

# Memory Politics and Material Culture: display in the memorial museum

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## Abstract

When private grief is brought into the memorial museum this transfer is a deliberate act that is seeking public acknowledgement and action. By considering the life history of a collection of objects now in the Museum of Free Derry (Northern Ireland), the use of objects in private mourning and as agents in the collective processes of public remembering is demonstrated. The story is one of loss and mourning that is intensified by the political context of the deaths. As cherished possessions these objects are active in the private processes of grieving and recovery. In the memorial museum they are agents in an evolving justice campaign, embedded in the political negotiations of the region.

## Key Words

Memorial Museum, Material Culture, Memory, Northern Ireland, Troubles

The past displayed in museums is carefully chosen. Curatorial decisions to collect, interpret and display are considered and have consequence. In a memorial museum, where the story told is borne from a violent experience and driven by a contemporary campaign, these decisions are laced with political purpose and tied closely with the contemporary needs of that community. In the memorial museum this is remembrance with a clear purpose, to extend the memory of injustice in order to grow awareness, seek acknowledgement and stimulate action. This article focuses on a collection of artefacts displayed in the Museum of Free Derry, Northern Ireland, which tell the story of 'Bloody Sunday' (30 January 1972) when thirteen people, all Catholics, participating in an anti-internment march, died as a result of gunfire from British soldiers. When the bodies of those who lost their lives were returned to their families their blood stained clothes, and the few things in their pockets, became part of the record of what happened that day and a final link with the deceased. Bloody Sunday has been described as having 'an immediate and catastrophic effect' on relations in Northern Ireland (Arthur 1980: 114). Arthur describes what began on the day as a 'skirmish between a youthful-mob and some army regiments' that lead to paratroopers moving in and 'firing recklessly' on an unarmed crowd (Arthur 1980: 114). The 'official memory' of Bloody Sunday, recorded and published in April 1972 in what became known as the Widgery Report, supported the Army's version of the event that they only fired in self-defence. This was rejected by the families of the deceased claiming it served the interests of the British military and the political establishment (Dawson 2005). In the late-1980s, the Bloody Sunday Initiative (later the Bloody Sunday Justice Campaign) was formed and it appealed for a

full and truthful account of the day (Dawson 2005, 2007). Subsequently Bloody Sunday was re-considered by the Saville Inquiry (1998-2010) and the report, published June 2010, prompted the UK Prime Minister David Cameron to describe the shootings as 'unjustified and unjustifiable' (Cameron 2010).

This article draws upon in-depth interviews with three individuals, who loaned objects to the Museum of Free Derry (located in Derry/Londonderry), an independent museum established and managed by the Bloody Sunday Trust. The Bloody Sunday Trust was formed in 1997 as a human rights organisation working for communities in Derry, particularly those in the Bogside area of the city, and it is, for the most part, associated with Catholic and Republican communities. The Trust describes its work as building on the memories and experiences of conflict, creating opportunities for them to be 'transmitted to the wider community'. The museum tells the story of conflict in the city, with a focus on the events of Bloody Sunday. Related objects vary from what the deceased wore on the day, and still blood stained, to their personal items treasured by the families: John Kelly, spoke about the babygro used to stem his brother's blood; Kay Duddy of the Priest's handkerchief, that came home with her brother's clothes; and Liam Wray about his brother's coat, used as evidence in the Inquiry and now on display in the museum. Interviews were conducted in the museum and, in one case, in the individual's workplace. The interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes and, although there were no set questions, it remained focussed on the history of the object in the home and later the value placed on objects donated to the museum. Inevitably, this was also a conversation about loss, grief, the nature of memory, and the political context of the tragedy. Appreciation of the sensitivity of the subject matter, and awareness of the ethics of this form of interviewing, was essential to the process (Connolly 2003). Each participant read their interview transcript and had the opportunity to alter it or to withdraw their participation. Crucially, contributors preferred their real names to be used in this paper and the reason for this is, in part, tied to the experience of the aftermath of Bloody Sunday. It was not until the Saville Inquiry that their accounts of the day became part of the record. Each interview, undertaken by a researcher like myself, is another opportunity for the individuals to tell their story in their words and to have it shared with others. One contributor despised the use of a pseudonym, likening it to the use of the alias to protect the identity of the paratroopers who gave interviews to the Saville Inquiry.

During these conversations the donors discussed the life story of the objects. Each person shared intimate experiences of grieving and, in recent years, a sense of recovery; although for some there are still unresolved issues. As they spoke it was apparent that these were cherished objects that extended the legacy and biography of the person (Hoskins 1998) and gave them relevance into the future. It was clear that these were objects of great power and symbolism (Domanska 2006; Hill 2007; Hurdley 2006; Norris 2004) and the individuals were aware of their social agency (Gell 1988; Myers 2004; Parish 2007). For the families of the deceased, meaning is constructed in three ways. The first is the object of *mourning*, which relates to the role of the object in the home as a means to negotiate loss and grieving. They shared the personal meanings associated with the objects and told me how they were used, stored and referred to in the home during the over forty years since. The second is the

object as *evidence*, marking the beginning of the public role of the objects as material evidence in the campaign for truth. As evidence in the Saville Inquiry (Saville 2010), the objects become active agents in recovering the details of what happened on that day. With corporal evidence, the objects are ‘a witness from beyond the grave’ (Domanska 2006: 344) and have been ascribed *memorial role*, as iconic objects in the Museum of Free Derry. Although the objects may continue to have a role in personal mourning, or as evidence, display in the memorial museum extends the significance of the objects: they are now making a contribution to the continuing campaign for justice for the deceased and their families. Analysis of the meanings ascribed by the individuals interviewed, in particular in regard to donation to the museum, brings new insights to the examination found in other studies of the importance of objects at times of loss or transition (Hallam and Hockey 2001; Hutchison 2011; Miller and Parrott 2009; Parkin 1999). The analysis of the interviews, as found in this paper, provides insights into the intention underpinning the transfer of the objects from the private space of the home into the memorial museum. With this move these are now more than objects of personal mourning; within the museum they are part of the collective effort of public and shared remembrance and a means to forge how the events are remembered. This paper explores the life story of the object, as a constant material presence, while memory work evolves, from private mourning to the public space of a memorial museum with an activist project.

### **Life story of an object: mourning, evidence and memorial**

On Bloody Sunday Liam Wray, then eighteen years of age, lost his brother Jim (22 years old) who Liam considered a ‘surrogate father’, given their father spent a lot of time working in England. The coat which Jim wore on the march is now on display in the Museum of Free Derry, with the bullet entry holes through the back of the coat marked with the original stickers used during the Saville Inquiry (Figure 1). When in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday his brother’s clothes were returned from forensic analysis, Liam describes his father as keeping the coat because he had ‘the feeling and the belief’ that one day it could be used as evidence to clear Jim’s name (Wray 2011, pers. comm.). Liam describes the coat as an item to be honoured. In the eyes of his family Jim was a hero and a martyr.

The coat and its significance to us, was like, now this might sound silly in a way, or over the top [pause] it was like a relic of someone who, in our family point of view, was a martyr, a hero. So it was always was treated with respect. Very few people ever seen it. But, a few did, but very few. (Wray 2011, pers. comm.)

Given the reverence with which the coat is held, the family were initially reluctant to part with it for the purposes of the Saville Inquiry, for fear it would not be returned or treated properly. The Inquiry eventually acknowledged the bullet entered from the rear while Jim was lying face down; as a result, Liam feels they were vindicated in parting with the coat for that purpose. Liam describes: ‘it was very important to us to give it in. I felt that the wisdom of my father, at that time, in preserving the coat was

very important'. Liam presents the coat as verification of Jim's innocence: 'it played a role in defining, as far as the evidence could go, that Jim was lying on the ground, prone, when he was shot the second time' (Wray 2011, pers. comm.). Repeatedly Liam refers to the magnitude of the object: 'the coat was very, very special to the family. As I said, it took on in a sense a relic, not to that degree, but that importance' (Wray 2011, pers. comm.). Although the coat was passed on to him by his father, because he was the eldest son, as far as Liam was concerned the coat 'belonged' to the entire family. Displaying it in the museum removed it from his individual possession. Now, the physical keeping of the coat isn't the privileged role of one 'singled out' family member, but the responsibility of a third party on behalf of the family. This arrangement gives the family equal access, something Liam prefers: 'so giving it to the museum took a bit of responsibility off me, or concern, as an individual' (Wray 2011 pers. comm.). Now displayed in the Museum of Free Derry, Liam emphasizes his family's continued ownership of the coat; the family has not parted with the coat: I never gave them the coat [pause] it still belongs to the Wray family' (Wray 2011, pers. comm.)



Figure 1: The coat worn by Jim Wray, displayed in the Museum of Free Derry (Photograph E Crooke, April 2012)

Clothes, because they are worn next to the skin, have a strong personal connection: 'imprinted with the shape, size, and odour of the lived body [clothing] has a power of immediacy' (Gibson 2004: 290). The materiality of clothing is formed by wear. Worn certain way by one person rather than another, the item will be shaped to fit and an everyday item becomes unique. The flat coat is 'bulging with presence' (Kelly in Deepwell 2005: 103); they bear the marks of their wearer; they are stained

with their blood and have become a document of their death. Certain clothing is considered auspicious, and can even protect from harm (Norris 2004). The items were a final link with the deceased; they were part evidence and part memorial to their death. Liam expresses the aura of his brother's coat:

There is in times [pause] not being over the top [pause] I find there is at times [pause], I tell you, not like a spiritual force, there is a force in that [pause] were it magnifies [pause] in my experience, any time I go near the jacket, mind you I am speaking as a relative, so it is sacred to me, as I said before. I find when you go into an environment, you are so close to something, you do get [pause] it draws you in, in human sense, not only that, I am trying to describe [pause] that sense of humanity [pause] it carries its own aura, in a sense. Does that sound too [pause] I don't know if I am expressing myself correctly, or not. (Wray 2011, pers. comm.)

Here Liam finds it difficult to put in words the power of his brother's coat. During the interview he talks about its importance as evidence for the Bloody Sunday story. He is aware that over forty years later, Bloody Sunday is still considered one of the most significant events of the Northern Ireland conflict. When in the presence of the coat he gets a sense of this magnitude. He is reminded of the enormity of what happened to his family, to the local community and nationally. This is all bound in his brother's blood stained coat.

It is this link with the person that makes the clothes donated to the museum so powerful. There is a sense of longevity of Jim's memory brought with display: 'his memory lives on. Although Jim was murdered his spirit and his story lives on. Part of that is conducted through having the jacket in the mechanism of a museum' (Wray 2011, pers. comm.). Although an inanimate object, the coat has a spirit or force that gives it charge in contemporary circumstances. The presence of the coat, and the materiality of it as a record of events, impacts on the family and has wider political consequence as an emotive memory device. This is inherent in the evidence of the cloth and how it was damaged:

You can say to people what happened, but you can clearly see the entry bullets at the back of the coat and the horrendous exit wounds on his shoulder and the side. [Pause] When you see something in its material form it focuses your attention on that day. In a sense, it keeps the memory of my brother alive. (Wray 2011, pers. comm.)

Liam Wray reflected: 'one of the difficult things of leaving the coat over [pause] I suppose it's a bit macabre, but it is true, Jim's blood is still seeped in the coat' (Wray 2011 pers. comm.). There is a clear sense here of an object that is still active, both because of how the materiality has been changed by the circumstances of the death and by what has been left of the deceased embedded in the fibres of

the coat. Past traumas are explicit in blood stained cloth and bullet holes. Liam Wray believes that collectively, the objects donated by the families provide a unique resonance:

You can read literature, do you understand me, but something in a material sense has a far greater impact. When there is one, it's very intense, but when you have more there is a greater resonance to the event and to the nature. I love to see that, I delight in the sense that the more we have regards to that event, the stronger that story is. And that is important to me. (Wray 2011, pers. comm.)

Later, as part of a museum collection this form of memorialisation is made public and is shared. In his interview Liam Wray, referred to the importance of the 'mechanism of the museum'. For Liam, the museum guarantees his brother is acknowledged in the future: 'I hope it [the museum] will be there in 200 years. I hope there will be children going to the museum. I hope that people in seeing the coat and reading the story beside it [will have a] sense of what we lost' (Wray 2011 pers. comm.). Here, in the current phase of the coat, Jim sees it as a memorial object, closely associated with the activist role of the museum.

When Jim Wray's coat came back to the family home its contents were also returned. Today, in a drawer in Liam's house, in the tin box they were placed in over forty years ago, sits a small bag containing a ten-pack of cigarettes, a set of rosary beads and a 10pence piece. The bag was the one used by the coroner and it has remained unopened since it was returned to the family in 1972. Although the items are associated with Jim's coat, Liam does not feel he can give them to the museum: 'they are still very personal items. Ah [pause], so [pause], I am still reluctant to just let them go at this time' (Wray 2011, pers. comm.). These objects occupied the personal spaces of the coat, the area that only Jim would have used. The coat became evidence in the inquiries; it was separated from the family, sent for forensic analysis, measured and photographed. Journalists visiting the Wray family often asked to see the coat and its now on display in the museum. The coat, from the moment Jim died, had a public life. The contents, however, remained private. When they were returned home Liam put the collection of objects in a small cigar box, in a drawer and has never moved them since: 'I don't know why I put them in the cigar box. Probably at the time I got them it was the only nice wee box that I had'. They are a means to contemplate his brother's last hours 'I often wondered did he have a couple of cigarettes'. Now and again Liam looks at them: 'I don't look at them very often. There would be an odd time maybe' (Wray 2011, pers. comm.). They are less significant to explaining how Jim died, but for the family they tell a lot about the person he was:

They tell you something about him. They tell you he was a smoker. That he had a faith, because of the rosary beads. They tell you of the simplicity of our lives at that time. That your total possessions when you went out on a Sunday on a march: it wasn't a wallet of

fivers, it was a couple of cigarettes, a couple of pence and your rosary beads. (Wray 2011, pers. comm.)

Although associated with the coat and with his late brother's story, this collection of objects is holds a different meaning for Liam: the coat is drawn into the activist and memorial role of the museum, the contents are personal and private. Liam is not yet prepared to part with these items, found in his brother's pockets, but admits 'I obviously have a decision to make [pause] in the future' (Wray 2011, pers. comm.). With this statement the sense of duty to the deceased is evident – because of the role of the jacket as evidence its place in the museum seems fitting. The 'bits and pieces' however, that tell so much about the person, remain as cherished possessions in the private space of the home.

### **Memory and mnemonics**

The evocative description of the personal and public meanings associated with Jim Wray's jacket demonstrates very well the phases of mourning, evidence and memorial. Within each of these phases of the life story, the objects associated with the bereaved have a mnemonic role - not only do the objects indicate *what* should be remembered but also *how* that should be remembered. As testimonial objects these are 'memory traces' (Hirsch and Spitzer 2006: 355) that keep the past visible for the individual and the extended family through the generations. With the loss of a loved one the objects that remain, telling the story of their lives, take on a new significance. Writing in psychology, Dyl and Wapner (1996) consider the nature, meaning and function of cherished possessions within the context of cognitive, social and emotional development. They found that objects were used to replace at times of absence, acted as 'contemplation objects', enabling people to think through and work out a situation. As such, they are 'evocative objects' that become 'companions to our emotional lives' (Turkle 2007:5).

How the individuals spoke about the objects in the museum demonstrates that individual emotional lives can be woven into collective and national projects, shaping the memory of events. This paper now turns to two other objects on display in the Museum of Free Derry that also play a significant role in shaping how the individuals are remembered: the first object is a white towelling babygro, held against Michael Kelly's wounds (Crooke 2012), and the second is a priest's handkerchief, donated in 2009 by the Duddy family in memory of 17 year old Jackie. Celebrated as the 'iconic Bloody Sunday handkerchief' (headline *Derry Journal* 2009), it belonged to Father Daly who walked in front of the wounded 17-year old as they attempted to bring him to safety (this image later to be permanently captured in a wall mural in Derry). Daly's handkerchief was returned to the Duddy family along with Jackie's clothes. Kay describes her father as finding it hard to deal with his son's death and keeping the handkerchief 'amongst his private collection of family memorabilia' (Duddy 2010, pers. comm.). Since her father's death in 1985 and until 2009, Kay carried the handkerchief on her person, including during her attendance at the Bloody Sunday Inquiry. On numerous occasions during our interview (and in

press interviews) Kay referred to the handkerchief as her 'comfort blanket' (*Derry Journal* 2009; Duddy 2010, pers. comm.). At the Inquiry, she describes:

I still have Bishop Daly's hankie which I have washed, and it has been a great consolation to me. I think it was sent to hospital with Jackie's clothes. It had Father Daly's name embroidered on it. Unfortunately, we burned Jackie's clothes. On reflection I think we probably should not have done but it seemed to be the right thing to do. (Duddy 1999: 4)

In this statement Kay describes the handkerchief as being of consolation to her. The cloth stemmed Jackie's blood and the Priest brought the reassurance of faith to the moment. The name, embroidered by the Priest's mother when he entered the seminary, provides confirmation that it was his handkerchief and assurance a Priest was present when Jackie was so close to death. Because Jackie's clothes were burnt, which Kay regrets, the cloth is the last material connection with that moment. By always carrying the handkerchief Kay was guaranteeing a daily reminder that Jackie had died and of the circumstances of his death. Hill describes how wearing certain clothing is a ritual performance 'loaded with memory, whether of places, experiences or social relations', such items have the potential to 'lead one on to very personal and sometimes intimate stories' (Hill 2007: 78). Rather than the memory being one of chance, the presence of the object acts as a trigger and becomes a guarantee of remembering. Always with her, the memory of her brother was constantly carried on her person. An attempted mugging prompted Kay to donate the handkerchief to the museum. After carrying it for so many years, parting with it was difficult and she weighed up her decision to donate it to the museum with the possibility it could be lost by other means. The museum allowed for safekeeping: 'better losing it this way, than losing it forever'; the museum is 'its final resting place' (Duddy 2010, pers. comm.).

Within the context of traumatic loss of loved ones, material culture associated with those memories has the potential to bind together complex senses of identity, relationships and interpretation of experience. It is with such ideas in mind that the thoughts shared during the interviews for this article reveals the significance of the objects and their purpose as part of a wider collection. We get some indication of the depth of the connections between people and objects and the intimate nature of that relationship (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Kopytoff 1986, Otto and Pedersen 1998; Rochberg-Halton 1984). The objects that remain become a material link with the past, enabling moments of contemplation and creating a link between the past and present that provides some stability (Gibson 2010). These become emotionally affecting objects that mediate 'the void of death and an irreversible absence' (Gibson 2004: 289). The loss is permanent but, by way of the object, the memory of the person and their presence remains. In their 'active presences' these objects continue a bond that allows the dead to 'linger a little longer' (Turley and O'Donohoe 2012: 1242). John Kelly, now Education Officer in the Museum of Free Derry, lost his brother Michael (17 years old)

on Bloody Sunday (see interview discussed in detail in Crooke 2012). When Michael was shot he was brought into a nearby house, the 'mother of the house' grabbed an item of baby clothing and it was held against his wound. When Michael died the babygro was returned to the family and, although it was not part of Michael's life, it was seeped in his blood and was kept. 'My mother', John said, 'kept everything. His suit, his jumpers, his underclothes, his socks and so on. His bits and pieces. A half-eaten wholenut bar. His wee bits and pieces. His text books' (Kelly 2008 pers. comm.). The clothes worn by Michael Kelly, and the chocolate bar he hadn't finished eating (and still preserved), provide the living with a close physical proximity. They are the remains of wearer; they bear their smell, carry their body shape and are stained with saliva, blood and sweat. The clothing links the living and the dead: 'whilst they had they had the belongings in the room with them their sons were close to them. I think that was the reason why they kept them' (Kelly 2008 pers. comm.). Here, irrespective of the political ramifications of the deaths, mothers are mourning. John's mother asked that, on her own death, she be buried with his things and when it came to her death her wish was carried out. However, unknown to John, the baby clothing got separated: 'everything was together, but somehow it got separated. But people say to me it was meant to happen.... my mother, had to leave something behind for to display Michael's life' (Kelly 2008 pers. comm.). In John's account of the survival of the babygro there is a suggestion of divine power; either a premonition experienced by the living or a power from beyond the grave ensuring the object remained. As a result it was the only object that could be donated to the museum in memory of Michael. Here there is a suggestion of the magical nature of objects (Hallam and Hockey 2001), as if their role is unfinished and it is necessary for them to remain thus explaining their remarkable survival. In this case, the unfinished business is the activist mission of the memorial museum. The babygro used on Michael, Jim Wray's jacket, and the Priest's handkerchief have each become iconic objects, central to the museum mission.

### **Memory activism and the memorial object**

In the aftermath of Bloody Sunday the local and national significance of objects was guaranteed because of the way the events were remembered. In the first instance they were personal objects, cherished possessions as families mourned. Later they are historical evidence, presented as active agents in the truth campaign. Finally, in the memorial museum they are the remains of a local event that reverberates through time as a legacy is forged and the campaign continues. In the latter phase, the objects displayed together in the museum space, enhanced by recorded sounds from the day that echo around the gallery, have a collective agency. Exhibited together the impact of one object builds on the other to enhance their consequence so they communicate more deeply with the visitor. Brian Conway, in his consideration of the 'memory entrepreneurs' who shape how Bloody Sunday is collectively remembered (Conway 2003, 2008), distinguishes between three phases in that movement: the 1970s with its focus on 'murderous British tactics'; the references to the 'unfinished war' in the 1980s to early 1990s; and the commemorative discourse phase of truth telling, human rights, and the idea of justice in the 1990-2000s (2008: 195). The latter phase, the founding years of the Museum of

Free Derry, forged a narrative of Bloody Sunday that is 'a more inclusive, pluralist one in which memory entrepreneurs sought to appeal to multiple audiences' (Conway 2008: 203). This discourse focuses upon the quest for truth; the eyewitness account and authentic vernacular memory; the innocence of the victims and injustice; and is committed to forging a story that would resonate with a wider range of people (Conway 2008: 197-200).

When the donors described the significance of those objects, and the importance they place on display in the museum, the key motifs they draw upon reflect the contemporary narrative of the justice campaign. The artefacts that tell the story of Bloody Sunday resonate with Conway's themes: (1) they are testimony to unfinished business and constant reminder of the continuing justice campaign; (2) they are authentic evidence - objects that have borne witness; (3) they are iconic objects that resonate with the theme of innocence; and (4) they are everyday objects that we can all identify with, thus forming a connection that resonates with more people. These themes are woven through narrative told by Liam Wray (as described above) and shared by John Kelly when he brings visitors around the Museum of Free Derry. John tells visitors they are in an authentic location that bears witness: 'they're standing in the middle of a historical event. Where it is actually wrapped round them. You're in the killing zone of Bloody Sunday' (Kelly 2008 pers. comm.). With this comment time is foreshortened and material memories are remade. In the case of the babygro and Priest's handkerchief, the deceased are remembered with objects that had no relevance to the individual when alive. Now the objects have risen in significance to become emblems of their death, conveying their innocence, and are woven into the campaign narrative. For John, the objects are a means to access the unique and particular story of Bloody Sunday 'by using all of these objects, displays in every way what people had to go through that day' (Kelly 2008 pers. comm.). He describes the objects as a means to access 'the fear, the panic ... the witnessing of people dying [pause] the blood, the life's-blood flowing from them' (Kelly 2008 pers. comm.). When asked, John tells the visitors he too lost his brother and the visitor is reminded they are getting an authentic account. Every day, he shares those experiences and describes the loss to new visitors. Forty years later John is closely bound with the memory of Bloody Sunday: 'I call myself a moving artefact [he laughs] because I move around. I was there on the day and I can tell the story. I know what happened' (Kelly 2008 pers. comm.). John presents himself as a means to a first-person account of the day and this, alongside the collection, provides, in his words, 'authentic material from Bloody Sunday' (Kelly 2008 pers. com). As memorial objects these tangible collections, the material remnants of conflict, are providing a link to those who died and tell the story of how they died. Furthermore, the key objects: the babygro, the Priest's handkerchief and the coat (displayed to indicate the victim was lying down when he was shot in the back) each tell the story of innocence. The authenticity of the objects, the significance of the museum at the site of the shootings, and a witness as a visitor guide, each contribute to the current narrative of the justice campaign. As part of the record of a seismic event in the history of the conflict, the iconic status of the objects is secured. The place, the objects, and the person bear witness and provide 'testimonies of the past' (Violi 2012: 39) that can connect with the contemporary visitor.

As a commemorative space, that attempts to forge a narrative of traumatic events (Radonic 2014), the Museum of Free Derry functions as a memorial museum (Williams 2007). Because it is located in what is referred to as the 'killing zone of Bloody Sunday', the museum takes on the additional significance of a 'trauma site museum' (Violi 2012) and encourages visitors to bear witness to the experiences of that day and the traumas suffered by the families. The museum is a means to crystallize the traumatic event as part of the cultural experience of a place woven through collective memory (Alexander 2012). Within a memorial museum the surviving object is presented as tangible proof of past atrocities; they reveal a truth where silence reigned and give moral weight to a political campaign (Williams 2007). These are museums that 'attempt to mobilize visitors as both historical witnesses and agents of present and future political vigilance' (Williams 2013:220). The fragments of past lives become iconic reminders of violence and injustice. At such times the everyday fragments of their lives achieve a new significance, one that could not have been imagined in the owner's lifetime (Crooke 2016). In this new location the privately held object is ascribed some of the agency of the memorial museum and the justice campaign. With new meanings attributed, the objects are a way to negotiate the relationship between the living and the dead and are part of the process and ritual of remembering (Turley and O'Donohoe 2012). Paul Williams (2013) distinguishes between memorial museums on the basis of the prevailing attitudes to what is represented. He refers to museums that concern a past that is 'largely settled' (he uses the example of the District Six Museum in Cape Town) as museums that tell a story of triumph over adversity, vindication of a struggle, and offers lessons to others. Memorial museums dealing with unresolved situations provide a contrast. These are museums 'staging an intervention ... in the midst of the event's ongoing repercussions' (2013: 232). Such museums are politically and socially active. They aren't merely depicting past events; instead, they influence the 'cultural reconstruction and transformation' of that past (Violi 2012:70). Reflecting on the Apartheid Museum in South Africa Brandon Hamber warns of regressive and nostalgic processes underpinning memorial exhibitions structured around the suffering of the past' (2012:276). In such places, he warns, 'new silences about the past are being created' (2012:273) that tends towards an uncritical history and narrow understanding of violence. As the narrative of Bloody Sunday evolves, it is evident that how meaning is ascribed to these memorial objects is closely tied to political culture – display becoming the materialisation of memory politics in the region. These intricate layers demonstrate the complexity of experience, remembering and negotiation associated with a contested past. The objects are central to how the Bloody Sunday Trust has constructed the collective remembrance and commemorative discourse of the event: a narrative that focuses on the eyewitness, the innocence of the victims, and telling the story in a way that will resonate. Now in the 'commemorative discourse phase' (Conway 2008) and displayed in the memorial museum, the artefacts bring the story to visitors who previously may have little or no connection with the conflict and to a generation born after the event. In their preservation, the objects survive to forge an indirect narrative that emerges and impacts as postmemory (Hirsch 2012). The memorial museum forecloses a life, reducing it to its period of most suffering (Williams 2007:31) and this is a function of what

Alexander (2012) describes as the 'collective processes of cultural interpretation' (2012: 3) in which actors and carrier groups are constructing a master narrative.

As the final resting place of the object, the museum is the latter phase of a life that continues to contribute to the continuing justice campaign. When the object enters the museum they are part of a twin obligation: of the families to remember their personal losses; and the insistence made by the Trust that others, the perpetrators, are made to remember. This is evident in the words of the museum manager 'we remember so that those responsible cannot be allowed to forget what they did' (Kerr 2012). Rather deciding the narrative of Bloody Sunday is complete (the conclusion for some being the publication of the Saville Report in 2010), the Trust is now campaigning for those who fired the shots to be held to account. The museum contributes to this as a living space with an eyewitness as interpreter and objects as testimony repeatedly sharing knowledge and memories of the event with new visitors. In telling the events of Bloody Sunday there is nothing militaristic; instead, the purity of a babygro conveys the innocence of the victims. The everyday objects used to represent individuals – a shirt, a jacket and a belt – portrays them as ordinary people not intent on violence. As private belongings the objects are familiar and stained with blood or damaged by bullets they are more shocking. As personal remnants of past lives the objects provide a bridge between the deceased and the viewer. An unfathomable event becomes an individual story the visitor can connect with. Furthermore by entering the museum the Bloody Sunday narrative becomes part of the story of the visitor, as they experience the museum and its testimony and share it with others. This potential is recognised by the families who donate the objects for a greater purpose: they parted with the artefacts to ensure recognition of the event beyond the family and into the future. This is the keenly felt 'responsibility to forebears' (Kroger and Adair 2008: 11); each donor conveys an obligation to the deceased to have the truth acknowledged and their loss remembered.

## **Conclusion**

On Bloody Sunday the nature of the individual's deaths changed their lives. Starting out on the march they were just one of a crowd, by the end of the day the circumstances of their deaths were to become part of a campaign sustained over 40 years and one that is still not fully resolved. This has determined how the individuals are remembered and the significance of the material culture that can aid that process. As highly emotive memorial objects, the Bloody Sunday artefacts in the Museum of Free Derry are fragments of experience: they are moments in past lives. In both how the individuals spoke about the purpose of handing over their cherished objects to the museum, and John Kelly's account of what is provided by the museum, it is clear the meanings made with the objects are embedded in the dynamics of public memorialisation and the memory politics of the region. Here cultural memory is forged, with all the characteristics identified by Assman (1995). Group identity is formed through the processes of making the collection and displaying it in the museum; the historical event is reconstructed through key moments and figures; the narrative is organised and institutionalised in the museum; and conveyed in a way that obliges us to remember. The memorial object is the aide,

providing what Hirsch and Spitzer refer to as 'points of memory' that can 'give information about the past' or 'prick and wound and grab and puncture' (2006:358). As a contribution to a contested history, the interpretation of these points of memory is forever moving. The meaning of these objects cannot be fixed: it will change with the social, cultural and political shifts of time, context and viewer. Likewise the employment of memory will vary, having different consequence in private moments in the home to the collective purpose in a memorial museum. It is the 'memory entrepreneurs' (Conway 2008) who have the ability to shape the agency of such objects – whether they are benign remnants or an artefact that will grab attention. At the Museum of Free Derry the Troubles story is told from the perspective of the Bloody Sunday Trust and in the early years the museum challenged the official narrative (a narrative that has now changed). Then, and now, the focus is upon authentic material evidence and local witnesses, both with the ability to challenge past accounts of the day. Furthermore, the museum tells the story of the Troubles in a way that could not be replicated in other museums in the region. Mindful of the contested and emotive nature of original objects, until recently the National Museum of Northern Ireland adopted an entirely text based interpretation of the Troubles (Meredith 2009) and rarely do museums dig so deep to expose the very painful and sometimes shocking stories can be told with the objects. In the Museum of Free Derry, as the objects 'prick and wound and grab and puncture' (Hirsch and Spitzer 2006:358) they are agents within the memory politics embedded in the evolving museum. A museum is often referred to as the storehouse of memory and, as such, is endeavoring to overcome how memory can fade with time and generational change. Memory may shift and wane, but in the memorial museum the activist memory endures, replete with political purpose.

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