

TRANSLATING FREEDOM - University of York Final Workshop

1 July - 3 July 2013

Brief Overview: The final meeting of the Translating Freedom network took place at the Centre for Applied Human Rights at the University of York from 1 - 3 July 2013. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss with practitioners and academics possible research proposals centered around the themes of translation and freedom, and drawing on proceedings in the earlier Rwanda, South Africa, and Egypt workshops.



Attendees

Ron Dudai, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Roger Duthie, International Centre for Transitional Justice
Jonathan Eato, University of York
Sanna Eriksson, University of York
Koen de Feyter, University of Antwerp
Sean Field, University of Cape Town
Jacqueline Gies, Videre est Credere
Paul Gready, University of York
Daniel Holder, Committee on the Administration of Justice, Northern Ireland
Briony Jones, Swiss Peace Foundation
Martin Jones, University of York
Stefanie Kappler, Liverpool Hope University
Catherine Kennedy, South Africa History Archive
John Lannon, University of Limerick
Cahal McLaughlin, Queens University Belfast
Zoe Norridge, Kings College London
Simon Robins, International Committee of the Red Cross
Lars Waldorf, University of York
Siobhan Warrington, Consultant, formerly Panos UK

Emerging Themes

Ethics and Translation
Humanities and the Everyday
Democratizing Representation
Securing Legacies

Programme: Over the course of the three-day workshop, presentations were given by academics and practitioners from a variety of backgrounds.

The morning of **day 1** was spent reflecting on the themes and concerns identified in the previous workshops in South Africa, Rwanda and Egypt. **Jonathan Eato** and **Paul Gready** provided a brief overview of the South African workshop and noted that both freedom and translation were contested and controversial terms in this setting. The latter, for example, had connotations of colonial and other external interventions. As criticism of the terminology was a significant aspect of the South African workshop, Paul suggested that the York event move away from debating the meanings of 'translation' and 'freedom' to instead use them as a platform to discuss related ideas linked to human rights and cultural practice. The concept of 'new' post-apartheid and even 'post-freedom' narratives arose from South Africa, namely the failing education system, cultures of secrecy, etc. **Zoe Norridge** reflected on her experience facilitating the workshop in Rwanda, stating that the workshop had focused on translation and fear, drawing on Franklin Roosevelt's four freedoms: freedom of expression, of worship, from want, and from fear. Key debates involved the process and ethics of representations and how those representations are translated between languages and settings. **Martin Jones**, introducing the Egyptian workshop, discussed displacement and marginalisation during moments of transition, highlighting the difficulties in translations during the revolution in Egypt. Martin raised concerns regarding the relationship between marginal communities and mainstream experience, noting language barriers, differing levels of participation in the revolution and conflicting ideas of freedom.

Following discussion of the country workshops, the University of York workshop proceeded on the basis that two to three research projects would be developed over the course of the three days. This report seeks to provide an overview of the various presentations and discussions in relation to the overarching themes that were identified.

Ethics and Translation

A central theme that evolved throughout the workshop was the role of ethics and translation in transitional settings. While almost all of the presentations involved questions regarding ethics, some presentations asked ethical questions head on. **Paul Gready** introduced the workshop by identifying different forms of translation – between the past and present, the global and the local and between ideas and practice. Referring to Michael Rothberg, Paul stated that translations don't always go in one direction - they can be resisted, transformed and adapted into local settings as well as going in multiple directions.

With regard to translation, **Koen de Feyter** examined how human rights language and terminology might marginalise some, but also often served to capture the attention of the global community albeit that this often required changing the nature of your claim. De Feyter stressed the importance of localising human rights in rural communities, stating that global norms need to be reinterpreted so that locals are able to better recognize the relevance of, and utilize, rights claims. Such localization is an act of translation. **Sanna Erikson**, like many of the other presenters, discussed the role of the researcher (as translator). How do cultural differences, political affiliations and perspectives change the outcome of research? Sanna looked at how to translate local ideologies back to international audiences in the context of China, but also at the 'receptor approach' to grounding human rights in local values and languages. In a final commentary on translation, **Ron Dudai** (echoing Koen) talked about translation as enabling actors to join an international conversation – the example being the Israeli transitional justice community and NGOs – legitimize what they are doing, and frame or capture their work in a different way. Ron noted that while transitional justice is inherently comparative, and hence translated, comparisons can be both enabling and constraining. Thus, there must be a balancing act between past models and keeping transitional justice organic.

Two main ethics issues were raised: 1) The fact that human rights claims and cultural representations change the nature of the claim or story (also see above). 2) The role of the researcher and practitioner in shaping and accompanying the claim or story. **Cahal McLaughlin** discussed ethical concerns raised when directing the film, *We Never Give Up II*, in South Africa. He contended that once you take a story and represent it, the meaning is

forever changed. **Siobhan Warrington, Sean Field** and Cahal debated the role of the storyteller/translator in representing the story. Siobhan asked, 'do we just boil it down, mix it up and take the best bits?' Cahal talked about the representation of interviewees in the Prison Memory Archive project in Northern Ireland, and reflected on the need to protect the storyteller, for example, by removing stories that could potentially implicate someone or emotionally harm family members. Sean examined the ethics of recording and interpreting oral histories of trauma survivors in South Africa. He discussed the need to be empathetic - in both the emotional and intellectual sense - describing it as the focused use of historical imagination and the need to be sensitive to what the storyteller is going through.

Humanities and Everyday Transitional Justice

The role of humanities in the everyday world of transitional justice and politics was debated throughout the workshop. Workshop participants such as **Cahal McLaughlin, Jacqueline Giles, and Siobhan Warrington** actively use methods and media from the humanities in their work. Cahal's film, *We Never Give Up II*, was made in collaboration with the Khulumani Support Group in South Africa and features individual lives in transition through post-apartheid South Africa. The film brought **day 1** of the workshop to a close, and illustrated the use of participatory arts, as well as culture, as a means of advancing transitional justice claims e.g. for reparations. The participants were the leaders of the project, with Cahal saying that the interviewees had a sense of ownership as a group. They often chose to foreground everyday concerns around housing, health and education.

Ownership and active participation are also key themes in Jacqueline's and Siobhan's work. The organisation Jacqueline works with, Videre est Credere, uses video and film, and she talked about their work in Zimbabwe which involves local communities documenting and exposing hate speech and human rights abuses. She highlighted the various ethical and strategic concerns that her organisation is faced with, including personal, operational, and organisational security; how to ensure sustainability (an archetypal challenge of the everyday); and how to appropriately balance the views of both the editing team and the local staff. She noted that often it comes down to key decisions about when a story will have maximum impact and what the motivations should be in distributing a story? Siobhan reflected on participatory methods deployed in the Panos Women and Conflict Oral Testimony Project, raising questions such as whether the approach was ethical or a success, and if so, for whom? Siobhan highlighted the need to see conflict as a process rather than as a singular event in people's lives. This understanding of conflict, and post-conflict settings, aligns well with a focus on the everyday.

Distribution was an overarching theme during all three presentations. How do you insure proper representation once the story is out of the creator's hands? Siobhan discussed distribution in relation to the radio docudrama created through the Panos project. She suggested that there is empathetic potential for personal stories to encourage reflection and discussion between contexts and between countries; also, that telling personal stories may lead to a comfort in shared experience. Such processes can embed personal stories in everyday experience and exchanges.

Democratizing Representation

Ideas of democratizing representation through participatory methods were discussed by many speakers throughout the **2nd and 3rd days** of the workshop. **Stefanie Kappler** asked the question, 'how can people tell your story, when they don't really know your story?' Stefanie discussed participation as resistance, and enabling interviewees and participants to set the agenda and control research (very much in line with the discussion of *We Never Give Up II*, above), thereby democratizing research. **Simon Robins** presented his experiences in democratizing representation through participatory approaches to transitional justice research and documentation in Nepal. Simon argued that elites in capital cities, instead of the victims themselves, often brought human rights claims to NGO or governmental attention. In such settings participatory methods can provide a way of challenging power inequalities and patterns of exclusion (based on class, caste, gender, etc.).

Amplifying some of Stefanie's arguments, Simon stated that participatory methods and mobilized victims groups allow victims to set their own agenda, engage with self-translation, create political space, and manage power relationships.

The use of new media was a topic introduced in the workshop by **John Lannon** as a way to democratize representation, giving examples such as Ushahidi, which utilises technology to empower everyday citizens to report abuses.

Ethical and practical questions were asked in all of the work that involved participatory methods, despite there being general support for such methods: 'What do we mean by terms such as participation and empowerment?' 'Are interventions sustainable?' 'Is there a danger of romanticizing participation and "the community"?' 'Should we prioritize active participation over the final product (human rights reports, cultural outputs)?'. **John Lannon** also brought up ethical and practical concerns in relation to new media. He argued that while technology and social media are creating new possibilities for reporting and addressing human rights abuses, they also pose significant challenges. Such challenges include how to protect the subjects and reporters using new media, unequal access to technology, information verification and the legitimacy of the information.

Securing Legacies

Ways of securing and protecting the legacies of research and other interventions featured strongly in the discussion during the **2nd day** of the workshop. Archives were identified as a key element of the legacy project. **Briony Jones** described archives as political spaces and as engaged in the production of memory. **Catherine Kennedy** touched on similar themes such as finding voice in shared and interactive archive. Issues relating to ordering, interpreting and owning the past also arose in these presentations. Using South Africa as an example, Catherine discussed the physical archive and where it is stored, stating that many did not trust the state to hold archives due to South Africa's recent history of hiding or destroying documents. Briony noted that an archive cannot be seen to represent the totality of information that exists and that other means of recovering history are important in order to have a fuller picture of events. She also noted that there has been a shift in archival science, from the more positivist approach of seeing archives as a closed space for discussion to a more interpretative approach that encourages analysis and critical enquiry.

On the theme of challenging silences, **Daniel Holder** discussed the idea of documenting human rights violations and documenting and challenging flawed remedies to prevent reoccurrence in Northern Ireland. Daniel noted that many human rights abuses have gone unacknowledged. Briony raised concerns regarding truth commission's tendency to privilege certain stories over others, which determines our version of historical events and excludes some stories from the broader narrative.

Other themes that emerged during these discussions about legacy were the contentious coexistence of different archives, ways of reading the traces left within and by archives, the potential of digitization and the need to challenge different forms of denial (as well as silences).

Moving Forward

On **day 3** workshop participants agreed on the overarching themes set out in this report, as components of future research projects. Two projects – Representation in Transition and Flawed Remedies – were outlined and teams were allocated to develop these ideas into research projects and funding applications.