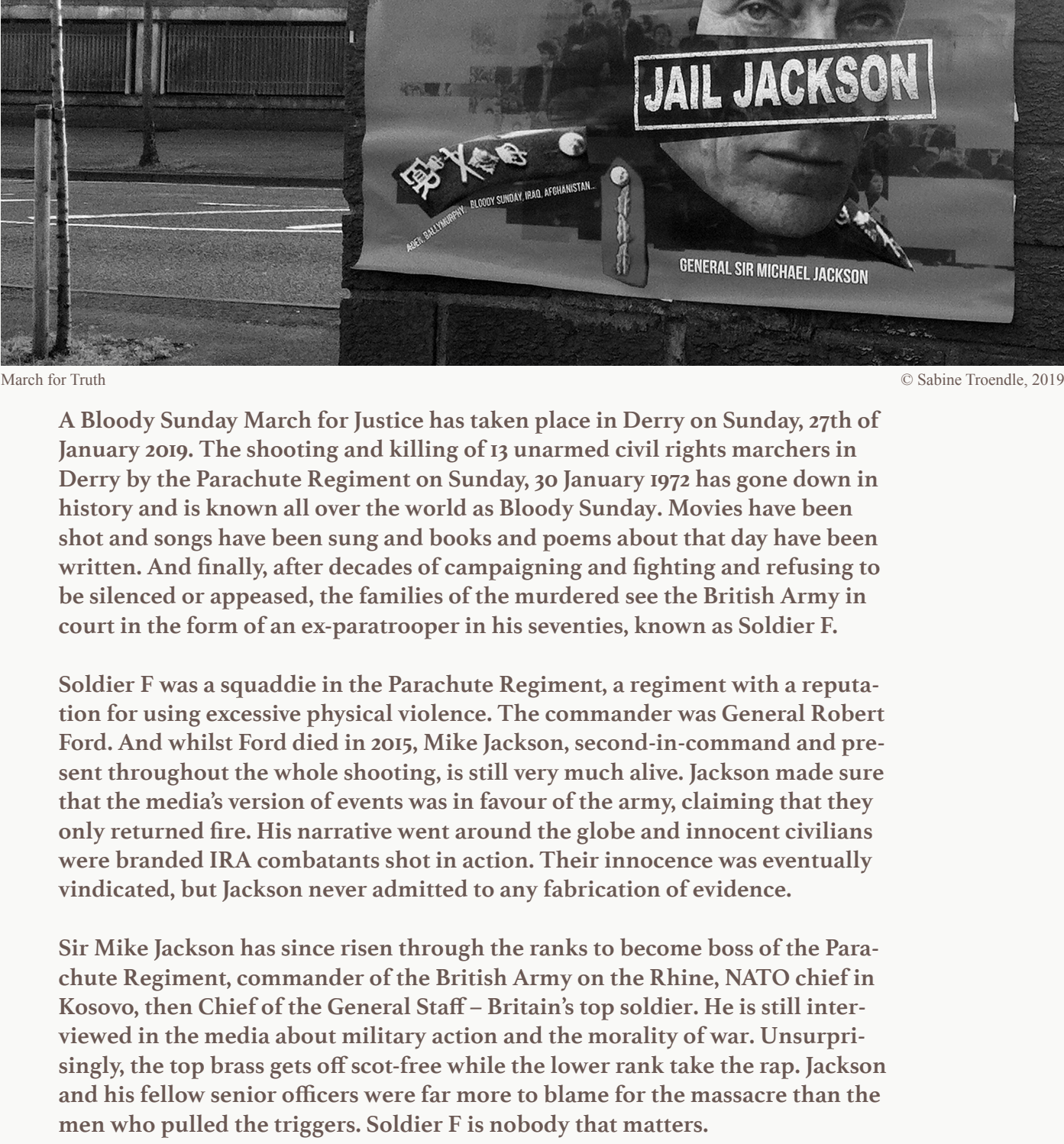


"As horrible as the conflict was, something good came out of it: a very strong sense of community. It's not that evident today, probably due to technology and individualism. But people here are very good in social bonding."

Gary, 2017



March for Truth

© Sabine Treondle, 2019

A Bloody Sunday March for Justice has taken place in Derry on Sunday, 27th of January 2019. The shooting and killing of 13 unarmed civil rights marchers in Derry by the Parachute Regiment on Sunday, 30 January 1972 has gone down in history and is known all over the world as Bloody Sunday. Movies have been shot and songs have been sung and books and poems about that day have been written. And finally, after decades of campaigning and fighting and refusing to be silenced or appeased, the families of the murdered see the British Army in court in the form of an ex-paratrooper in his seventies, known as Soldier F.

Soldier F was a squaddie in the Parachute Regiment, a regiment with a reputation for using excessive physical violence. The commander was General Robert Ford. And whilst Ford died in 2015, Mike Jackson, second-in-command and present throughout the whole shooting, is still very much alive. Jackson made sure that the media's version of events was in favour of the army, claiming that they only returned fire. His narrative went around the globe and innocent civilians were branded IRA combatants shot in action. Their innocence was eventually vindicated, but Jackson never admitted to any fabrication of evidence.

Sir Mike Jackson has since risen through the ranks to become boss of the Parachute Regiment, commander of the British Army on the Rhine, NATO chief in Kosovo, then Chief of the General Staff - Britain's top soldier. He is still interviewed in the media about military action and the morality of war. Unsurprisingly, the top brass gets off scot-free while the lower rank take the rap. Jackson and his fellow senior officers were far more to blame for the massacre than the men who pulled the triggers. Soldier F is nobody that matters.



Support for Soldier F in the Shankill area

© Sabine Treondle, 2019

Many unionist and loyalist communities show their support for Soldier F but they are not asking for the commanders and generals to be in his place. The controversy over Soldier F's trial is not about shifting responsibilities, it's an outcry against denouncing the British Army in general and goes all the way back to green and orange and to the question of who's got the right to be a victim.

The British government is keen on white-washing numerous atrocities committed by the British Army during the conflict in Northern Ireland. One of its favourite instruments is playing innocent and dumb, incorporated beautifully by former Secretary of State Karen Bradley, when she was stating that killings during the conflict by soldiers and police were not crimes and that they acted under orders and under instruction and fulfilling their duties in a dignified and appropriate way. While she was speaking, the court in Belfast under Justice Siobhan Keegan heard evidence from a man remembering what he had seen on the day he was shot as a nine-year-old child by a British soldier during what has become known as the Ballymurphy Massacre.

On the morning of Monday 9 August 1971, a heavy handed army marched into Catholic areas arresting men indiscriminately, on unfounded claims of IRA affiliations. The British government had launched Operation Demetrius, the introduction of internment, which resulted in a three-day shoot-out by the Parachute Regiment - one of the most elite units in the world, trained for high intensity warfare and with the motto 'Ready for Anything', and the death of ten civilians. Then army captain Mike Jackson briefed the media with a fairy tale about an IRA battle implying that the dead were volunteers killed in action. Only that they were not. They were ordinary civilians. They were:

FATHER HUGH MULLAN (38), FRANCIS QUINN (38), DANIEL TEGGART (44), JOAN CONNOLLY (44), NOEL PHILLIPS (19), JOSEPH MURPHY (41), JOHN LAVERITY (20), JOSEPH CORR (43), EDWARD DOHERTY (31), JOHN MEKKER (49)

An eleventh man, Paddy McCarthy, died from a heart attack after some soldiers subjected him to a mock execution. Eleven families lost loved ones and 57 children lost a parent.



Mural of the Ballymurphy Massacre in 1971

© Sabine Treondle, 2017

The Ballymurphy Massacre is not as well known as Bloody Sunday but momentum has risen since the Attorney General ordered a re-opening of the inquests into the circumstances of the deaths, army procedures, the significance of the media, and more. After a major delay the hearings started in November 2018 and for a hundred days Coroner Justice Siobhan Keegan heard evidence from hundreds of civilian, military and forensic witnesses. The most senior former soldier to testify was General Sir Mike Jackson. But not even hardened human rights lawyer Michael Mansfield got him to admit to obvious breaches of the British Army's policies and allegations of cover-ups of what happened in Ballymurphy. Jackson thought it all preposterous and concluded by saying that the British Army don't do conspiracy. Which earned him dismissive laughter from the audience.

For the families the hearings were an emotional rollercoaster, as John Teggart, whose father was among those killed, puts it:

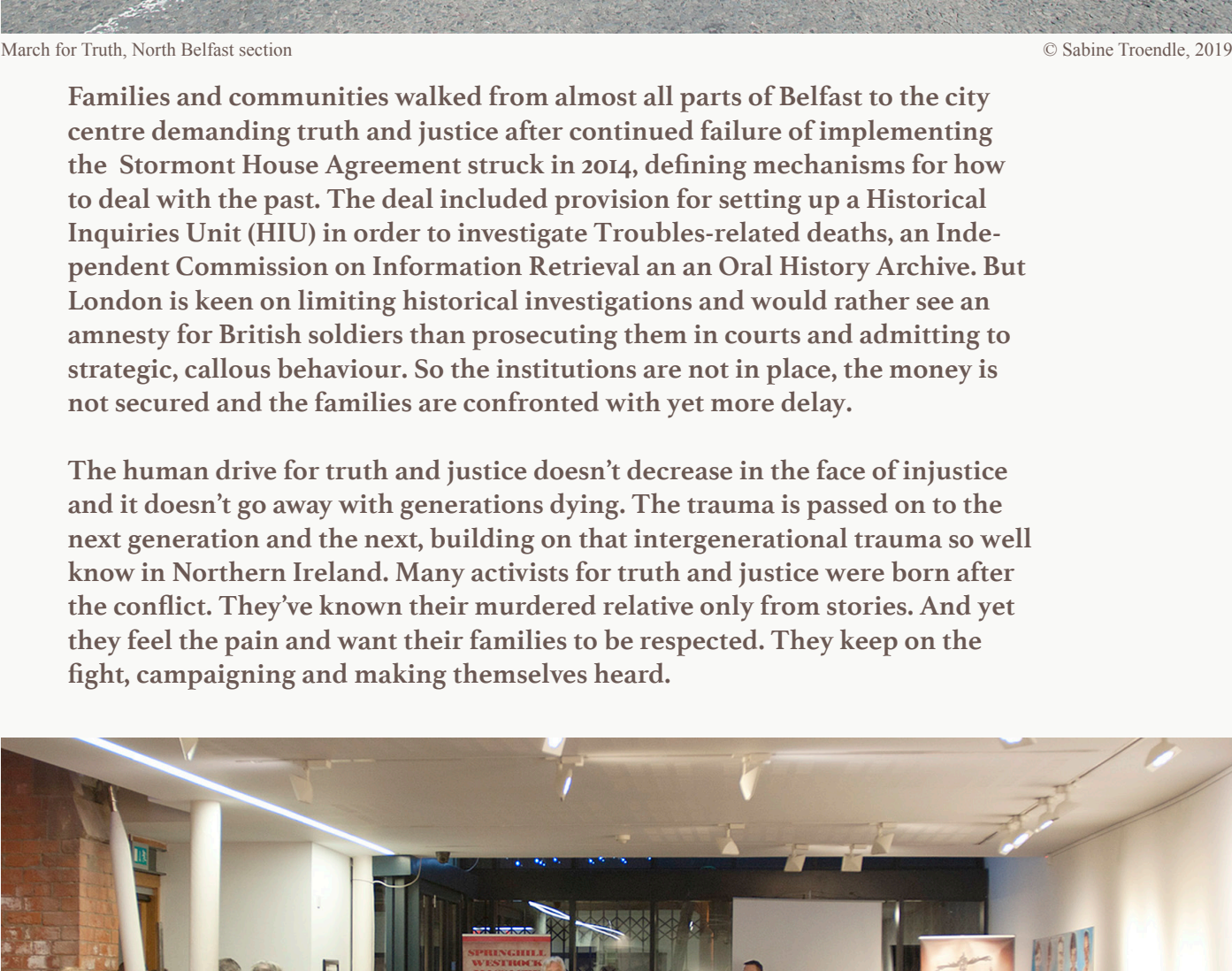
"We thought we were hardened campaigners who had heard everything and knew everything, but it was an emotional rollercoaster from the very start once we entered the court and heard the finer details from eyewitnesses about how our loved ones died. When you heard their details and saw them reliving what they had seen, you could see that they were traumatised by what they had seen."

On one occasion there was a two hours delay because M156, a former soldier, tried to get full anonymity while in the witness box. Most of the witnesses from the army enjoyed partial anonymity, meaning that their names were encoded and they were screened off to the public during the hearing, but visible to the immediate family members in the stand. While waiting for something to happen, the people around me were chit-chatting about the looks of Grace Kelly and Michael Mansfield. An old man in elegant outfit distributed sweets and another man snored heavily in his chair. It was an overall warm and relaxed atmosphere, as if they've met for coffee instead for hearing about the killing of their loved ones.

This mood would change to agitation and anger once M156 made an appearance and started his statement by retracting from what he once said and not remembering anything. According to a former sergeant it would be standard practice for soldiers not to cooperate with inquests by saying they had no memory. Another way of non-cooperation would be ignoring the invite to the hearing and therefore delaying it. Let the victims die and then it will be over with.

I was in court for three days and heard several former soldiers, one of them an army chaplain, resort to their bad memory. Whilst I don't think it impossible to forget certain things in the course of almost half a century, many claims of bad memory just felt wrong. How can you forget whether you've seen somebody being shot or not. Statements are not logic, contradictorily, evasive. The chaplain cannot explain why he didn't go to the hall where the dead were to give them their last rite, the soldier forgot his password when confronted with a computer, and another one changed his mind about what regiment he was in altogether. The three D's: Delay, Death, Dementia.

Not one of us was unhelpful. A former army medic remembered being asked to plant bullets on the clothes of the civilian victims. He refused to do so but didn't report it to the higher-ups. You just didn't do that, go behind your own. It would have been difficult to stay in the battalion, not playing along.



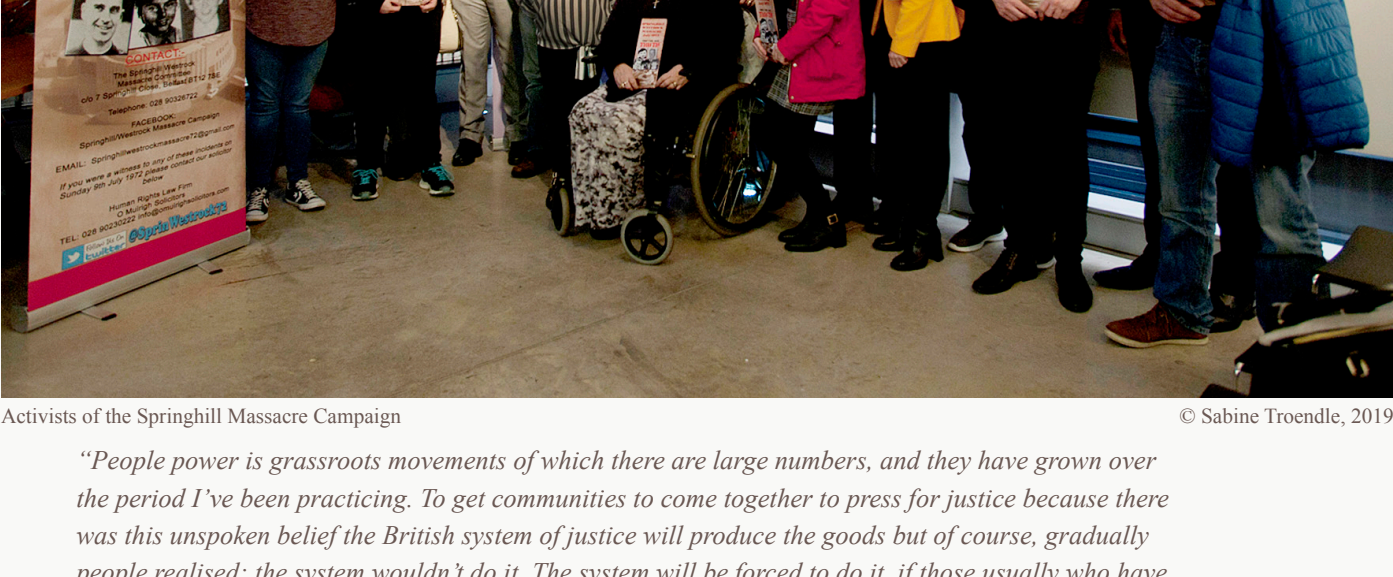
March for Truth, North Belfast section

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March for Truth, North Belfast section

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March for Truth, North Belfast section

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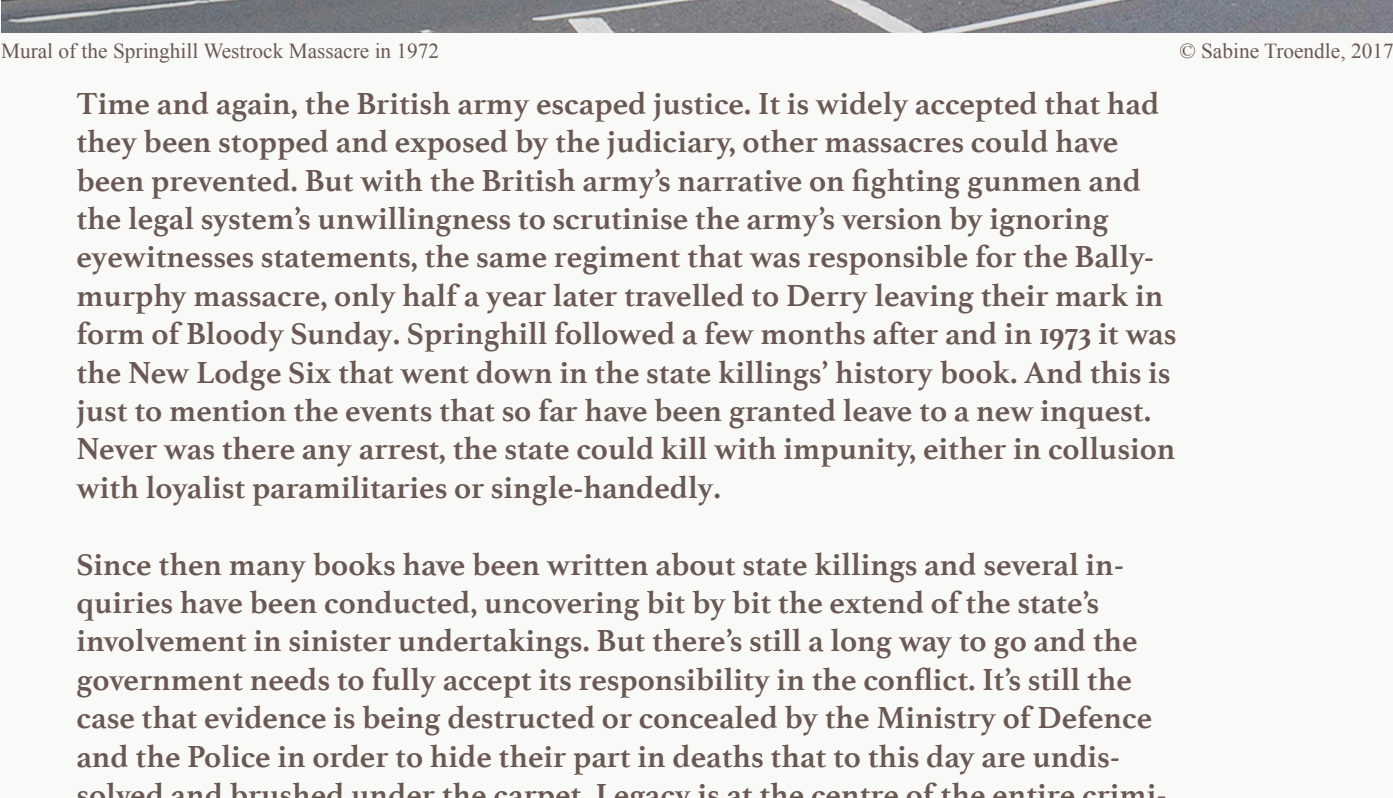
Families and communities walked from almost all parts of Belfast to the city centre demanding truth and justice after continued failure of implementing the Stormont House Agreement struck in 2014, defining mechanisms for how to deal with the past. The deal included provision for setting up a Historical Inquiries Unit (HIU) in order to investigate Troubles-related deaths, an Independent Commission on Information Retrieval and an Oral History Archive. But London is keen on limiting historical investigations and would rather see an amnesty for British soldiers than prosecuting them in courts and admitting to strategic, callous behaviour. So the institutions are not in place, the money is not secured and the families are confronted with yet more delay.

The human drive for truth and justice doesn't decrease in the face of injustice and it doesn't go away with generations dying. The trauma is passed on to the next generation and the next, building on that intergenerational trauma so well known in Northern Ireland. Many activists for truth and justice were born after the conflict. They've known their murdered relative only from stories. And yet they feel the pain and want their families to be respected. They keep on the fight, campaigning and making themselves heard.



Michael Mansfield and Padraig O'Muirgha, solicitors

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Activists of the Springhill Massacre Campaign

© Sabine Treondle, 2019

"People power is grassroots movements of which there are large numbers, and they have grown over the period I've been practicing. To get communities to come together to press for justice because there was this unspoken belief the British system of justice will produce the goods but of course, gradually people realised: the system wouldn't do it. The system will be forced to do it, if those usually who have been the victims of injustice decide not individually, but collectively, that they will stand together to shame authorities eventually into doing something. Because of course you want the truth for yourself but that is a truth you want to hand on to the next generation. You provide an example to the generation and all those generations that comes behind. That actually, you can do something. It's not the ballot box, at the end of the day, nor is it the armistice that actually brings about the change. It's the conscience of people deciding that they not gonna take no for an answer. The Bloody Sunday families did the same in Derry until eventually they got cross party support for a public inquiry. And a public inquiry which actually at the end of the day had a very distinct finger pointing exercise at certain members of the military of what was done on the streets of the United Kingdom. Truth and justice they go together as Martin Luther King pointed out many times." Michael Mansfield

These were the words of Michael Mansfield, the human rights lawyer involved in the Ballymurphy Massacre, at the launch of the Springhill Massacre campaign at the Cultúrann in February 2019. After the Bloody Sunday campaign made it as far as an actual court trial and the Ballymurphy Massacre campaign to the re-opening and conclusion of new inquest, the Springhill Massacre campaign is waiting for an inquest hearing date.

After disturbances in Lenadoon, where the army prevented Catholic families from moving into their allocated houses, because of threats by loyalist paramilitaries who regarded the estate as their own territory, the situation quickly escalated with soldiers firing rubber bullets. On Sunday 9 July 1972, the ceasefire that was in place between the IRA and the British government ended. While the fighting in Lenadoon raged, other areas of Belfast remained relatively quiet. Until around 9pm, when without provocation or warning several British army snipers opened indiscriminate gunfire on residents moving about the Springhill area. By the end of the night five innocent civilians were dead. What followed is just all too familiar with the army distorting the course of events and calling the victims gunman. They were:

JOHN DOUGAL (16), MARGARET GARGAN (13), FATHER NOEL FITZPATRICK (42), PADDY BUTLER (58), DAVID McCAFFERTY (15).



Mural of the Springhill Westlock Massacre in 1972

© Sabine Treondle, 2017

Time and again, the British army escaped justice. It is widely accepted that had they been stopped and exposed by the judiciary, other mass murders could have been prevented. But with the British army's narrative on fighting gunmen and the legal system's unwillingness to scrutinise the army's strategy by ignoring eyewitnesses statements, the same regiment that was responsible for the Ballymurphy Massacre, only half a year later travelled to Derry leaving their mark in the form of Bloody Sunday. Springhill followed a few months after and in 1973 it was the New Lodge Six that went down in the state killings' history books. And this is just to mention the events that so far have been granted leave to a new inquest. Never was there any arrest, the state could kill with impunity, either in collusion with loyalist paramilitaries or single-handedly.

Since then many books have been written about state killings and several inquiries have been conducted, uncovering bit by bit the extent of the state's involvement in sinister undertakings. But there's still a long way to go and the government needs to fully accept its responsibility in the conflict. It's still the case that evidence is being destroyed or concealed by the Ministry of Defence and the Police in order to hide their part in deaths that to this day are undissolved and brushed under the carpet. Legacy is at the centre of the entire criminal justice system and politics, as Mark Thompson from RELATIVES FOR JUSTICE says. As long as these cases are not looked at, as long as the families are denied justice, there will be no reconciliation and no peace in this society.

Mural of the New Lodge Six Massacre in 1973

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Memorial of the McGurk Bar Massacre in 1971

© Sabine Treondle, 2017

Victims of state killings and collusion with loyalist paramilitaries

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