpetration, or even condoning of violence presents deep discomforts, but more so for the thanotourist, who Philip Stone (2009) observes, has already had to work to overcome significant media critiques about the immorality of their venture, and so is either completely oblivious to, or completely convinced of their non-complicity in these practices. Nevertheless, it is through this understanding that comments expressing solidarity, and emotiveness in these visitor books should be read, more so because it is these expressions that curators and organisers of the museum often use to justify their own existence, and validate their particular interpretations of history.

Conclusion

As observed by Laurajane Smith *et al.* (2016) there has in recent years been an ‘affective turn’ in heritage studies, which often centred around example of difficult or ‘dissonant’ heritage (Tunbridge *et al.* 1996), has seen various scholars invest in the idea of empathy as a key driving force behind visitor understandings of the past (Landsberg 2004; Arnold de Simine 2013; Witcomb 2015; Tolia-Kelly 2016). Almost unilaterally, such studies tend to focus on the positive effects of empathy at these sites, the usual assumption being that their organisers are sincere in their attempts to address the past. However, as the case of the paramilitary museum demonstrates, expressions of sincerity can come at the expense of more nuanced and balanced approaches to the past, raising uncomfortable questions about what the political implications are of empathising with selective histories.

Whilst neither the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre, nor the Irish Republican History Museum explicitly state that they are trying to court visitor empathy, their self-positioning as victims, and appeals to innocence is contiguous with popularised understandings of empathy, which usually positions innocence as

the baseline for emotional identification, and which Martin Hoffman and Martha Nussbaum say is a key criteria for empathic engagement (Hoffman 1990; Nussbaum 1996; Nussbaum 2001). Certainly, the affective quality of the images of injured civilians at both sites compels an emotional reaction from the tourist that, if not entirely leading to complete empathetic identification, does gesture towards it, and seems to override the equally affecting experience of being confronted with weapons used during the conflict. As one Australian visitor to the Republican Museum remarked whilst looking at a display case filled with rubber bullets and images of the children killed by them, ‘if someone does something to you like that then you’re going to retaliate’, suggesting a similar level of identification with the republican cause to those expressed in the visitor books, which might be understood as both a cognitive and affectively driven demonstration of empathy (Coplan 2011).

Of course, the effects of such empathetic victim narratives are not restricted to the tourist, but also have the potential to impact the broader heritage landscapes in Northern Ireland and understandings of the past. It seemed significant that, on one of the later visits to the Republican Museum I noticed rifle pens, and keyring with images of IRA militants were for sale, suggesting not just the commodification of violence, but also a guileless assumption that such items

were ‘innocent’ and disconnected enough from contemporary issues to make their presence acceptable to the tourist visitor. Similarly, on one occasion at the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre, a museum volunteer gestured towards the posters and objects littered around the walls and chuckled that “this is basically like my bedroom”, again suggesting a certain level of confidence about how I was perceiving the museum and its contents, and my inability to connect this to ongoing UDA gang violence in Belfast.

Such moments and items are of course not in themselves examples of ‘bad’ heritage (Lowenthal 1997), and particularly in a nation riven by traumatic experiences of the past, all forms of remembrance have a right to public expression. However, as Cillian McGrattan (2013: 40) has argued, when such single identity work becomes enmeshed with discourses of empathy, these more selective interpretations of history become more problematic, particularly in relation to victims’ issues, where ideas of indiscriminate empathy for all ‘points to a generalised position where distinctions are no longer possible, and, since everyone is responsible for the 3,700 plus deaths, no one is individually culpable’. As single-identity sites that are becoming increasingly popular amongst international audiences, both the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre and Irish Republican History Museum become complicit in this generalisation of

justice, and in the absence of critically engaged visitors to these sites, discourses of innocence and empathy are not simply limited to their effects in the museum, but become a route through which violence (symbolic and real) is condoned in the present.

Words: 6959

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List of Captions

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