

Edited by Jolene Mairs Dyer, Conor McCafferty, Cahal McLaughlin

The Prisons Memory Archive

A Case Study in Filmed Memory of Conflict

SERIES IN CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

Summary

The Prisons Memory Archive (PMA) explores ways that narratives of a conflicted past are filmed at the site of the experiences and later negotiated in a contested present in the North of Ireland. Given the state's failed attempts at establishing an official process for addressing the legacy of the conflict that lasted between 1968 and 1998, there are a number of community and academic initiatives that have taken up this task. The Prisons Memory Archive is one such project, whose aim is to research the possibilities of engaging with the story of the 'other' in a society that is emerging from decades of political violence. The PMA filmed back inside the prisons with those who passed through Armagh Gaol (2006) and the Maze and Long Kesh Prison (2007), which were both touchstone and tinderbox during the 30 years of violent conflict. We applied protocols of co-ownership, where participants become co-authors of their own story, with the right to withdraw up to the point of exhibition; inclusivity to ensure a multi-narrative archive with prison staff, prisoners, visitors, teachers, chaplains, etc.; and life-story telling, where leading questions are eschewed in order to return more agency to the participants. Currently, the full archive, made up of 160 walk-and-talk recordings totaling 300 hours of filmed material, is available at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, where it is preserved and made accessible to the public, and a website has been designed for educational use of the archive. This collection offers critical reflections on the processes of recording, archiving and utilising the

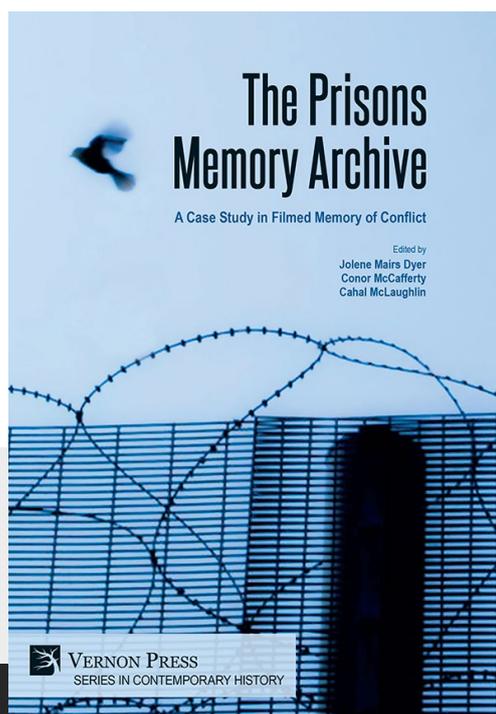
archive in its several manifestations, e.g. feature films, website, and full archive at the Public Records Office. The perspectives offer a range of reflections, including filming, editing, archiving, web design, education, and museum practice.

About the editor

Jolene Mairs Dyer PhD is a Lecturer in Media Production at Ulster University. She edited material from the PMA to create 'Unseen Women: Stories from Armagh Gaol', a 26-minute documentary and multi-screen gallery installation shown at Belfast Exposed in June 2011. Her most recent work, 'Women's Vision from Across the Barricades' (2015) and 'Women's Vision in Transition' (2020), used collaborative photography to explore socio-economic issues affecting women living in interface areas of north Belfast. She is the Director of Belfast Feminist Film School.

Conor McCafferty has worked in research, management and creative roles in academia and arts and heritage organisations. He holds a PhD from Queen's University Belfast – his research and professional interests revolve around archival collections in the arts and architecture, and public engagement and outreach through digital media. Conor was Project Manager of the 'Visual Voices of the Prisons Memory Archive' project at Queen's University from 2019-21 and is now a member of the PMA Advisory Group.

Cahal McLaughlin is the Chair of Film Studies at Queen's University Belfast and director of the Prisons Memory Archive. He has produced films from this archive and written about the PMA for 'Memory Studies' and 'Oral History Review'. His most recent film is 'Right Now I Want to Scream: Police and Army Killings in Rio – the Brazil Haiti Connection' (2020).



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