

Bereaved Family Activism in the Aftermath of Lethal Violence

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Initial Pages

Abstract

The boundaries of victimhood have received increasing attention in criminology, particularly considering the recent proliferation in ‘trauma talk’ or ‘trauma creep’. Noting the connections between victims and trauma, there is now increasing recognition of the impact of victimisation, not only on individuals, but upon families, communities and cultures with its effects extending across time, place and person. Following David Garland’s assertion of the ‘return of the victim’ 15 years ago, the interests of victims have moved to centre stage of the criminal justice system with the experiences of some taken to be representative of others. While this has encouraged an appreciation of the extent of suffering in victimisation, it is easy to understand how we might ‘lose sight of the individual victim’.

This research presents a qualitative study of the phenomenon of bereaved family activism. Findings presented in this thesis are based upon 15 in-depth interviews and participant observations with *Mothers Against Violence*: a Manchester-based charity that emerged in response to an intense period of gun violence and ensuing community outcry in the 1990s. The aim of this thesis was to explore how victims have confronted and mobilised their experiences of lethal violence to promote acknowledgment and prompt recognition. By refocusing on the individual and foregrounding the victim, this thesis asked how those involved understand, make sense of and give value to their experience in light of their role in *Mothers Against Violence*. Data collected was analysed through thematic analysis, remembering the embedded nature of such stories in cultural, historical and biographical contexts, communities and the research exchange. Findings are presented as a way of following the stories of individuals to the moment of collective action.

The primary contributions of this thesis can be summarised under the following headings; firstly, applications of ‘trauma’ in victimology; secondly, understanding victim movements such as *Mothers Against Violence* as spaces for emotional, social and practical learning; thirdly, conceptualising victimisation as one moment in a series of ‘turning points’; and fourthly, the role of stories in prompting recognition, encouraging identification and assembling communities.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Setting the Context

Commenting on the landscape of criminal justice over fifteen years ago, Garland (2001) wrote in *The Culture of Control* of the 'return of the victim' and the resurgence of interest in victims' rights, needs and experiences. It had long been argued, as Rock (2014:11) points out, "that victims were marginal, the 'forgotten' party', treated only as potential witnesses, complainants and alleged victims" until the moment of conviction. However, the past forty years has seen the emergence of a diverse victims' movement which has quickly expanded to accommodate voices representing a range of interests, from feminists to right wing law-and-order advocates (Goodey, 2005:102). With the rise of these movements, victims' voices were formally organised and criminal justice policy developed to include victims' participatory rights, funding for compensation schemes, victim 'champions' and charters. While some have questioned the quality of these changes, victims are at least more *visible* in the criminal justice policy landscape than before.

This also remains true for the political sphere, with recent analysis pointing out the value and currency of the victim in contemporary politics. Miers (1978:51) was the first to identify this trend, describing the 'politicisation of the victim' as a process in which "victims of crimes of violence were converted into an identifiable and coherent group, with evident political potential". More recently, others have situated these trends of politicisation and responsabilisation of victims within the dominant neoliberal agenda in the United Kingdom, where emphasis is placed on delegating responsibility and managing harm rather than confronting its structural causes (Duggan and Heap, 2014; see also Ginsberg, 2014 for similar arguments in the US).

Pointing specifically to the role of the victim, Garland (2001:11) observes the value that the image of the victim holds in the political sphere:

...the victim is now, in a certain sense, a much more representative character, whose experience is taken to be common and collective, rather than individual and atypical. Whoever speaks on behalf of victims speaks on behalf of us all or so declares the new political wisdom of high crime societies.

More recognition is now afforded to the varied impact of victimisation, not only on individuals, but upon families, communities and cultures, with its effects extending across time, place and person. The recent proliferation in 'trauma talk' (Neocleous, 2012:189) or 'trauma creep' (McGarry and Walklate, 2015:44) in victimology has encouraged this shift further with notions of trauma and victim becoming conflated. Although once an obscure and somewhat suspect term, the concept of 'trauma' appears now as an unusual conflation of psychological, cultural and popular discourse. As Laqueur (2010) observes, the term 'trauma' used in the *New York Times* fewer than 300 times between 1851 and 1960, has appeared 11,000 times since. However, Laqueur (2010:19) explains that the reason for this was "...not a resurgent interest in wounds but the elaboration of a new meaning..." in which trauma signifies physical wounds, psychic injuries, social suffering and holds moral value for the victim. In *The Empire of Trauma*, Fassin and Rechtman (2009:114) write on the legitimacy that trauma provides some victims and how the relationship between the two has been reconfigured:

...by blurring the boundary between visible and invisible injuries, trauma became the mark of all victims: the injured, the survivors, and the 'involved', a group that would include rescue workers and therapists, and soon even television viewers. Thus psychic trauma completed the process of victim legitimization by providing the unifying element it had lacked: a common hub joining the destinies of all the affected.

By conflating narratives of the victim and trauma, different experiences, histories and identities risk becoming obscured and collapsed. This turn towards the trauma

narrative has been criticised by some for ‘trivialising’ the victim experience (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009:19) and by others for running the risk of ‘pathologising the normal’ (McGarry and Walklate, 2015:49). While this has encouraged an appreciation of the extent of the impact of victimisation, it is easy to understand how we might ‘lose sight of the individual victim’ (McGarry and Walklate, 2015:39). This research aims to refocus on the *lived experiences* of victims; namely, how victims make sense of and give value to their experiences in the aftermath of lethal violence. By foregrounding the victim, this research asks how victims confront and mobilise their experiences of lethal violence to engage in victim movements or, more specifically, bereaved family activism.

1.2 What is ‘Bereaved Family Activism’?

Activism grounded in loss, suffering and injustices extends across a broad range of movements. This might include, for example, the protests against violence against women such as *Take Back the Night* and *One Billion Rising*, the #JusticeforLB campaign to challenge failures in care for disabled people, critical social justice campaigns such as *Justice4Grenfell*, recent digital activism campaigns such as #SayHerName and #JeSuisCharlie and global movements such as *Black Lives Matter*. However, this research focuses on one type of victims’ movement in particular, that of bereaved family activism following lethal violence.

Bereavement, for most, is a “normal, natural human experience” (Stroebe et al., 2007:1960). However, bereavement following lethal violence threatens to disrupt and disorder assumptions, create uncertainty and threaten the relationships upon which assumptions are based. The term ‘bereaved family activism’ was proposed by Shute (2016:173) and applied in the context of lethal and organised mass violence to explain:

...the effects of violent bereavement on family members – defined as any self-identifying relation by blood or partnership – and attempts, among the normal range of responses, to understand the organised attempts of some to address publicly aspects of their experience...

Bereaved family activism is grounded in ties of kinship and shared relationships, which lethal violence threatens to undo and disorganise. This phenomenon can be found in the persistent campaigns for truth and accountability by the Hillsborough Families (see Scraton, 2016), the continued anti-violence police reform efforts of Doreen Lawrence (see Lawrence, 2006) and, the focus of this research, the grassroots-based work of *Mothers Against Violence*. While the experiences of those victimised in organised mass violence may be qualitatively different to those in 'peacetime', in both contexts lethal violence produces debilitating and enduring effects (Shute, 2016). The experiences and needs of victims in these instances are varied and how exactly they are managed depends on a number of factors. It is what bereaved families '*do*' with these experiences, as Shute (2016) writes, and how they are mobilised for the purpose of bereaved family activism that is the primary focus of this research.

Victim movements, such as bereaved family activism, vary in shape and scope, each characterised by different means and geared towards different ends. Each represents a diversity of voices, needs and strategies at one historical and cultural moment in time and emerging in response to a particular form of violence. This research asks how the stories and experiences of some victims translate into and come to shape these collective responses. If the experiences of some victims are taken to be representative of others, as Garland (2001) argues, these movements offer an insight into how the interests of victims might be communicated to a wider collective, bridging divides between otherwise unfamiliar communities. By organising, sharing stories and mobilising particular issues, these campaigns can communicate personal experiences to engage public responses or, as C. Wright Mills (1959) outlined in *The Sociological Imagination*, turn 'personal troubles' into 'public issues'.

1.3 Aims and Rationale

This thesis presents a qualitative study of the phenomenon of bereaved family activism, based upon research with *Mothers Against Violence*. In the summer of 1999, at the height of gun and knife violence in inner-city Manchester, a series of shootings occurred. Prompted by these events, a collective of women, mostly mothers of those killed and affected, emerged as an organised response to discuss the recent spate of violence, support the affected families, and propose a way forward. Findings are presented based upon fifteen in-depth interviews and participant observations of those involved in *Mothers Against Violence*, as a way of understanding the role and purpose of bereaved family activism for victims and their families. Foregrounding the victim in this way encourages an understanding of what meaning victims give to their experiences in bereaved family activism and how these 'personal troubles' might become 'public issues'. By moving away from aggregate experiences and the preoccupation with cultural traumas, this research aims to explore how those involved understand and make sense of their experiences.

Victim movements emerge in response to particular cultural and historical moments. Indeed, much analysis has been given to the institutional and socio-historical contexts in which victims' movements emerge, such as the pressures of neoliberalism and the conditions of crime control and victim policy. However, by focusing more specifically on the personal and lived experience of those involved, this research draws connections between experiences and the contexts and encounters in which they occur. By documenting the experiences of those involved in *Mothers Against Violence*, this research seeks to understand how personal experiences are confronted and come to drive and shape bereaved family activism.

The research question is therefore as follows:

How do 'victim-activists' *confront* – both individually and collectively - their own experiences of the trauma associated with serious violence and *mobilise* their suffering to promote mass acknowledgement of that violence?

This research question asks first, how bereaved families 'confront' experiences of lethal violence and are able to move forward to the point which they are able to, second, 'mobilise' such experiences to engage in activism and achieve recognition. In asking this question, the research also seeks to understand how the act of sharing experiences of suffering might prompt acknowledgement from others. Furthermore, considering the diversity of experiences, needs and identities of those involved, might bereaved family activism serve different purposes for different people? The primary research question can therefore be divided and complemented by three sub-questions; each, in turn, addressed by three consecutive findings chapters:

- i. How do individuals confront experiences of violent bereavement to arrive at the moment of collective action?
- ii. What is the role of shared experience in mobilising collective responses to violence?
- iii. How might victim movements be reconceptualised in a way that reflects the energy of groups like *Mothers Against Violence*?

The experiences of those involved in *Mothers Against Violence* are presented to story the life of the organisation, observing its shape, direction and influence upon those affected. Just as bereaved family activism holds a purpose for those involved, it is also important to consider how personal experiences come to inform bereaved family activism. This research therefore aims to understand how victims give meaning to inherently personal experiences of suffering in light of their role in bereaved family activism. Remembering that *Mothers Against Violence* is nearing two decades in action, the story presented here represents only a snapshot of a series of interactions, responses and encounters.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 presents the first of two linked literature reviews. This chapter begins by reviewing existing literatures on the concept of 'trauma' which spans across medicine, psychology and more recently into the humanities through disciplines such as cultural sociology and literary theory. The chapter then moves on to show the implications of this recent 'trauma creep' for boundaries and definitions of the victim. It is argued that victimisation, while rooted in personal and private experiences of suffering, has been extended to denote shared, social and cultural suffering. The chapter concludes by situating the current research as a response to this problem by foregrounding the victim. Here, the chapter also provides discussion of how victims typically respond to and 'confront' (or are confronted by) bereavement by homicide.

Chapter 3 presents the second literature review which considers the role of victim movements in communicating the interests of victims to wider society. The chapter begins by discussing the 'return of the victim' and rise of victim movements before moving on to consider the diversity of organised responses that emerge in the aftermath of violence. The importance of socio-political contexts is acknowledged before considering how the experiences of victims themselves can be 'mobilised' and may shape victim movements. By engaging in a 'critical appreciation' of victim movements, it is argued that we avoid romanticising victim movements and assuming the vulnerability of such groups to political manipulation.

Chapter 4 presents and justifies the methodological framework guiding this research. A case study of bereaved family activism is presented before outlining a qualitative approach which combines in-depth narrative interviews and participant observation. This chapter details each stage of the research process from the moment of entering

the field, becoming familiarised through participant observation, emerging ethical issues, the practice of interviewing, assessing the quality of data and methods of data analysis. This chapter also considers some of the methodological issues emerging from the conflation of trauma and suffering. By following the research process in this way, this chapter aims to present some sense of the *experience* of doing fieldwork on the topic of lethal violence.

Chapter 5 presents the first of three findings chapters focusing on the origins and context of *Mothers Against Violence* as viewed by those involved. Remembering that such groups are a product of a precise cultural and historical moment, the chapter begins by setting the context from which *Mothers Against Violence* emerged. This established, the chapter then summarises the individual stories of loss as relayed by bereaved relatives before discussing the variety of motivations cited by those involved. By outlining the variety of experiences here, an early insight can be gained into the variety of purposes that bereaved family activism has for different people which will be explored in later chapters.

Chapter 6 ties the personal experiences recounted in the previous chapter to the point of collective action. This chapter begins with a discussion of Rock's (1998) distinction between 'fusions' and 'fissions' as a way of understanding the role of shared experience in *Mothers Against Violence*. This established, the chapter then considers how sharing stories of lethal violence encourages empathy, motivation and understanding, yet also creates boundaries in identification. The image of the bereaved mother is of particular importance here.

Chapter 7 presents the final findings chapter, drawing together and making sense of the key themes that emerged from the study of *Mothers Against Violence*. The impacts of bereaved family activism are discussed, such as the importance of gaining

acknowledgement, being heard and empowerment. Following this, the notion of *Mothers Against Violence* as a 'vehicle' is discussed where it is suggested that the group serves a number of purposes for different people at different points in time. Changes in the field, such as funding priorities and declining gun violence, are then addressed to consider how *Mothers Against Violence* might sustain itself amidst these shifts.

Chapter 8 presents a case study of Eve to further an understanding of the diversity of ways in which the bereaved make meaning from experiences. Eve's story is not presented here as an 'ordinary' or 'typical' case of *Mothers Against Violence*. While the case cuts across a number of common themes, such as the notion of finding purpose in activism, Eve's experience is distinctive in her faith-based understandings of suffering, purpose and agency. The case study is presented here to show how Eve's story is embedded within the story of *Mothers Against Violence*, and vice versa.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by presenting a summary of contributions; applications of 'trauma' in victimology, the notions of victim movements as emotional, social and practical spaces for learning, victimisation as a turning point, and the role of stories as making sense of suffering. Proposals for future research are outlined which suggest extending this analysis of bereaved family activism to explore contexts of organised *mass* violence and other State harms and injustices. The chapter concludes with some final thoughts.

Chapter 2 – Trauma, Suffering and the Aftermath of Lethal Violence

2.1 Introduction

Lethal violence in the family does not end with the death of a loved one; it endures in families and friends connected through ties of kinship, identity and social bonds. Violence can be both ‘transgressive’ and disruptive (Humphrey, 2002:x), with its effects stemming from physical injury and distress in immediate victims, traumatic grief in relatives and extending across to disrupt communities and collectives. The emergence of ‘trauma talk’ (Neocleous, 2012:189) or ‘trauma creep’ (McGarry and Walklate, 2015:44) in victimology has encouraged an increased appreciation of the extent of the impact of victimisation. Recognition is now afforded to the impact of victimisation, not only on the immediate victim, but upon families, communities and cultures. However, it is easy to understand how we might ‘lose sight of the individual victim’ (McGarry and Walklate, 2015:39). Employing trauma as a key concept, this chapter presents a critical review of literatures on trauma, its uses, and the implications for the way we define the victim.

The chapter begins by briefly outlining definitions of trauma as identified within psychological and psychoanalytic literatures, before moving on to trace the concept’s recent movement into the scope of the humanities. Sociological and social-psychological literatures are reviewed to demonstrate how the concept, despite being modelled on intricate psychic mechanisms, has been mapped onto broader social and cultural levels of analysis, signified by terms such as ‘social suffering’ and ‘cultural trauma’. While this shift has encouraged recognition of the varied impacts of victimisation, much criticism has been voiced at the unintended ‘universalisation’ and ‘trivialisation’ of such experiences (see Fassin and Rechtman, 2009). The chapter

closes by considering the implications of these conceptual shifts for the study and definition of the victim. Here, it is argued that the problematic conflation of trauma with victimisation risks obscuring a diversity of victim identities, histories and experiences and becoming abstracted from the *lived* experience.

While the 'legacy of violence' extends much beyond immediate victims (Humphrey, 2002:1), it is the aim of this thesis to remember that the effects of violence are ultimately rooted in the suffering of a few individuals. How families respond and cope with the aftermath of violence and its legacies is the subject of this thesis. By 'foregrounding' the victim, this chapter argues that more attention should be given to how victims make meaning and give value to their experiences of lethal violence rather than how such experiences are represented through terms such as 'cultural trauma'. This chapter therefore addresses how victims 'confront' and deal with experiences of lethal violence.

2.2 The Psychoanalytic Origins of Trauma

As various genealogical accounts demonstrate, the concept of trauma was initially identified as a physiological injury of the person in the mid-19th Century (Young, 1995; Leys, 2000). However, under the scrutiny of psychoanalysts of the late-19th Century such as Jean-Martin Charcot, Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet, the term has progressively been ascribed to and is more popularly employed today as a psychological disorder. In the aftermath of the Second World War and following campaigns by Vietnam veterans and feminist activism, traumatic stress and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) were carried forward into psychological and clinical psychiatric debate (Burstow, 2003). In this respect, research has until recently focused on the *individual* traumatic experience: the psychic mechanisms involved, cognitive and emotional responses to trauma and the resulting therapeutic solutions.

In psychological and psychiatric research, trauma emerges from an individual's inability to assimilate the memory of the traumatic experience. Following a traumatic event, memory of the experience seeks to integrate into ordinary memory. However, the nature of the traumatic experience overwhelms ordinary memory assimilation and information processing capacities which subsequently become deregulated (Van der Kolk and MacFarlane, 1996). As a result, unconscious cognitive defence mechanisms, such as dissociation, avoidance and denial, are mobilised in response to a flood of anxiety and stress (Baumeister et al., 1998). Influenced by Freudian and Kleinian roots, C. Garland (1998:11) defines trauma as a phenomenon which triggers:

...a massive disruption in functioning, amounting to a kind of breakdown. It is a breakdown of an established way of going about one's life, of established beliefs about the predictability of the world, of established mental structures, of an established defensive organisation.

The intensity of trauma derives not only from its immediately overwhelming nature, but also from anxieties stemming from long-standing, deep-seated fears, a disruption that "provides confirmation of those deepest universal anxieties" (Van der Kolk and MacFarlane, 1996; Garland, 1998:11). Trauma is understood to incur a disruption of basic assumptions, of the world, self and identity (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), impose states of perpetual fear (McCann and Pearlman, 1990) and a fundamental fracturing of individual sociality (Herman, 1992). It exposes and shatters a person's ontological security; triggering a loss of order, certainty and meaning (Giddens, 1991).

2.3 The Turn to 'Cultural Trauma'

2.3.1 Origins of 'Cultural Trauma': Clinical Meets Cultural

Although rooted in psychoanalytic traditions, the humanities have also laid claim to the concept of trauma with its recent introduction into literary theory. Within literary theory, repeated reference is made to the work of Caruth (1995) and the oft-cited

seminal text, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Caruth (1995) defines trauma through its inability to be catalogued, located and assimilated. Premised on Freudian notions of 'repetitive compulsion' and 'belatedness', Caruth's central claim is that trauma cannot be 'worked through' and can only be expressed indirectly through cultural reference. Here, trauma defies comprehension and is beyond communication.

Extensive critique of Caruth's unusual amalgamation of psychoanalysis and literary theory has been demonstrated elsewhere. Critics have pointed in particular to the lack of attention given to the *lived reality* of traumatic experience (e.g. see Leys, 2000, pp.266–297). Kansteiner (2004; with Weilnbock 2008) has launched an extensive critique listing issues such as the disinterest in the therapeutic capacity of narrative, a lack of systematic empirical validation, selective application of psychoanalytical concepts and overall, trivialisation of victims' experiences. Critics claim that the 'cultural trauma' paradigm makes sweeping assumptions about high culture and philosophical conclusions (Kansteiner and Weilnbock, 2008). Aside from Kansteiner's critique, the so-called 'deconstructive trauma paradigm' has encountered significant resistance elsewhere: namely, postcolonial critiques of Eurocentrism (Visser, 2011; Craps, 2013), the notion that trauma cannot be worked through and resolved (see Luckhurst, 2008 for the notion of 'aporia'), discouraging victims' testimony, and the need to consider the social and political location of the concept (Burstow, 2003).

The advent of this new 'cultural trauma' turn also betrays the beginnings of a recurrent and bigger issue in the study of trauma that will be explored later: the issue of conflation. It is questionable whether intricate psychic processes and unconscious defence mechanisms, extracted selectively from a Freudian lens, can and should be projected onto broader cultural processes and intergroup dynamics. As LaCapra (2001) has argued, this application risks conflating multiple levels of analysis; across psychological and cultural mechanisms, and direct and vicarious victims. Glossing

over the lived realities of victimisation and its complexities, this 'deconstructive paradigm' seems more interested in reducing trauma to obscurities of "high art, and philosophy as sites of intangible, ethereal authenticity..." (Kansteiner and Weilnbock, 2008:237). Despite the above critique, Caruth's work is acknowledged here as a gateway for trauma studies into the humanities and social sciences (Radstone, 2007).

2.3.2 Cultural Trauma and Traumatized Collectives

In its most recent appearance, Alexander (2004, 2012) has attempted to situate cultural trauma theory within a sociological framework. Departing from 'lay' applications of cultural trauma modelled upon psychoanalysis, Alexander assigns the concept an empirical value that traces the process from event to representation. In *Trauma: A Social Theory*, Alexander (2012) is concerned with the way in which sociocultural processes, power structures and reflexive agents work to ascribe an event with traumatic status, and subsequently elicit a transformation of collective identity. In his critique of psychoanalytic 'lay' thinking, Alexander (2004:8–10, 2012) contends that, through the uncritical translation of ideas in ordinary language to intellectual concepts, works such as Caruth's are guilty of the 'naturalistic fallacy': the assumption that events inevitably cause trauma. Rather than becoming concerned with the nature of the event, a social theory of trauma makes claims of an epistemological, rather than ontological, quality (Alexander, 2004:9). The author argues that events are only labelled as traumatic because they are constructed, labelled and imagined as such by society. Alexander's 'social-constructivist' account is primarily concerned with the 'trauma process': the sociocultural processes that define an event, its representations and meanings. Whereas previous theories of trauma have assumed an unproblematic transference of individual psychic mechanisms to broader cultural entities (e.g. Caruth, 1995), Alexander claims to avoid analogising psychological mechanisms and concentrates on how events are represented as traumatic (or not).

As an example, Alexander (2012) presents a case study of the Holocaust and the collective response that it prompted in the post-war period. Immediately after the war, Alexander argues that the Holocaust was framed within the 'progressive narrative': despite the Holocaust being an evil and atrocious event, it was assumed as an inevitability of war. However, later on, the Holocaust became removed from this progressive narrative and was situated within a 'tragic narrative' of widened moral culpability, sensitivity to evil, and recognition of the Jewish population as victims. This move to recognise the Holocaust as a 'moral universal'¹ formed what Alexander (2012:85) called the 'dilemma of uniqueness': paradoxically, "the trauma-drama could not function as a metaphor of archetypal tragedy unless it were regarded as radically different from any other evil act in modern times". If moral panics constitute a confession to a "neurotic over-reaction", then cultural traumas mark a "profound moral event" and disruption to the moral order (Garland, 2008:26).

Although both framed within this 'cultural trauma' paradigm, Alexander and Caruth's approaches to the phenomenon are markedly different. Whilst Caruth looks to draw philosophical conclusions from the traumatic experience through reference to high culture, Alexander is primarily concerned with cultural frameworks of meaning developed in social structures and groups. In contrast to previous theories, Alexander's concept engages with the *relational* aspects of trauma rather than its more commonly studied *psychical* component. Here, traumas are representational processes rather than empirical objects:

¹ Commenting on the 'moral universalism' of the Holocaust, Alexander (2002:6) asks: "How did a specific and situated historical event, an event marked by ethnic and racial hatred, violence, and war, become transformed into a generalized symbol of human suffering and moral evil, a universalized symbol whose very existence has created historically unprecedented opportunities for ethnic, racial, and religious justice, for mutual recognition, and for global conflicts to become regulated in a more civil way?"

...cultural traumas are not things, but processes of meaning making and attribution, a contentious contest in which various individuals and groups struggle to define a situation and to manage and control it (Eyerman, 2013:43)

Alexander distances cultural traumas from the psychological mechanisms associated with trauma. Rather, this account encourages a situated analysis of the traumatic experience, response and coping; in particular, how the interpretation of suffering may be framed and informed by cultural frameworks. Following Alexander's line of thought, it is not the quality of the event that determines the traumatic experience but the interpretation and attachment of meaning to that event.

The principal value of Alexander's approach lies in that it explores the dynamics of representation and subjective interpretation. An understanding of the *contextualised* responses to violence requires an appreciation of over-arching socio-cultural frameworks and narratives from which actors draw meaning. Indeed, there is a growing literature that recognises differences in cultural 'idioms of distress' (Kirmayer and Young, 1998), the problematic uncritical transference of Western concepts across cultures (Summerfield, 1996) and the social and cultural embeddedness of human behaviour and meaning-making (Bracken, 2002). Characterising trauma as a relational experience recognises how the traumatic experience unfolds at the cultural and social level: for example, the conditions under which human rights advocates and non-governmental organisations define the event and how such claims are mediated by cultural frameworks (see Cohen, 2001; Seu, 2013). Tracing the process between event and representation recognises the way in which suffering is interpreted, related to and understood according to particular cultural contexts.

2.3.3 '*Psychologising*', *Conflation* and the Problems of *Analogising 'Trauma'*

However, by the same token, this over-emphasis on the representational aspects of the trauma process raises key concerns. In its purest form, adopting this 'social-constructivist' account can be exploited to the point which, by Alexander's logic, traumatic status can be ascribed irrespective of the quality, or even existence, of an event (Katz and Katz, 2009; Eyerman, 2013). Despite originally being conceived as an unconscious phenomenon, Alexander's social theory posits trauma as a rational calculation; a conscious social process carried by various socio-cultural institutions and processes which elicits a transformation in collective identity. This sits in opposition to much psychological and psychiatric literature, in which trauma is depicted as an experience that overwhelms and possesses the individual reducing them to a state of powerlessness. In contrast, Alexander's 'cultural trauma' approach defines trauma as a process of representation regulated by powerful institutions (such as the law, education and media) who define the nature of suffering, the victim, the relevance of suffering to the audience and ultimately attribute responsibility (Alexander, 2004:10–24). Traumatic status is ascribed and constructed by society rather than inherently overwhelming and 'naturally existing' (Alexander, 2004:2). Returning to Garland (2008:26–27), while moral panics infer a 'hysteric' reaction, the concept of cultural trauma "unquestioningly accepts that some events are so profoundly disturbing to the moral order that they traumatize a culture and the collective life of its members".

Emphasis is placed solely on the *representation* of events which not only distracts from the quality of the event, but obscures the historical and cultural idiosyncrasies of different traumatic events. For example, in comparing and contrasting the historical traumas of the Holocaust and North America, Kirmayer, Gone and Moses (2014:301) argue that "each human catastrophe has its own history, social dynamics, and

corresponding patterns of individual and collective response rooted in culture and context". For example, the types of violence and loss in the Holocaust and Indigenous historical traumas are different. While the Holocaust involved isolation in ghettos, concentration camps and systematic mass extermination, the atrocities in North America involved colonization, forced displacement and assimilation through residential schools (Kirmayer et al., 2014:304). Concepts such as 'historical trauma' and 'cultural trauma' inadvertently obscure the pre- and post-trauma contexts of fundamentally different events. This is problematic considering the different configurations of suffering and attributions of meaning that each context likely carries.

In bridging between individual and collective trauma, it is important to acknowledge that the former are not merely micro versions of the latter (Halbwachs, 1992; Olick, 1999; Kansteiner, 2002), nor do they share the same mechanics. A conflation of micro, meso and macro terminology deepens this problem. For example, referring to the role of 'carrier groups' in the 'transmission' of trauma and the 'indelible marks' left on the collective, Alexander and Degloma's accounts still display a 'psychologistic' element (McLennan, 2005:9). While the concept may provide a useful analogy for making metaphorical inferences of collective suffering, ultimately, the processes of collective and individual victimization and coping are empirically different:

The mechanisms associated with psychological trauma are the intrapsychic dynamics of defense, adaptation, coping and working through; the mechanisms of cultural level trauma are those of interacting social agents and contending groups (Smelser, 2004:39).

The core contribution of Alexander's approach concerns this relational experience of trauma: conceived here as a disruption of basic interpersonal relationships. It represents an account of how individual experiences are converted to collective memories. However, this approach extrapolates these assumptions, modelled on intra-psychic processes and clinical psychiatry, to broader notions of social suffering,

post-traumatic cultures and transformations in collective identity. This raises the question of how exactly we got to the point which traumatic status can now be *assigned* regardless of the event. In attempting to scale all levels of analysis and agents, these social theories of trauma still demonstrate an analogising effect. Locating trauma at such a broad level of analysis, despite its psychological roots, risks conflating qualitatively different processes and creating an imprecise notion of trauma. The conflation of medical, psychological and socio-cultural terminology and processes at micro, meso and macro levels of analysis only conceals the reality of traumatic experience and collapses victim and non-victim identities – whether a victim of genocide or indirectly exposed through media coverage of a traumatic event.

There is also an unusual lack of attention given to the social psychological and micro-political significance of agency implicated in the ‘trauma process’, especially given the reliance on claim makers and their use of symbolic resources. Expanding on this, Degloma (2009) traces these cultural frameworks to the interpersonal, micro-sociological processes in which they are grounded. Various rhetorical strategies are employed by social movements, conceptualized as ‘trauma carrier groups’, to expand their trauma claim and demand attention and action. Using these strategies, ‘carrier groups’ such as Vietnam Veterans Against War, “generalize a vocabulary of victimization and promote affective solidarity” with the intention of projecting the social, political and moral relevance of their claim across agent and context (Degloma, 2009:107). Plotting these discursive strategies highlights how abstract narratives, such as ‘cultural trauma’, are at some point rooted in personal experiences. Abstract narratives such as these risk analogising the lived realities of suffering to make claims on behalf of others (McGarry and Walklate, 2015).

By failing to consider the social-psychological mechanisms and interactions behind suffering, cultural trauma analyses are perhaps ‘arbitrary’ compared to other, more

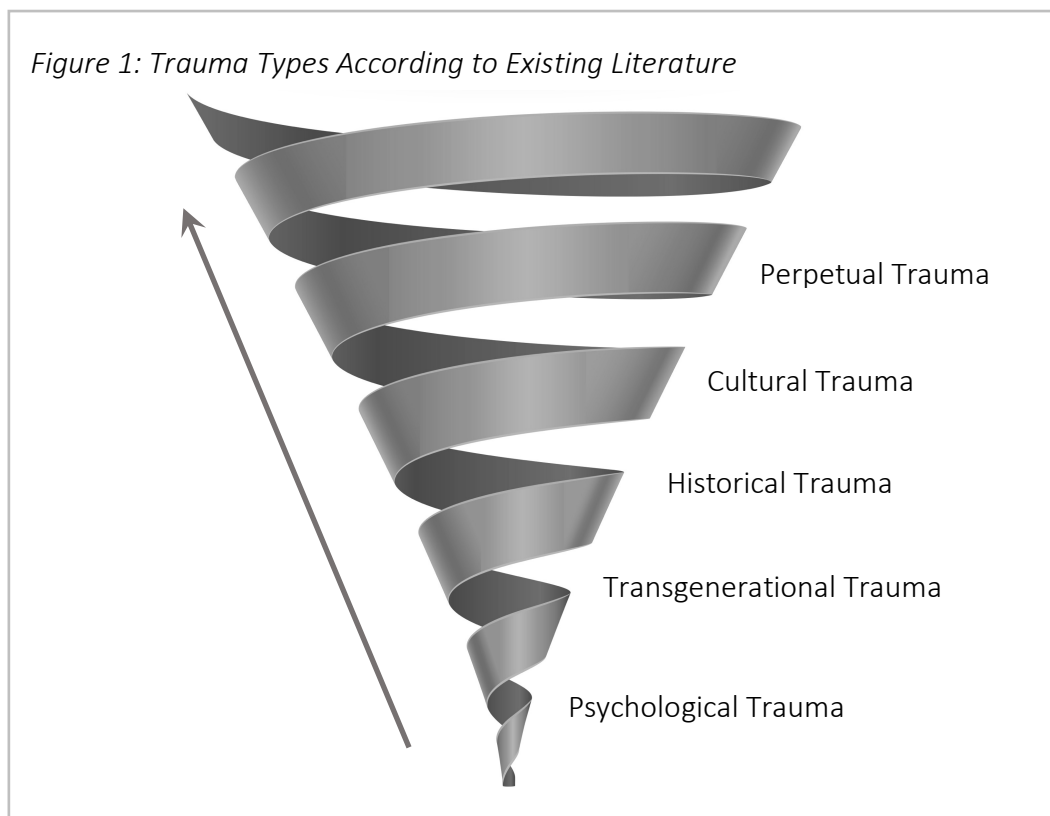
‘established’ studies of collective suffering (see Traverso and Broderick, 2010:8; for examples, see Kleinman et al., 1997; Robben and Suarez-Orozco, 2000; Das, 2001; Volkan, 2001; Vollhardt, 2012). While terms such as ‘cultural trauma’ may be used “metaphorically in the sense of a disruption of communication structures”, how the ‘collective processing’ of such events actually takes place requires further attention (Brunner, 2011:204). Even more, as Traverso and Broderick (2010:8) point out, this task might be better placed elsewhere:

There are, in fact, other established sociological and anthropological models, such as social suffering, conflict, violence and genocide studies, which consider the social and cultural responses of communities to catastrophic events, while avoiding the psychologizing connotations implied by concepts of trauma.

For example, parallel to cultural sociologists’ study of trauma, social psychologies of violence have explored a somewhat comparable notion of ‘collective victimisation’. In a recent review, Vollhardt (2012) summarised existing research in an effort to unpick the processes and mechanisms behind collective victimisation. A configuration of macro processes (socio-structural and cultural shifts), meso-level practices (such as the strategies of social and political institutions) and micro level responses (such as resilience and traumatic stress) were reviewed as a way of tracing the diffusion of victim experiences to collectives. Similarly, Bar-Tal’s (2007; with David, 2009) analysis of the ‘socio-psychological infrastructure of intractable conflict’ shares a strong resemblance to Alexander’s theory of cultural trauma. Although Bar-Tal’s (2007; 2009) approach focuses on the ‘socio-psychological infrastructure’ that develops *during* conflict, both theories examine the shared social and cultural frameworks through which new experiences are interpreted. While there are interesting parallels between these concepts of ‘collective victimisation’, ‘chosen trauma’ and ‘cultural trauma’, the point remains that these events are ultimately rooted in the “embodied suffering” that victims experience (Spencer, 2011:47).

2.4 Differentiating Trauma Types: A Critique of the Literature

As a way of formalising this critique of literatures, a diagram is presented below which plots concepts of trauma as identified in the literature. Vollhardt (2012:137) distinguishes between personally experienced collective victimisation, indirectly experienced collective victimisation in the present, and indirectly experienced collective victimisation in the past. Following this line of thought, a continuum is presented below which plots different types of trauma according to their *assumed* spatial and temporal distance from the event. As this continuum ascends, concepts of trauma expand across person, place and time drawing in people connected in different ways and at different points in time. This model therefore reflects a critique of *literatures* of trauma, rather than the realities of traumatic experience; it illustrates where the boundaries *are not* in contemporary trauma theory, rather than where they *are*. Moving from the centre to the peripheries, concepts of trauma become more concerned with the *representation* rather than *experience* of suffering itself.



At the centre of this spectrum, psychological trauma reflects the personal, and often prolonged, suffering of an individual. Literature on psychological trauma has seen contributions from cognitivist, behavioural, psychodynamic and psychosocial perspectives, as well as prompting broader discussions in meaning and memory (see Bracken, 2002). While the concept emerged in response to physical injuries such as shell shock, trauma now reflects psychological injuries and is applied to a range of different events. Indeed, some have argued that such a broad application of the term in a clinical sense can be unproductive. Rather, the term:

...conflates emotional responses to being in a motor vehicle accident and emotional responses to being the victim of repeated torture, the consequences of being mugged and the consequences of being held prisoner and repeatedly gang-raped over a several week period as an act of "ethnic cleansing," the sequelae to losing your house to a tornado or house fire and the sequelae to losing your village and your entire family to a paramilitary assault (Ehrenreich, 2003:15–16)

Psychological trauma can stem from single event experiences, such as car accidents, or cumulative and chronic traumas, such as torture which threatens to disrupt and disorder much beyond the moment of release. For example, Kira (2001) distinguishes between attachment traumas, autonomy or identity trauma, interdependence trauma, self-actualisation trauma, and survival trauma recognising that not all stressors are experienced in the same way. Nonetheless, psychological trauma reflects experiences which are close in proximity in time and place. While some learn to adapt to the threat of disorder, psychological trauma can become the subject of fixation, causing avoidance, hyperarousal, deterioration in physical health and cognitive functioning, flashbacks as well as prolonged acute anxiety (Herman, 1992).

These effects have also been reported to endure and reverberate in later generations. Concepts such as trans-generational or inter-generational trauma reflect how unresolved trauma of first generation victims can be transmitted to second generations through mechanisms such as "symbiosis, empathy, attachment,

enmeshment, personal or collective identification, projective identification, introjection, dependency, co-dependency, interdependency, parenting, and acculturation” (Kira, 2001:78). These types of trauma focus on unresolved traumas that are internalised and passed on to relatives (Danieli, 1998). For example, the transmission of Holocaust trauma has been studied through various psychodynamic, socio-cultural, family and biological systems resulting in ‘catastrophic expectancy’, problems in forming attachments and feelings of disconnection and anxiety (Kellermann, 2001). While transgenerational trauma occurs through the enduring effects of psychological traumas, we can start to see that traumatic experiences are not discrete in time or space.

The concept of historical trauma expands upon this notion of trauma over time and place by describing the transmission of trauma through collective identity. Historical traumas describe effects which endure beyond familial relationships and create lasting structural inequalities such as social isolation, marginalisation, poverty and unemployment. Literature on historical trauma argue that its effects are transmitted to collectives connected by identity, experience, as well as kinship (Denham, 2008; Kirmayer et al., 2014). This concept touches upon the notion that “persons may be traumatically affected by what happened to their ancestors or predecessors, by virtue of identification, even if they themselves have not directly experienced traumatic events” (Eagle and Kaminer, 2015:5). Case studies of historical trauma include the oppression of Indigenous people in North America (Denham, 2008) and slavery (Gump, 2010; Schwab, 2010). Here, trauma is temporally distant in that they are cross-generational. However, they are immediate in their manifestation as structural violence and injustice.

The concept of cultural trauma marks a shift in focus; moving from the assumption of events as inherently traumatic to the notion of events as traumatic only to the extent

that they ‘constructed’, labelled and imagined as such by society (see Alexander, 2004, 2012). According to Alexander (2012:1), cultural trauma occurs “when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways”. Under this definition, an event is neither required to be immediate in time nor close in proximity.

These categories of trans-generational, historical and cultural trauma all represent responses to dealing with the legacies of violence. Unresolved traumatic effects emerge in later generations as a result. However, these concepts of trauma vary by degrees of identification. While transgenerational traumas are transmitted through familial relationships, the effects of historical trauma such as structural violence are transmitted through connections of identity as well as kinship (although the distinction between these two concepts is quite fine). The victims of cultural trauma, on the other hand, are not individuals, but collectives in which are ‘indelible marks’ are left. The transmission of these cultural traumas is a social process which stems from no particularly traumatic event; only an event which is represented as such by society and to the extent which its audience identifies with the immediate victims. While psychological, transgenerational and historical traumas reflect how victims deal with legacies of violence and its long-term effects, cultural trauma is about the *representation* of these legacies. In critique of the cultural trauma thesis, Glazer (2009:152) argues that too much emphasis has been placed on the representation or labelling of events rather than its realities:

I would like, against Alexander, to claim a larger role for “the event itself”; I think we make too much of “representation” in much of contemporary social science, and we allow “events themselves”, “facts”, and “realities” to fade into a murky background.

By Alexander's (2012) logic, violent events need not actually happen to be represented as traumatic. The concept of 'perpetual trauma' develops this notion further and represents traumas in which events have not yet occurred (Schmidt, 2014). Whereas cultural trauma is based on events in the past and is retrospective, the concept of perpetual trauma shifts the focus to prospective, anticipatory stress. Schmidt (2014:240) argues that "perpetual trauma....is not based on actual events and people, but rather on potentiality, a sense of future danger, and iconic victims/perpetrators". Building upon the social constructivist influences of Alexander, Schmidt (2014) explores the role of social movements like 'Mothers Against Drunk Driving' (MADD) as 'trauma organisations'. These 'trauma organisations' are tasked with constructing trauma narratives for social and political functions. Centred on this social constructivist logic, Schmidt (2014:247) argues that "the *fear* of a drunk-driving crash is as traumatizing as the crash itself".

Unlike psychological, transgenerational, historical and even cultural trauma which requires at least some level of identification or affiliation with victims, in perpetual trauma "...categories of victim and perpetrator are depersonalized. They are empty positions waiting to be filled by any individual" (Schmidt, 2014:244). While historical trauma is transmitted through identification, such as African Americans in the case of slavery, perpetual trauma does not. Perpetual trauma sits on the outermost level of the continuum drawing in more people, over different places and time where little identification or proximity to victims is required.

This spiral plots concepts of trauma as identified within the literature. While instances of violence may be fixed to particular times and spaces, its effects have been found to endure much beyond these boundaries. As the spiral ascends, concepts of trauma extend across person, place and time. Literatures on transgenerational trauma speak to the legacies of violence in family systems while historical trauma reflects legacies

transmitted by way of “salient social identities” (Schmidt, 2014:244). On the peripheries of this continuum, the concepts of cultural and perpetual trauma share little connection with the event of victimisation but still threaten to effect those who are distant in many ways. However, as the continuum expands, the concept of trauma loses precision and becomes an “extravagant metaphor” to vaguely describe unpleasantness (Ignatieff, 1996:121). Concepts such as cultural trauma become preoccupied with the representation of events rather than its lived realities and effects upon victims. Rather than describing the subjective experience of victims, these concepts imply a turn to trauma as a universal and collective experience (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009). Little room is left to consider the differences between experiences.

The concepts identified in literature also overlap and lack precision; with categories of transgenerational, historical and cultural trauma sometimes being used interchangeably. Even more, the process of mapping what are essentially subjective experiences involves moral and political judgements, where the experiences of some are assumed to be more or less distressing than others (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009). There are difficulties in trying to categorise events of serious violence into these concepts. Events such as the Holocaust inevitably transcend different levels of victimisation. The Holocaust has been studied and defined as both an historical (Kirmayer et al., 2014) *and* cultural trauma (Alexander, 2012), as well as in the context of trans-generational effects (Danieli, 1998) although each has a different focus. While transgenerational trauma describes the transmission of trauma to family, historical trauma explores the impact upon current social, economic and health inequalities and cultural trauma focuses on how social structures are destabilised and events are represented as traumatic. However, what these concepts do speak to is how the experiences of individuals become the ‘property’ of others (Rock, 1998:62).

2.5 The Conflation of Trauma and Suffering

This theoretical review has demonstrated the concept of trauma to be a widely employed, yet relatively obscure notion. ‘Trauma’ holds connotations of intrusion and disruption for individuals but also broader inferences of ruptured collective identities further confounded by ‘lay’ master narratives (Leys, 2000; Fassin and Rechtman, 2009; Alexander, 2012; Walklate, 2013; Kirmayer et al., 2014). As Kansteiner (2002:185–186) observes in his discussion of trauma and collective memory, the concept risks becoming “at best metaphorical and at worst misleading about the phenomenon under study”. The concept is both emotionally and politically loaded becoming over-inclusive, attempting to describe a wide range of events, impacts and outcomes. It appears to possess a ‘dual terminological’ use as both a *traumatic event* and *traumatising impact* (Eagle and Kaminer, 2015:3), in *aporetic* (Caruth, 1995) and *therapeutic* (Herman, 1992) manifestations, and as a *psychic* process in both individual and collective identities (even if metaphorically).

As Traverso and Broderick highlight (2010: 7), there exist numerous genealogical and theoretical reviews of contemporary trauma theory which testify to the difficulty of “collapsing diverse concepts of trauma into a single, undifferentiated one”. Rather than finding definition, arguments are often being presented for a more inclusive theoretical concept. To some extent this unravelling of the concept has allowed some sensitivity to the impact of trauma across context, person and level of analysis. However, the process of attempting to theorise and recognise boundaries of contemporary trauma theory has paradoxically brought about what Kansteiner (2004:194) refers to as “some unfortunate side effects”: namely, issues of transmissibility and conflation.

The emergence of the new 'cultural trauma' paradigm, originally justified in its intention to *recognise* the traumatic experience, has fostered an imprecise notion of victimisation. Alexander's social constructivist account essentialises the role of cultural frameworks in framing responses to trauma to the extent that the *lived* experience of victim suffering is overshadowed. Again, similar to the critique of Caruth's 'deconstructive trauma paradigm', Alexander's approach ultimately risks concealing the reality of these experiences. As cultural sociologists claim, the trauma narrative possesses a unifying effect; through which victims' and non-victims' experiences, narratives and identities become 'harmonized' (Ehrenreich, 2003; Degloma, 2009, 2011:71; Alexander, 2012). Even more, whereas Alexander presents a relatively seamless impression of the 'trauma process', the reality is such that cultural narratives are the subject of struggle and resistance. Historical, cultural, and individual differences are suppressed under a more schematic narrative which 'subjectivises' members of the collective and diminishes agency (Joas, 2005:367).

The contemporary notion of trauma, typified by this new 'cultural trauma paradigm', risks becoming detached from its empirical value. Rather, as some argue, the concept has taken on a moral and political value through which experiences are "retrieved, interpreted and narrated" (Herman, 1992; Young, 1995:4; Fassin and Rechtman, 2009). 'Trauma' is a product of a number of meshed histories and disciplinary trajectories, as well as its entrenchment by psychiatry as a diagnostic category. As Young (1995; 5) explains in his genealogy of post-traumatic stress disorder:

The disorder is not timeless, nor does it possess an intrinsic unity. Rather it is glued together by practices, technologies, and narratives with which it is diagnosed, studied, treated, and represented and by the various interests, institutions, and moral arguments that mobilized these efforts and resources.

Current trauma talk can be traced as a construct of a number of interdisciplinary trajectories (such as the 'cultural trauma' paradigm), political interest and

legitimation (such as feminist movements), and wider cultural shifts (such as the 'culture of fear', see Furedi, 2006). Ironically, as Fassin and Rechtman (2009:7) argue, this 'master narrative' of trauma emerging from recognition of victimhood has reduced the concept to a state of 'naturalization'.

This 'trauma creep' has also extended into victimology, turning a concept once used to validate victim experience to a political and over-elaborated one. This paradox, simultaneously pathologising the traumatic response and trivialising the victim experience, has changed how the victim is defined. Traumatic events such as genocide will inevitably transcend qualitative analytical levels affecting families, communities and cultures. However, a conflation of victims and non-victims, traumatic and non-traumatic and individual and collective analyses, has produced a somewhat imprecise concept detached from the lived experience of victimisation. Rather than authenticating victim experiences, the cultural trauma paradigm has resulted in the "valorization and aestheticization of trauma" where there is more focus on how events are *represented* rather than experienced (Kansteiner and Weilnbock, 2008:237).

Concepts such as 'cultural trauma' also diminishes the capacity for agency in victims. Despite stemming from the experiences of a few, victims' voices are glossed over in favour of more systematic descriptions of the 'trauma process'. Attempts to analyse the micro-level aspects of experience are often situated within social and cultural frameworks and reduce the capacity of individuals in negotiating these shifts. This is not to diminish the value or power of broader socio-cultural processes: of course, individuals do not function in a "social vacuum" (Reicher et al., 2001:50). However, by refocusing upon the victim, we can observe how victims accept or reject narratives and how ruptures within collectives might emerge. The potential for disconnect between agents and across levels of analysis needs to be acknowledged, recognising the " ...transformative, critical, and creative agency that challenge conventional

notions of victimhood” (Helms, 2013; Björkdahl and Selimovic, 2015:167). Rather than considering how individuals and collectives interact, victim agency is subverted to a seemingly unified and unifying cultural trauma narrative (qua O’Malley, 2006). Differences in experiences, identity and history are reduced to a single dimension. Such a venture only serves to stage a decontextualized and abstracted notion of victimisation detached from complex lived realities. As Walklate (2011:189) points out:

...the foregrounding of trauma, particularly by the media and victims’ advocates, disguises the historically present structural dimensions of those people’s everyday lives and their capacity for managing those structural conditions.

To some extent, by acting as a ‘unifying’ construct, the concept offers an effective platform for previously marginalised voices to share experiences beyond those immediately involved. As Fassin and Rechtman (2009:277) argue, the concept has provided an “unprecedented ability to talk about - and hence to experience - the violence of the world”. There is now an increased appreciation of the varied ways victimisation may impact victims of lethal violence and its witnesses. As Degloma (2009) argues, traumatic experiences have expanded and are communicated both diachronically through time and synchronically through space from individuals to collectives. However, the concept also serves to divide and exclude by legitimising some experiences and rejecting others. Ascribing traumatic status and categorising the suffering of others holds assumptions of authenticity and can be employed for particular political ends. As Fassin and Rechtman (2009, p.153; emphasis added) note:

Trauma has far exceeded the grasps of psychiatrists and their debates about how to define it. It is now a part of everyday language. It has *descriptive value*, but more importantly *prescriptive value*, calling for action (clinical, economic and symbolic) and reparation.

While this has encouraged a growing appreciation of the extent of the impact of victimisation and as a kind of platform for claims to victim status to emerge, it is easy to understand how we might “lose sight of the individual victim” (McGarry and Walklate, 2015:39).

2.6 ‘Foregrounding’ the Victim

Departing from such broad cultural analyses of trauma, this research aims to ground and realign the analytical focus to the *lived realities* of victimisation. A critical victimological perspective is employed which recognises victims as structurally situated, yet active agents of such change. Applying Giddens’ (1984b) notion of duality, critical victimologists look to understand the “dynamism between the structural location of people and their day-to-day negotiation of this...” (Walklate, 2006:46). The purpose of this research is therefore to document and remember the lived experiences behind the supposedly ‘metaphorical’ injuries that cultural trauma alludes to. In doing so, this research explores how bereaved families and affected communities confront and mobilise their experiences as a way of prompting change. Set against the recent conceptual shifts explored above, this research explores the *lived realities* of victimisation.

While the process of *becoming* a victim has received much attention, the experience of suffering and harm risks becoming detached and abstracted from these processes (Spencer, 2011; McGarry and Walklate, 2015). Indeed, as Spencer (2011:46) argues, there is a “tendency within the victimology literature [] to make the label of ‘the victim’ the ultimate referent for inquiry”. As this discussion has shown, much emphasis has been placed on the representation and labelling of events rather than significance and meaning of events for those affected by them. Rather, as part of a nascent cultural victimology which aims to “foregrounds suffering, our exposure to

it, how it is presented to use, and what sense we make of it”, this research aims to ground and refocus on the experiences of victims in the aftermath of lethal violence (McGarry and Walklate, 2015:18).

Indeed, as Shute (2016:173; see also Walby et al., 2017) notes, “[t]here is, sadly, no shortage of ‘data’ for the scholar of lethal violence”. The effects of violence reverberate widely; they manifest in the direct effects of physical, psychological and emotional injury, secondary victimisation of families, for example, through interaction with the criminal justice system, and harm experienced through ties of identity and kinship (a phenomenon reflected in Spalek’s (2006:88) concept of ‘spirit injury’). As Condry (2010:219) summarises, “...the ripple effect of crime travels across time, across place, and through kin and friendship ties”. Increasing recognition is afforded to the extent of harms that may affect the secondary victim of crime. Commenting on the implications of sudden and violent death, Shute (2016:173) writes:

Naturally, each death presumes one direct victim, however, the effects of an untimely and violent death on the networks of actors connected to the deceased by ties of family, friendship and work are often profound and enduring.

A sizeable literature exists on the impact of bereavement highlighting that, while painful and sometimes debilitating, grief is an “unfortunately common experience” (Bonanno and Kaltman, 2001:705). In their systematic review of evidence, Bonanno and Kaltman (2001) identified several effects of bereavement for relatives including cognitive disorganisation, such as the loss of meaning, emotional dysphoria, such as loneliness, various health deficits, such as somatic symptoms and increased risk of mortality, and disrupted social and occupational functioning (Parkes, 1998; Rothaupt and Becker, 2007; Stroebe et al., 2007). While the experience of bereavement is unique and specific to each individual, research indicates that a majority exhibit a common grief pattern (for example Bonanno and Kaltman, 2001).

However, bereavement through homicide presents a distinctive pattern of responses and experiences which are different to those of non-violent homicide; the effects of which, can be multiple, severe and enduring bereavement (Rynearson and McCreery, 1993; see Rock, 1998; Armour, 2002; Connolly and Gordon, 2015; Walters, 2015; Englebrecht et al., 2016; Wijk et al., 2016). As Rynearson and McCreery (1993) argue, bereavement through homicide is a complicated 'synergism' of the distress of loss and the overwhelmedness and disruption of trauma. Co-victims of homicide or families of the deceased:

...suffer from traumatic grief that is a unique blend of trauma and grief in which the bereaved person's need to defend against intrusive stimuli related to the violent death may block their ability to mourn (Armour, 2002:110)

Feelings of loss of control, powerlessness and vulnerability are compounded by the sudden and unanticipated nature of homicide while assumptions of safety and certainty are shattered. Similarly, as Rock (1998:51) points out, the "sheer ugliness of violent death" can conjure unsettling images and fantasies about the circumstances of their loved ones' death. Families may also experience stigma or feel guilt for the way in which their relatives died or, as Armour (2002:110) points out, "even for the way the victim lived". More recognition is afforded now to families bereaved by homicide as a distinctive population, with research noting how violent death complicates and risks disrupting the 'normal' stages of grief (Rynearson and McCreery, 1993; Kaltman and Bonanno, 2003; Malone, 2007; Stretesky et al., 2010; Englebrecht et al., 2016).

Drawing across homicide studies, death studies, and trauma and violence literature, existing research demonstrates that co-victims of homicide suffer a number of psychological, emotional and physiological afflictions in the aftermath of homicide. Violent deaths often leave indelible and enduring effects on those involved, with research demonstrating the prevalence of depression, anxiety and traumatic stress in co-victims of homicide (Casey, 2011; van Denderen et al., 2013; Connolly and Gordon,

2015). For example, Casey's (2011) *Review into the Needs of Families Bereaved by Homicide*, surveying 400 families of homicide victims, found that over 80% of respondents exhibited trauma-related symptoms while over three quarters reported depression. Co-victims have reported feelings of anger, fear, shock, and guilt in the aftermath of traumatic loss (Spungen, 1998; Armour, 2002). In circumstances of stigmatised loss, such as gun-related deaths, co-victims have also reported feelings of shame and lack of social support (see Doka, 1989 for the concept of 'disenfranchised grief').

Such effects also compound problems on a cognitive level, where violent death disrupts meaning, destabilises assumptions of safety and uncertainty and for some, increases fearfulness and erodes confidence (Armour, 2003; Connolly and Gordon, 2015). Relatives of homicide victims also reported deteriorations in physical health such as insomnia, loss of appetite, lack of concentration, headaches and stomach aches (Armour, 2002; Casey, 2011; Wijk et al., 2016). Further to psychological and physical injuries, families of homicide victims are also confronted by the demands of the justice process; an ongoing police investigation, court trial and sentencing. Riches and Dawson (1998:143) argue that acts of mourning and processing grief are 'subordinated' to the requirements of legal responses to homicide. At a time when families are in the immediate and intense stages of grief, bereavement is subverted by the procedures of the criminal justice system, such as investigation and trial (Casey, 2011; Gekoski et al., 2013). Families must liaise with coroners, solicitors and the police. Arrangements for funerals may be postponed for post-mortems and further investigations. Even more, the end of the trial does not promise closure for families. Rather, as Armour (2003:519) highlights:

Besides the horror that someone wilfully and violently took life away from another, homicide survivors quickly learn that the dominant social narrative makes the State the surrogate victim and harm done by offenders to victims is handled as if it is harm done by offenders to the State.

Research indicates that the needs of families are subverted and overtaken by agendas of the State with co-victims reporting feeling a lack of control, resentment over sentencing outcomes, and the inadequacy of authorities providing information. In their research with women bereaved by homicide, Gekoski, Adler and Gray (2013) documented a series of problematic interactions with the criminal justice system amounting to secondary victimisation. Families reported a lack of information provided by police, insensitive treatment, the distress of dealing with evidence as well as issues arising when wishing to view the body of their relative (Riches and Dawson, 1998; Malone, 2007; Stretesky et al., 2010; Casey, 2011; Gekoski et al., 2013). These feelings might be aggravated further by the loss of privacy if the media become involved.

Research on violent bereavement indicates that the experience is both common and debilitating. How individuals respond to such events will vary according to differences in coping strategies, personal qualities, relationship with the victim and encounters with, for example, family, survivors, and the criminal justice system. However, there is also increasing recognition of how such experiences present opportunities for personal growth and transformation beyond coping. These processes have received various labels such as 'altruism born of suffering' (Staub and Vollhardt, 2008), 'resilience' (Bonanno, 2004; Ungar, 2013; Walklate et al., 2014) and 'posttraumatic growth' (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1995, 2004). As Neimeyer, Prigerson and Davies (2002:245) point out, while bereavement disrupts and destabilises the meaning structures of survivors, overstating the distressing effects of these experiences risks marginalising responses of personal growth. Rather, co-victims might reconstruct and make sense of these experiences in ways which encourage a greater appreciation of life, share closer relationships with loved ones and perceive a greater sense of meaning and purpose (Neimeyer et al., 2002; Tedeschi and Calhoun,

2004; Davis, 2008). Here, the term 'growth' holds *subjective* significance for those involved; whether co-victims perceive changes in the self, their relationships and world views to be positive.

Therefore, while research on violent bereavement has shown it is a debilitating experience, there are also opportunities for 'growth'. By documenting the experiences of these 'hidden' victims of lethal violence (see Spungen, 1998), this research explores how these individuals understand and make sense of their experiences (Spalek, 2006; McGarry and Walklate, 2015). Foregrounding the victim in this way encourages an understanding of how and what meaning victims give to experiences and how these 'personal troubles' might become 'public issues' through responses such as bereaved family activism (see C. Wright Mills, 1959).

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how the concept of trauma, originally an immediate and intense experience, has been uncritically projected onto social and cultural levels of analysis. The concept has attracted much criticism, from the trivialisation of victimisation (Kansteiner and Weilnbock, 2008; Fassin and Rechtman, 2009) to the unhelpful metaphorical claims that it makes about the ways in which collectives work (Ignatieff, 1996; Kansteiner, 2004; Brunner, 2011). With the emergence of 'trauma talk' (Neocleous, 2012:189) or 'trauma creep' (McGarry and Walklate, 2015:44) in victimology, the victim experience has become conflated with that of trauma. McGarry and Walklate (2015) argue that both narratives of trauma and victims have failed to capture the lived experience of suffering. Whilst victim discourses collectivise experiences through aggregate data, the trauma narrative makes claims on behalf of the collective despite being based upon the experiences of a few.

Those who experience suffering are not always recognised as victims. However, the conflation between trauma and victim narratives has prompted an increased appreciation of the extent of the impact of victimisation. As this chapter has demonstrated, the legacies of lethal violence extend much beyond the immediate death. The effects reach families, communities and cultures through ties of kinship, identity and social bonds. Victims' experiences are shared with other collectives and extend across person, place and time with personal experiences being communicated to prompt collective responses. The various literatures on concepts of psychological, transgenerational, historical and cultural trauma speak to this.

Despite providing an 'unprecedented ability' to talk about violence, this chapter argued that concepts of 'cultural trauma' are preoccupied more with the representation of events rather than how victims actually experience them. With questions of suffering becoming conflated with questions of trauma, categories of victims and non-victims, the traumatic and non-traumatic and individuals and collectives are collapsed. Differences in victim histories, identities and experiences are subsumed under sweeping narratives which risk becoming abstracted from the lived experience. Concepts such as 'cultural trauma' risk obscuring, rather than informing, different experiences.

This research is presented as a way of realigning focus to the lived experience of lethal violence: how victims confront, mobilise and make meaning from such experiences. By foregrounding the victim, this chapter has also provided discussion of how victims typically confront and respond to bereavement by homicide. The following chapter discusses how these experiences might manifest in *organised* responses such as victim movements. In exploring existing literature on victim movements, the next chapter explores how the personal experiences might be 'mobilised' as a source of change for others.

Chapter 3 - 'Return of the Victim' and Victim Movements

3.1 Introduction

In the aftermath of lethal violence, victims are confronted with uncertainties and demands placed upon them by communities, criminal justice agencies and wider society. As Gadd (2015:1032) writes, “[w]hen people are seriously harmed or murdered, it is often difficult to discern where the violence ends and the aftermath begins”. For victims, responses to violence emerge in efforts to rebuild relationships, restore meaning and to ‘be heard’ “even if it threatens to break the order of the known world for those who listen” as well as responses that can stifle recovery (Stauffer, 2015:80). While some argue that the retelling of these experiences threatens to incite further violence, the practice of sharing these stories *out* of isolation can also encourage victims “to make sense of their grief, rebuild communities and assert their resilience” (Gadd, 2015:1032). Victim movements are one such response to lethal violence.

Much emphasis was placed in the previous chapter upon the recent ‘trauma creep’ into the discipline of victimology. There is now increasing recognition of the varied ways victimisation can impact not only an individual, but families, communities and even cultures. Experiences of harm, injustice and suffering are shared across different collectives by virtue of identity, kinship and social bonds. This phenomenon is supported by, as McGarry and Walklate (2015:17–18) describe, the “increasingly visual nature of social life which constantly and consistently places us beside the victim, encouraging us to feel what they feel”.

This chapter considers the role of victim movements in sharing and ‘mobilising’ these experiences; in particular, the ways in which personal experiences are communicated to prompt recognition and acknowledgement. The chapter begins by presenting a critical review of the rise and role of the victim movements. Using examples to illustrate, the chapter examines the diversity of experiences, needs and strategies that victim movements exhibit and their role in communicating such claims to wider collectives. Considering the complexity of victim movements and the accompanying tensions in such groups, the chapter closes by arguing for a ‘critical appreciation’. This would involve a critical inquiry that balances between the romanticising tendencies on the one hand, and the underestimation of victim agency on the other.

3.2 The ‘Return of the Victim’ and the Rise of Victim Movements

As several commentators note, victims in both national and international criminal justice have, until recently, been somewhat absent (Zedner, 2002; Walklate, 2006; Karstedt, 2010). Victims in many cases were relegated to instrumental and secondary to the criminal justice system, merely instigating the claims necessary for the State to proceed. As Christie (1977:3) explains in his oft-cited essay *Conflict as Property*:

...the one party that is represented by the state, namely the victim, is so thoroughly represented that she or he for most of the proceedings is pushed completely out of the arena, reduced to the triggerer-off of the whole thing. She or he is a sort of double loser; first, vis-a-vis the offender, but secondly and often in a more crippling manner by being denied rights to full participation in what might have been one of the more important ritual encounters in life. The victim has lost the case to the state.

Victims held little substantive legal or procedural rights in the criminal justice system and the impact of victimisation was otherwise overlooked. If victims were acknowledged in any way besides as a ‘trigger’ for State justice, they were pitted as individuals desperately, or even hysterically, seeking revenge. Victims, therefore, were seen as a ‘hazard’ to the solutions that formal justice offered and were

supposedly best separated for fear of antiquating an otherwise balanced system (Rock, 2002:3).

However, as first submitted in Garland's (2001:11) landmark study of *The Culture of Control*, the criminal justice system has witnessed a 'return of the victim' to the 'centre stage'. The factors driving this shift have been listed extensively elsewhere, but briefly include; seemingly 'permanently high crime rates', disillusion with the rehabilitative ideals of the welfare state, the growth of women's movements and recognition of violence against women, the politicisation of crime by politicians *and* social movements and the increasing popularity of a law-and-order approach to criminal justice (Elias, 1993; Strang, 2001; Goodey, 2005:13–14; Walklate, 2006:11–17; Rentschler, 2011; Duggan and Heap, 2014). The victim now wields much more political authority in criminal justice processes with academic, public and political discourse influenced by matters of victim interests, needs and rights.

Moving from the margins of criminal justice, victims are now more intimately involved in policy and practice. This shift is characterised by the launch of compensation schemes, participatory rights such as victim impact statements and restorative justice, Victim Champions, Victims Charters, and the institution of more punitive legislation dedicated to affected victims such as Sarah's Law and Helen's Law² and is indicative of a move towards a victim-centred populist approach (Garland, 2001; Reeves and Dunn, 2010; Hoyle, 2012; Duggan and Heap, 2014). This is a marked change from the space and responses afforded to the 'invisible victim' that

² Sarah's Law (introducing a sex offender's register), Helen's Law (denying parole to offenders who conceal whereabouts of victims), and Clare's Law (detailing a new domestic violence disclosure scheme), represent examples of laws in the UK in which "victim's experiences are used at a political level to justify the expansion of legislation and introduction of criminal justice reform" (see Fitz-Gibbon and Walklate, 2016:287)

Christie (1977:7) proposed forty years ago where victims rarely made an appearance. Even more, as Rock (2002:4 emphasis added) notes, “if they did appear, they were *spoken about* or *spoken for* but they were rarely allowed *to speak*, and they acquired a correspondingly fantastic appearance”. In contrast, the run up to the 2015 General Election saw Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat manifestos all promise legislation on victims’ rights. While these debates have been somewhat diluted when subsumed under the Police and Crime Act 2017, calls for a Victims’ Law have continued from various victim advocacy groups which now feature in criminal justice policy and practice in the UK (see, for example Victim Support, 2015b; Newlove, 2017; Voice 4 Victims, 2017).

Victims’ issues have followed the rise of a formally organised and politically active victims’ movement. Emerging in the 1960s and 1970s in the US as a rights-based group, the movement quickly expanded to accommodate a range of interest groups from feminists to right wing law-and-order advocates (Elias, 1993; Williams and Goodman, 2007; Rentschler, 2011; Hoyle, 2012). Victim interest groups now operate in a range of contexts, through various means and to different ends. From the critical social justice advocacy of the Hillsborough Families to the government-funded service provision of Victim Support, the experiences and responses of victims now see a greater exchange of political authority and expression in the form of victim movements.

With this acceleration of victim advocacy and policy, some have commented on the politicised nature of victimhood. Speaking first on the ‘politicisation of the victim’, Miers (1978:51) described this as a process in which “victims of crimes of violence were converted into an identifiable and coherent group, with evident political potential”. According to Garland (2001) and others (Elias, 1993; Christie, 2010; Tonry, 2010; Duggan and Heap, 2014; Lawther, 2015), this politicisation of victimhood

persists in both the US, where victim groups are often noted for their dominant law-and-order ideology, and in the UK, where it is argued that victims' voices are co-opted for punitive responses (Williams, 1999; Strang, 2001; Hoyle, 2012).

Departing from earlier notions of the victim as marginal and suspect, criminal justice policy has instead sought to professionalise and "formalise[] the use of the victim's voice" (McGarry and Walklate, 2015:104). Victim movements within the UK take a number of different forms; from the individual lobbying efforts of Sara Payne, to grassroots family justice campaigns such as Mothers Against Violence and larger nationally-funded organisations like Victim Support. Groups have emerged in various contexts and for a number of different reasons; to share their experience, to provide a service they felt they should have access to, because they feel that they have something to say that other victims need to hear, to share information, or to give structure and meaning back that victimisation might have disrupted – something Rock (2004:333) describes as an attempt to "re-moralise a world that appears to have lost meaning" (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Jennings, 1998; Rock, 1998; Williams, 1999; Condry, 2007; Williams and Goodman, 2007; Hamber, 2009). Victim movements hold a range of purposes.

However, the victim movement is in fact characterised by a variety of interests, needs and voices rather than unwavering solidarity and represents a range of different means for achieving different ends. As Pemberton (2009) argues, a host of 'endogenous' and 'exogenous' factors shape the nature and direction of a victim group. These influences can range from the broader structural conditions and "political management of [victim] identity" to the role of specific experiences (Scruton, 2002:111). The following section seeks to outline and explain some of these influences using existing literature on victim movements as well identify other possible influences.

3.3 Diversity in Victim Movements: from Bereaved Family Activism to National Victims' Charities

3.3.1 'Official' and 'Unofficial' Movements

A commonly made distinction is the difference between the more conciliatory 'official' and the alternative 'unofficial' or 'hidden' victim movements (Elias, 1993; Spalek, 2006). While the latter tend to question the systematic causes of victimisation, the former are focused on the symptoms of such harms and are perhaps more likely to receive steady government funding and adopt a more 'conservative' agenda. In the UK, there are a number of victim groups that aim to deliver services tailored to victim needs and support victims' interests including Rape Crisis, Support After Murder and Manslaughter (SAMM), and Victim Support. Victim Support, which emerged as a national association in 1979, is the principal voluntary organisation for supporting victims in the UK. Last year, Victim Support received over one million referrals from the police, attending to the needs of over 150,000 victims and received £53.1million in winning grants or competitive contracts for providing victim services (Victim Support, 2015a). Support for the provision of victim services has therefore developed and expanded.

While occupying a central location in the provision of victim services in the UK, Victim Support faces mounting criticism regarding its increasingly professionalised and centralised organisation (see Simmonds, 2013). However, there are also a number of 'single issue' (Goodey, 2005), 'hidden' (Elias, 1993) or 'unofficial' (Spalek, 2006) victim groups in operation that are more critical in their approach. Unlike the role of Victim Support which receives steady funding from the Ministry of Justice, 'unofficial' victim movements are mobilised and often managed by a collective of affected victims united by shared experiences, community concerns, kinship or identity (Spalek, 2006;

McGarry and Walklate, 2015). These groups may emerge from a single issue, as in the case of the Hillsborough Families, or revolve around a concern over a spate of events, as in the subject of this thesis, Mothers Against Violence. Partly owing to their distance from the State, victim groups are often inclined towards more critical stances of social issues. In contrast to the officially sanctioned definitions accepted by 'official' victim movements, advocates of the 'unofficial' victims' movement work to reform rather than reproduce them. Such victim movements represent a more critical approach to the passive consumers of criminal justice policy that earlier literature has alluded to.

The distinction between 'official' and 'unofficial' victims' movements also closely reflects a second influence; namely, the nature of the relationship with the State as either critical or co-operative. It is the tendency of 'unofficial' organisations to acquire this more critical and cautious approach to harm and, in doing so, "...emphasize the more systematic victimization produced by persistent political, economic, and social problems" (Elias, 1993:57). Here, based upon a particular sense of moral and political disenfranchisement and ostracism, critical victim groups pursue a less prescribed and more 'radical' agenda (Spalek, 2006). Victim movements can be either co-operative with the State or overtly critical. Each has implications for how such movements are shaped and characterised.

The Hillsborough Families provides one such example; a victim campaign that mobilised in the aftermath of the Hillsborough Tragedy. On the 15th April 1989, 96 supporters of Liverpool Football Club died at Hillsborough Stadium in a human crush. As Scraton (2013) notes, merely hours after the incident the causes and play of events became the subject of public and political contention. Shortly after the event, the Hillsborough Family Support Group (HFSG) emerged representing the interests of a majority of the bereaved families. Despite divisions in the campaign, the group

shares the common aim to achieve truth, justice and acknowledgement amidst “police corruption”, concerted efforts of the “manipulation of evidence” and official “cover-up” attempts (Coleman, 2015:85). The activities of the Hillsborough Families have provided a critical voice in attempting to upset the structural and institutionalised scripts of State power. Sustained under a “pre-existing climate of public fear and anxiety over football hooliganism”, anti-Liverpool sentiment, and assumptions of Liverpudlian militancy, blame was quickly shifted to the fans of Liverpool Football Club (Hughson and Spaaij, 2011:256; Coleman, 2015; Scraton, 2016). Accordingly, repeated efforts have been made to discredit, shun and scapegoat victims and fans under an official rhetoric of institutionalised denial manufactured by the media, Government and local authorities (Scraton, 2016). On the 26th April 2016, the longest sitting jury in British history returned a verdict of ‘unlawful killing’ confirming that victims had not contributed to the Hillsborough Disaster. This conclusion came following an arduous and sustained 27-year campaign by bereaved family activists in pursuit of truth and justice – despite attempts to silence and scapegoat victims. At the time of writing, six people have been charged with criminal offences.

Victim movements have not always engendered immediate moral and emotional understanding or official response. Rather, whether such groups are able to elicit or ‘achieve’, as Walklate (2006:28) terms it, such a response seems largely a product of whether these movements are able to identify with, communicate and perpetuate conventions of the ‘ideal victim’ (Christie, 1986; Spalek, 2006). The ‘ideal victim’, typically defined as the passive, blameless and the weak, represents strong currency in how socio-political institutions recognise and respond to violence. Instead of encouraging solidarity, some have argued that the ‘politicisation’ of victims’ issues emphasises competition for recognition, acknowledgement and material compensations (Williams, 1999; Rombouts, 2004; Lawther, 2015). In this sense,

victims' groups that accord to the notion of the 'ideal victim' carry decidedly more political weight.

In the case of the Hillsborough Families, a movement which sought to expose truths paraded by the State, campaigners were instead marginalised and made targets of a process of "pathologisation" and "vilification" (Scruton, 2002:117). Similarly, there are a number of miscarriage of justice campaigns organised in support of those who claim to be wrongfully convicted. Groups, such as INNOCENT, campaign to prevent wrongful conviction and support the appeals of individuals who claim to have been wrongfully convicted. Similarly, the group *Wrongly Accused Person* established by campaigner Billy Middleton shortly after his acquittal aims to advise and assist claims by those believed to be wrongfully convicted. More recently, family activism such as JENGbA (*Joint Enterprise: Not Guilty by Association*), support and campaign for individuals wrongfully convicted under the 'Joint Enterprise' law. Addressing the problematic nature of joint enterprise, campaign groups such as JENGbA have been quick to point out the danger of such crime policies in the "unfair criminalisation and incarceration" of young people in black and ethnic minority communities (Bridges, 2013:34). The families involved in JENGbA seek reform of these laws. Though not consistent with the 'weak' and 'innocent' qualities of the 'ideal victim', families of the wrongfully convicted represent an organised response by family members to feelings of injustice and loss (Charman and Savage, 2009).

The agenda of critical campaign groups can reflect constructions of 'other victims of crime'. For example, in her research with the families of serious offenders, Condry (2007) has revealed the moral and emotional struggles that relatives were confronted with following discovery of the offence. In *Families Shamed*, Condry (2007) discusses the profound feelings of shame and resulting stigma that relatives of serious offenders were confronted by and coped with. As "victims of the stigma, shock and

repercussions of serious offending”, families of serious offenders can be seen as ‘other victims of crime’ (Howarth and Rock, 2000; Condry, 2007:278; Charman and Savage, 2009; Jenkins, 2013, 2014). Constructing families of serious offenders and the wrongfully convicted as the ‘other victims of crime’ “encompasses both recognition of suffering and blamelessness” (Condry, 2007:177). By working around notions of blamelessness and responsibility, these groups offered a place of refuge and mutual support for otherwise ‘stigmatised’ experiences of loss.

3.3.2 Rights-Based and Service-Oriented Organisations

Victim movements also occupy a number of different social justice and policy roles. Earlier literature has been quick to assert the stark differences between the retributive priorities of victim movements in the United States and the service-oriented nature of victim movements in the United Kingdom (Strang, 2001; Dubber, 2002; Pemberton, 2009; Rentschler, 2011). Labelled as the ‘European’ model of victim movements by Strang (2001), the victim support or serviced-oriented approach is one characterised by the provision of emotional support, practical assistance, and raising public awareness while remaining nominally ‘free’ from political commitments. Support for victims of crime and their families is an oft-cited intention of victim groups and represents an effort to offer both empowerment and emotional recovery. Embedded in the “supportive social fabric” of these organisations, victims participate in a community of shared experience, understanding, and identity recovery (Huyse, 2003:63). For example, organisations such as Support After Murder and Manslaughter (SAMM), Women’s Aid, Through Unity, and Rape Crisis each offer a number of emotional, psychological and practical support services, from peer mentoring and self-help seminars to advice on liaising with criminal justice authorities.

However, some have argued that this contest between the punitively-inclined rights movement and the service oriented victim movements, or 'between being nice and being vindictive' as van Dijk (1988:115) describes it, seems to be fading. The turn to penal populism in the UK in the mid-1990s, coupled with the rise of victim movements, has raised concern regarding the political exploitation and manipulation of crime victims for punitive ends (Garland, 2001; Barker, 2007; Christie, 2010; Tonry, 2010). For example, Duggan and Heap (2014:xi) voice concern over the "political vulnerability of crime victims" in being co-opted under populist punitive agendas in the UK as part of a wider trend of neoliberalism. There are a number of victim interest groups and campaigners that have revealed more retributive ideals. These more punitively inclined actors have proven very present and politically 'effective' in their campaigns. For example, Sarah Payne, the British media campaigner and mother of murdered schoolgirl Sara Payne, spearheaded the public campaign for Sarah's Law; allowing parents access to the details and locations of child sex offenders in their area. It's 'success', as Harper and Treadwell (2013) have questioned, culminated as a product of two factors; firstly, the moral authority held by Payne in her roles as mother, victim and champion for justice (Rock, 1998; Charman and Savage, 2010), and secondly, the political climate of 'rebalancing the criminal justice system' in favour of the victim which allowed political manoeuvring – or as Tonry (2010:401) calls it, 'populist posturing'.

3.3.4 Institutional and Socio-Historical Contexts

Taking a more nuanced perspective, Barker (2007) has criticised the over-simplified dichotomy commonly drawn between victim movements as either 'anti-modern', retributive and vengeful or 'authentically democratic' campaigns encouraging meaningful participation for both victims and offenders. In her political institutional analysis of victim campaigns, Barker (2007) identified a number of institutional and

socio-historical conditions that provide context to the demands of victim campaigns. Factors such as a history of civic participation and a strong precedent of social inclusion and cohesion were regarded as key to less retributive and coercive demands of victim movements. In this respect, the directions of victim movements, including the moral and emotional ‘work’ involved, can be constrained by the political and economic context in which they emerge.

Taking a closer look at the socio-historical and political contexts which frame victim campaigns, it is also worth mentioning the influence of neoliberal agendas and changes in civil society. Several critics have warned that trends of marketisation and competitive contracting have created conditions of insecurity for voluntary organisations (McLaughlin et al., 2001; Maguire, 2012; Hucklesby and Corcoran, 2015). The criminal justice sector is not exempt from this trend (see Tomczak, 2017). The advantages of voluntary sector involvement in criminal justice have been detailed elsewhere, but briefly include cost-efficiency and flexibility of service provision, independence from criminal justice agencies, and subsequently closer dialogue with service users (Corcoran and Hucklesby, 2013; Hucklesby and Corcoran, 2015; Tomczak, 2015). In response to public welfare and social justice issues, more focus is placed upon voluntary organisations in promoting active citizenship, responsabilising non-state actors and encouraging accountability, transparency and legitimacy (Garland, 2001; Mercer, 2002; Duggan and Heap, 2014). While these developments encourage greater social responsibility and participation, concerns have also emerged over growing professionalisation and bureaucratisation.

To some extent, the case for a ‘mixed economy’ of criminal justice falls hostage to similar critiques that non-governmental organisations have witnessed in other policy arenas: a lack of accountability, the mainstreaming of organisations as technical projects of poverty alleviation rather than campaigns against structural inequalities,

increasing dependence upon government funding and increasing bureaucracy (Edwards and Hulme, 1996; Tvedt, 1998; see Alvarez, 1999; Mercer, 2002; Williams and Goodman, 2007; Corcoran and Hucklesby, 2013). Looking specifically at the impact upon victim policy, Simmonds (2013:212) observed the implications of these trends upon Victim Support, noting how changes had "...achiev[ed] the agency's total transformation into a more corporate body, in terms of structure, management, the ability to attract stable funding and the way in which it undertakes its work". These pressures of professionalisation and bureaucratisation, as critics of non-governmental organisations have argued, risk voluntary organisations becoming merely "palliative rather than transformative"; in other words, dealing with the symptoms of problems rather than its structural causes (Banks et al., 2015:708). Recent analyses have also drawn attention to the influence of neoliberalism upon victim policy and contests for victims' rights (Duggan and Heap, 2014; Ginsberg, 2014). For example, Duggan and Heap (2014:32) highlight how neoliberal agendas rooted in economic rationalities can create pressures for the "effective management of public resources within...competitive markets". These political agendas reinforce the idea of victims as passive consumers.

While remaining mindful of these critiques, it is also important to recognise the problems inherent in dichotomising non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in opposition to grassroots organisations (GROs). Distinctions are frequently made between the 'indigenously formed', member-based GROs and the placatory service-oriented methods of NGOs (Edwards and Hulme, 2013; Banks et al., 2015). Rather, as Banks, Hulme and Edwards (2015) note, it may be more constructive to locate NGOs as just one among many in a larger 'associational ecosystem' of organisations which vary in form, aim and approach (Edwards, 2009:83). As Roy (2011:598) points out:

It can be activist and institutionalized just as it can be professionalized but not corporatized.

By avoiding the problem of pitting ‘passion’ against ‘profession’, it is useful to remember that GROs operate amid the very same economic and political pressures as NGOs (Alvarez, 2009). The implications of such debates for victim movements should also be considered, for example, how funding pressures and changes in local and national priorities might shape or constrain the direction of victim movements.

3.3.5 Lethal Violence in ‘Peacetime’ and ‘Organised Mass Violence’

A distinction can also be made between victim movements in contexts of ‘peacetime’ and ‘organised mass violence’. Comparing the movements that emerged in each context, Shute (2016) discusses the organised responses of bereaved families and survivors that emerge in the aftermath of lethal violence. Looking beyond the UK, particularly towards cases such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Argentina, there are a host of organisations campaigning in the aftermath of human rights violations, transitional justice, and post-conflict settings.

Perhaps one of the most well-known and prolific victim movement is *las Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, based in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This association, which formed in 1976, emerged in direct response to the instigation of the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* imposed under a military-enforced Junta government: a policy of systematic political repression eliminating ‘subversive’ threats to preserve to ‘Western democracy’ (Feitlowitz, 1998). Between 1976 and 1983, it is estimated that 8960 victims were ‘disappeared’³ in a campaign of brutal counter-

³ The term ‘disappearance’ denotes the *enforced* disappearance of individuals imagined to be a threat, in Argentina’s case, to the political or ideological status quo. The nature of ‘disappearances’, often carried out by the State or a paramilitary organisation, inflicts a state of uncertainty over an individual’s real or symbolic death (Feitlowitz, 1998; Bevernage and Aerts, 2009).

insurgency on cultural, social and personal aspects of Argentinian life (CONADEP, 1984; Robben, 2005b). The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo represent a group of mothers whose children were 'disappeared' during the Argentine 'Dirty War'. In response to the enforced disappearances of 'subversives', a group of mothers began to assemble and protest at the Plaza de Mayo; a place of national, historical and political significance. The Mothers organised amidst a cultural and institutional epidemic of denial imposed by the military Junta to demand the return of the disappeared and justice to be served to perpetrators of violence (Femenia and Gil, 1987; Sutton and Norgaard, 2013). Post-conflict countries such as Argentina are therefore host to a number of competing associations and their respective notions of truth and justice⁴.

Similar organisations have also emerged in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina. A number of victim interest groups formed that drew attention to the heavily gendered nature of violence in Bosnia, most notably, the Mothers of Srebrenica and the Zepa Enclaves, *Zena-Zrtva Rata*, the Association of Women Victims of War, and *Udruženje Snaga žene*, the Association of Women's Strength (see Helms 2013; Simić 2009). The Mothers of Srebrenica is perhaps the most recognised example representing the mothers, sisters and widows left behind following the Srebrenica Massacre of July 11th 1995. The Mothers campaign through a combination of peaceful assemblies, speeches and commemorative practices, for the punishment and redress of suspected perpetrators, compensation and support for victims of the war, and critically, the exhumation, identification and recovery of remains of lost relatives that still continues twenty years after the massacre (Simić, 2009; Wagner and Nettlefield, 2013).

⁴ For more examples see; *las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, *Familiares de Desaparecidos y Detenidos por Razones Políticas* (Families of the Disappeared and Detained for Political Reasons), *H.I.J.O.S* (Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice Against Oblivion and Silence), *Hermanos* (Siblings), and *Asociación de Ex-Detenidos Desaparecidos* (Association of Former Detained-Disappeared).

Victim movements, in particular bereaved family activism, emerge in both contexts of 'peacetime' and 'organised mass violence'. However, as Shute (2016) argues, the nature of organised mass violence places demands upon bereaved families which are different to those bereaved during peacetime violence. In the aftermath of organised *mass* lethal violence, Shute (2016:188) argues:

...that sudden, unexpected bereavement borne of dehumanising and eliminationist ideology can exert widespread and enduring effects on mental and physical health, particularly when it is combined with primary victimisation and, in the case of major international crimes, the destruction of property, community and a way of life

Adding to these difficulties, families bereaved by mass violence must also contend with the absence of a body to grieve; for example, in Argentina, where clandestine executions 'disappeared' victims and, in Bosnia, where victims' remains were buried and scattered across different grave sites. Depending upon the context, victim movements must contend with different barriers to recognition.

3.3.6 'Endogenous' Factors: Victims' needs, experiences and interests

Victim movements operate in a variety of contexts, employing a host of different means to achieve different ends. Using Pemberton's (2009) terminology, there are a number of 'exogenous' factors shaping the emergence and development of an organisation; from the relationship with the State, to the political context, and cultural receptivity of victim imagery. This 'politics of pain', as Barker (2007:656) defines it, invites us to consider the kinds of political configurations or "...mechanisms [that] facilitate the expression of anger, righteousness, remorse, compassion, mercy, the emotions of crime and punishment". By this account, the emotions of crime and punishment are measured by the political landscape that tolerates them.

However, as this thesis asks, to what extent do the claims and contexts of victim campaigns derive from the experiences, interests and needs of victims themselves?

As Pemberton (2009:4) argues, such a range and diversity of victim campaigns, voluntary groups and services "...begs the question whether and in what way these different experiences translate into different needs and priorities between victims of crime...". Accordingly, attention needs to be given to not only what purpose collective responses have for individuals, but also how the experiences and needs of individuals characterise collective responses.

3.4 Conceptualising Victims' Movements

So far, this review has demonstrated that a diversity of victim movements now feature in criminal justice policy and practice. These movements are shaped (and sometimes constrained) by particular factors such as the socio-political context, the nature of their relationship with the State and the difficulties that both peacetime and organised mass violence contexts create for victims. From the limited existing literature on victim movements, the 'politicisation' of victims' issues has prompted concern over the sway of such groups in policy and practice. For some, victims' movements are dangerously vulnerable to manipulation while, for others, particularly in political and public discourse, the participation of victims is romanticised and valorised to the extent that differences between victims are obscured. The following section discusses the implications of this 'politicisation' of victims before arguing that what is required is a 'critical appreciation' of these movements.

3.4.1 Victims, Vulnerability and Manipulation

Since the 'politicisation' of victims' issues, numerous concerns have been raised regarding the dangers of political exploitation that victims' movements may fall hostage to. The pronounced retributive attitudes of particular campaigns have prompted much scepticism over the disruptive consequences that victim rights might hold over the criminal justice process. Critics such as Christie (2010) warn of the

political embrace that victim movements have seen and the danger of becoming co-opted for punitive ends (see also Fattah, 1986; Elias, 1993; Garland, 2001; Rentschler, 2011). Concern has been voiced over the 'vengeful'⁵ nature of victims' involvement, particularly in campaigns for the death penalty. Other criminal justice policy developments such as the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme and introduction of Victim Impact Statements which have also attracted strong criticism (Harper and Treadwell, 2013; Fitz-Gibbon and Walklate, 2016).

However, a more pressing issue is the extent to which these punitive ideals are in fact a product of careful political manipulation and appropriation of victim imagery. Actors with various social, political and economic interests have each laid claim to victims' issues; ranging from conservative law-and-order groups to the agendas of radical feminists (Maguire, 1991:367). Victims' interests have featured in both left- and right-wing campaigns, with the works of Elias (1993) and others (Fattah, 1986; Garland, 2001; Christie, 2010; Duggan and Heap, 2014) commenting on the political manipulation and misrepresentation of victim campaigns. Referring to the disruptive and apparently primitive nature of victim participation, criminal justice has reportedly assumed an expressive function to channel the emotions of crime and punishment (Garland, 2001; Karstedt, 2002; Rock, 2002; Muldoon, 2008). In an earlier comment on the roles of victim campaigns, Fattah (1986:2–3) warned that "...the noble cause of victims of crime is used as a pretext to unleash suppressed vindictive impulses or as an excuse to act out the inhibited aggression against the offender". It is

⁵ Interestingly, Rock (2004:181) commenting on the use of Victim Impact Statements has dismissed the view of the dysfunctional and disruptive role of anger and vengeance for victims in criminal justice stating, "[t]he victim-vigilante has always been more of a demon that haunted legal imagination than an empirically well-ground figure".

argued that victim imagery plays upon emotional sensibilities and sympathies of the public to hold control of crime control issues (see Aradau, 2004).

Commenting on the role of victims in transitional justice, Madlingozi (2010) has highlighted the dangers of appropriating and subordinating the victim voice in transitional justice processes in South Africa. Instead of attempting to re-engage the victim in transitional justice, 'transitional justice entrepreneurs' determined the objectives of justice, truth and recovery in post-conflict societies. For example, Madlingozi (2010) explored the role 'transitional justice entrepreneurs', such as international non-governmental organisations, aid workers and officials, in speaking *for* victims. By asserting the boundaries of transitional justice mechanisms, entrepreneurs assume the responsibility of representing victims, whereby experiences and stories are essentially commodified and packaged to 'produce an authentic victim' (McEvoy and Jamieson, 2007; Madlingozi, 2010:225). As Barker (2007) might argue, the domestic concerns of victim campaigns are somewhat susceptible to the demands of existing power structures, including the top-down procedural demands of transitional justice. This point has also been echoed by Stauffer (2015) who proposes the concept of 'ethical loneliness' to describe the failure of institutions such as truth commissions to properly hear stories of suffering.

However, considering the enduring nature of these 'moral protests' and the political embrace that some campaigns have seen, the assumption that *all* victim movements are vulnerable or weak enough to be readily exploited appears simplistic. Indeed, there are a number of socio-political agendas and pressures which may influence the shape of such movement (Duggan and Heap, 2014). However, the emergence and proliferation of victim movements represent a number of interests and demands which can resist manipulation in political practice.

Victim movements have endured in contexts both hostile and conducive to their activities, some of which have campaigned for more than 30 years. This remains true for both contexts of organised mass violence and peacetime. The campaigns of Doreen Lawrence, JENGBA and the Hillsborough Families, have all sustained lengthy and compelling polemics against structural injustices of the State prompting a host of policy changes, public investigations, and prosecutions (Rock, 2004). This phenomenon is perhaps even more visible in post-conflict situations where claims to victimhood in political violence are intensely contested (Bouris, 2007; McDowell, 2007; van Wijk, 2013; Shute, 2016). The *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* have resisted pressures to 'forget' for the purposes of 'national reconciliation', in favour of memory and truth (Jelin, 1994; Robben, 2012). The Mothers of Srebrenica have also struggled forward to disrupt cultural and official narratives of denial in Serbia (Wagner and Nettlefield, 2013).

Attention should also be afforded to the agency expressed by victims in such movements. Returning to Madlingozi (2010), the Khulumani Support Group in South Africa represent one such example where victim movements can elicit, rather than impose, meaning by gathering victim testimonies. While 'transitional justice entrepreneurs' encouraged dependency and passivity in victims, the Khulumani Support Group was instigated and sustained by those that suffered under the apartheid. Those involved in decision-making for the Khulumani were ultimately those affected by those decisions. Rather than top-down hierarchical projects, groups such as the Khulumani encouraged independence and agency. In this way, victims could present and express their own stories rather than being represented by other invested parties. Through this process of organisation, victims attempt to challenge the dismissive tactics of top-down approaches to transitional justice in an effort to restore agency, empowerment and emotional recovery (Madlingozi, 2010; McEvoy

and McConnachie, 2013). Despite the weight of political context in determining crime victims' demands, victim movements continue to challenge and resist the pressures placed upon them. Presuming that such groups may be exploited for particular political ends would seem to undermine the persuasive appeal of victims' 'moral protests' (Barker, 2007).

3.4.2 Valorising Victim Participation

Whilst the involvement of victim voices has been welcomed by campaigners, equal attention should also be paid to the inherently exclusive, as well as inclusive, constructions of victims in both national and international criminal justice. Victim participation is not a panacea for democratic criminal justice practice. As LaCapra (2001:79) argues, the "[v]ictim is not a psychological category... [i]t is, in variable ways, a social, political, and ethical category". The previous chapter discussed this when drawing connections between narratives of the victim and trauma. The labelling of victims involves moral and political claims and, although it prescribes particular ends, it routinely denies others a platform to speak. When individuals enter 'public victimhood', whether it be in the form of media appearances or justice campaigns, victims are able to bring light to issues and incidents previously ignored.

However, as Brewer (2010) warns in the context of post-conflict societies, there are unintended consequences in the contest of defining victims. Breen-Smyth (2007) adopts the term 'moral beacons' to describe the role of victims as leading authorities on issues of truth and suffering (see also Degloma, 2009 for a comparative concept of 'trauma carriers'; Brewer and Hayes, 2011). However, as Breen-Smyth points out, inasmuch as victim campaigners assert themselves as 'moral beacons', the voices of others can be inadvertently silenced. Stockwell's (2014) study into the experiences of families of individuals killed by the guerrilla groups in Argentina, Condry's (2007)

research into families of serious offenders and Hall's (2001) research with members of the Loughgall Truth and Justice Campaign⁶ illustrate some potent examples of the marginalisation and ostracism perceived by 'other' victims.

If the 'moral protests' of some victims are able to suppress the demands of 'other' victims in political contests of victimhood, it is useful to ask to what extent the experiences of some are able to aptly represent the views of others. Aside from their shared experiences, the protests of victims can in some cases be competing and contradictory, for example in their political affiliations, ideological commitments and moral reasoning. While 'moral protests' are valuable in speaking for *some* victims, they should be treated with a certain degree of caution remaining mindful of the romanticising tendencies that obscure victim diversity (see Fitz-Gibbon and Walklate, 2016). As McEvoy and McConnachie (2013:497) summarise, a balance must be struck between the "silencing and essentialism" of victim voices.

The 'victim' label derives from a diversity of experiences, histories and identities of which 'victim' does not constitute the sole identity. Referring to a framework developed previously to address the needs of victims of terrorism, Pemberton (2009) noted the procedural and outcome needs required for both meaningful victim participation in the criminal justice system and personal emotional recovery. Accordingly, four 'endogenous' factors associated with the needs of victims were identified. Factors including the 'severity of the crime suffered', the 'repetitiveness of victimisation', the 'extent to which the effects of victimisation are reparable', and the extent of 'criminal justice involvement' each bear significance for the nature of the political response to victimisation (Pemberton, 2009:7–8). Victims impress a range of

⁶ The Loughgall Truth and Justice Campaign was formed by families of deceased IRA paramilitary soldiers killed by the SAS

experiences, identities and needs to their involvement as members of these campaigns arriving at a number of different strategies for achieving their aims. As a result, these movements can be divided in their approach to issues rendered by different notions of victim needs and interests.

The most pronounced example of these divisions can be found in the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo which, despite emerging in 1977 amidst a military dictatorship, split in 1986. Leading the more moderate faction, the then President Maria Adela Antokoletz began a smaller splinter group of women including many original key founders of the organisation such as Laura Bonaparte, Nora de Cortiñas, Renee Epelbaum, Matilde Mellibovsky, and Chela Mignone (Feitlowitz, 1998; Peluffo, 2007). Renamed as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (*Madres Línea-Fundadora*), these Mothers are often considered to be the more co-operative of the two factions. This group sits in contrast to the more hard-line agendas of Hebe de Bonafini's Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Association (*Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo*). Despite the implications of the split for both factions, there has been relatively little attention to the ideological and organisational differences that prompted and consolidated the split over the past thirty years. Brief reference has been made to class and educational differences, noting that many members of the Founding Line came from middle and upper classes whilst members of the Association held working class backgrounds with less education (Bouvard, 1994:16; Moon, 2012). Some have also suggested the role that alleged anti-semitism played in the split (see Peluffo, 2007).

Even more, there are key ideological and political differences in their approaches: firstly, to collaboration with the Government, secondly, to the exhumation and identification of the 'disappeared' and thirdly, in their organisational strategies and leadership (Mellibovsky, 1997:178–179; Robben, 2005b:330). Under the radical agendas of the Association, few attempts have been made to co-operate with the new

democratic government. As Robben (2005b) noted, Bonafini has seen little difference between the aggression of the military Junta and the exonerative aims of Alfonsín's amnesty laws in that they had both failed the 'disappeared' and the plight of the Mothers. The Association were therefore quick to reject the offer of economic reparations from the State. Commenting on the offer of compensation, one mother of the Association likened acceptance of payment from the Government to "selling the blood of the disappeared" (Lessa, 2013:62). On the other hand, the Founding Line has demonstrated increased willingness to co-operate politically with the State, including the acceptance of economic reparations to fund the exhumation and memorial of the 'disappeared'.

Following the end of the 'Dirty War' and the exit of the military Junta, exhumations were arranged allowing the identification, return and burial of 'disappeared' relatives to their families (Moon, 2013). However, members of the Association rejected the exhumation process with protests of some mothers even taking place at the sites of excavation (Peluffo, 2007). For the Mothers of the Association, acceptance and burial of their relative's remains constituted an acceptance of death and a further campaign by the State to deny and forget. As Bonafini (1990; cited in Moon, 2012:7) writes:

[W]e don't accept them as dead. We demand their re-appearance as living entities, which does not mean that we think they are alive. Our demand questions the system, and we will not accept their deaths until someone is made responsible.

The two factions therefore applied markedly different strategies to achieving these aims. Under the banner of *aparición con vida*, 'make them appear alive', Bonafini has remained a controversial figure in both activism and politics demanding truth and justice rather than memory and commemoration. Whilst the Founding Line chose to memorialise the dead through symbolic means, the Association have sought to agitate through a more confrontational form of political protest. These tactics however,

rejected by the Founding Line, have attracted a host of criticisms not unfamiliar to Bonafini (see Briggs, 2012). The Association were disinterested in reparations, whether economic or symbolic, with efforts instead being devoted to securing truth and justice despite the “disruptive potential” such campaigns posed to ‘national reconciliation’ (Roniger and Sznajder, 1999; Robben, 2005a, 2012).

Similar tensions can also be observed in the campaigns of the Hillsborough Families which have, in the aftermath of the disaster, divided into two groups. The Hillsborough Family Support Group (HFSG) was set up shortly after the Hillsborough disaster by Trevor Hicks, a father who lost two daughters. The HFSG represents a larger proportion of families and receives increased publicity, greater media attention, and the recognition of Liverpool Football Club. Forming in 1998 on the initiative of John Glover, who had lost a son in the disaster, and other members previously of the HFSG, the Hillsborough Justice Campaign (HJC) represented a smaller splinter group of families. The HJC formed shortly after, nine years following the Hillsborough disaster. Very little material is available on the source of this split however. While the aims of the HFSG and HJC are similar, their approaches and tactics of achieving truth and justice are slightly different; for example, decisions over the membership of the campaign and cooperation with the Government. The lack of recognition accorded to the HJC by local authorities, local and national media, and in consultation with the Hillsborough Independent Panel has generated a sentiment that, in fact, “...not all Hillsborough families are treated equally” (Coleman, 2011).

Another example of the contests in ‘moral protest’ can be found in the release of ‘celebrity activist’ Angelina Jolie’s controversial film *In the Land of Blood and Honey* which highlighted differences between victims of the Bosnian War (Volcic and Erjavec, 2014). The film’s plot depicts the story of a Bosnian Muslim woman’s relationship with a Bosnian Serb soldier in a detention camp during the war; a time

when thousands of women were subjected to mass rape. Even before its production, strong opposition was expressed to prevent the release of the film with the then Minister of Culture for the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Gavriilo Grahovac, revoking filming permits in October 2010 reportedly under pressure from victim organisations (although they were later reinstated). One of the loudest voices in this opposition was Bakira Hasečić, President of the Association of Women War Victims who, in an open letter to Angelina Jolie, argued that a relationship between a Bosnian-Serb perpetrator and a Bosnian Muslim woman would simply not be possible and, even more, degrading. However, despite strong resistance, there were many activists, feminists, and rape victims from other organisations that disagreed with Hasečić. In particular, Enisa Salcinovic, the head of the women's section of the Association of Concentration Camp Torture Survivors in Sarajevo, voiced support for the film noting the importance of capturing the brutal reality of the war for women.

This episode has been the subject of analysis for Helms (2013, 2014) who explored the interaction between gender, innocence and victimhood in post-war Bosnia. In opposition to interethnic relationships, Helms (2014) points out that Hasečić defended an exclusive notion of victimhood perpetuating notions of innocence, gender, and ethno-nationality. In this context, definitions of victims are plotted along ethno-national boundaries reinforcing strictly gendered and ethnic notions of victimhood. In portraying an interethnic relationship of mutual acceptance, Jolie's film undermined entrenched and polarised categories of "morally and sexually pure Bosniak women (and thus Bosniaks as a group) and barbaric, aggressive Serb men (and thus Serbs)" (Helms, 2014:628). These affairs speak to a moral contest over who has the right to represent and speak on behalf of victims. Even those who assert moral legitimacy share in a competition to speak for others.

3.5 Towards a 'Critical Appreciation'

Whether it concerns the practice of commemoration and memorialisation, attitudes towards government cooperation and exchange, or political differences in leadership styles, victim groups represent different experiences, needs and responses that emerge in the aftermath of violence. Of course, victims' movements do not work in isolation from socio-political or historical contexts as Barker (2007) and Garland (2001) have argued. However, there are also a number of different experiences, needs and motivations that shape the character of victims' movements. These personal experiences can, in some cases, spark tensions and eventual separation of groups. In this sense, victim movements are a site of struggle between personal experiences and political responses. To see victims' groups as essentially vulnerable to political manipulation or romanticised as a panacea for victim participation, undermines the complexities of experiences that these movements represent. Relegating victims to the position of either 'moral crusader', uncritically representative of victim interests, or political pawns, vulnerable to the whims of others' demands, appears simplistic.

Instead, what is required is an evidenced understanding of both the opportunities afforded to victim movements and obstacles to meaningful participation. Such an acknowledgement "does not require the suspension of critical faculties or a naive or overly romanticised notion of community or civil society" (McEvoy and McConnachie, 2013:499). As McEvoy and McConnachie (2012, 2013:505) have pointed out, there is a justifiable 'price' of making claims to victimhood: the submission to an appreciative but critical inquiry. A 'critical appreciation' should recognise the agency and endurance of victim activists under the weight of political persuasions. However, caution must also be exercised so to avoid romanticising victim movements given their many forms and leave moral authority critically unquestioned. Essentially, a

balance must be struck to avoid being too dismissive towards victims' groups and taking too lightly the authority of such campaigns.

Mobilised by a formally organised victims' movement, the claims of victims have discovered a wider political authority where 'private troubles' are translated into 'public issues' (see Wright Mills, 1959). Victim movements offer a critical insight into the ways in which these private experiences can be shared to engage wider public interest and acknowledgment. Victims now make normative claims on behalf of the wider collective concerning the nature of victim needs, what victim rights should look like and how the criminal justice system should respond. These claims, though not necessarily representative, maintain an "irreproachable moral authority to speak for and about the living and the dead" (Rock, 1998:128). As Garland (2001:11 emphasis added) writes:

...the victim is now, in a certain sense, a much more representative character, whose experience is taken to be common and collective, rather than individual and atypical. *Whoever speaks on behalf of victims speaks on behalf of us all* or so declares the new political wisdom of high crime societies.

In this sense, victim movements represent those experiences previously individualised and depoliticised. Through victim movements, personal experiences now prompt public responses and provide a platform upon which a few victims make claims for the many. However, as the previous chapter argued, while providing an 'unprecedented ability' to talk about violence, we risk becoming preoccupied more with the representation of events rather than how victims actually experience them. Rather than focus on the political contexts of these movements, this thesis explores how relatives in bereaved family activism make meaning from their experiences.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the diversity of victim movements. The victim movement is a growing and varied phenomenon; one which requires a critical appreciation and not simplistic assumptions that romanticise victim participation. The examples discussed in this chapter reflect the range of contexts and harms in which victim movements have emerged in response to. Much analysis has focused on the socio-political contexts, systems and forms of violence in which these movements have developed. There have been repeated efforts to show the symbolic and political use of victims in criminal justice, particularly in light of neoliberal agendas (Elias, 1993; Garland, 2001; Duggan and Heap, 2014; Ginsberg, 2014). While these movements may serve as a platform for broader political goals, they are also established in a distinctive yet shared experience of suffering, injustice and loss. In this sense, victim movements can also share a cathartic and restorative role. However, little attention has been given to how the experiences of victims themselves are confronted and come to shape these movements and in turn, what meanings these encounters give to victims' experiences.

This thesis aims to explore these dynamics through a case study of bereaved family activism. By hearing the stories of those directly and indirectly affected by violence, this research looks to understand how such experiences can be confronted and mobilised to prompt recognition. While often rooted in a shared experience, movements that have emerged in the aftermath of lethal violence represent a range of interests and serve different purposes for those involved. Rather than focus on how experiences are represented, this thesis explores how the experiences of those involved in *Mothers Against Violence* are *lived* and what meaning they make from bereaved family activism.

Chapter 4 - Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The exercise of defining the 'victim' has seen ambiguity in both academic and policy arenas and in response, a number of victimological approaches have emerged reflecting different research agendas (Walklate, 1990; Spalek, 2006). Remembering that research designs are imitative of theoretical frameworks (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Maxwell, 1996), this chapter presents and justifies a methodological framework for the current research. A qualitative methodology is outlined which employs participant observations and in-depth narrative interviewing with *Mothers Against Violence*: a Manchester-based charity that emerged in response to an intense period of gun violence and ensuing community outcry in the 1990s.

The chapter begins by returning to the research question, which is presented and unpacked for the purposes of defining a clear research agenda. This thesis asks how those involved in *Mothers Against Violence* are able to *confront* – both individually and collectively – their experiences of lethal violence and *mobilise* their suffering to promote acknowledgement of that violence. After a brief acknowledgement of the influence of earlier positivist and radical victimological research agendas, the following section then proceeds to focus on critical victimology and a nascent cultural victimology which inform this research. This established, the case study of bereaved family activism is presented with the following sections detailing each stage of the research process, from entering the field to data analysis. By following the research process in this way, I hope to present some sense of the *experience* of doing fieldwork on the topic of lethal violence.

4.2 Returning to the Research Question

In review of the literature, the concept of trauma was revealed as a popularly used, yet comparatively obscure notion. While psychological perspectives have demonstrated a tendency to pathologise and over-diagnose, a critique particularly pressed in feminist and anti-psychiatry movements (Burstow, 2003; 2005), the concept of trauma has also been projected on to social and cultural levels of analysis. Under the authority of trauma, victim identities, histories and experiences have been conflated, provoking both a universalised and trivialised construction of victimhood (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009; Alexander, 2012; McGarry and Walklate, 2015). Traumatic events such as genocide will inevitably have implications that transcend across people and places. However, a conflation of victims and non-victims, traumatic and non-traumatic, and individual and collective analyses, has produced a somewhat imprecise concept detached from the lived experience of lethal violence.

In light of this, the current research question considers the role of victim movements as critical insights into how personal experiences of suffering prompt collective responses. By realigning the focus to the lived experience of victimisation, the present research aims to move away from the preoccupation with cultural traumas and aggregate experiences. Rather, the research aims to particularise and reconcile these accounts with the personal experiences of victims. By engaging with the experiences of those affected by lethal violence, this research aims to understand how direct and indirect victims make sense of these events. Foregrounding the victim in this way encourages an understanding of how and what meaning victims give to experiences. This research considers how encounters with bereaved family activism, such as *Mothers Against Violence*, might re-value or restore meaning following lethal violence which threatens to disrupt meaning, certainty and familiarity.

The research question is therefore stated as follows:

How do 'victim-activists' *confront* – both individually and collectively - their own experiences of the trauma associated with lethal violence and *mobilise* their suffering to promote mass acknowledgement of that violence?

Unpacking this research question, three core themes emerge. First, the research question looks to address the personal experiences of victims by asking how those involved have managed and *confronted* their experiences of lethal violence; whether a victim, witness or a concerned member of the community. This research aims to consider the diversity of experiences in *Mothers Against Violence* while recognising that each member brings a different configuration of moral and emotional sensibilities, motivations and ideas to the group. By exploring these differences, an insight into the early life of *Mothers Against Violence* can be gained whereby individuals can be followed to the moment of collective action.

Second, the research question asks how individuals are able to *mobilise* experiences of lethal violence to engage in bereaved family activism. The research aims to explore how those with shared experiences of lethal violence become involved and work together to prompt recognition. Attention is paid not only to how survivors are prompted by their experiences, but what might *sustain* such a prolonged engagement with *Mothers Against Violence*. The purpose of bereaved family activism for those involved needs to be considered, recognising how these purposes might change for different people at different points in their lives.

Third and finally, the research question asks how the personal experiences of those involved interact with collective responses. Here, the research asks how the experiences of those affected characterise victim movements; for example, how different experiences, needs and motivations drive the aims of bereaved family activism. In contrast, attention should also be afforded to how victim movements mediate and shape the experiences of the victims involved. As the previous chapter

outlined, it is also useful to ask to what extent personal experiences of lethal violence are influenced by socio-political contexts, wider policy trends and funding demands. By exploring these themes, this research aims to establish a greater understanding of bereaved family activism and the impact it has on those involved.

4.3 Researching Victims: A Critical Victimological Approach

A number of victimological perspectives have attempted to approach the problem of studying 'the victim', each emerging with different methodologies, research agendas and predicting various policy priorities. With each attempt to 'measure' and document victimisation, three victimological perspectives can be identified; positivist victimology, radical victimology, and critical victimology (although more recently there have been movements towards cultural victimology, see Mythen, 2007; McGarry and Walklate, 2015). It is not the purpose of this section to review these perspectives in detail as extensive accounts have been detailed elsewhere (see for example Goodey, 2005; Spalek, 2006; Walklate, 2006). However, brief acknowledgement should be given to early (and competing) victimological perspectives as a way of understanding the theoretical developments up to the current moment. McGarry and Walklate (2015) recount the development of victimological theory from the early roots of positivist victimology to emergent perspectives of cultural victimology, which each relay particular conceptions of choice, suffering and power relations.

Positivist victimology is concerned with the identification of precipitating factors in non-random patterns of victimisation and attempts to typologise victims (Miers, 1989). The positivist strand of victimology can be found in the early works of Von Hentig (1948) and Mendelsohn (1956). Here, socio-economic, demographic and lifestyle factors are calculated in an explanation of victimisation under the assumption that the victim category is non-problematic. Radical victimologists have been quick

to critique the tendency of positivist victimology to take the category of victim almost as a non-issue, with feminists taking particular issue with notions of 'victim precipitation' and 'proneness'. Accordingly, radical victimologists have set out to unpack the structural conditions and power relations behind victimisation. Here, attention is shifted to the role of the State and their capacity to inflict and perpetuate victimisation. Radical victimologists might consider, for example, the structures supporting corporate crime and 'social murder', or the impact of criminalisation and the 'gangs' discourse. While positivist victimology relies on the use of police records to 'measure' victimisation, radical victimology emphasises the use of victimisation surveys to document both local and international trends and render previously 'invisible' victims visible (Spalek, 2006; McGarry and Walklate, 2015).

However, as critical victimologists have argued, little room has been left by both radical and positivist victimology for victim choice and agency (Mawby and Walklate, 1994). Despite much needed attention to the political, economic and legal-institutional structures that perpetuate harm, radical victimology falls short in considering the role of victims themselves in accepting, resisting or negotiating the label of victim. Developing the points of radical victimologists, critical victimology acknowledges both the structural location and the authority of victims themselves to negotiate these positions. Critical victimology argues for a nuanced and critical analysis of the structures of race, gender and class in interaction with individual attempts of resistance and negotiation. More recently, an emergent cultural victimology seeks to connect with critical victimology and "situate victimhood within a wider political economy of the state in the context of the cultural" (McGarry and Walklate, 2015:19).

Critical and cultural victimological research agendas have signalled a marked shift towards understanding the qualitative aspects of victim experiences. In contrast to the quantitative profiling of victimisation employed by earlier victimological

traditions, critical and cultural victimology is closely aligned with the use of ethnographic accounts, in-depth narrative interviews and visual methods. By 'foregrounding' suffering, these research agendas document the structures and routines of everyday life which may either obscure or reveal particular forms of the victim (McGarry and Walklate, 2015). Unpacking both the "unobserved and unobservable" patterns behind victimisation recognises that there are further transient processes in motion (Walklate, 2006:46). Critical victimology considers both the structural mechanisms of victimisation, whether observable or not, as well as the impact of such mechanisms on the lived realities. This also reflects Sayer's (2000:12) notion of critical realism, who points out, "what has happened or been known to have happened does not exhaust what could happen or have happened". Critical victimology therefore aims to understand the victim "as a product of the interaction between the cultural and ideological in particular socio-economic circumstance" (McGarry and Walklate, 2015:14), while cultural victimology "foregrounds suffering, our exposure to it, how it is presented to us, and what sense we make of it" (McGarry and Walklate, 2015:18).

Informed by the research agendas of critical and cultural victimology, this research aims to explore the interactions between lived realities of suffering and the responses that this suffering prompts at a personal and public level. As argued previously, the trend towards cultural expressions of trauma and suffering has encouraged an increased appreciation of the varied effects of victimisation. However, this trend also risks becoming somewhat detached from the lived experience of victimisation. Rather, this research aims to foreground the victim and, somewhat reflecting Matthews' (2014) proposal of 'cultural realism', remember that crime is essentially rooted in *lived* experiences and the meanings attributed to them by individuals. By foregrounding suffering in this way, this research aims to avoid the trivialising effects

of the trauma narrative and tendency for victim narratives to aggregate experiences. Refocusing upon the individual recognises the agency that victims can and do exercise in confronting experiences of suffering. This research employs in-depth narrative interviews and participant observation methods to explore the lived experiences of victims and what sense is made of such experiences. This is not to say that the research methods attached to the earlier practices of victimology are not each without their own merits. However, in this case, such methods run the risk of amplifying rather than easing the trivialisation and universalisation of victim experiences.

4.4 A Short Note on Philosophical Underpinnings

The research question aims to return the victimological lens to the lived reality of victimisation. To this end, the research methodology here employs a form of phenomenology. Distinctions have been drawn in phenomenology between Heideggerian (1962) or hermeneutical phenomenology and Husserl's (1970) 'pure' phenomenology'. While both are concerned with the 'lived experience' and often subsumed under the same term, these two approaches diverge on a number of methodological, epistemological and ontological levels. Whereas the Husserlian phenomenology holds assumptions of 'ahistorical beings', Heidegger acknowledged individuals as self-interpreting and their understandings painted by history, culture and sociality (Lavery, 2003).

For this reason, this study also draws upon foundations of critical realism which, in addition to its emphasis on processes of meaning-making, concedes the fact that such experiences are influenced by wider social discourse and structure. Developing basic realist foundations, Sayer (2000:12) presents critical realism as distinguishing between the real (that which exists and might exist), the actual (that which happens if the real is activated) and the empirical (the "domain of experience"). Departing from the

somewhat prescriptive tenets of empirical realism which assumes everything is accessible and observable, critical realism accepts that the empirical is in fact dependent on the contingencies of the real and the actual being exercised. As Seale (1999a:470) explains, critical realism recognises that “although we always perceive the world from a particular viewpoint, the world acts back on us to constrain the points of view that are possible”. Using the example of crime, Matthews (2009) argues that categories of crime maintain an independently existing reality which are encountered and engaged with by actors. Even where one might be able to “influence[] the meaning or significance of an object it does not mean that the researcher has ‘constructed’ this object” (Matthews, 2009:345).

While philosophical debates in social science are important to demonstrating how epistemological understandings inform research questions (and answers), the research process is also determined by a number of methodological and practical demands. Indeed, several have warned of an over-attention to some of the more prescriptive commitments of philosophy for social science (Maxwell, 1996; Seale, 1999a; Morgan, 2007). As Seale (1999a:466) notes:

...it is time for social researchers to exploit this paradox, by breaking free from the obligation to fulfil philosophical schemes through research practice, while remaining aware of the value of philosophical and political reflexivity for their craft. A confident view of social research as a craft skill could then emerge, relatively autonomous from social theory or philosophy, yet drawing on these arenas of discourse as a resource.

Considering the reflexive nature of the research process, a central concern in planning qualitative research is coherence and consistency across design elements. Therefore, some degree of consistency between methods, methodology, epistemology, ontology and theoretical perspectives is necessary. Each element of qualitative research design informs the next and, rather than a linear process, each design decision is reflexive (Maxwell, 1996; Crotty, 1998). Consequently, the research question proposes specific

assumptions to be satisfied by subsequent design decisions. The research question may, for example, predict the nature of understanding sought, the relevance of particular data collection methods, and the current state of conceptual literature. The following section presents a research methodology as an answer to how the above research question will be approached, at each point providing methodological justifications for such steps (Crotty, 1998; Carter and Little, 2007).

4.5 Research Design

Having established and unpacked the research question, a qualitative research design was selected which aimed to understand the meanings attached to a particular phenomenon; in this case, bereaved family activism in the aftermath of lethal violence (Maxwell, 1996; Williams and May, 1996; Mason, 2002). Qualitative inquiry is an interpretive practice which explores and takes as its focal point, the world of others. To make “the world [of others] visible...” researchers apply a toolkit of data collection methods, analyses and theoretical frameworks in an “...attempt[] to make sense and interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011:3). Although definitions of qualitative research vary in some measure, there are a number of features that hold fast, particularly the significance of others’ understandings and meanings of their social world (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Creswell, 1998; Mason, 2002). This research asks how those affected by violence understand, make sense of and give value to their experience, in light of their role in *Mothers Against Violence*. Therefore, the aim of this research, following Geertz (1975:48), is not only to know what participants know, but to understand *how* they know it. The following sections present and justify the research design decisions to investigate these processes.

4.6 Mothers Against Violence: A Case Study

To investigate the phenomenon of bereaved family activism, a site for study was selected in which these processes could be observed. Sampling decisions were made at two levels: the sampling *of* cases, otherwise known as the selection of the site; and sampling *within* cases, otherwise known as the selection of participants or settings. By explaining the *logic* of sampling, as Mason (2002) reminds us, sampling techniques reflect wider methodological criteria regarding the 'work' expected from the sample and the nature of understanding sought from this population.

In selecting the site for study, a number of candidate organisations were considered which met a particular set of criteria; that the group emerged in response to lethal violence, was established for the purpose of supporting or campaigning for those affected, and was located within the UK, ideally the North West of England. From these criteria, a number of victim advocacy groups were identified such as Support After Murder and Manslaughter (SAMM), Mothers Against Murder And Aggression (MAMAA), and Families Fighting for Justice. From this sampling frame, Mothers Against Violence was selected as the case study for this research for two reasons.

First, *Mothers Against Violence* represented a distinctive case in the study of bereaved family activism: it held longevity with over 17 years of engagement, and is rooted in a particular historical and cultural form of violence that emerged concerning gangs, gun and knife violence. This case represented a valuable opportunity to understand not only how individuals had emerged from and responded to a particular form of violence in the UK, but to explore how these experiences might transform over a period of nearly two decades.

Second, there were also a number of practical advantages in selecting this case. Existing connections within the Centre for Criminology and Criminal Justice (CCCJ)

at the University of Manchester meant that the group was already closely familiarised with the University. This also made the initial process of gaining access to the group more straightforward as existing members or contacts introduced me to key players. This, in addition to the fact that the group was based only a short distance from the University, made *Mothers Against Violence* the most feasible option.

Mothers Against Violence (MAV) is a community organisation based in Hulme in inner-city Manchester. Established in 1999, the group emerged amid a spate of gun-related deaths in the inner-city area, particularly in the neighbouring community of Moss Side. Gun and gang violence has been symbolically associated with Manchester, particularly South Manchester, since the 1980s with Moss Side firmly fastened to “a (racialized) iconic status as the epitome of ‘Dangerous Britain’” (Fraser, 1996:55). Situated within a wider national debate and moral panic of the ‘gang’ problem (see for example Hallsworth and Young, 2004), gun violence in Manchester fuelled a polarised image of Moss Side as the ‘urban ‘Other’” (Fraser, 1996). The label of Moss Side as a ‘problem’ area, has only been further animated by the push of national media in unhelpfully labelling of the area as ‘Britain’s Bronx’ and ‘Gunchester’. Moss Side eventually became almost synonymous for gun violence which preoccupied national and political attention in the 1980s and 1990s.

Between 1999 and 2000, there were 81 incidents of gun-related serious or fatal violence in Manchester (GMP, 2002:69). In the summer of 1999, the community of inner city Manchester was witness to four shootings leading to the death of three young black males. In the following period, dozens of members of the community, mostly women, gathered to discuss the effects of recent events on the community. Meetings were at first held weekly in the South Manchester area to discuss and share information and experiences. From these initial informal meetings, membership wavered over time with a core group remaining to lead monthly meetings and eventually establish a

formal Constitution. MAV's stated aims and objectives are: firstly, the promotion of educational and public awareness of gun and knife crime, secondly, to campaign towards the "eradication of violence" and the relief of the "effects of violence within the community", and thirdly to "assist young people, men and women, to find meaningful training, employment or work experience" (MAV, 1999).

Mothers Against Violence has been involved in the organisation of a number of events, initiatives and programmes since its establishment in 1999. In 2001, MAV was involved in the first city-wide march organised with other leading community groups which earned much media attention. Since then, MAV have been active in promoting awareness of the effects of gun violence through a number of initiatives: prison workshops, Home Office roundtables, mentoring and counselling, substance misuse referral services, and various other community outreach work. The work of *Mothers Against Violence* now culminates in an annual public event 'Making Children and Young People Matter' which is now in its ninth year of running. The group has attracted both local and national praise over the course of its campaign as well as being the subject of a number of media appearances and reports. In 2001, the group was invited to attend a closed meeting with then Prime Minister Tony Blair and was later awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2004. At the time beginning fieldwork, *Mothers Against Violence* had just passed its sixteen-year milestone and achieved charitable status which was awarded in March 2010.

4.7 Entering the Field or 'Getting In'

The process of negotiating access in organisations can be divided into three acts: entering the field or 'getting in', negotiating the field or 'getting on', and leaving the field or 'getting out' (Buchanan et al., 1998). Fieldwork, as Buchanan, Boddy and McCalman (1998:53) state, is a balance of "what is theoretically desirable on the one

hand and what is practically possible on the other". With *Mothers Against Violence* established as the site of study, entry required negotiation on more than one level and was ongoing and renegotiated as new actors entered the setting. This section aims to give a reflexive account of these processes and the experience, practice and, sometimes, anxieties of doing research on lethal violence.

Ethical approval was granted by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) at the University of Manchester in July 2015 which prompted discussions on doing research with organisations, in particular, the issue of informed consent and gaining access. Outlined in the British Society of Criminology (2015) *Statement of Ethics*, informed consent is the responsibility of the researcher "to explain as fully as possible, and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how any research findings are to be disseminated". This research required consent for entry on two levels, calling for negotiation at both the institutional and individual level.

The process of negotiating entry began at the level of the organisation. Existing contacts within the Centre for Criminology and Criminal Justice (CCCJ) at the University of Manchester helped to identify the key 'gatekeepers' of *Mothers Against Violence*. However, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) warn that the use of some gatekeepers risks precluding the recruitment of other participants. As different gatekeepers hold different social capital and social networks, I approached two gatekeepers: one current and one previous member of *Mothers Against Violence*. This allowed a wider range of participants to be recruited. Following a number of attempts, contact was successfully made in October 2015 – specifically, with Eve, a long-standing member of with *Mothers Against Violence*. Emails were exchanged to inform Eve of the purpose of the research, the potential benefits, and the implications of participation. Following this, Eve and I arranged to meet at the offices of *Mothers*

Against Violence so that I could introduce myself and explain the research more fully. To document my observations and interactions with *Mothers Against Violence*, I kept a research journal to highlight the influences upon fieldwork and provide context (Berger, 2015). In the following excerpt, I discuss my first encounter with Eve:

Research Journal, October 22nd 2015

Today I met Eve, one of the key members and founders of *Mothers Against Violence*. I was anxious to meet her and concerned (and partly catastrophising) over what might go wrong in our first meeting. I arrived at the offices which were located in a community centre in Hulme. The building was worn, well-lived in and was host to a number of other community groups, of which, were bustling around the building. The office itself was small but cosy and lined with leaflets, information for services for young people, and photos of young people who had passed away, including Eve's son (as Eve explains in the meeting). Eve and I talked for just under an hour and I explained the research, what was required and why I thought it was important. Getting up to leave, Eve explained that she would raise it at the next Committee meeting, hugged me and walked with me to the exit.

In the following month, I was invited to attend the Committee of *Mothers Against Violence* to introduce and outline the research opportunity. To illustrate this encounter, an extract from my research journal is presented below:

Research Journal, November 20th 2015

Today represents the first substantive meeting with *Mothers Against Violence*. As before, I was anxious to meet those involved with MAV, although, in total, my time in the meeting amounted to no more than 15 minutes. I waited in the office until I was called in by Eve. The Chair of the meeting asked me to tell the Committee about myself, the research and its requirements. I tried to make explicit that I wanted people to be informed as possible about the research. While I was aware that the issue of reciprocity and the 'research bargain' might come up, I was surprised that it was addressed so explicitly. When asked exactly what I could contribute to MAV, I made clear that I would volunteer, present a summary of research findings, and make all publications accessible. What was asked for specifically, however, was an acknowledgement in the final output. While I considered that providing an acknowledgement of MAV was a given, the fact that MAV asked for one suggested that previous experiences with researchers has not always been reciprocal.

During this first meeting, I made clear the nature of the research, what was required and what I intended to provide in exchange (this latter point was of particular

importance). Shortly after, the Committee agreed to take part and a letter of agreement was signed to that effect. While the Committee provided consent at the organisational level, consent was still required from the individuals involved with *Mothers Against Violence*. To obtain informed consent from individuals, it was important that those involved were aware and clear of my role as a researcher in the setting and the purpose of the research.

Throughout fieldwork, consent continued to be negotiated, reminding those involved in *Mothers Against Violence* of my role and purpose in the setting. However, as Patton (1990; Marshall and Rossman, 1995) and others have noted, revealing the 'researcher identity' in fieldwork at the wrong moment risks upsetting the natural order of events and behaviours in the setting. The line between insider/outsider status required negotiation throughout fieldwork, giving consideration to how the role of the researcher should be defined (Whyte, 1984). Contributing as a volunteer to *Mothers Against Violence*, allowed me access to casual interactions, day to day issues and insights – issues perhaps participants assumed would not be noted down. Indeed, some have criticised, in particular, ethnography as an 'interactionally deceitful' method (Ditton, 1977), a charge which echoes ethnographic research as *casually* deceptive rather than overtly so.

To manage this claim of 'casual deception', and following Patton's (1990) line of reasoning, I tried to ensure that participants had 'full disclosure'. Introductions to each participant briefly detailed my role and intentions in the setting. In some instances, where these introductions were not appropriate, I made sure to clarify my role as soon as appropriate making the effort to do so on a one-to-one basis in the

event that they might decline to be involved⁷. On other occasions, for example, where members handed out tasks that allowed access to new information and settings, I made efforts to remind them of my role within the setting. While I was anxious to remind those involved of my researcher identity, members of *Mothers Against Violence* seemed not to be concerned and the supposed status as 'outsider' somewhat mitigated by my contributions as a volunteer.

Volunteering began in November 2015 and, while the first interview took place in January 2016, the core of interviews took place between June and September 2016. However, as Reeves (2010) points out, gaining entry is a different undertaking to that of gaining access, with the latter involving the building of 'rapport', 'engagement', and trust with those involved. The following section discusses two methods of investigation; firstly, participant observation as a means of familiarising myself and developing rapport with participants and, secondly, narrative interviews which were informed and contextualised by these interactions.

4.8 Becoming Familiarised or 'Getting On'

4.8.1 Participant Observation

While ethnography relies largely, or at least partly, on the use of participant observations, participant observation as a research method is characterised by varying degrees of immersion. The role of the researcher in observations can range from that of a complete observer to a complete participant (Gold, 1958; Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). To the extent that this research relies on participant observation, it can be *broadly* defined as ethnographic in the sense that it requires a degree of

⁷ None of the participants declined to be involved or even concerned over my presence there

immersion. This research was focused on “long-term data collection” over the space of 12 months, which gave significance to “the meanings people give to objects, including themselves, in the course of their activities” and used both participant observation and interviews which are broadly descriptive of ethnography (Hammersley, 2017:5). However, this ‘culture’⁸ was subject to many revisions over time and fluctuated over the course of the year in both activity and availability which, to some extent, places limits on the claims of knowledge to be made. Participant observations served three main purposes in this research; to help establish and develop relationships, to understand the working priorities of *Mothers Against Violence*, and to guide the development of narrative interview schedules (Kawulich, 2005). These shall now be explored in turn.

First, participant observations provided a valuable opportunity to establish and develop research relationships, encourage rapport and secure access to more interviews. Volunteering began in November 2015 with the core of interviews taking place in summer 2016. In the time running up to the interviews, I took the opportunity to familiarise myself to the research setting, a phase referred to Whyte (1984) as a process of ‘social exploration’. Volunteering could involve tasks as small as preparing letters and emails to organising and fundraising at public events, but provided an opportunity to establish a base for more ‘systematic’ data collection (Whyte, 1984:35). Practically, volunteering allowed me to offer a tangible contribution, inform those involved of the progress of the research as well as the opportunity to explore and familiarise myself with this new social base.

⁸ See also Condry (2007:191) for a discussion on the use of ethnographic methods in self-help groups of relatives.

Second, this early 'exploratory' phase of research also allowed me to grasp a better understanding of the nature and dynamics of *Mothers Against Violence*. As a voluntary-based organisation, the offices were not always staffed or permanently open. Rather, by volunteering for particular tasks I was able to meet a variety of the members. Meeting members in this way also allowed some insight into the routine activities of the organisation and to understand what *Mothers Against Violence* considers to be important; their aims, priorities and obstacles. For example, by volunteering to create a timeline of the organisation's activities, I was able to gain an insight into the history of *Mothers Against Violence* and the key events in previous years. Theoretically, volunteering helped to establish what day-to-day issues preoccupied *Mothers Against Violence* and therefore contextualised and informed conclusions drawn later.

Third, and finally, participant observations also helped to develop and refine the topic guide for interviews. Recognising that narratives are located in particular historical and cultural moments, participant observations allowed some understanding into the contexts that these stories emerged from. As May (2001:149) argues, "...people act and make sense of their world by taking meanings from the environment...". By undertaking participant observations of group meetings, workshops and public events, some understanding could be gained of the relationship between bereaved family activism and lived experiences, for example, what role *Mothers Against Violence* played for those involved. Jerolmack and Khan (2014) have launched critiques against the 'Interview Society' in an attempt to undo the assumption that talk predicts action. The authors argue that interviews are based on the assumption that narratives provide transparent and tangible reflections of experience (which, as the next section shall show, is not a simple translation of experience to narrative). Rather, Jerolmack and Khan (2014:19) argues that ethnographic research "routinely depict[s] and

deconstruct[s] tacit and embodied knowledge” acknowledging that talk is often situated in social action. Participant observations then provided important wider contextual knowledge and identified points for further discussion in interviews.

Just as sampling *of* cases has been discussed above, sampling *within* cases is also worth attention. Researchers are not typically party to all research contexts, relationships and interactions. As is frequently repeated in qualitative research, ‘everything is data’ (Latour, 2005; Brinkmann, 2014). An important exercise then lies in being able to decide which ‘data’ effectively informs the research question. Sampling *within* cases therefore considers questions such as “where to observe and when, who to talk to and what to ask, as well as about what to record and how” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:35). Observations may extend from individual acts, activities and their distinctive meanings, to situated participation, relationships and complete settings (Lofland, 1971).

During participant observation, a number of questions informed data collection. For example, taking note of the activities occurring, which acts are not occurring, which acts are recurring, the importance of particular acts to which actors, the nature of the setting, how individuals are related to one another, and what assumptions underlined each interaction. Over the course of the fieldwork, a number of settings were intended for observation such as fundraising events, volunteer meetings, public events, community programmes in addition to everyday informal interactions. However, the activity of *Mothers Against Violence* has fluctuated over the years, susceptible to funding trends and the size of their volunteer base. To this end, observations were shaped by convenience and availability.

4.8.2 Narrative Interviews

The narrative tradition in social research has seen increasing popularity in the past thirty years. This phenomenon, referred to by Reissman (1997; Atkinson and Delamont, 2006; Andrews, 2007) as the 'tyranny of narrative', has also extended to the scope of criminology (Maruna, 2001; Presser, 2009; Presser and Sandberg, 2015). As is true of the concept of trauma, 'narrative' also suffers from a lack of definition⁹. Even more, as Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2008) point out, the narrative tradition lacks a methodological coherence and transparency due to the absence of rules, criteria and instruction that might be found in, for example, grounded theory.

Treating the narrative method as a 'resource' rather than a prescriptive approach to accept (Seale, 1999a), this thesis learns from and realises the advantages of narrative to in so far as they facilitate answers to the research question; namely, to hear and understand the stories of victims. Informed by a narrative approach, focus is placed not only on what happens but what sense individuals make of it. By foregrounding and refocusing on the individual victim, this research asks how those involved understand, make sense of and give value to their experience in light of their role in *Mothers Against Violence*. In exploring how victims make sense and meaning from their experiences, this research invites individuals to participate in a re-telling and re-storying of their experience at a particular moment and in concert with a particular audience.

Over the course of the fieldwork, 15 semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with participants. Due to the small size and nature of the group, purposive

⁹ While contested, Presser and Sandberg (2015:1) offer a definition of narrative criminology as "any inquiry based on the view of stories as instigating, sustaining, or effecting desistance from harmful action".

sampling was employed to access participants who were eligible, willing and available; in particular, snowball and opportunistic sampling methods (Patton, 1990). Decisions concerning sampling *within* cases were often constrained by the practicalities of time and availability of members for interviews. Candidates for interviews were either identified by research gatekeepers or key informants, or were self-identified. Opportunistic sampling was used to ensure all those who were available and willing could be interviewed while snowball sampling was used to extend the search to a broader network of individuals. Through various gatekeepers and spending time with members at various meetings or events, contact could also be made with members on the peripheries. Introductions being made *through* 'inside' members may have also encouraged participation. This also demonstrated to those involved that the study intended to conduct research *with* rather than *on* them.

Attempts were made to access a range of participants. Interviews included both members who were *currently* involved and those who had been *previously* involved but were no longer. As mentioned previously, *Mothers Against Violence* is a long-established charity and was its sixteenth year when fieldwork began. By approaching previous members or those who had pulled back their involvement, a better understanding of the life and change of the organisation could be established. Previous members were identified and contacted through gatekeepers who, with consent of the participant, passed on contact details to follow up. Efforts were made to access a range of deviant, typical and critical cases for interviewing and access a range of experiences of lethal violence, backgrounds, and time periods. An overview of interview characteristics can be found in Table 1 (below). Ages have been broadly categorised to preserve some anonymity between members.

Table 1 – Interviewee Characteristics

Relative	Gender	Relationship to Victim	Age	Ethnicity	Religion
Eve	Female	Mother	50+	Unanswered	Christian
Marie	Female	Aunt	50+	Black British	Christian
Alison	Female	n/a	30-49	White British	None
Tara	Female	Community	30-49	Mixed Race British	Christian
Jane	Female	Sister	30-49	Mixed Race British	‘Spiritual’
Matthew	Male	n/a	30-49	White British	Unanswered
James	Male	Brother	30-49	Black British	Christian
Peter	Male	n/a	50+	White British	Jewish
Stephanie	Female	Cousin	30-49	Black British Caribbean	Christian
Jennifer	Female	Brother	30-49	Black British	Christian
Anna	Female	Sister	30-49	Black British	Christian
Claire	Female	Community	30-49	Black British	Christian
Andrea	Female	Friend	50+	Black British	Christian
Diane	Female	Friend	50+	Unanswered	Christian
Rosa	Female	Aunt	50+	Black British Caribbean	Christian

As Table 1 demonstrates, a majority of interviewees from *Mothers Against Violence* were women, mothers and shared some familial or social bond with the deceased. Eight of the fifteen participants had lost a relative to lethal violence while a further five participants had lost a friend or had been witness to violence within their community. Two participants also had past experiences of offending and imprisonment. Participants involved represented a range of experiences; some who had lost relatives to gun violence, some who had witnessed violence and others who,

while not directly affected by violence, were invested in the community affected by it. It is also important to note that seven of the fifteen participants were related to each other in some way and had lost the same relative. A majority of participants identified themselves as Black British and also identified themselves as Christians, either practising or non-practising. Participants came from a range of professional backgrounds including social work, nursing, academia, counselling and youth work and from across different areas of Manchester.

Several issues emerged in attempting to access this range of participants, particularly in the context of doing research with organisations. While participant observations had made the process of identifying and making contact with participants less demanding, arranging a time to meet for interviews proved more problematic. As a small volunteer-based charity, those involved in *Mothers Against Violence* led demanding schedules and busy lives. Many held full-time jobs elsewhere and a further few were involved in other voluntary services. Depending on their role and the activities of the group at the time, members were active and available at different points in the year. A majority of interviews took place at the offices of *Mothers Against Violence*, while others took place over coffee in restaurants, over the phone or in people's homes. Even when interviews were arranged, they often needed to be rescheduled by participants. One interview was rescheduled five times over the course of two months.

The problems surrounding access and availability were even more pertinent in the case of contacting previous members. From the 15 interviews that took place, only five could be gathered from previous members. In some instances, contact could not be made because their contact details could not be located or their whereabouts known. For some, several years had passed since being involved with *Mothers Against Violence* and therefore they had fallen out contact. The use of two gatekeepers, one

current and one previous member, countered this problem to some extent, with some previous members maintaining close connections with the group. In other cases, where contact details were located, attempts to contact previous members gathered little response. There are a number of potential reasons for this lack of response, such as incorrect contact details or lack of availability.

However, over the course of fieldwork, another explanation for this low response became apparent. Throughout my work with the group, a number of comments were repeated both in observations of the group and exchanges between participants regarding the lack of reciprocity. In one case, an intermediary had attempted to contact a number of ex-members on my behalf. No responses were received from these contacts with the exception of one individual who indicated that they did not wish to be involved stating that previous research experiences had not been beneficial. While they had been involved in similar research before, their experience had not been a positive one with participants being not being able to access the final findings. It is not clear whether this reason might also be extended to other non-responses.

What did become clear was the persistence of 'research fatigue' and its effects on the group that members alluded to. As Clark (2008:955–956) notes, research fatigue stems from a discontent and reluctance to continue research in future projects particularly if previous engagements have not proved fruitful. Research fatigue and the effects of *over-researching* might typically affect those groups where prolonged participation is required, or repeated requests are made from outsiders or researchers (Clark, 2008). However, these issues might have been further complicated by the already demanding nature of the group's voluntary work and the sensitive nature of the topic. Comments were made occasionally referring not only to the lack of exchange between the group and outside organisations, but also the lack of change that *Mothers Against Violence* had seen following research. Accordingly, it was important that the

researcher was able to offer not only mutual engagement, but *meaningful* engagement through concrete volunteering tasks, keeping members informed with the progress of the research and relaying the final findings.

In many cases, I was already familiar with participants before interviewing and was therefore able to approach them in person and ask for their participation. Nevertheless, written requests of the research were sent out to all participants prior to the interview including an information sheet which detailed the aim of the study and what was required and other expectations. Respondents were given time to consider their participation in the research, after which, upon expressing interest, they were contacted again to arrange a suitable time to be interviewed. Interviewees were reminded that participation was completely voluntary, that they could stop the interview at any time and they had the right to withdraw their data from the study at any point. Before the interview began, participants were given a chance to raise any remaining questions or uncertainties they had. Written consent was obtained before beginning the interview, indicating that they understood the expectations and requirements of the research. An audio-recorder was used to facilitate interviews, but only with the consent of participants.

To ensure confidentiality, respondents were assured that transcripts would be transcribed, password-protected and audio recordings would subsequently be deleted. Only myself and my supervisory team had access to these files. While contact details for myself and one supervisor were provided for each respondent, no issues were reported in the time after the interviews. To provide anonymity to participants, personal identifiers were removed and pseudonyms were added. However, while respondents in the study may have been anonymised to the public, it is uncertain the extent to which there was sufficiently anonymity *between* members. The decision to

identify *Mothers Against Violence* as the case study for this thesis was discussed with the organisation who were eager to be acknowledged for their involvement.

A topic guide was developed for interviewing to ensure that each discussion had direction but also adequate consistency for later stages of data analysis. In contrast to interview schedules, this *aide memoire*, as Burgess (1984) describes, still allows a degree of flexibility making sure that questions can be altered according to context. Initially, interviews began by asking participants to describe the activities of the group as a softer and undemanding opening to what is a sensitive topic of discussion. However, in starting with this question it became difficult to move participants on to their *personal* life story and risked upsetting the flow of the narration. Individuals were asked to recount their stories not as single experiences but as a stream of narration. This narrative interviewing aimed to elicit a “whole which is more than the sum of its parts, an order or hidden agenda” establishing connections between experiences (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000).

As a result, interviews were modified to begin with a more open-ended question in order to elicit rich, in-depth and uninterrupted stories. This included questions such as: *Could you tell me your personal story?* Beginning the interview with this more exploratory, open-ended question encouraged a natural flow of conversation where answers could be provided at the interviewee’s own pace and tone, using their language (Fontana and Frey, 2005). In many cases, this opening question elicited rich stories which prompted further points for discussion, for example, *Can you tell me about how you first heard about Mothers Against Violence?* or *Can you tell me about the story of your involvement with Mothers Against Violence?* Over time, the interview questions were refined and developed as I learned more about *Mothers Against Violence*, its history, priorities and future directions. This was particularly so in preparing to listen to Eve’s story who, as one of the founding members, had been witness to the entire

life of *Mothers Against Violence* (see Chapter 8). Some participants were able to tell long stories with little prompting. Those with experiences of violent bereavement shared stories which were coherent and structured, perhaps reflecting the fact that these stories had been shared with many others. Many interviewees were open and candid about their time in *Mothers Against Violence* and the experiences that came before that moment.

However, narrative research is not without its difficulties. The relationship between narrative and experience is ambiguous. Narrative does not merely represent a “more or less transparent and neutral medium for conveying something that lies beyond language and the story” (Bruner, 1987; Hydén, 1997:50). The nature of this relationship is uncertain and therefore the translation of experience into narrative is not necessarily linear (Presser and Sandberg, 2015). Rather, as Reissman (2008) explains, “...transforming a lived experience into language and constructing a story about it is not straightforward, but invariably mediated and regulated by controlling vocabularies”. That experience might not be so simply translated into narrative form has been repeated in various streams of thought. This problem prompted some to question whether research may ever be able to ‘fully know’ the subjects of their research (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000; Mauthner and Doucet, 2008). The notion that narratives are able to offer a transparent and unfettered access to the lived realities of individuals has come under much criticism (Atkinson and Delamont, 2006; Jerolmack and Khan, 2014). Indeed, even as Bruner (1987:14) contends that narrative offers the only means for communicating experience, he concedes that narrative is nonetheless very “unstable”.

The process of narrating experience is organised by the vocabularies of story-tellers and readers and the environment of the research exchange, all the while assuming that narrators are cognizant of these experiences. As Holloway and Jefferson (2000)

argue, much qualitative research uncritically takes the assumption that individuals are both self-transparent, or knowledgeable of their own experiences, and transparent with researchers. When individuals recount their lives to an audience, it is much more a “narrative achievement” rather than “a through-the-clear-crystal recital of something univocally given” (Bruner, 1987:13). Storytellers engage in an interpretive exercise inscribed by a number of influences.

For example, stories of the lived experience can be mediated by the audience by which they are ‘heard’ or ‘read’ (Fricker, 2007; Stauffer, 2015). As well as those that ‘tell’ the story, narratives are also a product of interpretations by researchers and readers, which creates a certain degree of distance between narrative and experience (Denzin, 1994; Reissman, 2008). The relationship between narrative and experience is somewhat elusive and prompts us to ask how such experiences might be transformed, translated and interpreted into narrative. Engaging with narratives as a medium for understanding experience requires close and prolonged engagement with participants; a collaborative relationship between researchers and participants. The idea of the ‘researcher as research instrument’ is a common and longstanding claim within qualitative research with interviewers often situated as impartial listeners, clear of preconceptions particularly as grounded theorists might argue (Hyman, 1954; Richardson et al., 1965; Gillham, 2000:25).

However, narratives are produced at particular moments in particular contexts in concert with researchers who are not detached or removed from political, ideological or theoretical knowledge. Researchers are intimately involved in the co-production of narratives, as are readers, leading some to question whether qualitative research merely engages in an enterprise of interpreting interpretations. For instance, Denzin (2002:353) has examined the notion of the ‘hermeneutic circle’ in the interpretive process. As Denzin (2002:74) argues, “[i]nterpretive research enters the hermeneutic

circle by placing the researcher and the subject in the center of the research process". The 'hermeneutic circle' represents a shared interaction between researchers and research subjects whereby "...[t]wo interpretive structures interact". Research subjects narrate and interpret experiences while researchers simultaneously re-interpret narratives shaped by their own predispositions (see also Giddens, 1984a on the 'double hermeneutic'; Denzin, 2002). Rather than acting in a 'social vacuum', researchers hold a number of interpersonal, political and ideological differences that manifest in research relationships, data production, and analysis (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003:414).

To this end, keeping a research journal was a particularly useful exercise as I came to observe and become familiar with different settings. By documenting thoughts and observations throughout the research process, an account could be presented which was reflexive and transparent. Following each interview, I summarised the key points of the discussion, relevant observations, and thoughts as to what went well and what didn't. The following provides an example excerpt as a reflection on an interview:

Research Journal, Interview #7 9th June, 2016

J was very proactive in organising this interview, commenting in a meeting about his willingness to take part (this is different as the interviews so far have taken much more organisation on my part). The interview took place in the late evening; the interviewee called 40 minutes late, juggling many other commitments of family, work and the charity. Confirmed verbal consent and left a signed consent form in the office for me to pick up.

In arranging a telephone interview, I was concerned that it might not provide the right environment for sharing sensitive and personal experiences such as violent bereavement. However, the interviewee had voiced a preference for this and, overall, I was very pleased with how this interview went. He seemed comfortable, confident and articulate in sharing his experiences while also seeming to reflect on his story as the interview progressed. The event of bereavement was described as a 'catalytic event'. The loss of his brother has been 'transformative' in this way yet he does not assume that his experience allows him to understand the experiences of others. Next time, it might be useful to ask more of the type of relationship shared with the group.

Although there is no way to deduce with certainty the extent to which researchers influence research settings, the personal biographies of researchers and research subjects are notable influences on fieldwork relationships (Punch, 1986). During the course of the fieldwork, I also grew conscious that my personal biography as a young, white female researcher, without children, originally not from North West England, might impact research relationships in both observations and interviews. As stated previously, *Mothers Against Violence* emerged during an intense episode of gun and knife crime with Moss Side becoming symbolic of Manchester's racialised gang and crime problem. References to racism within the community were not uncommon by participants. Unfamiliarity with the historical origins of group and its intimate social foundation also prompted some initial hesitancy over whether my status as an 'researcher' would inhibit access to particular settings or conversations. As Berger (2015:228) notes, "a stranger to the culture may miss clues that are clear to an insider", lack identification and unintentionally misrepresent that which is unfamiliar. Even more, the persistence of 'research fatigue' in the organisation and reluctance by some members to engage with the research seemed to compound this.

Despite this uncertainty over unfamiliarity, the group remained open and welcoming to anyone who shared an interest in their cause and could contribute. Although *Mothers Against Violence* is run largely by women, and predominantly mothers, this did not preclude membership from other members of the community. My status as a researcher appeared to fade after prolonged engagement with the group allowing for a dual role as researcher, conducting research *with* members, and as a volunteer, providing help in any small way possible without disrupting the setting. What was originally seen as distance between researcher and research subjects, encouraged a reflexive awareness of how conclusions were formed. This suggests that there are also advantages to being a *stranger* in an unfamiliar culture (Schutz, 1944).

This is not to say reflexivity is a panacea for transparency. Both Pillow (2003) and Mauthner and Doucet (2003) have expressed scepticism at empty motions towards reflexivity maintaining that the practice behind reflexivity and 'recognition of the other' in research must also be defined. The socio-historical location, biographical differences, interpersonal contexts and interpretive frameworks between researchers and research subjects that Mauthner and Doucet (2003) outline require parcelling out and conceding. Strategies of reflexivity should not represent merely cathartic exercises for the researcher, but also provide the basis for acknowledging alternative and potentially 'uncomfortable' conclusions (see also Seale, 1999b:11 for 'fallibilistic' reflexivity; Mason, 2002; Pillow, 2003:88). This self-critical engagement with 'uncomfortable' assumptions recognises the potential for competing interpretations.

In this sense, reflexivity goes further than discussions of positionality in the field; it speaks to how the researched-researcher relationship might affect the research process and its conclusions (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, 2008; Berger, 2015). Reflecting on these notes allowed me to make comparisons over the course of fieldwork, understand my own role in co-producing these stories as well as some of the anxieties associated with studying experiences of lethal violence. These observations also encouraged me to remember how narratives are located in situational contexts and interactions.

The research journal was therefore a valuable opportunity to reflect on my role as a researcher within the field and the ethical issues that arose during the research exchange. As both a researcher and volunteer offering practical support, my role within the research could be defined as an 'observer-as-participant': I made some practical contribution to the field but was not typically part of it and tried to stay on the periphery (Gold, 1958). Carrying out social research with individuals who have experienced suffering or harm heightens already pertinent social, ethical and political issues within qualitative research. In these fields, the degree of immersion and

reciprocity of researchers is a key issue. As Marshall and Rossman (1995:76) highlight, “the researcher enters the lives of the participants”. Consent required repeated negotiation as I encountered different individuals, entered new settings and learned new knowledge from *Mothers Against Violence* (see Darling, 2014). This conflict was reflected in a journal entry when discussing the ethical dilemmas of the insider/outsider status in qualitative research:

Research Journal, Saturday 9th April 2016

Today I attended an event organised by VolOrg held at a local centre in Manchester. One of the volunteers asked me to attend this event, in their words, for ‘MAV heads to go down, support and represent’. This created two conflicting dilemmas:

i) practical demands of wanting to make a contribution, build rapport and show that I was invested and interested in their stories (this was especially relevant considering the day before I had been contacted by a participant who wished *not* to take part because of previous (negative) experiences with researchers)

ii) ethical obligations to maintaining the insider/outsider distinction, I was particularly anxious that I should ‘represent’ MAV – the organisation that I am supposedly researching (concern that I am essentially becoming the group that I set out to observe)

Although I was anxious to remind those involved of the research and my role, in many cases, participants were not bothered or concerned with these issues. It seemed my contributions as a *volunteer* were much more relevant for *Mothers Against Violence* than my role as a *researcher*.

Narratives offer a tentative insight into lives but are by no means exhaustive accounts. These stories are situated in research exchanges as the research journal entries above indicate. However, stories are also told and read within communities. As Plummer (1995:168) writes, “whatever else a story is, it is not simply the lived life”. Situated with a community of bereaved families, each narrative is rooted not only in the form of violence in 1990s Moss Side or the biographical differences of victims, but the

shared social fabric of *Mothers Against Violence*. These 'communities', argues Plummer (1995:85), perform an essential role in story telling:

Stories need communities to be heard, but communities themselves are also built through story tellings. *Stories gather people around them*: they have to attract audiences, and these audiences may then start to build a common perception, a common language, a commonality.

Narrative presents a critical link between the story-teller and the community, with each party invested in the hearing and retelling stories. Over nearly two decades, those involved in *Mothers Against Violence* exchanged stories which were re-told, re-storied, and re-conceived. In this sense, *Mothers Against Violence* represent an organic collective in which individuals engaged with, expressed and sometimes contested narratives. Through meetings, marches and public events, members of the group have shared stories between themselves, to themselves, and to the wider community. As these stories are shared they are at the same time being re-interpreted, re-learned and re-produced for difference audiences, purposes and times. The role of collectives then, such as *Mothers Against Violence*, in shaping or re-labelling experiences through interaction also warrants consideration.

Attention might also be paid to how narrativising an experience could be transformative in itself. Bruner (1987) has commented on the two-way relationship between narrative and experience noting that narrative may simultaneously constitute experience as well as experience reflecting narrative. Whilst narrative may be continually re-interpreting past experiences, they may also be re-conceived in light of the future, as an instigator for change and reflecting prospective ambitions or objectives. Through this habit of storytelling, narratives do not just clinically imitate the lived experience, but eventually come to structure future experience and re-interpret the past:

...eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very “events” of a life (Bruner, 1987:15)

Using narrative as a resource, rather than as a fixed theoretical position, provides insight into the multiple layers of meaning that inscribe experiences. By employing narrative interviews, victims are encouraged to situate their stories within overlapping layers of meaning in order to understand how and why stories are structured and told in such a way (Reissman, 2008). As Denzin (1989a) writes, each story is fixed to a ‘cultural locus’ in which frameworks of meaning, values and significance are anchored, without which, the stories of others cannot be read (this becomes particularly relevant in Chapter 8). By understanding how such experiences are rooted in these contexts, narratives provide an understanding of “connections among experiences, actions, and aspirations” (Presser and Sandberg, 2015). This is perhaps ever more important in stories of trauma and suffering which are characterised by disruption and loss of order (Herman, 1992; Charmaz, 1999; Crossley, 2000). As Pemberton (2015:18) argues, the act of narrativising experience lends a coherence and comprehensibility for which victims can make sense of traumatic events over time:

The efforts to make sense and meaning are concerned with coming to terms with the manner in which the past, the victimisation, the present, and the future can be *reconceived* anew to represent a coherent and continuous whole.

Through narrative interviewing, those involved in *Mothers Against Violence* were encouraged to re-tell stories, drawing connections between different experiences of loss, grief and activism. By speaking about their experiences, participants were telling a story that reflects past encounters, current thoughts, and future ambitions. In this way, stories were not simply ‘recitals’ of experience but rather the result of telling stories to certain people, at a certain moment in time. The stories shared in *Mothers*

Against Violence reflected experiences of loss, previous encounters with other survivors, families and the affected community as well as their appraisals of these events now. This research focuses on the meanings and significance of these stories for the story-tellers rather than the historical accuracy of these events.

4.9 Quality in Qualitative Research

The issue of whether narrative practice can accurately capture lived experience refers to a wider debate regarding the 'crisis of representation' in qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:9). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) have argued that language and the stability of narrative in communicating experience entered a 'crisis of representation' with questions arising over how to situate the research subject and researcher. Narratives are subject to re-interpretation and can change purpose, shape and hands raising some concern that narrative in fact *dilutes* authentic lived realities. Experience may be re-created, given form and structure, through narrativisation (Bruner, 1987). However, the role of the researcher in re-presenting such experiences has prompted some to question whether qualitative research merely studies interpretations rather than lived experiences. The discussions and reservations above concerning the translation of experience into narrative and more broadly the 'crisis in representation' have implications for judging the quality of qualitative research; particularly in relation to principles of validity and reliability.

4.9.1 Validity

The criteria for making assessments of validity have changed with the development of qualitative research. Although it appears in many forms¹⁰, the principle of validity

¹⁰ Whilst some have opted for the wholesale rejection of this natural science criterion, others have sought to selectively redefine validity (see Creswell and Miller, 2000; Lewis et al., 2014). As Creswell and Miller (2000:124) note, "...readers are treated to a

broadly refers to whether the research conclusions formed reflect the phenomenon under investigation. This 'measure' asks whether the knowledge produced through qualitative research truthfully and accurately represents the world as lived by research subjects.

Uncertainties surrounding the accuracy of narrative representations of lived experience become particularly relevant here. The 'crisis in representation' that weighs down narrative methods reminds us that with each interpretation, narrative is tempered and changed by the various persuasions of researchers, readers and research subjects. As Denzin writes, "if we only know a thing through its representations, then ethnographers no longer directly capture lived experience" (Flaherty et al., 2002:483). The nature of narrative methods then requires validity on two levels: those accounts relayed by participants, and those re-counted and re-interpreted by researchers (Reissman, 2008).

There is also an ethical imperative to ensuring that qualitative inquiry accurately describes experiences of victimisation. The potential for narrative and qualitative research in empowerment and emancipation has been alluded to elsewhere, most notably in feminist methodologies. The role of qualitative inquiry as a method to 'give voice' to individuals, particularly those with experiences of traumatic events or harm has also been persuasive. However, this notion of narrative as empowerment stems from the assumption that voices and narratives are just 'there' waiting to be discovered (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Mason, 2002). Rather, as Atkinson and Delamont (2006) note, voices do not merely 'speak for themselves'. In stronger terms, as researchers, "we make them speak" (Sandelowski, 2002). Validity in narrative

confusing array of terms for validity, including authenticity, goodness, verisimilitude, adequacy, trustworthiness, plausibility, validity, validation, and credibility".

practice therefore requires transparency not only as an empirical criterion, but as an ethical standard to ensure that voices and stories are not misrepresented or distorted (Andrews, 2007).

4.9.2 Ethical obligations to validity: the conflation of trauma and suffering

Using an example to illustrate, I return to the previous chapter's discussion of the conflation of traumatic experience and victim experience. A critical review of the literature revealed the concept of trauma to be subject to much critique for creating a simultaneously universalised and trivialised construction of victimhood. Charged with this 'assumed universal validity', trauma has been uncritically transferred across cultures, experience, and analytical levels (see also Summerfield, 1998; Bracken, 2001). As McGarry and Walklate (2015) discuss, the current moment is in fact characterised by a 'slippage' between suffering and trauma; between an enduring experience of harm and a radical, disruptive degree of suffering. Subsequently, whilst not all suffering may result in trauma, it seems reasonable to suggest that trauma incurs an acute level of suffering.

Aside from the conceptual difficulties that this conflation of trauma and suffering created, there were also methodological implications that arose in the early stages of fieldwork. Following preliminary observations and early interview data with *Mothers Against Violence*, it became evident that the experiences of survivors were not addressed in terms of trauma but in fact through metaphors of grief, loss and pain. These early stages of fieldwork and literature reviews highlighted that the term 'trauma' had different uses; from trauma as a medical condition and psychiatric diagnostic, to a 'keyword'¹¹ of modern language or a sociological concept. Those

¹¹ See Williams (1976)

involved in *Mothers Against Violence* regularly made reference to enduring yet transformative suffering. Remembering that narrative data is co-produced in concert with researchers, it was essential that theoretical assumptions – such as those extended in the literature review – were acknowledged. As Sandelowski (2002:482) writes, “[b]ecause interview texts are co-created, interviewers need to guard against simply producing the texts they had expected”. Ethical interview practices thus create space rather than close dialogue. While *a priori* influences derived from the research question and preceding literature discussion are important, they should not lead and obscure emerging *inductive* themes.

By re-interpreting the experiences of suffering through a framework of trauma, narratives risked becoming a *translation* rather than *reflection* of experience. Fassin and Rechtman (2009:281) previously argued that the proliferation of ‘trauma’ moved to “obliterate experience”. By conflating experiences across place, people and event, trauma was used to describe everything from car accidents to wartime violence. As trauma is assumed to account for such diverse experiences, difference is eliminated obscuring the structural and historical roots of such violence. While this shift has encouraged an increased recognition of the impact of victimisation, the authority of trauma lies more in its “social effectiveness...” than providing “...historical truth for victims” (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009:215). Earlier fieldwork observations echoed this. The conflation of trauma and suffering prompted realisation that trauma cannot describe all experiences of suffering. Researchers must be careful in how they represent stories that are shared by participants and their role in co-constructing narratives. We must instead consider what is at stake when research subjects, researchers and other potential readers of narratives describe an experience as trauma or suffering.

To some extent, this issue denotes the long-standing methodological problem of validity in qualitative inquiry; namely, the translation of theoretical knowledge into lived experiences and vice versa. This problem brings into question whether the problem of trauma is necessarily a unique one at all. As stated in previous chapters, the concept of trauma has seen a slow shift from a clinical diagnostic to a cultural sociological concept. For the purpose of this research, the concept of trauma was initially used as an illustration of the shift in discourse surrounding victims. However, it became apparent in early fieldwork stages that this social scientific analysis of victims risked being distorted by the use of trauma as a diagnostic tool. Whilst the use of conceptual *a priori* themes in research is not uncommon, the conflation and imprecision of the concept outlined in previous chapters produced distinctive methodological problems. This ‘slippage’ risked shutting down space for dialogue and impeding authentic representation of experience (McGarry and Walklate, 2015:35). That victims’ experiences are accurately reflected and not misrepresented through qualitative inquiry raises ethical questions as to how far researchers are involved in the articulation of experience.

The use of a research journal throughout fieldwork allowed for this self-critical method. Making journal entries after each day in the field helped to make visible the lines of reasoning and unravel conceptual assumptions. For reflexive accounts to be transparent, the researcher must “...recognize that knowledge of the world cannot be advanced apart from the sociologist's knowledge of himself and his position in the social world, or apart from his efforts to change these” (Gouldner, 1970:489). In understanding how theoretical knowledge is constructed, researchers must be sensitive to multiple, interacting and competing interpretive structures of the researched, researcher and research context. Reflecting on this research journal revealed the anxieties that I had experienced during fieldwork, particularly over my

'identity' in the field as a researcher and how these anxieties to disclose my identity sometimes overtook practical considerations. The research journal also proved useful in my 'reading' of stories during data analysis, particularly in the case of Eve (see Chapter 8).

4.9.3 Reliability

A similar approach may also be extended to reliability which regards the replicability of studies and consistency of interpretations. Positivist criteria such as reliability are rooted in notions of an independent knowable reality which may create significant problems for ethnographic qualitative research (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982). As is true of validity, reliability has been reworked in interpretivist and constructivist traditions to acknowledge how narratives are fostered by multiple voices (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The value of reliability lies in ensuring the credibility of interpretations and methodological transparency. Seale (1999b) argues that in order to enhance reliability, methodical accounts of the research engagement are required. Systematic recordings detailing observations of activities, contexts and people were noted, if not during observations of the group, immediately after. Preliminary interpretations and analysis were kept separate to avoid the risk of obscuring emergent themes (Seale, 1999b).

4.10 Methods of Analysis

In order to clarify the iterative connections between methods and research objectives, the method of analysis is detailed below. By making transparent the 'logic' of this qualitative inquiry, insight can be gained into the processes behind the conclusions formulated in this study.

This research employed thematic analysis as the method of analysis. Despite receiving little explicit attention in qualitative inquiry, thematic analysis remains a

popular method of data analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013) or thematic narrative analysis (Reissman, 2008) consists of the reading and re-interpreting of narrative texts according to themes identified by researchers. Thematic analysis provides a means of “identifying, analysis, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006:83). This method of analysis was selected for two reasons; firstly, for its flexibility in giving coherence and structure to data and, secondly, in its application as either theory-driven or data-driven analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). This research allowed for the emergence of new themes through deductive analysis and, guided by the research question, the identification and testing of pre-existing themes through inductive analysis.

Data analysis followed the six-step process suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006); familiarisation, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes and finally, producing the report. As the first ‘moment of contact’, transcription presented the first opportunity for analysis; *familiarising* myself with the data, re-reading transcripts, and summarising early thoughts. Each transcript was read through twice comprehensively before beginning coding exercises. This stage provided an opportunity for *generating initial codes*, manually analysing and highlighting basic codes. Coding is the process of analysis, organising and sorting of data in order to draw meaning from a large mass of data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). According to Miles and Huberman (1994:56), codes are “...tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study”. This stage of identifying initial codes allowed patterns of meaning to emerge. In this ‘data reduction’ stage, relevant and irrelevant codes were categorised and refined to create a catalogue of codes.

In order to collate these codes into themes, relationships and similarities between codes needed to be identified. To facilitate this stage of data analysis, transcripts were

entered into NVivo: a data analysis programme for qualitative research. The use of NVivo allowed connections to be made between codes, discarding the irrelevant and combining those that overlapped. In this way, NVivo facilitated a comprehensive and inclusive view of a large dataset easily drawing connections between different transcripts (Lewins and Silver, 2007). However, by the same token, the use of NVivo in this way risked fragmenting data from context. As argued above, narrative interviews were employed to understand how lived experiences of victimisation reflected a particular historical moment, biographical roots, and, ultimately, are situated within life stories. The function of NVivo, however, risks decontextualizing meaning from the referents in which it makes sense. To counter this issue, two comprehensive readings of each transcript were conducted which provided base codes, while NVivo was applied for the purpose of refining and reducing codes to *search for* and *review themes*. Identified themes were subsequently *defined* and recounted as part of a coherent narrative of the dataset. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present this narrative as a storied response to the research questions.

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined a justified methodological framework remaining alert to the iterative nature of the research process. *Mothers Against Violence* was introduced as the case study, before outlining the two methods of investigation: narrative interviews and participant observation. This chapter questioned the uncertain relationship between narrative and experience in qualitative research indicating that stories do not exist as detached or tangible products. Rather, repeating Plummer's (1995:168) assertion, stories are "not simply the lived life". Narratives are instead a refined product of socio-historical contexts, particular exchanges and interactions underlined by sometimes conflicting interpretive structures. By unpacking the 'logic' of this research, uncritical and implicit assumptions could be addressed. Rather than present

these methods “as a series of neutral, mechanical and decontextualized procedures that are applied to the data”, interview data must be recognised as a product of particular interpersonal exchange between the researcher and ‘researched’ (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003:414).

Stories represent socially and politically pragmatic tools. While the validity of claims made by story tellers remains important, this thesis does not become preoccupied with “matters of truth” at the risk of overlooking “matters of consequence”; that is, the significance of relaying particular details in particular settings (Plummer, 1995). This thesis gives significance to how people understand and make meaning from their subjective experiences. Therefore, while it might be argued that such layers of meaning risk diluting experiences, this thesis argues that *stories* of these experiences may be explored as a unit of analysis in themselves. In this sense, the value of using narrative method is not always in its transparency, but in its ability to embody ‘verisimilitude’ (Bruner, 1991:4). These stories represent a means of relating to past experiences of victimisation, present but potentially fleeting interpretations and future ambitions. The next chapter considers the role of these stories in connecting with and organising communities in *Mothers Against Violence*.

Chapter 5 - Origins of *Mothers Against Violence*

5.1 Introduction

In August 1999, the community of inner city Manchester was witness to a spate of shootings resulting in the deaths of three young black males. In the following period, dozens of concerned members of the community, predominantly mothers, gathered to discuss the impact of recent events. *Mothers Against Violence* was established shortly after and, at the time of writing, had been working for just under two decades. Remembering that such groups are the organised responses to particular historical and cultural moments of violence, the first of three findings chapters is presented here as an exercise in recounting the early life of *Mothers Against Violence*. This chapter asks: how do individuals confront experiences of violent bereavement to arrive at the moment of collective action?

The chapter begins by providing an overview of the origins of *Mothers Against Violence*, situating its emergence within the specific historical context of post-industrial Manchester and discourses of gun and gang violence. This established, the chapter then focuses on the stories of loss that *Mothers Against Violence* emerged in response to. By foregrounding the suffering of those involved, the aim here is to understand how personal experiences come to define and prompt collective responses. These stories also share some insight into precise circumstances in which *Mothers Against Violence* emerged in. The role of single parent families, cultural images of the bereaved mother, prevalence of domestic violence, and history of distrust of public authorities are considered here. The chapter concludes by discussing the motivations of those involved, showing how personal experiences might prompt public responses.

5.2 'Gunchester', Gangs, and *Mothers Against Violence*

Gun and gang violence has been symbolically associated with Manchester, particularly South Manchester, since the 1980s with Moss Side firmly fastened to "a (racialized) iconic status as the epitome of 'Dangerous Britain'" (Fraser, 1996:55). While rich in industrial heritage, Manchester saw rapid deindustrialisation following the 1960s with a "new era of post-industrial/cosmopolitan revival" emerging during the regeneration of Manchester in later decades (Peck and Ward, 2002:7). Moss Side, in particular, has a diverse community of ethnic minorities with many migrants arriving in the 1930s onwards to be housed in the area (Rahman, 2010).

Situated within a wider national debate and moral panic of the 'gang' problem (see for example Hallsworth and Young, 2004), gun violence in Manchester fuelled a polarised image of Moss Side as the racialized 'urban 'Other'" (Fraser, 1996; see also Smithson et al., 2013; Williams, 2015). In this discourse of 'gangland Britain' as a 'folk devil', gangs were regarded as "armed, organized, predatory and lethal" (Hallsworth, 2011:183). The label of Moss Side as a 'problem' area has only been further animated by the push of national media in unhelpfully labelling the area as 'Britain's Bronx' and 'Gunchester'. This negative imagery has also been fuelled by the comments of politicians at the time. Paddy Ashdown, then leader of the Liberal Democrats, commented on his visit following the death of Benji Stanley: "I used to find the arguments about legalisation of cannabis quite powerful until I went to see Moss Side. Now I'd been a soldier on the streets of Belfast, but I'd never been so frightened in all my life" (cited in Murji, 1999:57). Moss Side eventually became synonymous for gun violence which preoccupied national and political attention in the 1980s and 1990s.

Within the area of South Manchester, four major gangs could be identified: Gooch, Doddington, Pitt Bull Crew and Longsight with the former two emerging in earlier

years, between 1988 and 1991 and the latter two as the product of splits between the first (Mares, 2001; Bullock and Tilley, 2002). Bullock and Tilley (2002) estimated that as many as 470 individuals may have been involved in the South Manchester gang scene in 2001. While the arrival of heroine, crack and cocaine markets in the UK in the 1980s created tension within communities, gangs were not 'drug-gangs principally' and, as such, were not organised around these activities (Mares, 2001).

In an ethnographic study of working class street gangs in Manchester, Mares (2001) focused on the Gooch and Doddington gangs, two of the more recognised entities. These two informally organised gangs were attached to the area of Moss Side, located one mile South of the city centre of Manchester. Those involved in gangs were most commonly 'young, Afro-Caribbean, male and born in Britain' were typically recruited through friends, family and disaffected youths (Fraser, 1996; Bullock and Tilley, 2002:29). Amid tensions of unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, 'environmental degradation' and eventually the emergence of gangs, the 1980s and 1990s saw marked increases in gun homicides. This episode of violence prompted a series of responses from its victims, witnesses and the concerned community; each attempting to confront the aftermath of these losses. The following section details the stories of these losses in an effort to foreground the victim and understand how *Mothers Against Violence* became a response to these losses.

5.3 Stories of Loss

5.3.1 Vivid Experiences

Over the course of fieldwork, both members and ex-members were asked to recount memories of their first involvement with *Mothers Against Violence*. Those involved represented a range of experiences and histories and each were witness to different developments in the group. Over half of participants reported the loss of someone

directly related to them while nearly all of the sample described experiences of indirect victimisation such as witnessing violence in the community. These vivid accounts were a powerful means of animating co-victims' experiences of violence; they identified key events, marked boundaries, and humanised those involved. As co-victims of violence or secondary victims¹², these experiences varied across individuals with existing research indicating that coping strategies are contingent on time, context, encounters with different communities, family and the nature of their interaction with the criminal justice system (Gekoski et al., 2013; see Connolly and Gordon, 2015). In this sense, secondary victimisation, or co-victimisation, comprises a 'unique blend' of trauma and grief highlighting the varied number of ways victimisation can impact not only individuals, but families and communities (Armour, 2002). The accounts presented below aim to show the diversity of effects that secondary victimisation has on those individuals affected by lethal violence.

For many who had suffered violent bereavement, their experiences were vividly recounted. Bereaved relatives narrated detailed accounts attending closely to the details of the day, what they had been doing at the time they received the news, and their immediate responses:

So that's some of the things I've seen the changes in my life which brought me into the place which I am now in regards to when my son died, shot and killed. *Never forget that night* [Eve; emphasis added]

I remember the day quite clearly actually because... [Jennifer]

I won't forget how peaceful he looked [James; emphasis added]

For some, these accounts were part of a series of previously practised stories shared among other bereaved family activists, survivors and in other collectives. This

¹² A secondary victim is defined by Condry (2010, p. 222) as "someone who has suffered the effects of violence (or indeed any crime), illness, or bad luck, indirectly or through their relationship with another".

collection of stories represents just one point in a constellation of interactions reflecting past experiences, present circumstances and future ambitions (see Chapter 4). For others, however, these stories seemed to be a challenging exercise of 'working through' and introspection. Some participants were prompted to consider questions that had previously gone unaddressed echoing Holloway and Jefferson's (2000) warning of the 'transparent-self problem' in qualitative research. 'Practised' accounts were often organised around the experience of violent bereavement which allowed some degree of narrative coherence - although some have suggested this is more a desire of the reader than the narrator (see, for example, Andrews, 2010; Reissman, 2008). Alternatively, these 'practised' accounts might have appeared more coherent because it is these stories which are most often recited and provide a definitive locus for story-telling. As Chapter 6 demonstrates, these stories then represented important connections not only within and between individuals but in assembling communities around them.

5.3.2 Disruption, Disordering and 'Shattered Assumptions'

From the participants who had suffered bereavement through violence, disordering of meaning frameworks in violent bereavement represented an important theme. Overwhelmed by the sudden experience of victimisation, sense- and meaning-making structures are undermined. For many, the immediate reaction to violent bereavement was one of shock. Jane and James reported the disbelief and devastation at the sudden loss of relatives to gun violence:

So I couldn't believe it - I just thought oh my gosh. And then it was a case of - he's dead. So I didn't - when I got that call I just didn't believe what I was hearing. The fact he'd got shot - did I believe it? I didn't disbelieve that [Jane]

I don't remember a harder time than that. I don't remember a more difficult time than that. I don't think I've ever seen the family in complete grief... and shock [James]

Similarly, when asked of the impact of the loss of her brother, Anna recounted:

Oh it was like total shock. Total shock. 'Cause it's like y'know even if y'know 'cause people're getting shot in the area so it's not that I never ever ever expected my brother to get shot because he's a black guy in the area y'know but I think the fact that he got shot and died was like - that was the total shock basically [Anna]

To some extent, these early responses of shock stemmed from a loss in meaning or, as cognitive theorists might argue, 'shattered assumptions' (see Janoff-Bulman, 1992). In this instance, there were a number of references to the assumptions of safety and honesty of the 'good Christian family' as a protection from the impact of gun violence. The event of violent bereavement, however, unsettled those assumptions. As Stephanie explained:

But even that didn't really faze me maybe it was just because I was in shock that it had all happened, so yeah thinking back it's just like the realisation of how....not - not that it's scary but how gangs were real because they were just never real to me. *They were just y'know - we were a good Christian family like we...y'know just...I don't know, loved each other, supported one another and it's just strange to have this new dynamic of death brought into our family. You expect your gran or your grandad to go first, y'know and it wasn't, it was one of the youngest people in the family so that was really difficult for me to get my head 'round.* [Stephanie; emphasis added]

While the assumption of 'it doesn't happen to us' provided some reassurance, the experience of secondary victimisation threatened to disrupt the sense of certainty and predictability that these assumptions provided:

I think just in kind of realising that *just because you're a Christian family it doesn't mean that this kind of stuff doesn't affect you really.* Y'know 'cause generally nobody in the family was involved in campaigning against gun or knife crime, it had been going on for years but it was one of those there all those kinds of things don't happen to us, it does kind of affect you but actually it can affect anybody [Anna; emphasis added]

The experience of gun violence prompted a sharp realisation that victimisation could in fact, paraphrasing Anna, 'happen to anybody'. Rather, victimisation could affect

individuals in a varied number of ways. Jennifer summarised this when discussing the initial shock felt by herself and her family in their early responses:

...it just doesn't happen to our family d'you know what I mean? We're quite...y'know...we're a Christian family and you just don't expect these things to happen to your family so I think that's what I mean. Yeah...[Jennifer; emphasis added]

While discussions with participants showed they were aware of rising gun and knife violence in the community, it was not until the moment of victimisation that these anxieties were realised – which echoes Garland's (1998, p. 11) notion of trauma as a "confirmation of those deepest universal anxieties" rather than unfamiliar threats. As further discussion of this will show, the collapse of these assumptions and structures of meaning created an important impetus for some bereaved family activists. The loss of these meaning frameworks could also be extended to the loss of confidence in faith:

And the impact on me was great. It really rocked my faith - when I say rocked my faith I questioned what, why this would happen to a family like my family and what happened to me and what happened to my brother. So, there's a lot of wondering why for just after his death [James]

The role of faith within Mothers Against Violence and the experience of violent bereavement worked in different ways. For James, faith was questioned and tested when confronted by violent bereavement. However, for others, faith played a constructive role in making meaning from suffering (see Chapter 8).

A smaller number of participants described their initial responses to violent bereavement using the discourse of denial. Stephanie and Jane expressed their early responses to the event, following the initial reaction of shock:

And that's - I think what drove me to go and live abroad because I just thought I need to escape from this whole situation it's just not good. It's not good. It wasn't nice to go through that at all. [Stephanie]

But I was still in denial, I couldn't believe that that would happen. [Jane]

These practices of denial were still reported by one participant as the research was being carried out. Rosa explains this, interestingly, remaining entirely aware of this strategy of denial and its potential effects:

So I just couldn't understand. And I still don't even now but I don't, try and not let it affect me because what you don't understand, don't go there, if you don't understand chop, it. And that's what I do, I just leave it until - it will I'm sure one day come out. One day. [Rosa]

While only a small number described these experiences using the notion of denial, it raises the question as to whether bereaved family activism can become more or less relevant at different points in people's lives. This is perhaps also indicative of changing coping strategies as the experience of violent bereavement is appraised, re-appraised and managed. Victims' families also recounted stories involving different emotions; from anger and fear to moral emotions of shame and guilt. One participant, for example, noted how her perception of safety within the community changed following the loss of her cousin:

I'd started to notice more and more things about gangs coming up but it just felt very distant to me even though it wasn't that far away, it would be happening in [PLACE] and in [PLACE] as well, it just never felt like I needed to be afraid or anything like that until the day of finding out that my cousin was murdered. And even then, I still didn't feel afraid it was just like it didn't seem real, it was quite strange... [Stephanie]

Again, reference is made to having awareness of rising gun and knife violence in the community although it is not until the moment of victimisation that these anxieties were realised. Other participants, however, reported precisely the opposite effect: that is, no longer feeling fearful. Eve discussed this as one of the many changes that she experienced following the loss of her son:

And one of the things that I find for myself as that is happening in my own personal life, I used to be a very fearful person. Fear doesn't come my way now you know what I mean. [Eve]

She continues later:

The fear just went from me. I believe the Lord took it all away from me so I could walk at any time and not be afraid of anybody or anything. [Eve]

A lot of them were afraid, they were fearful and I wasn't you know what I mean. Because for me I was dead already [laughs] Yeah.... I was dead already, you can't kill me twice can you now? Can't kill a man twice can you? [Eve]

Three members also described moral emotions such as guilt which emerged in the aftermath of fatal violence. Respondents reported this sense of guilt for a number of reasons; for example, the concern that they 'could have done more'. Jennifer discussed this matter when questioned about the impact of violent bereavement upon herself and her family:

Yeah there was a lot of mixed - there was a rollercoaster of feelings I think. I mean at first it was shock and disbelief and y'know how did it happen. And then there was feelings of guilt I think y'know probably could of done a little bit more. [Jennifer]

The sense of guilt that these participants expressed might be more broadly associated with feelings of responsibility for their younger brother or son. Similarly, James discussed his sense of guilt over how he might have shared his last moments with his brother:

And yeah I recall that that last time that I could have seen him, I could have got up and seen him but I chose not to and it was hard to deal with that after his death. I think that was one of the reasons the counselling was very, very supportive for me because I felt very guilty that I didn't get up that...and look him in the eye, and see him 'cause if *I'd known that was going to be the last time, he was never going to be in my presence alive, y'know how different that moment would have been d'ya know what I mean.* [James; emphasis added]

Again, remembering that these experiences of violent bereavement are diverse, it is also important to consider the situational context of these discussions. For example, James mentions in the extract above his effort to 'recall', particularly emphasising the past tense of these recollections. James' description of this episode is at once a collection of his previous memories of this interaction between himself and his

brother, his reflection and revision of this experience, and its location more broadly within his story of violent bereavement. Again, this echoes the iterative nature of narrative in suffering; stories are constantly retold to accommodate new experiences.

Some members also discussed 'what if' moments which may have represented attempts to make meaning from violent bereavement. As James alludes to above, these 'what if' moments perhaps represented attempts at trying to explain and understand the effects of secondary victimisation. Stephanie also discusses this in relation to the death of a family member and stressing her desire to 'turn back the time':

...And yeah, I think looking back it's just like...*if I could just turn back the time* and be there in the house that day when he had gone out, I wish I was there, I wish he would have been with somebody else who would have known what to do in the situation, who might have been able to protect him, or stop him from getting out of the car that night. [Stephanie; emphasis added]

Similarly, Eve shared her thoughts on the death of her son reflecting on the different ways those events might have unfolded if she had done something differently:

And every time I think about that I think you know something Eve if you had obeyed, your son would have been still alive. [Eve]

Others recounted feelings of unfairness concerning the circumstances of bereavement. Five participants expressed sentiments of confusion regarding the way in which the event of violent bereavement had unfolded. For some, this concern echoed the state of unpredictability, disempowerment and uncertainty that bereavement through homicide imposes upon families discussed in previous sections. Both James and Anna, for example, describe their confusion at the circumstances of their brother's death:

And I was sort of...it was confusing because his friend was in a gang or was a drug dealer so I didn't believe why he...with two of them dying, the one that was...that appeared to be more actively involved in drugs and gangs and things like that - he lived and our brother died. And it felt so unfair at the time as well. [James]

...if my brother had been involved in a gang and we had known he was a gang member or whatever then you half kind of expect those kinds of things to happen really. But you know, he was just kind of targeted I think because of who his friends were really. [Anna]

This sentiment was also echoed by Rosa who expressed the incomprehensibility of the situation, particularly the idea that her nephew could be involved in gang activity:

And I couldn't understand why my nephew was involved because I know he was never in a gang and people spoken quite highly of him. Even people from church they said wherever he sees them he would stop and talk to them for a young lad to do that. [Rosa; emphasis added]

As these extracts might suggest, the nature of violent bereavement is particular and distinctive to other types of bereavement. Bereavement through homicide is unique in that it is the sudden, unexpected and disruptive of meaning structures that allow for predictability (Armour, 2002; Gekoski et al., 2013; Rock, 1998). In this instance, conflict emerges between the family's intimacy with and understanding of their lost loved ones and the implication by some that they might be involved in 'gang activity'. This reflects discussions of 'stigmatised loss' or 'disenfranchised loss' where relatives report feelings of shame and confusion. To some extent this also speaks to the shape, form and, ultimately, how violence was embedded within the community at the time. The nature of lethal violence in this case required that *Mothers Against Violence* become advocates of both victims of gang violence and criminalisation of social and structural problems (see Williams, 2015). *Mothers Against Violence* therefore responded to both those who have lost members to gun violence and those who are involved or concerned about others who might be.

5.3.3 Support and Response in the Aftermath of Violence

In the aftermath of violence, victims of violence enter encounters with family, friends, and communities with each interaction encouraging or undermining coping and recovery (Kenney, 2004). Seeing the construction of victims' agency as a 'corridor with

many doors', Kenney's (2004:245) approach considers each encounter as opportunities which inform coping strategies:

Each door represents a different type of encounter, such as those with 'family, friends, the community, self-help and 'victims', groups, therapeutic professionals, and legal institutions. Over time, individuals could choose to 'knock' at particular doors while avoiding - or not noticing - others. Sometimes they would find a welcoming response, other times not, such that they chose to move on. Sometimes they were initially welcomed in, but later chose, or were forced to leave. Other times, once inside, they had a harder time leaving (e.g. witnesses in the justice system). Each person's unique accumulation of such encounters acted as the interactional framework underpinning both their choices, and their ultimate coping ability.

Members of *Mothers Against Violence* provided some discussion on the support (or lack of) that bereaved family members received in the immediate aftermath of violence. However, there was very little discussion about the formal and informal mechanisms of support for bereavement through homicide outside of the group (although, this is perhaps due to the assumed significance of support mechanisms provided by *Mothers Against Violence* and focus of the research, see Chapter 7). Those who did discuss the availability of support in the immediate aftermath of homicide reported different experiences. While some reported receiving some - although fractional and unsystematic - support, there was one participant who described the period following her relative's death as a lonely experience. When questioned on whether she had received any support, Stephanie responded:

Not really no. Just kind of went through it all on my own.

...so kind of put that to the back of my mind. But yeah that was just - I think being able to put it to the back of my mind without getting help was what carried it on later which was, I think that's why I became depressed later on because I never really dealt with it, I never spoke to anyone and my thing was always writing so I'd write so I'd write stories, I'd write poems. [Stephanie]

This experience spoke to co-victims' needs for understanding from those around them. Both James and Eve spoke of their experiences of the immediate response from those they knew:

...again one of the things about church and the life of church as well - people didn't know what to say to me you know what I mean. [Eve]

And I think right then they were in shock, there was a feeling of shock. People didn't know what to say, or what to do. I think that's the other horrible thing - is that it's not like a normal death, nothing's a normal death, but when it's murder it's just, people don't know how to treat you and what you find is that people will avoid you and avoid the subject and people won't talk about it. [James]

As James summarises, part of his experience of bereavement was the lack of understanding and identification from the surrounding communities. Indeed, as Jane discussed, while those around you can express and offer their support, for some, there were limits of empathy:

...because I think that unless that has happened to you, I don't think you can possibly understand. I think you can empathise. And that's what empathy is, being alongside somebody and being there but that feeling is like something - there's nothing to describe it when that happens to you at all. [Jane]

For those two members who *did* discuss support they received outside *Mothers Against Violence*, two social mechanisms were important; namely, the family unit and informal community groups. While James observed a lack of understanding from some people, he continued to mention the importance of an informal community men's group that met shortly after his brother was killed:

The only things that I recall was the group that I was in - if it wasn't for that group, those men that I was sort of seeing at that time and we had a meeting booked in that same evening and they called to cancel it. And I said don't cancel it, I need it, it was one time I needed it, it's now, let's meet, and we did meet that same evening. And I was so glad that we did because for me that was the greatest experience of warmth about the community because my local inner-city community and the people around me I guess they were in shock, they didn't know what to do or to say. And the best thing for most people was to avoid the subject and to carry on as though nothing had happened. [James]

On the other hand, Marie described the importance of family networks and support in the immediate aftermath of violence. In this case, the family provided a large but close-knit network of support for those dealing with bereavement through homicide:

... it was sad, but yeah, we just carried on, that's how we are I think as a family anyway when things happen. [Marie]

Violent bereavement prompted a moment of crisis requiring resolution. In these encounters with others, whether family or the community, victims could learn, reject, or 'innovate' the coping strategies of others (Kenney, 2004:245–246). Referring to these decisional junctions, three participants emphasised the 'sink or swim' conviction when confronted with these events. Andrea addressed this in her discussion of her previous life experiences:

So, I had a choice then, life is about choices whether to sink or swim and I decided to swim [laughs] ... if I had I just given up then, if I had said 'oh d'you know what I can't do this anymore' which I probably did but something inside... was far stronger than me and that strength that was within helped me through the tough times and so that's why I have a heart and a passion to help others. Because I know what it's like, I've been there, absolutely been there. So that's why I do what I do and I enjoy it very, very much. [Andrea; emphasis added]

Similarly, James and Alison discussed the variability of possible experiences in the aftermath of violence:

...and I think that the lesson for me in this is that you can - when things like this happen to you, because they're so unpredictable, you can't plan for the murder of a relative - but what you can do is use it either for good or for evil - I think some people get very angry and very bitter and can sometimes hate life...I've worked with families who have been bereaved as a result of gun violence and they internalise it and can become quite unhappy, turn to drink, depression and things like - which is all totally understandable when I think about how low you can feel but I think if you do I guess address that internal pain and channel it into something positive you can turn these things around to reach and to become something beautiful. [James; emphasis added]

So yeah it was not a particularly nice upbringing which makes me now make sure my son has a good upbringing. So, it's that - so I think you can go one way or the other 'cause I've got a brother who is now violent to his wife. Whereas I won't accept violence anywhere in my life so I think it can either put you on the same path or it can make you go 'I'm not ever having that in my life ever again'. And that's what it did with me. [Alison; emphasis added]

This decision to 'sink or swim' can otherwise be understood as critical juncture at which point actors are required to reorganise their stories in concert with others; survivors, co-victims, families or communities. Systematic responses to the question

of support after bereavement – outside *Mothers Against Violence* – was lacking and those that did make reference to such support focused on informal support in the community and family networks. However, these excerpts speak to how families ‘confront’ experiences of violent bereavement. Bereavement through homicide confronted co-victims with a series of junctions or turning points that bring encounters with different actors (Kenney, 2004). If indeed, as Kenney (2004) argues, victims are subjected to encounters that lend coping strategies, information and understanding, *Mothers Against Violence* might be considered as an ‘accumulation of encounters’ between different invested interests.

5.4 Contextualising *Mothers Against Violence*

As stated previously, *Mothers Against Violence* emerged at a moment of high emotion, acute grief and community outcry. This section, however, looks to provide a contextual account of the landscape in which *Mothers Against Violence* emerged and, in doing so, show the precise moment in which the stories above coalesced. Participants revealed that *Mothers Against Violence* emerged in the context of four interrelated factors; i) the prevalence of single parent families and absence of fathers, ii) the cultural symbolism regarding mothers in afro-Caribbean communities, iii) a lack of trust in local authorities, and iv) domestic violence against women. These four themes are explored below to illustrate the early origins of *Mothers Against Violence* as an exercise in storying the life of the organisation.

5.4.1 Single-parent Families

The prevalence of single parent families was a theme repeatedly emphasised by participants in defining the context in which *Mothers Against Violence* emerged. As James described:

I think a lot of those mothers that came together were single mothers. Many of the young people that died, if we were to look at the figures and address them, there were a number of things they had in common. A lot of them were from the inner city, a lot of them were black or mixed race. A lot of them were of single parent mothers and, actually, there wasn't a father involved in many of those families... [James]

As James explained, single parent families were considered as a defining feature in the emergence of the group with participants referring to the absence of father figures at the time of its foundation. Similarly, when questioned about the significance of mothers in the group's origins, Alison stressed the status of mothers in lone parent families.

I think the picture of a mum is more likely to - and a grieving mum at that - is more likely to give an impact because there a lot of absent fathers and there are a lot of - so a lot of young men have been brought up by women on their own. So I think that's probably why it resonates with people because a lot of them have come from single parent families [Alison]

Many observed that it was the sheer absence of fathers, at least in the precise moment that *Mothers Against Violence* emerged, that characterised the nature of the group and the knock-on effect this had on the constitution of the group (this is discussed further in Section 6.23). Comparisons can be drawn here with the Mothers of Srebrenica in Bosnia where women dominated the make-up of the group simply due the fact that there were 'no men left' following the massacre (Leydesdorff, 2011:38). This sits in contrast to the context of Moss Side where fathers had the choice to engage and be involved.

5.4.2 The Cultural Story and Image of the Mother

The role of mothers was considered to be of importance not only within the family, but within the Afro-Caribbean community. Here, James and Anna make reference to the symbolic status of motherhood within the Afro-Caribbean community at the time:

... And yeah so I think that's why, it was mothers because...*mothers were the power of our community* and with inner city communities you tend to find that's what happens... [James; emphasis added]

Because mothers are usually like the head of the family when you look at black Caribbean families, even though they're very matriarchal a lot of them, and a lot of them are that way even if fathers are involved in the child's life, they don't necessarily live in the same household, so it is very female orientated. [Anna]

To some extent, this echoes research more broadly demonstrating high rates of single parenthood among Caribbean communities in the UK at the time (see, for example Berthoud, 2000). As participants indicated, the status of mothers in single parent families provided an important social and cultural feature of the landscape in which *Mothers Against Violence* emerged. Continuing, Alison discusses the role and image of mothers as figures of leadership and respect in both family units and in the way they relate to communities:

But I think the mum figure, everyone can relate to a mum figure, when most people can relate to a mum figure and I think that's what it is and I think it's a bit of cultural thing as well for black young men and elderly black women [Alison]

In her discussion of the group's foundation, Rosa also refers, in passing, to the emotional and moral reactions that the label '*Mothers Against Violence*' elicits from the surrounding community:

...I think - there is something about Mothers Against Violence - when you say Mothers Against Violence people stop and start thinking and to me that's how I feel. [Rosa]

The image of the grieving mother is a recurring issue in the context of social movements mobilised around suffering. Although this will be explored more closely in Chapters 6 and 8, it is important to note here how these cultural scripts around motherhood provide the landscapes for which *Mothers Against Violence* emerged.

5.4.3 Lack of trust in local authorities

Members also drew attention to the history of distrust within inner-city communities in Manchester of public authorities; in particular, the police. For example, recounting from his own observations of the group, James remarked on the community's relationship with public services including those of Victim Support:

And what I realised that there's a mistrust of national services, especially services that are linked to the police, and government. So, inner city families tend not to want access things like that because there's sort of a trust thing [James]

In lieu of trusted services, *Mothers Against Violence* acted as an important intermediary giving individuals the opportunity to consult this grassroots organisation for advice, support or, simply, for information. As Tara elaborates:

...you got any information that you were scared to go to the police with or you were scared to tell somebody else, you knew you could say it in the group [Tara]

In this respect, *Mothers Against Violence* acted as important middle ground, bridging the divide between affected communities and local authorities, particularly amid the tumultuous public-police relations. Alison discusses the role of *Mothers Against Violence* as a 'bridge' between communities:

I think it was set up in the beginning to bridge a gap between the community and the police - in that people would tell somebody at MAV something that they wouldn't necessarily go to the police with and it was about trying to repair the relationship between the community and the police. [Alison]

...it's a difficult bridge to gap and I think having someone like MAV in the middle to facilitate that communication helps a lot because then you've got the language of the community being spoken by the person in the middle. So, you've got the police, then you've got MAV and then you've got the community. MAV in the middle speak their language so they can put it to them in this way. [Alison]

Here, community groups such as *Mothers Against Violence* are a valuable intermediary for communicating local knowledge and interests. This is consistent with images of

civil society organisations as responsive and inclusive solutions to growing disillusionment between States and citizens (for example, Banks & Hulme, 2014; Lewis, 2005). Aldridge et. al. (2011:375) have highlighted similar issues in their study of parents of gang members, noting the mistrust of statutory agencies and feeling “that official responses to them betrayed a fundamental misunderstanding of the conditions of their lives”. This distrust of local authorities, the role of single parents and the cultural status of mothers were important characterising features and were oft-commented themes in the origins of the organisation. However, there were also theoretically instructive themes identified in rendering the landscape of *Mothers Against Violence*.

5.4.4 History of Violence Against Women

While only one participant commented on this theme, the prevalence of violence against women and the climate of distrust in public services were conceptually illustrative and contextually useful for understanding *Mothers Against Violence* (see, for example Buetow, 2010 for a discussion on 'saliency analysis'). When discussing the emergence of the group, Tara's experience of growing up in inner-city Manchester highlighted the impact of domestic violence in the community. Recalling the question of the involvement of fathers, Tara discussed the importance of the group as a 'safe space':

...I remember a couple of the women distinctly, you know, it has to be a woman only zone... And a lot of them coming from domestic violence backgrounds and feeling that men could, um...they just wouldn't feel free to speak about their sons openly. Again, some of the women were in broken relationships with their partners who had since left and they didn't want to speak about the issues their sons were having at home if their son's fathers were present in the meetings. [Tara; emphasis added]

According to Tara's experience, the impact of domestic abuse in the community was a pertinent history to the origins of the group. Continuing, Tara realised the prevalence of these incidents of violence in defining the group:

...when I think back now that's probably why it was decided at the time, we are mothers but mothers who ourselves are coming from a background of some form of abuse or violence implicated by men onto us, which was never ever openly declared or discussed but once you sat down with individual members maybe ten, *fifteen years later, everyone had a story to tell*. Yeah. Most women I'd spoken to all had a story to tell of either, you know, domestic abuse, psychological abuse, emotional abuse, from my mind... [Tara; emphasis added]

Acting as this 'safe space', *Mothers Against Violence* offered a secure emotional setting for honest dialogue and a space in which women would 'feel comfortable being able to speak'. As Tara alludes to, these stories were the eventual culmination of a series of exchanges invariably mediated by shifts in community narratives, the act of sharing experiences, and the precise moment of exchange. To what extent these stories are organised and structured by these mediating processes are, therefore, important methodological questions of the role of narrative within victimology.

5.5 Motivations behind *Mothers Against Violence*

Having detailed the landscape in which individuals arrived at *Mothers Against Violence*, the next section examines the motivations as an explanation of *why* people became involved. From the process of data analysis, two codes were created to illustrate the motivations of victim activists; 'drive' – the reasons for becoming involved – and 'engagement' – stories of their involvement. The motivations are explored, firstly, to examine the nature of their initial involvement and, secondly, as a pretext for understanding the purpose the group has for different individuals.

While initial coding originally separated motivations and drives – or, in other words, *why* individuals get involved – from the aims of such movements – or, in other words,

what they want to achieve – the process of data analysis found that aims and motivations were difficult to separate. *Why* people got involved and *what* they wanted to achieve were conflated so that what they wanted became why they were involved. Untangling these aims proved to be a difficult task. The aims shared by respondents were a conflation of individual aims, collective aims, individuals' interpretation of collective aims and a reflection on past aims and the future aspirations. This is further complicated by the entry and exit of members at different points in time. For this reason, the aims and motivations are addressed together in this section.

Confirming earlier ideas on the range of victims' experiences, the drives for individual engagement also varied. These drives ranged from the impetus of community outcry, the need for dialogue, experiencing loss and the act of meaning-making, preserving memory by preventing further victimisation, as an attempt to re-divert energies, the feeling of empowerment, serving others and giving back to the community, and the notion of protecting future generations and 'parenting' communities. This section will address each of these in turn.

5.5.1 Community Outcry

Mothers Against Violence emerged in response to community outcry following a spate of gun-related deaths in inner-city Manchester. As Tara recalls from her memory of the group's beginnings:

...I think it started off, there'd been a few, there'd been like a peak in violence over the summer, the summer months...I know there'd been maybe two or three deaths in Manchester and there'd been some outside of Manchester as well. ...But the young men involved were from Manchester and there'd been instances where young men had been injured. Um...and it kinda just got to the point which *people was thinking enough is enough* we need to kinda like sit down and do something about it and so that's how it first came about. [Tara; emphasis added]

This sudden impetus was also mentioned by Anna and Marie, relatives of one of the victims killed in the summer of 1999:

I think the community was kind of a bit like - 'cause my brother was the third person to be shot within - shot and killed - within like three weeks. It was like right y'know usually in shootings or in deaths that have happened like years apart, or a good few months apart but this was like three deaths within three weeks. So *there was kind of this has got to stop, what is going on here? And I think the community probably kind of...woke up a bit really in terms of what is going on.* [Anna; emphasis added]

...but that's when the cry came from the community that y'know this can't go on [Marie]

In response to these demands, *Mothers Against Violence* emerged to help in the search of information, support and change. With events in inner-city Manchester reaching the 'peak of violence', members of the community began to gather for discussions about what could be done to respond to increasing violence. According to two of the original members of the group, the initial meeting was attended by around twenty to thirty members of the community – predominantly women and mostly mothers who had sons affected by gun and gang violence; those who had lost relatives and those who feared losing relatives.

5.5.2 The Need for Information and Dialogue

For those involved in the early life of *Mothers Against Violence*, this recent spate of killings created what some saw as a need for dialogue; dialogue between communities, dialogue between communities and the police, and the dialogue created through shared experience (see Chapter 6). For Eve, this signified conversation *between* communities, for searching for information and understanding after the death of her son. Eve discussed her early involvement in the organisation and the role that this played in meeting her needs after the death of her son:

...and I used to turn up every single time, every time - because one of the things I realised it was meeting a need in my life... [Eve]

She continues to discuss an earlier conversation with another bereaved mother who had the opportunity to meet her son's killer and her own frustrations at not knowing who had killed her son:

Because I would like to find that out as well. Why did they kill my son? What it is that made them kill my son you know what I mean. So I can know [that] his death - well I don't believe his death is in vain - but when you can hang something on it you can say oh well I understand or I don't understand - or you can talk to the person. Say how do you feel now? Do you feel it was alright to kill my son? And you'll get some answers, you will get something, they will tell you because this is what happened to that woman. [Eve]

Mothers Against Violence met Eve's need for information, or at least the *process* of searching for information, by creating dialogue between different communities. However, as three of the members discussed, the group also bridged a connection between the community and the police. For example, Tara saw *Mothers Against Violence* as a space for social support and understanding for those who felt they had nowhere else to turn:

And it was always like a support network in that sense, where if you knew something was going on and you didn't know who to speak to you knew you speak to someone in the group. [Tara]

For some, the group represented a space to share information and experiences. Returning to Alison's discussion, the practice of creating dialogue between mistrusted authorities and the community was an important 'bridge to gap':

...it's a difficult bridge to gap and I think having someone like MAV in the middle to facilitate that communication helps a lot because then you've got the language of the community being spoken by the person in the middle. [Alison]

The grassroots nature of *Mothers Against Violence* is perhaps what allowed for these ideas and experiences to be shared in a trusted and 'safe space'. As Alison states, the group worked to 'repair' this relationship between the community and police to bridge divides and create dialogues, and eventually, to replenish trust in local

authorities. Dialogue was therefore an important theme in the early life of the organisation – both within communities and between communities and authorities.

5.5.3 Serving Others and Giving Back to the Community

The need to create dialogue between communities also reflected broader interests in serving others in the community. To some extent, this drive to serve others resonated with some participants' practice of Christianity (see Chapter 8). Participants placed great emphasis on serving others in need; whether through raising awareness, providing support or sharing their experiences. For example, Andrea discussed the difficult loss of someone close to her and the prospect of managing this experience to serve others:

I came through that over a period of time but then I realised that if somebody else is going through something like that - the shock, the loss of bereavement, a loved one - then to have someone there on the other end of the phone, someone you can talk to, to share your fears, and concerns with then *that's where I wanted to give back*. So, I was a survivor and I wanted to help others who was going through. [Andrea; emphasis added]

Similarly, Eve described her view of how *Mothers Against Violence* represented a vehicle for serving others, speaking to the notion of how individual experiences can drive public acknowledgement:

Once you've discovered it those people can come along and do what they're supposed to do to bring that to pass. And it's not just for me, it's not just for you, the future is not about you because we're very me orientated and I orientated. No. *It's for all of us. So what we are doing here it's for every - all of us - everyone's going to benefit from it* [Eve; emphasis added]

For others, this notion of giving back to the community was based on the idea of repaying into the community from which they may have taken; whether it was a source of social support or professional development. Andrea raised this when discussing her emotional investment in the community and her involvement in *Mothers Against Violence* as repaying this debt:

... just to know that y'know my self-esteem, this is my community, *these are my people* and so this is my way of giving back because I've taken over the years in terms of y'know being a young rebellious teenager, being there at the riots and everything. And so this is my way of giving back to my community, and *I think as we go through cycles in life and there's a time to give and a time to receive and this is my way of giving back.* [Andrea]

This point was also raised by Diane and Matthew who recalled their sensitivity to giving back to the community. Both were eager to return the contributions to their communities:

And you never feed back, you go away, you don't invest in the community and it's well I'm not that sort of person and erm it kind of seemed before it started it made me kind of want to do stuff in the community, and do stuff. And I kind said I wanted to get involved anyway, in some shape or form and wanted to put, put - y'know try and make a difference in the community. [Matthew]

And at that stage, I wasn't doing anything for my community at that stage. I was just going about me, it was my life and my education, and my children and I wasn't - and when I stopped and I asked myself that and I realised I wasn't actually doing anything that's when I committed to do something. [Diane]

Accordingly, the prospect of serving others and giving back to the community were important motivations for becoming involved in the organisation. This notion of community payback was also suggestive of a drive to protect future generations of the community.

5.5.4 'Parenting' Communities

For many, the drive to 'give back' was seen as necessary recompense for individuals who had leant on the community over the years. However, this need to give back was also framed by members as a safeguard for their children – otherwise seen as future citizens of the community. Investing time in the children of the community was seen by these six participants as protection for the future of the community and the role that they will have in shaping it. As Anna explains:

That MAV supports families where children could have been involved in crime and have given them that opportunity or experience where they've gone down another path. So, I think for me, it kind of makes me feel like I'm contributing to the community, and to a better and more peaceful community really. A place where people are not afraid to see their children growing up and I think as a community we have a lot to offer...I feel that my involvement with MAV that kind of contributes to a better community. A community that people will want to kind of live in. [Anna]

Focusing on the positive potentials of future generations, involvement is seen as an investment in protection. James takes this point further in his discussion of the role of parenthood in *Mothers Against Violence*:

I think now I'm a father to an 18-year old, I think looking back at my life and what I've been able to achieve, I do so much for him now as well. So there's a sense of my brother who has gone, I've also my son now who I want to be able to get the best choices for his life, for him to be able to make the best choices, for him to surround himself with the right types of people. So, there's a sense of looking at the next generation which includes my son, for them to have better opportunities really.

So *actually we [parent villages?]* if you know what I mean, and I see that now. *I can't just take care of my son*, because my son has to go out and be in the community and he needs to be kept safe within the community... [James]

Here, there is an active interest in the lives of other children in the community; not just as *children* but as future citizens that shape society. Investment in the future of Manchester is therefore seen as an investment in the protection of their own children as Diane summarises:

So, as a parent, and now as a grandparent I'm really interested in what happens in Manchester in the future. [Diane]

This role of bereaved family activism as an investment in the community, and therefore children, echoed the notion of *Mothers Against Violence* as a quasi-familial unit; not only in how they relate to the community but in how they relate to one-another within the group. The prospect of shared experience represented important fusions for understanding, meaning and empathy (see Chapter 6).

5.5.5 Experiencing Loss and the Act of Meaning-Making

For those who had experience of loss, whether through direct or indirect victimisation, engaging in *Mothers Against Violence* provided space for drives to find information, make sense of loss and achieve in the memory of others. One participant noted her original motivations for attending the group:

All I went there to do was to sit down, to listen, to see if I can find out who killed my son and why. That's what was in my mind but God had other plans for me [laughs] but that was my mind for going. And so that's what I did. I went and I listened and I heard... [Eve]

Although Eve was the only participant to talk directly to this, four participants remarked on the lack of police support and information following bereavement reflecting Alison's earlier comments of *Mothers Against Violence* acting as a bridge between communities and the police. For others who had suffered bereavement through homicide, involvement in the group represented an important opportunity for working through loss. Rock (2004) has made similar observations in his study of policy-making regarding victims' rights in the UK. Commenting on the collective responses to violence from victims, Rock (2004:414) notes that campaigning was an attempt at:

[r]emoralizing the world that has been thrown into chaos, a quest for knowledge that might restore control, to ensuing formation and maintenance of strong binary oppositions, commemoration of the dead, restoration of meaning that would have been an otherwise meaningless act.

For some, *Mothers Against Violence* represented a method of coping and an attempt to make meaning or 're-moralize' a disrupted world. For example, James discusses this in relation to the death of his brother:

I think how I internalised it, it was that my brother was no longer here but I was going to live his life as well as live my own so to achieve as much as I could all in his name. So, and I still do feel to this day, when I've achieved something that I've achieved it for him, as well as achieved for myself. That was the way I think I internalised things and how I dealt with things that if I

could achieve anything and credit it to him then that was my way of dealing with his loss. [James]

Similarly, Stephanie remarked on the connection her cousin that *Mothers Against Violence* maintained through its actions.

I felt like this was started obviously because of my cousin and yeah it was a *way that he kind of lived on* so I felt like I should play a part in that... [Stephanie; emphasis added]

To some extent, this bid to achieve in the memory of others or as a vehicle for maintaining connections with lost relatives reflects an attempt to prevent further experiences of victimisation. For example, Andrea discussed her experience of loss and her resolve to support those going through similar victimisation:

I think for anyone going through any sort of difficulty in their life, just to know that someone cares, that someone is there, that you're not alone, it's not all in your mind, you're not losing the plot...[Andrea]

Again, the significance of shared experience can be found not only in its ability to empower (see Chapter 6) but in its intensity and urgency to prevent others experiencing the same loss. As Tara explains in the early life of the organisation:

But I think, some people have more reason to push for it, um, if you've lost a child, *that's your passion, that's your drive, you don't want anyone else to lose a child*. So I think that's where Eve came to the fore, came to front... [Tara; emphasis added]

She continues to discuss the importance of preventing others' experiences of this loss as a means of preserving the memory of others:

Obviously, she wanted the killers of her son found, but it wasn't the be all and end all, she just wanted to make sure no one else suffered that loss. *And she knew that, no matter what happened to the murder of her child, it would not bring her child back*. So, it was more about... that's done. There's nothing I can do to change it but I can make sure it doesn't happen to anyone else or I can young people avoid getting themselves killed or becoming a killer themselves. So that was that. I think her driving force, her passion, probably pulled her through the grief as well... [Tara; emphasis added]

While half of those interviewed had experiences of violent bereavement, it should also be noted that not everyone involved shared these experiences. Therefore, before concluding this section on motivations behind *Mothers Against Violence*, it is worth discussing those more informal or 'accidental' paths into bereaved family activism.

5.5.6 'Accidental' or informal paths

Whether discussing motivations as a need for dialogue, a response to community outcry or for making meaning from loss, it should be clear that not all routes into the group were the product of concerted action or conscious decision making. Rather, for four of the participants, the path into *Mothers Against Violence* was more scattered and informal. These participants included both those bereaved by homicide and those who had not. For these participants, involvement with the group began through simply having a mutual friend, perhaps from being in the same community, or responding to volunteering opportunities.

The point here is not to undermine the value of these kinds of motivations. However, it is important to emphasise that it is not a simple causal relationship between the experience of loss and becoming involved in victim movements. As Eve remarks below, for some of her family, their route into *Mothers Against Violence* resembled more of an informal 'wander' than a precise plan:

...some of my family are in MAV but they didn't come in MAV at first, they kind of a *wandered in*, it was a wander. [Eve; emphasis added]

It is not helpful to assume there is always a connection between loss and engaging in bereaved family activism. The notion of activism as meaning making is variable over time as with many of the other motivations discussed here. These drives for engagement therefore materialise and dissipate at different points in the life of the organisation. Bereaved family activism served different purposes for different people

at different points. People's experiences became relevant at different points in the life of the organisation and, vice versa, the group became relevant at different points in the life of individuals. In this respect, these organisations appear much more organic and dynamic than previous literature has allowed for. There is by no means a linear relationship between suffering and activism just as there are no easy dichotomies such as those assumed between silence and passivity, and voice and agency (see Chapter 8). From this data, not all those with experiences of serious and fatal violence engaged immediately in family activism. Rather, as Chapter 7 will show, groups are 'made and remade' (see Latour, 2005:34) by members engaging and disengaging at different points in the life of the organisation.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter asked how individuals confront experiences of violent bereavement to arrive at the moment of collective action. As a way of storying the early life of *Mothers Against Violence*, stories of loss, as relayed by members, were presented. These stories were vividly recounted, showing variation and being contingent on encounters with friends, families and communities. In this sense, *Mothers Against Violence* was presented as an 'accumulation of encounters' that emerged in a particular socio-historical moment, influenced by the imagery of bereaved mothers, histories of distrust in public authorities, single parent families and the prevalence of domestic violence. Just as experiences of bereavement varied by individual, this variation also manifested in a number of different motivations.

Returning to the research question, this chapter highlighted how victims' families managed experiences of lethal violence to become catalysts for change. By understanding the different experiences of lethal violence, *Mothers Against Violence* represented an important meeting point for sharing these stories. The next chapter

follows these stories and the 'work' that sharing such stories do in spaces designed to hear voices.

Chapter 6 - Shared Experience in *Mothers Against Violence*

6.1 Introduction

In the aftermath of lethal violence, victims, witnesses and concerned communities are confronted with uncertainties that prompt both personal and public responses. The previous chapter detailed the personal experiences in an effort to foreground the suffering of the victim. Hearing the stories of those involved allowed some insight into the context in which *Mothers Against Violence* emerged and an understanding of the motivations of those involved. This chapter aims to tie these stories of ‘personal troubles’ to the collective responses found in *Mothers Against Violence*. This chapter asks: what is the role of shared experience in mobilising collective responses to violence?

Drawing upon Rock’s (1998) phenomenological account of victim organisations, this chapter begins with a discussion of shared experiences as ‘fusions’. In his account of victim organisations, Rock (1998) discusses the distinction between ‘fusions’ and ‘fissions’ in collective responses to victimisation. While ‘fusions’ provided opportunities for shared experience and understanding, ‘fissions’ represent the differences in identity, experience and strategies between victims. Here, the chapter considers the importance of shared experience for encouraging empathy and understanding between *co*-victims of serious violence. The concept of ‘moral authority’ in victimhood is introduced to examine the notion of shared experiences in creating ‘fusions’ between otherwise dissimilar individuals. The image of the mother in public victimhood is explored here as a platform for connecting those experiences of *Mothers Against Violence* with wider communities. This established, the chapter then moves on to consider the unintended consequences of moral authority – or

‘fissions’. This is explored to understand how particular individuals not only become involved but sustain a prolonged engagement; or, how they are able to surpass differences in identification. This is situated within a broader discussion on voice and representation within and between different communities. Remembering that this movement is an important space for dialogue, the chapter concludes by presenting shared experiences as an effective platform for bridging divides between communities.

6.2 ‘Fusions’ through Shared Experiences of Bereavement

Writing on the concept of ‘ethical loneliness’ and the injustices of failing to be heard, Stauffer (2015:143) stresses the importance of spaces for hearing stories of suffering:

A continuing resentment or desire for vengeance might lead to violence. But it might also lead to political activism, commitment to social organizing, solidarity between and among abandoned persons and populations, creation of groups bent on getting new truths heard and assuaging ethical loneliness, and any of a host of other positive developments.

These spaces for stories of suffering present an opportunity for repair and recovery where harms can be addressed and victims can rebuild (Stauffer, 2015). Reporting on their own experiences of sharing stories of suffering, participants in this study described *Mothers Against Violence* as an important space for opening dialogue across different individuals and collectives. While characterised by such diverse experiences, identities and histories, *Mothers Against Violence* represent important gathering spaces for an array of trajectories. For those involved in the early life of the group, the violence in Summer 1999 prompted what some saw as a need for dialogue; searching for information, support and understanding after the death of a relative. For some, therefore, *Mothers Against Violence* provided a platform for sharing experiences and a supportive ‘social fabric’ (Huyse, 2003:63). As Humphrey (2012:62) notes, commenting on the emergence of victim organisations in post-conflict Bosnia, these

groups are defined and “socially constituted by their shared experience of violence, trauma and loss”. This section explores how such personal experiences of victimisation are shared with families and communities in the aftermath of violence. Here, it is argued that *Mothers Against Violence* consisted of opportunities for fusion through empathetic understanding, dialogue and shared experience.

6.2.1 Moral Authority of Shared Experience

From fieldwork, shared experience was identified as acting in two forms. Firstly, shared experience allowed for differences to be bridged between those involved in *Mothers Against Violence*. This is particularly relevant for the early life of the organisation where shared experience offered a socially supportive quality. Sharing private experiences between members offered an important source of social support and public acknowledgement; support which perhaps cannot be found in existing social circles. Tara discussed this when commenting on the unique *social fabric* of bereaved family activism:

I just think how people found a place within the group and how it gave them a sense of 'I'm with women that have experienced the same thing that I have' - especially for those mums that had lost their children 'cause I can't imagine ever if ever anything happened to my son and then just being able to speak to someone who's lost her child in exactly the same way, at the same time in a similar kind of circumstances. [Tara]

Similarly, Diane commented on the role that such experiences in connecting and fusing the members of *Mothers Against Violence*:

...it's hard to imagine but that's what kind of connects us all – through all those experiences [Diane]

She continues to discuss the extraordinary nature of her experience and the effects this had on her relationships with other members:

Because we were going through something we'd never ever gone through before and never y'know probably never ever in our lives go through things

differently. So it was that *bonding thing*, and you can't explain it. It's just, it was *organic, it was real, it was just what happened*. [Diane; emphasis added]

While neither Tara nor Diane had experience of bereavement through homicide, both were fully in touch with the disrupting effects that such a period of violence had on the community. Relationships within *Mothers Against Violence* were fashioned through intimate and vivid experiences of loss, harnessing these shared experiences to prompt acknowledgement. Shared experience provided an opportunity to bridge divides across different identities, histories and communities which coalesce at the meeting point of *Mothers Against Violence*. Sharing these experiences with others also provided a platform for empathetic understanding, social support and, in some cases, empowerment. As Diane alludes to below, these relationships were grown out of, not only experiences of violence, but of the act of bereaved family activism itself:

...for me, it's took me on a journey - my God, when I think - it's only because you've come today that I'm thinking about things, I haven't really thought about things - it took me on a journey that the most amazing journey that most people don't experience [Diane]

Secondly, shared experience created dialogue and bridged divides between those involved in *Mothers Against Violence* and those who approached as outsiders. By sharing their stories with service users, members of *Mothers Against Violence* were able to reach out to offenders, ex-offenders and families of relatives involved in gun violence targeted through counselling services, community outreach activities and drugs misuse programmes. This research consists of a range of cases; different experiences, coping mechanisms, communities and individuals who have entered and exited at different points in the life of the organisation. Whether experiences of bereavement by homicide, marginalisation or of community loss, participants harnessing these experiences reported the benefits of sharing these stories with service users. Participants who had previous experiences of loss or violence described how

they were able to draw upon them in their work to create dialogue, build trust and empathy.

...obviously, you go off what you've experienced in your life [Alison]

This notion of using experience to inform can be found in concepts such as 'experts by experience' (Bradstreet, 2006), 'experiential knowledge' (Borkman, 1976; Dawney, 2013), Becker's (1963) concept of 'moral entrepreneurs', or 'moral authority' (Rock, 2004:414). Experiential knowledge is that which victims have gained exclusively through suffering. As Borkman (1976:446) comments in his analysis of self-help therapy groups:

Experiential knowledge is truth learned from personal experience with a phenomenon rather than a truth acquired by discursive reasoning, observation or reflection on information provided by others.

Often juxtaposed with technical knowledge, this experiential knowledge gains authority in its validation and reaffirmation by other individuals or collectives. As an extension of this, the concept of 'moral authority' refers to the currency that such stories carry in speaking on behalf of others or, in this case, encouraging recognition. *Mothers Against Violence* might then be considered as a critical space for such stories to be heard where they may have previously gone unheard (see Fricker, 2007; Stauffer, 2015).

6.2.2 Uses of Moral Authority: Leading by Example

The notion of knowledge through experience emerged as a latent theme of analysis; particularly, how shared experience offered an opportunity to build trust between individuals. Five participants remarked how their own experiences of suffering – whether through violence or experiences of imprisonment – were important points of identification and understanding between members of *Mothers Against Violence* and its users. Alison discussed this at length in her interview commenting on how

previous life experiences acted as points of reference and possibly drivers of change for otherwise dissimilar individuals:

But that's another thing aswell was that I'm able to use being in prison in the work that I do now 'cause I say I've been in prison but I've got a degree, I've got a masters, I've got a beautiful son who I love and I've got the best job in the world so they can't try and sort of blag me and say well I've been to prison I'll never be able to do anything 'cause I'm like well I'm sorry. *You've got me as a case in point* and that's not true. So yeah I always draw on real life stuff to deal with present day stuff *because people appreciate it having known that you've gone through the same sort of thing*. 'Cause I always compare it to it's like a midwife telling a mum what to do with the baby who's never had a baby. *Doesn't work, they don't listen*. [Alison; emphasis added]

Drawing upon the metaphor of the midwife, Alison emphasised how such shared experiences created dialogue between individuals. In Alison's words, these individuals represent a 'case in point' and shared some similarities with Breen-Smyth's (2007) 'moral beacons'¹³. The value of shared experience here is found in the effort by those with stories of suffering to lead by example. This effort to lead by example was also touched upon by Peter discussing his experience of imprisonment before arriving at *Mothers Against Violence*:

...it taught me a lot which is where you're coming from on this, to be able to relate and deal 'cause every offender I meet I always tell I've been there, I've worn the t-shirt. And there's an insta - you've been there, they say to me! I say, yeah I've been there, I've worn the t-shirt I've done my bit, wherever you've bit - you're immediately - *that barrier has dropped and there's a certain amount of trust between you*. [Peter; emphasis added]

Mothers Against Violence has over time represented a diverse collection of individuals each carrying their own histories and stories of suffering. Here, Peter discusses the

¹³ Breen-Smyth (2007:75) employs Thomas' (1999) concept of 'moral authority' to describe the political advantages that knowledge from suffering accrues in the context of Northern Ireland. Victims as 'moral beacons' are "held up to the rest of society in order to provide role models, to illustrate some higher state that others should aspire to, some feat of self-control and self-mastery that should be aimed for". Citing Thomas (1999), 'moral beacons' hold a type of 'deep moral knowledge' (Breen-Smyth, 2009:31)

significance of relaying these experiences in bridging divides between individuals. In a different sense, Matthew discussed the encouraging potential that he hoped his role in *Mothers Against Violence* might have for those growing up in his childhood neighbourhood:

...there's all this postcode stuff where you if put down you're going to our school or you got a [PLACE] postcode you're never going to get a job.... So part of why I say that because when I linked in with MAV, I liked do the school things and going back to my old school and going back there and a lot of the stuff was about positive role models and y'know you're not going to have to end up a gang member or drug dealer or whatever...And I'd kind of experienced exactly the same thing growing up and I felt like I could - when they're talking about positive role models. So in that way I felt like I could kind of contribute that you know I'm an academic, I'm a doctor, blah blah blah, this is where I come from kind of thing. [Matthew]

Employing these stories as a platform for understanding and trust-building, participants noted the advantages of drawing upon experiential knowledge as stories of motivation. Continuing this discussion on shared experiences, Alison described what she thought of as the 'relief' that sharing these stories had on service users:

I think they feel a bit relieved, because I can understand what they're saying y'know whether it's to do with the violence, the abuse, to do with prisons, to do with - I've been homeless - y'know I've taken every drug on the planet y'know all those things, it's kind of a relief 'cause I can say for example in prison I would remember when you're the last table to get fed and you didn't get a meal or talking about violence at home and I remember when this particular day when me dad tried to throw me through a window. Y'know stuff like - so they can relate directly to it and I'm very open about that all that sort of thing because like I say *it helps to get a dialogue going with somebody if you've had similar experiences to what they've been through and they know you've been through it by the way you tell it.* [Alison; emphasis added]

Alison's experience of suffering is used as a platform to connect with others experiencing similar issues. Here, typical divisions between private and public issues are eroded to engage and prompt acknowledgement from other audiences (see McGarry and Walklate, 2015). Personal experiences of suffering are confronted, mobilised and communicated to engage other communities. As Frank (2010:3) states,

“[s]tories breathe life not only into individuals, but also into groups that assemble around telling and believing certain stories”.

In Alison’s account, stories are employed to create dialogue. However, as the final line of this excerpt reminds us, there is still a sense of ineffability in these accounts. Whether these details are unknowable (i.e. the ‘transparent self problem’) or inexpressible by participants (i.e. the ‘transparent account problem’) remains to be seen (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000). Nonetheless, this problem reinforces the idea that narrative does not represent a ‘record of what happened’ (Bruner, 1987:12) but rather a joint project between participants and researchers. Rock (1998) confesses a similar point in his phenomenological account of victim organisations, *After Homicide*, noting the distance between researchers and participants’ attempts to convey their experience. Rather, Rock (1998:xiv) acknowledges that these research accounts are attempts at an “outsider’s reconstruction of another’s very unfamiliar world”.

Returning to Alison’s account above, these stories of suffering set normative assumptions about what responses to violence should or can look like. To some extent, victims’ stories are instructive; they tell us how to act or how we *should* act (see Presser and Sandberg, 2015). As James remarked in the previous chapter, *Mothers Against Violence* represented an opportunity to ‘channel’ experiences of suffering and redirect energies into new trajectories. Indeed, this group also discussed the ‘cathartic’ effects that sharing these experiences had on the participants themselves. When asked what the impact of sharing these stories might have on others, Alison elaborates:

I think it does because it’s almost cathartic to get it out and to - but to frame it around something that’s positive to say rather than I’m a victim of, I’m a survivor of. So if you put it in that way and then say y’know I’ve been in a really shit situation but this is where I am now. It makes me feel good that I can do that for somebody else. Y’know I’ve got people who’ve been through similar experiences but I’ve been through and *I can be sort of a motivation* to say well y’know c’mon I did it, yeah I had to do X, Y and Z to get where I am now so I’ll support you and I’ll do it because what we want to do is *empower* people,

rather than doing it for them, but give them the skills to be able to do it for themselves.... [Alison; emphasis added]

As Alison explains, sharing these stories with others allows individuals to reconceive and re-story these previous experiences in light of new ones. By reframing these experiences, these stories become potential catalysts and empowerment for the communities in which they are heard. Again, this reflects the notion of narrative as a 'performative' act in which stories act to mobilise others and prompt responses. Similarly, James discusses how his story of the loss of his brother might be harnessed not only as a catalyst for his own engagement but as a catalyst for others:

...because I feel I can help others who are going through this now, who are fearful of their youngsters who are involved might be in gangs. I think, yeah, it's given me a way of being able to use my pain to channel that into something positive so that I can see, I can see the impact of it and then it becomes itself the healing to the loss that I experienced in '99, in 1999 when my brother was murdered. [James]

The impact of bereaved family activism will be explored more closely in the next chapter. For now, it is important to acknowledge how these stories have the potential to organise individuals. As Plummer (1995:174) writes, "[s]tories need communities to be heard, but communities themselves are also built through story tellings. *Stories gather people around them*: they have to attract audiences, and these audiences may then start to build a common perception, a common language, a commonality". Like Alison's story, James speaks of reframing his experience both as a source of empowerment for himself and a source of motivation for others in a similar position.

Just as these stories might organise others, they infer moral authority through experience. In retelling and revising these stories over the 17 years of bereaved family activism, these narratives draw upon images of motherhood, grief and violence. To some extent, these accounts are the product of practised story-telling and revision as they are shared among other bereaved relatives and concerned communities. As

Frank (2010, p. 60) writes, stories “will not leave people alone. Stories call individuals into groups and they call on groups to assert common identities”.

Stories held the moral authority to mobilise and rally other victims, survivors and concerned members of the community who, in turn, became storied also. The ‘cultural locus’ therefore, as Denzin (1989a:73) writes, anchors not only how stories are written but how they might be read. Accordingly, the next section considers the responses and emotional sentiments prompted by the label ‘*Mothers Against Violence*’ and the ‘cultural story’ that motherhood might tell (Wright, 2016).

6.2.3 Responses to Moral Authority: Mothers in ‘Mothers Against Violence’

The image of the grieving mother has been a recurring feature in victims’ movements and public victimhood. Returning to Chapter 3’s discussion of victim movements, there are many examples of organisations mobilised around the script of motherhood (for example, the Mothers of Srebrenica in Bosnia and the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina). As Wright (2016) and others have argued, mothers provide a humanising image to anti-violence movements (Valier and Lippens, 2004; see, for example Charman and Savage, 2009; Helms, 2013). Harnessing this cultural image of motherhood, participants alluded to how the label ‘*Mothers Against Violence*’ invoked a politically neutral image of the grieving mother. Of the 15 members and ex-members interviewed for this research, 12 were female and all of those 12 were mothers. Interestingly, the three males that did become involved, engaged much later in the group’s development; in 2005, 2010 and 2011. The image of mothers in *Mothers Against Violence* was therefore a more pertinent issue in the early life of the organisation. As Eve describes of the foundation of the group and its label:

And I remember one day they said what are we going to call the group? So, they said well we’re all mothers here so they said let’s call it ‘*Mothers Against Violence*’. So, I said well y’know well what about the dads, well I have got a

dad a home you know what I mean? And I think most of the other people didn't, okay? So, they said oh no no no. No. We're not having that, just look at who's here, where are the dads? Where are the dads? None of them have come 'round to the meeting. I think we maybe we had one or two now and then. But obviously maybe because they were all women they felt a little bit whatever it is anyway. So, then I said well why don't we say Parents Against Violence then? They said no no no no, we're all women here and that's how the name came 'Mothers Against Violence'. [Eve]

As discussed in the previous chapter, mothers held an important role both within the family and within the Afro-Caribbean community. This, in addition to the high prevalence of single parent families at the time, allowed mothers to assumed positions of leadership and independence within these settings. To some extent, Eve's discussion here reflects these social and cultural features of the landscape which provided important context for *Mothers Against Violence* to emerge. As Eve discusses, in the context of single-parent and often female-lead households, the group was predominantly comprised of women during the early years.

The responses to the label '*Mothers Against Violence*', as far as participants indicated, were largely positive. In the early life of the organisation, mothers were posited as figures of leadership and respect in families. Confirming Eve's account, Tara discussed how the label of mothers was identified when *Mothers Against Violence* initially formed:

So that was debated and it was a good few weeks before it was decided it would just be women. And mothers, *because anyone can take on the role of a mother* or be a sister, an aunt, a cousin, a friend, anyone can be that motherly role [Tara; emphasis added]

Following this debate, the name *Mothers Against Violence* was settled upon. The image of mothers that this name invoked, provided an effective platform for drawing in and engaging with a wider community of support. If, as Tara suggests, 'anyone can take on the role of a mother', *Mothers Against Violence* were able to draw connections between audiences. By making these connections, the image of the mother acted as a

tool for engaging other audiences and prompting acknowledgement. Alison makes a similar point in her discussion on the figure of the mother:

But I think the mum figure, *everyone can relate to a mum figure*, when most people can relate to a mum figure and I think that's what it is and I think it's a bit of cultural thing as well for black young men and elderly black women [Alison; emphasis added]

Again, this image of the mother in public life draws others in; it allows other communities to identify and empathise with its subjects. If 'everyone can relate' to the image of a mother, witnesses are compelled to recognise the proximity or possibility of suffering. Paraphrasing McGarry and Walklate (2015:17–18) we are encouraged to place ourselves beside the victim, to feel what they feel. Tara alluded to this when discussing her initial engagement with the organisation:

...I think then at the time listening to the women's stories and hearing what they've gone through and being pregnant with my first child; it was kinda just like well, I could have a son, he could grow up and be involved in this. [Tara]

Here, Tara discusses not the experience of becoming a victim but the *risk* of becoming a victim; the potential that it 'could' happen. By listening to the stories of others, Tara empathises and recognises the possibility of becoming a victim. To some extent, this response reflects the discussion above; how the stories of others can mobilise and organise concerned communities. As Wright (2016:327) argues, "...we look upon the grief of the mother with horror, not only in sympathy for her, but with agony for the possibility that her pain could one day be our own". While moral authority might present unintended consequences, these 'fusions' of experience also provide opportunities for movements based on solidarity. Touching upon this notion of 'moral authority', Eve discusses these experiences as an opportunity for empathetic understanding and identification:

...you have to go through it to know it and that's one of the things I've learnt. The person who don't go through something can't talk to you really, they

shouldn't even be talking to talking to you because they've never been there. They can listen to you and say well you know I don't know what you think but I can feel something because then *you tend to feel through people don't you?* [Eve; emphasis added]

In the organisation's early life, motherhood provided a script both for prompting recognition from the concerned communities and as a way of relating to those with similar experiences. In some cases, the matriarchal figure played an important role in catalysing others to act (see Chapter 8). However, for now, it is important to understand the influence of gender on bereaved family activism and its connection to moral authority.

To unpack this connection between gender and moral authority further, participants were asked for their thoughts on how women came to lead *Mothers Against Violence*. Several participants drew upon gendered notions of grief and how these translated to collective action in *Mothers Against Violence*. Contrasting to the image of the mother, the image of the father appeared to tell a different 'cultural story'. While mothers hold a very visible role in these campaigns, fathers have not seen the same profile in public victimhood. Alison touched upon this issue in her comparison of images of mothers and fathers in these circles:

And I think that mothers they're sort of - the persona of a mum is more likely to have an impact than the persona of a dad. Because a dad, a male might come across as being a bit aggressive or a bit gobby or a bit y'know it could cause confrontation [Alison]

The image of the father in public victimhood was coloured differently to that of the grieving mother. These notions of aggressive or 'confrontational' fathers also echo discussions in the previous chapter regarding the prevalence of domestic violence in the community. Assumptions about gendered grief became essentialised – although not necessarily in a negative way as Helms (2013) argues in her concept of 'affirmative

essentialisms'¹⁴. Fathers in public victimhood do not invoke the same semblances of nurturers or gentle carers as mothers might. Rather, drawing upon Alison's comments further, fathers are charged with the 'image of men beating their chests'. Similarly, Matthew, who came to the organisation around 2005, compares what he sees as the gendered responses to grief:

And I say like, and it's just interesting to me just when I sat in the first meeting how it was all forgiveness and you think if this was guys you'd just be like...*guys would just seek revenge* and it was just the level of kind of *compassion and forgiveness that people like Eve would and so many strong women*. [Matthew; emphasis added]

Matthew connects responses of forgiveness, compassion and tolerance to the actions of women while men are associated with desires of revenge and aggression. This echoes a well-elaborated literature on gendered patterns of grief in mothers and fathers. While research points to anger, aggression and frustration as typical responses to grief for males, female responses to grief have proved be privatized and linked to changes in identity (Martin and Doka, 2000; Charman and Savage, 2009). Similarly, Diane shared her thoughts on the strong female base of *Mothers Against Violence* noting how a mother's loss was a unique type of suffering:

I think women are always lead. I think women will always lead because you're talking about your child and *as a mother there's nothing that you're going to do to stop your child from hurting* do you know what I mean? You're going to try everything and I think that pain, I don't to even ever experience it in my life, and that's emotive isn't it? Some mums are going to come. A few dads will come. But mainly you're going to get *women supporting women*. [Diane; emphasis added]

¹⁴ Helms (2013) builds upon Richard Fox's (1996) concept of 'affirmative essentialisms' in her study of women's activism in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina. Helms argues that 'affirmative essentialisms' (or assumptions of women as carers, nurturers and peacemakers) were strategically mobilised by women's NGOs to make women's political participation in post-conflict Bosnia possible.

Eve made a similar comparison between mothers and fathers and the public responses that each invoke:

And the other people as well I find in relation to the media they actually comes for the mother - y'know you don't see them coming to the fathers. Usually mothers the one that shouts the loudest 'cause she's the one that carried the pain, carried him for 9 months, and then birthed him. I always wonder how do the men go through this kind of thing? What it is that they feel? [Eve]

Here, Eve makes tacit links between grief and the biological link to maternity. Similar remarks have been made in the context of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina (Fisher, 1989; Bouvard, 1994). Although the group is now divided as mentioned in earlier chapters, some mothers have made connections between the pain of birth, their maternal identities and grief (Burchianti, 2004).

In this respect, motherhood represented a symbolic association to engage broader public interest and recognition. The image of the bereaved mother, as Helms (2013) and Wright (2016) argue, told a particular cultural story marking out women as strong and matriarchal, whilst also politically unthreatening and morally legitimate. Motherhood provided an important platform for prompting public recognition. Gilmore (2007) presents a similar point in her research of the rising prison industry in California. In her study of *Mothers Reclaiming Our Children*, a group of relatives working to resist the alarming rates of incarceration, Gilmore (2007:191) asks:

How do people come actively to identify in and act through a group such that its trajectory surpasses reinforcing characteristics (e.g. identity politics), or protecting a fixed set of interests (e.g. corporatist politics), and instead extends toward an evolving, purposeful social movement (e.g. real class politics)?

The image of the mother in public victimhood presented an opportunity to transcend differences between its members and divisions between public and private issues. Through the vehicle of bereaved family activism, individuals were able to turn 'personal troubles' into 'public issues' (see C. Wright Mills, 1959). However, this

‘problem of identification’ that Gilmore (2007:191) refers to also creates ‘fissions’ or the unintended consequences of moral authority.

6.3 ‘Fissions’ or the Unintended Consequences of Moral Authority

While ‘fusions’ represent an important means for communicating these experiences to others, it is not unusual then when such relationships are confronted with tensions – these are perhaps felt more intensely by their grounding in intimate experiences of grief. These ‘fissions’ largely revolved around differences in identity, experience and history between victims. While these groups are bound by shared experience, it is important to remember that *Mothers Against Violence* was a meeting point for a diversity of voices and needs.

That these natural differences might arise in these organisations is not a new observation. As discussed in Chapter 3, victim movements such as the Mothers of Srebrenica and Mothers of Plaza de Mayo have seen serious tensions arise with the latter separating into two factions. *Mothers Against Violence* did not see the tensions observed within Bosnia and Argentina although there were some natural differences which highlight the diversity of voices and issues over representativeness that might emerge. Shared experience is an important foundation of this organisation. Yet, in order to understand how it functions as a movement of solidarity, we must also understand how individuals can surpass issues in identification and remain part of this collective. As Gilmore (2007) suggests, exploring these tensions also prompts us to ask whether such tensions might *consolidate* identification rather than fracture it.

The image of the mother was an important feature in the early life of the organisation. It provided an effective platform for engaging wider audiences. While acting as a catalyst for action in concerned communities, the image that *Mothers Against Violence* presented may have had the unintended consequence of closing dialogue with others.

As stated previously, the role of men in the organisation only developed as the group matured. The male participants involved in this research stated that they only became involved from the mid-2000s onwards. As James and Matthew remarked, the images that were attached with *Mothers Against Violence* caused hesitation in some before joining. Matthew summarises this concisely:

So 'Mothers Against Violence' - you expect mothers y'know [Matthew]

From the three male members and ex-members that were interviewed, two reported feelings of hesitancy or uncertainty before joining or participating after joining. In particular, Matthew acknowledged his reservations over his position in the group:

...everybody other than Sarah and Rachel...were white, everybody else was black...so I was like this white guy...what you kind of doing here, you're just kind of sat there, and *the things they're kinda talking about* so that kind of thing feeling a bit y'know *not kind of fitting in* [Matthew; emphasis added]

This sentiment of 'not fitting in' was repeated several times by Matthew; primarily over his lack of identification with the image of the mother but also in that he had not lost any relatives to gun violence. Matthew elaborates on this further:

...and it's like well I can't do that y'know, they'd expect Mothers Against Violence, you're expecting a mother and I'm just some white [anon] who's not lost anybody to gun crime, I was not a mother, I'm a bloke, y'know what can I do? And that kind of thing. [Matthew]

Revolving around these maternal identities and grief, shared experience took a different shape in the early life of *Mothers Against Violence*. Those unable to identify with these identities or experiences voiced doubt over what they believed they could contribute. Though James' story of his engagement with the organisation was different to that of Matthew's, he still touched upon a similar issue of 'not fitting in':

There were lots of things for young people and y'know groups that supported young people. But nothing really for mums to come together or parents, yeah so, the fact that it was made up of mothers who had all sort of lost children. I think that was very different...I think the other thing is that it appeared to be for mums as well. So, family members like myself wouldn't really, but it *was*

for us. And I think that that came after, hence the name really, it's Mothers Against Violence, and actually if you weren't a mother you didn't really feel like it fit for you. [James]

While James had lost a brother to gun violence at the time of the group's emergence, the image associated with *Mothers Against Violence* generated some uncertainty over who the group was for. It is important to clarify that this was not the reason for James' delayed involvement. As James explains, despite his first impressions, he realised 'it was for us'. However, James' excerpt above raises the issue of representation. It prompts the question: how was James able to surpass identification to find meaningful engagement with the group? As shall be explored in the following chapter, actors engage these movements for different purposes with groups becoming relevant or irrelevant at different points in the life of individuals.

Unable to identify with these early manifestations of the group, there is perhaps a risk that these individuals might disengage. Either the shape of the organisation changed to the point which it became relevant to prospective members, or individuals accepted and adapted to different roles in the organisation (see Chapter 7). The unintended consequences of moral authority did not go unnoticed by its members. Male members did not arrive at the group until 2005 and three of the group's female members acknowledged the disadvantages of this. Stephanie summarises this neatly in the following question:

How do you help to change the mind sets of young men by just using women?
[Stephanie]

Here, Stephanie alludes to the issue of representation. Mothers shared their experiences on behalf of their children using their authority by experience to voice their struggles and concerns. However, as Stephanie points out, the moral authority of mothers' experiences could only convey the message so far. Tara discusses this issue noting the limits of speaking on behalf of young men involved in gun violence:

And I think probably like the early meetings opinions of men was quite low, where are the men, why aren't they doing anything which was quite kinda like ironic cos you're dealing with women that have quite a low opinion of men yet most the people you're gonna be dealing with gonna be young boys. So it's also in that acknowledgement that we need to change our perspective 'cause - what message are we passing on to our sons if we're just saying men are...no good. [Tara]

So far, these 'fissions' emerged in response to earlier manifestation of the group and its connection to maternal identities. However, a few participants also made reference to the notion that some stories and some voices were 'stronger' than others. As Tara discusses above, the act of speaking on behalf of others prompts questions of representativeness.

6.4 Voice, Representativeness and Ownership

6.4.1 Hearing Voices

Understanding *Mothers Against Violence* as a meeting point, the group provided a space for voices to be heard. Mothers came to speak on behalf of lost relatives and became voices to represent the interests of their sons. As Tara reflects:

...it was almost like the mothers were speaking for what they heard from their sons...that were still alive, the sons that were deceased, and the son's friends [Tara]

In its early life, *Mothers Against Violence* provided a constructive space for individuals to air their concerns over escalating gun violence. For those, such as Diane, these spaces were important for 'finding' voices and articulating experiences:

Would I have had that if I had not been taking those steps to speak out? And it's the speaking out that really the key. I found my voice. I was finding it because I was doing things before then that led to me finding my voice but being part of Mothers Against Violence - being forced to in a good way. [Diane]

Speaking on behalf of their lost relatives, *Mothers Against Violence* provided an important vehicle for sharing experiences and moving forwards. For some, the victim

movement allowed *re*-empowerment following the disempowering experience of violent bereavement. Tara points to this when discussing the importance of having a voice in these organisations:

But everything was always decided upon a vote and everyone in the organisation got a vote. And that was *just so that everyone felt that everyone still had a voice*, 'cause you think me coming from a place where *you feel like you've not had a voice*, it's important that when you're in a group you feel part of that group and that everyone's voice was taken into account... [Tara; emphasis added]

This was also touched upon by Stephanie who lost a relative to gun violence. While the experience of traumatic bereavement was disempowering and uncontrollable, action through these movements provided a source of legitimacy:

Maybe it is just solely for the fact of my cousin and his death and *being able to do something because as I said before I felt like I couldn't do anything at the time* of the whole out of body experience, not being able to tell anyone, you kind of feel a bit lost maybe or I don't know what the word is but yeah I don't know if I need to do a bit more, I don't know. Try to make changes somehow and go with whatever's being done at the time in MAV, like now [Stephanie; emphasis added]

Similarly, Jane emphasises the importance of being heard in dealing with the loss of her brother to gun violence:

Yeah, it was just...it was being around people that lost and seeing how far you have grown...emotionally in a sense, dealing with your grief when you then witness who it's just happened to. And also just, I suppose quite cathartic really, just telling your story. *Being listened to, being listened to, being heard*. [Jane; emphasis added]

Although a number of participants made explicit reference to the cathartic or empowering nature of sharing experiences, I am cautious to overstate and extend this analysis to all those who 'found their voice' in *Mothers Against Violence*. For example, Eve reflected on the importance of this space for hearing their voices and articulating their experiences. However, as Eve points out below, getting her voice 'heard' began in her earlier activity in the Church community:

So that was where my voice was heard and sound you know what I mean but then I had practice in church. I did you know what I mean. That's what we did in church, we sat down, we talk, we would give a thought out of the bible, we would sing...And that's where my grounding came from do you get what I'm saying. But I didn't know it was in me because I was really quite quiet even though I was doing certain things, I was quite quiet. [Eve]

Similarly, Claire acknowledged that her engagement, while reinforced by her experiences, was largely rooted in previous experiences as a community activist:

But then I know before I even had him I was already doing things that would have led to that but I didn't realise that that's where I was leading to. Obviously, it's been a big part of me, it's made me realise that out of pain, joy can come. It's made me realise that I wanted to make a difference. [Claire]

Rather than assuming importance, the word *re-empowering* is used here to acknowledge the *recovery* of empowerment rather than as a new condition. The impact of bereaved family activism will be explored more closely in the following chapter. For now, though, it is important to recognise the role of these spaces in hearing voices in addressing harms. As Stauffer (2015:7) summarises, “unaddressed harms do not disappear”.

6.4.2 Taking Ownership

To some extent, engaging in bereaved family activism speaks to a broader notion of ownership; were those involved invested in communities they represented and did they find purpose in bereaved family activism? While gun violence has been readily associated with South Manchester and particularly, since the 1980s, Moss Side, *Mothers Against Violence* represent members from across different communities. For some, community activism represented an investment in the protection of future generations. Those speaking on behalf of their communities were encouraged to take ownership over issues such as gun violence as well as encouraging others to do so. James touched upon this when discussing how to bring community engagement to young people:

That they can see getting themselves an education, getting themselves a job, putting positive investments in the community as a goal, bettering themselves, getting an education, learning about their history, and things like that. It's just about that, valuing them, as young people and allowing the community to be within those schools as well. So, it's not just teachers who are teaching children, that *we see ourselves as teaching in a way, shape or form so that young people can have an experience of community engagement* [James; emphasis added]

This notion of 'ownership' was not a regular theme in stories of engagement. However, it might hold some explanatory power in understanding how certain members sustained a prolonged engagement or 'desisted'. Eve, who has been involved with *Mothers Against Violence* since it's foundation, summarises this briefly:

I was saying what is my purpose, why am I here? [Eve]

A number of participants expressed a sense of ownership or investment in their communities. This was examined in the previous chapter; viewing community ownership and protection as an investment in the future generation of the community. Diane discusses her commitment to the community and how this commitment provided an important motivation for initial engagement:

And I think before that I just questioned myself as to what I was actually doing in my community. And at that stage, I wasn't doing anything for my community at that stage. I was just going about me, it was my life and my education, and my children and I wasn't - and when I stopped and I asked myself that and I realised I wasn't actually doing anything that's when I committed to do something. [Diane]

Returning to Andrea's story of involvement, her investment in *Mothers Against Violence* was compelled by her sense of ownership in 'her community':

... this is my community, *these are my people* and so this is my way of giving back because I've taken over the years...*I think as we go through cycles in life and there's a time to give and a time to receive and this is my way of giving back.* [Andrea; emphasis added]

While this sense of identification and ownership with certain communities encourages consolidation in one sphere, it perhaps discourages those from other communities

from investing. This was underlined by Jane who alludes to the different kinds of communities in her discussion:

...a lot of people in the group was from that side of Manchester, *it wasn't my community*. [Jane; emphasis added]

She continues by distinguishing between being invested in private and public issues:

And it was something that had affected my family as opposed something that had affected my community so I wasn't as heavily involved. [Jane]

While connected by their shared experiences of violent bereavement, each individual shared a different relationship with their communities. For those who shared only a distant relationship with their community, *Mothers Against Violence* perhaps prompted less investment. For others, a sense of ownership in their community compelled a prolonged engagement.

The difference between communities was a particularly pertinent issue for participants actively involved in the Church community. At least six members of *Mothers Against Violence* distinguished between the Church community and those communities of the 'street' or 'of the world'. Discussing the early life of the organisation, Tara described the Church community as 'a community within itself'. While the Church community was situated within the wider community, participants described that it remained self-contained during the early years of the movement. For example, Marie and Rosa make distinctions between the two communities:

So growing up in Manchester, my friends all came from church, they didn't come from the streets, I didn't know anyone from the streets. [Marie]

For me...the community...I had sort of two communities if you see what I mean. I had the church community and that was quite loving and the other one was quite loving - like my neighbours where we were living...And it was just a good community...and in the church community because you must remember the church community live wider, they live different parts of Manchester so they used to come in. [Rosa]

Similarly, James made a point to separate the communities he knew at the time of his brother's death to those he is familiar with now:

...the only community I could really talk about at that particular time was the church community because that's the only community that I knew at that particular time. [James]

These distinctions were made in reference to the early life of the organisation and, as James alludes to, before its development and expansion. As explained previously, some members took active ownership and investment in the organisation which might explain particular members' sustained engagement in *Mothers Against Violence*. These shared experiences of loss and community concern contributed a supportive 'social fabric' (Huyse, 2003:63). However, it also created tension between communities. Firstly, as discussed above, in discouraging prolonged engagement and secondly, in prompting questions of representativeness.

6.4.3 Being Representative

Movements such as *Mothers Against Violence* create social spaces for listening to voices that might have previously gone unheard. However, given the differences between communities, the act of speaking on behalf of others creates problems if some voices are seen to be louder than others (McGarry and Walklate, 2015). While this theme was touched upon by three participants, differences were often treated openly and constructively. The question of whether some voices might be louder than others can be found in Tara's notion of the 'strongest story':

And I think because, Eve came from, at this point she was pretty much you know the lead the front voice of the group and everyone agreed that was fine because *she had the story, the strongest story* to tell [Tara; emphasis added]

As Tara notes, the group raised no issue with this. Able to speak with authority from experience, Eve was often approached to share her thoughts and concerns on particular issues. During the early phases of *Mothers Against Violence*, media attention

towards the organisation was more focused with members being approached for their opinions on escalating gun violence. Eve touched upon this in her discussion:

Because I'm the person that they ask for because *I am the person that had the experience* do you get what I'm saying. And they wanted to know how I think, how I feel... [Eve; emphasis added]

For Eve, these issues did not go unnoticed and at various points she attempted to encourage others to come forward. The practice of bereaved family activism represented a practice in sharing experience drawing support and strength in the aftermath of violence. However, part of this practice also involved learning the needs of others; knowing each other's story, their concerns and politics. Bereaved family activism also meant learning about the community, its history and informal politics. Eve reflects on a meeting she attended at the very outset of the organisation:

I went and I listened and I heard and some people were accusing other people - because they were people of the world. I was from the church remember I was coming from the church, that was my life, that was my world. [Eve]

Here, Eve recognises the natural differences that emerged when such a diversity of voices converged on a single issue. While very familiar with the Church community herself, Eve noticed how different communities had their own history of relationships. Tara also confirmed this when discussing the 'strained relations' that gun violence had brought about and its earlier manifestations within the group:

...she was more involved in the church community and the church community was kind of insular, looking in... and I think as a result of that, she wasn't aware of the strained relations between parents, certain sides of the community [Tara]

Mothers Against Violence responded not only to victims of gun violence, but victims of social exclusion and marginalisation. As a result, the initial composition of *Mothers Against Violence* came to reflect the composition of the community including its cleavages. Tara summarises this below:

Because what you find is within a community, you're dealing with a group set up to support people affected by gang violence and obviously parents coming together but there's parents whose children are involved in different gangs. [Tara]

The group represented those associated with different gangs and different interests. Negotiating these differences, *Mothers Against Violence* learned to understand and respond to the need of others. These rifts, however, were by no means 'deep-seated' as Tara explained. Rather, these rifts emerged naturally and became central to the project of learning and maturity that the organisation worked through.

Even more, this question of representation did not go unnoticed by members of the movement and was a recurring theme in the interviews. Continuing her discussion of representation within the community, Tara asked the following questions:

... 'cause I mean there's probably the same balance from both sides so it kind of became you know, *who are we here for?* Just that segment of the community or the whole community? So, some of the members began to feel that more help was being offered to one gang than another basically. [Tara]

Because they had people from the community then thinking oh, why have you's set up - what you're actually doing? You're not actually doing anything. 'Cause obviously you've got to be accountable to the community, the media present you as a spokesperson for the community. But are ya? You know, *you're not telling everybody's story*, you're just telling a small segment. So there was just lots of, in the early days, *fumbling around* trying to find a place, *trying to find a need*. [Tara; emphasis added]

Here, Tara openly acknowledges the difficulties of claiming to represent different communities and interests. Under the pressure and importance for accountability, relatives came to question 'who the group was for'. In some cases, as both Eve and Tara state, unable to reconcile over these differences, sometimes members disengaged from the group. While the history of gang rivalry in the community created an important 'fusion' for organised responses to violence, it also represented a subject of division within the organisation. This history provided context for the early stages of the group's design and an indication of the limits of shared experience.

The role of these movements in channelling 'voices from below' to the public and public bodies was also important to the issue of representation. The question of representation raised issues surrounding 'who the group was for' or perhaps who the group spoke for. Rather, *Mothers Against Violence* saw value in drawing connections between communities. As Alison discusses, the group aimed to surpass issues in identification and use these divisions to consolidate the strengths in the group:

...because it's about getting people together, not separating. No divide and conquer sort of thing going on and there's not a 'us' and 'them' it's a we. D'ya know what I mean? So it's not an us and them with the police, it's not an us and them with the community, it's all of us together. [Alison]

Although the issue of representativeness was a recurrent theme, many were keen to stress that they were not representative of the community nor did they claim to be so. As part of a process of learning and reflection, *Mothers Against Violence* has moved to recognise the advantages of reaching beyond one community and making connections between communities. Diane makes this point clearly when discussing the issue of representation, acknowledging that her story represents just one story:

I don't represent the community, *I've never said I represent the community*, I talk about *what I see in my community* and reflect some of the issues that I'm dealing with in my community but I'll never stand up and say 'I represent [PLACE] or I represent [PLACE] or I represent Manchester' because somebody will say 'No, the hell the you don't represent me'. Y'know I've *learnt* that, so I don't do that. I reflect what's going on in our community and that's really some of the experiences that I've had [Diane; emphasis added]

Mothers Against Violence therefore provided a meeting point for a collection of voices and experiences. It is both these 'fusions' of shared experience and 'fissions' in needs and interests which inform the unique shape of the movement. Discussing his role in delivering counselling services, James was quick to point out that his experience was intended in no way to be representative or indicative of others' experiences:

And I've realised that actually somehow the biggest downfall about providing a service like mine is that there is that sometimes *I have a misconception that I'm going to be able to understand* and also that the client comes in with the

misconception that I will be able to understand because. And a lot of the time that is not the case because they're feeling and going through are completely different experience. I still think that it's a valuable service but it's also taught me that it is a unique experience and actually someone who hasn't been through it could provide the same support and maybe even better to an individual. *It's not that the experience has given me the right to be able to support other people like that but my greatest learning is that it's a very unique situation and it's important that you see it from their perspective, when you're working with a client, that you're seeing it from their perspective, and understanding that your issues and your experiences are very, very different to everybody else's.* [James; emphasis added]

This reflects the previous chapter's discussion of responses to violent bereavement and the diverse manifestations of grief. James acknowledges that his experience, as much as he learned from it, cannot be easily transposed or extended to the experiences of others. In James' words, he recognises that he does not have 'the right to be able to support' others and openly acknowledges the limits of shared experience. Rather, James and Diane make clear that they cannot and do not speak for the experience of others.

Learning from the needs of others, *Mothers Against Violence* recognised the lessons in drawing connections between different communities and broadening their scope. The group worked from the foundation of shared experience. 'Fissions', such as different voices, also became important characterising features of this movement as it strengthened and confirmed the ideas of those involved. Learning from these different communities allowed the group to move forward. As Alison described when discussing the aims of *Mothers Against Violence*:

We've got this thing that Eve's always said which is 'Each one, Teach one' so what I learn I try to pass on and what they learn they pass on and we do it here as well with our clients. So I think it's that sense of bringing new experiences to it, a new voice, a new ethnicity even [Alison]

Continuing, Alison underlines the importance of connecting different communities:

If everyone's segregated into their own little pigeonholes or boxes or where ever they fit because of their story or whatever then it's never going to work.

Everyone needs to work together. And just accept other people for as they are, so that's the only way to do it really. Can't do it any other way. [Alison]

By drawing upon the knowledge and histories of different communities, the group was able to connect with wider audiences through the platform of shared experiences whilst also learning from new ones. James extends these points using the example of Martin Luther King Jr to explain what was to be learned from new communities:

My mind is drawn Martin Luther King Jr who, the preacher in church but as soon as he stepped out of his church, and began to impact governments and communities, he changed his pulpit, Washington, the White House, that for me, *made his faith come to life and it reached so much people and it reached more people now even in death*. He's reached more people now than he ever did or would have staying in the church and staying behind that pulpit. And I think that's how I model myself now, I think the biggest change or impact on me has been that I am now able to reach more people. [James; emphasis added]

While 'fusions' or shared experiences provided an instigating factor for these organised responses to violence, *Mothers Against Violence* was also characterised and to some extent consolidated by its 'fissions'. The movement represents a meeting point for individuals on various trajectories, at different points in their lives with each person contributing, revising, pushing and pulling the group in different directions (see Chapter 7). By connecting with wider audiences, the group learned through a type of reflexive process which encouraged identification with shared experiences while being receptive to new ones.

6.5 *Mothers Against Violence* as a Quasi-Familial Unit

Under these constant revisions, *Mothers Against Violence* reveals more energy than typical categorisations of 'being nice and being vindictive' (Van Dijk, 1988:115). Rather, the relevance of the organisation to different individuals changes over its life and maturity. Relationships are configured to reflect this energy, echoing what Diane described as the 'organic' nature of *Mothers Against Violence*. Shared experience offers an effective foundation for creating dialogue between individuals. Here, *Mothers*

Against Violence became a site for intimate relationships forged in shared stories of suffering but also growth. While family was a recurring theme within the interviews and observations, *Mothers Against Violence* was only referred to as a family unit *explicitly* by one individual. While not common, this theme is theoretically illustrative of how terms of kinship encourage ties between communities.

A number of participants described their relationships in 'quasi-familial' terms both in the way members related to each other and in the way the group related to the community. Recounting in his own fieldwork with victim organisations, Rock (1998:303) describes such groups as 'quasi-familial' in nature. Rather than impersonal or technocratic, relationships within *Mothers Against Violence* reflected a type of familial intimacy. It is not my intent here to romanticise victim participation or understate the divisions that might arise in such groups. However, the relationships displayed within *Mothers Against Violence* provide valuable insights into the collective dynamics of the organisation. For instance, these quasi-familial relationships might provide opportunities for 'reconstituting' the family following the disruptive and disordering effects of violent bereavement (an idea explored briefly by Wagner and Nettlefield, 2013 in their study of Srebrenica-Potocari Memorial Centre). Alternatively, the kinship quality of these relationships perhaps represents another mechanism for bridging divides and reinforcing attachments between individuals from different communities. Speaking of her early involvement in the organisation, Alison discussed how deeply embedded the group was within the community:

...and generally really just love the way that they are and who they are and all that kind of thing, it's like a family, it's *like a little family*...

...because Eve's family and all their extended are very well established in that community so they're already known in the community anyway and people trust them, people trust people at MAV. [Alison; emphasis added]

Jane made similar remarks when discussing the influence of Eve, a long-standing member and founder of *Mothers Against Violence*. Within this family unit, Jane identified Eve as playing the role of the mother:

And she always was there. And you could always ring her, *it was like having this other mum*. And that's what made it strong.

And also Eve's influence. I've never met anyone like Eve. And she was almost like the mum of the group back then y'know... [Jane]

A number of participants also commented on the importance of such work for their surviving children who had become familiar with the practices of *Mothers Against Violence*. In this sense, there was a sense of 'reconstituting' family relationships through bereaved family activism but also anticipation of the benefits of this work for future generations of *Mothers Against Violence*. Diane had an interesting way of conceptualising her relationship with the organisation, again, referred to in terms of kinship:

Because I think you change anyway y'know you can't y'know it was never my baby do you know what I mean so this is my baby so I'll be here 'til feel like I don't want my baby anymore and who doesn't want a baby? [laughter]
[Diane]

On the other hand, the latter half of the organisation's life has seen changes in membership with *Mothers Against Violence* now reflecting more closely Eve's extended family and community network. As Eve remarks below:

But that's how MAV went and it's amazingly so, some of my family are in MAV but they didn't come in MAV at first, they kind of a wandered in, it was a wander. Wander in. [Eve]

Of course, these quasi-familial relationships translated directly into familial relationships as family members became actively involved in the organisation's more recent work. However, there were still noticeable continuities in the way *Mothers Against Violence* related to the community they served. This reflects the previous

chapter's discussion on the notion of 'parenting' communities; the framing of activism as an investment in the future of the community and future generations. Remembering the previous discussion on 'fusions', relating to the community through this language of kinship reinforces ties between *Mothers Against Violence* and its constituents as well as encouraging a sense of ownership of issues. Again, familial ties are invoked to encourage wider communities to invest in otherwise 'personal troubles' (C. Wright Mills, 1959). This issue was summarised in James' discussion:

We're not just seeing it as a job that we do with our own children, but we actually *influence the lives of other children in our community*. And that's the reason I do the work I do and that's the reason I want to have an impact on not only my son's life but lots of other young people's lives as well...

I think the lesson I've learnt is I don't just have one child. As much as my wife gave birth to our son and we raised a son I realised that children are part of a community and this is one of the things I learnt about my brother is even though he was brought up quite well [inaudible] the people that he lived alongside weren't necessarily having the same values as he had and that he was brought up with. *So, actually, we [parent villages?] if you know what I mean,* and I see that now. I can't just take care of my son, because my son has to go out and be in the community and he needs to be kept safe within the community so if I'm just thinking about bringing up my child and impact that has on my life, actually his environment is so important. And that can have a greater influence on him than me at one period of his life. [James; emphasis added]

Here, James explains how his involvement in *Mothers Against Violence* is an investment in the protection of the community. By protecting the children of others, he protects his own children and by communicating through terms of kinship, people are encouraged to engage in the 'personal troubles' of others. The focus is on the *risk* of becoming a victim. By invoking the notion of 'it could happen to anyone', personal troubles become public and people from different communities gather and organise.

6.6 Conclusion

Whereas the previous chapter focused upon the individual, this chapter has explored how stories of serious violence can prompt an organised collective response. The role

of shared experience was presented here as an important instigator of these responses, although not always sufficient enough to sustain prolonged engagement. *Mothers Against Violence* was established as a gathering space for an array of trajectories and experiences. Following Rock's (1998) distinction between 'fusions', which represent understanding through shared experience, and 'fissions', which represent differences in experience, this chapter examined the purposes, responses and unintended consequences of moral authority. Sharing experiences with others represented an effective platform for creating dialogue, empathy and prompting acknowledgement from wider audiences. Here, the image of the grieving mother was explored as a tool to bridge divides and connect different communities.

Returning to the research question, this chapter discussed how sharing experiences of lethal violence could bridge gaps between communities and otherwise dissimilar individuals. By exploring the connection between personal experiences and collective responses, these stories became sources of change and prompted recognition. However, as these movements are meeting points for different experiences, histories and identities, they must learn to accommodate these differences. These differences help to understand how its members are able to surpass issues in identification and remain part of the group. With shifting policy priorities, changing trends in gun violence and the pressure of funding, the question arises as to how these groups might maintain the same identity. This shall be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 7 - Making Sense of *Mothers Against Violence*

7.1 Introduction

Over the past near two decades, *Mothers Against Violence* have campaigned, supported and stood up for those affected by lethal violence, promoting positive lifestyles for young people. The previous two chapters have offered insights into the early life of *Mothers Against Violence* and how the practice of sharing ‘personal troubles’ might prompt collective responses. The arrival and departure of members over this duration has seen *Mothers Against Violence* subject to a number of revisions amid shifting policy landscapes and changes in national priorities. Considering the changing shape of these movements, this chapter asks: how might victim movements be conceptualised in a way that reflects the energy of groups like *Mothers Against Violence*?

The chapter begins by presenting the varied effects of bereaved family activism upon its members. Here, bereaved family activism is understood as having different purposes for different individuals at different points in their lives. *Mothers Against Violence* is posited as a space in which individuals engage in processes of social, moral and emotional learning as well as a practical means for achieving and resolving needs. Moving on from this discussion, the chapter then proceeds to take stock of recent changes in the landscape of *Mothers Against Violence*. The pressures of changing memberships and competitive funding climates are explored here before considering how an organisation maintains their identity amidst these shifts. Considering this, participants’ reasons for disengagement are discussed to show how such organisations are subject to constant revision. The focus here is shifted from the tangible boundaries and borders of *Mothers Against Violence* to the ‘traces’ that those involved impress upon the group during group formation (see Latour, 2005).

7.2 Impact of Bereaved Family Activism

The bereaved family activism found in *Mothers Against Violence* was driven by community outcry, as an investment in the community and to serve the interests of others. However, those involved also reflected upon the impact of bereaved family activism upon their *own* personal experiences. Upon encountering these movements, *Mothers Against Violence* held different purposes for different people, becoming relevant or irrelevant at different points in people's lives. The group provided an opportunity to be acknowledged and heard, to make meaning from loss, to keep connections with the deceased, to reach and learn from others, for empowerment and as a practical means for personal development. This section presents each of these reflections to understand how bereaved family activism serves different purposes for those involved.

7.2.1 Acknowledgment and Being Heard

Referring to survivors of sexual violence, Stauffer (2015) stresses the importance of creating spaces for hearing stories of suffering as a release from 'ethical loneliness'. As discussed in previous chapters, participants in this study described *Mothers Against Violence* as an important space for opening dialogue across different individuals and collectives. This was particularly resonant in Jane's account of her engagement with the group. Jane discusses the loss of her brother and the advantages of sharing such experiences with others:

I found it so useful and powerful because it was with other people cos I didn't think anybody else understood. And it was so powerful - so it was always - it *was almost a two-way process* because as much as I was doing all that work - and it was my grief - it was all during my peak grief period and I was out there trying to change things and help people because of what I was going through, I was also getting a lot back from being surrounded by other people that had lost families... [Jane; emphasis added]

Here, Jane underlines the cathartic effects of sharing stories with others with similar experiences. Engaging with *Mothers Against Violence* allowed Jane to invest in and learn from the experiences of others. Sharing these experiences also lent an aspect of legitimacy and understanding to otherwise disempowering and 'lonely' experiences¹⁵. By retelling and sharing these stories of suffering with others in a similar position, Jane could draw on the experiences of others as a form of validation and understanding that could not be gained solely through the act of empathy. It is also interesting to note Jane's professional and educational background in psychotherapy which is reflected in her use of terms such as 'cathartic', 'transformative', 'denial' and 'therapeutic' to describe her experience. Remembering that stories are an expression of "our experience of the world, of course, and from our sense of who we are", this excerpt demonstrates how narratives are manifestations of particular situational interactions and differences in language and vocabularies (Stauffer, 2015:9). Jane also draws a distinction between empathy and understanding. While many can empathise with experiences of loss or grief, as discussed in the previous chapter, Jane suggests that there is little understanding to be offered unless you have suffered loss first-hand:

I think having that sense of belonging with like - I don't want to say like-minded people - but people who have been through it really helps. Because *I think that unless that has happened to you, I don't think you can possibly understand*. I think you can empathise. And that's what empathy is, being alongside somebody and being there but that feeling is like something - there's nothing to describe it when that happens to you at all. And being around those that it's happened to and seeing that they're able to move forward and carry on, is so powerful. Honestly, it's so powerful. [Jane; emphasis added]

¹⁵ Stauffer (2015) discusses a type of loneliness she terms as 'ethical loneliness' which represents the act of abandonment through oppression and dehumanisation. However, as Stauffer (2015:2) explains, ethical loneliness is also "the failure of just-minded people to hear well".

Returning to Eve's explanation in the previous chapter, spaces provided by these movements present an opportunity for empathy from witnesses and understanding and identification with fellow survivors and victims:

...you have to go through it to know it and that's one of the things I've learnt.
[Eve]

As Jane and Eve infer, experience also creates boundaries to understanding but are perhaps reconciled by movements such as *Mothers Against Violence*. These emotional and social spaces provided a platform for sharing experiences and a supportive 'social fabric' (Huyse, 2003:63). Continuing, Jane discusses how such spaces provided the prospect of acknowledgement and understanding:

...I don't know, I think I felt welcome at the meeting. I definitely remember feeling welcome and being part of it and *feeling listened to*. But I think it was the acknowledgement and even though it's been acknowledged off other people, I think being surrounded by other people who have lost y'know close family members, is so endearing and nurturing. [Jane; emphasis added]

This practice of 'being listened to' also raises the question of meaningful engagement and the dangers of co-opting 'voices from below' which hold political currency (see Duggan and Heap, 2014). However, the experience of 'being heard' held some significance for victims themselves. As Jane describes of her early involvement where she attended an event attended by the organisation:

So, I asked him this question and then afterwards when all the cameras had gone, the politicians normally disappear. You don't see them for dust. But he came over and said: 'Hi Jane, are you any further on with your brother...?' and I mean, yeah, I know that's his job and he's very good and he might not absolutely not care, but *that meant something*... [Jane; emphasis added]

The opportunity for acknowledgement emerged not only from the supportive space that *Mothers Against Violence* provided but, more generally, from social institutions such as policy spheres. This also prompts another question over what meaningful engagement looks like. This asks more than 'who get[s] to be the voice' as Tara noted

in her interview, but whether this voice is listened to or heard. While Jane was the only participant that directly discussed feelings of acknowledgement, there were a number of participants who described how their engagement allowed them to recover meaning.

7.2.2 *Making Meaning, Finding Purpose and Mobilising Pain*

This process of 're-moralizing' discussed by Rock (2004:414) captures how victims aim to find meaning from a "world that has been thrown into chaos" and to gather "knowledge that might restore control". Those participants who did describe the loss of a relative, narrated their experiences in terms of empowerment, change and growth. Earlier chapters discussed the overwhelming and sometimes debilitating effects of violent bereavement upon families. However, Eve's experience also speaks to the opportunity for personal growth and transformation in the aftermath of violence. Drawing comparisons between her search for answers before *Mothers Against Violence* and her resolve after, Eve discusses the importance of finding purpose:

Why's he dead, Lord? You know what I mean - but now I can see the why him. And because of the way I think that he is in a better place and *his life was for a purpose*, the life that he lived, the 20 years that he lived, *was for a purpose and that purpose was being fulfilled by the things that I did* do you get what I'm saying? [Eve; emphasis added]

This search for answers and understanding was also repeated when Eve recounted a discussion she had shared with a contact in a similar situation who had found answers through restorative justice:

She said she got answers. When I haven't, you know what I mean? So - I have in a sense - I got mine from God you know what I mean? She got them from the person. Because I would like to find that out as well. Why did they kill my son?

Eve reflects on *Mothers Against Violence* as an important vehicle in reconciling the loss of purpose with renewed structures of meaning. Through her work in the campaign,

Eve recovered meaning following the death of her son, eventually understanding her loss as an important instigator for change. However, Eve also alludes to the enduring insecurities and uncertainties she had having not found 'answers' about her son's death. Eve's account blends her memory of past uncertainties and pain, reflections on her purpose now, as well as future aspirations and hopes for *Mothers Against Violence*. Eve re-stories her experience in light of the progress that the movement has made during its 17 years:

For me, *I've lived so much more than I've died*. You get what I'm saying. And it's just so amazing you know what I mean. Yeah. But I don't really know. I think of where my son and where he brought me to, I wouldn't have it any different.... [Eve; emphasis added]

My son's life was never a waste. Even when he died I never saw it as a waste. I believed that something good was coming out of it do you get what I'm saying. So that's how the change has come about it. [Eve]

Several participants framed their experiences of violent bereavement as 'catalysts' for change or 'transformative' in nature. However, through her engagement in *Mothers Against Violence*, Eve reframed her experiences of loss by placing violent bereavement as just one point in a series of events set in motion by the death of her son. As shall be argued in the final section of this chapter, these experiences of loss represent significant 'turning points' changing how individuals relate to and interpret the world (Goodey, 2000). While it may have provided a catalyst for change, loss represents just one point in a series of encounters. The process of making meaning and making sense from loss also revealed a new sense of purpose for some individuals. Continuing her discussion on the meaning of her son's death, Eve explained how her engagement in *Mothers Against Violence* led to a new realisation:

Whatever I'm doing now, I can continue to do until my last breath because I believe *it's what I was called to do*. I was called to do it. The circumstances that led me to here wasn't a very pleasant one but after the unpleasantness came the joy. The satisfaction, the amazing tingle in my body, in my mind. [Eve; emphasis added]

Confronted by this loss, Eve's encounter with *Mothers Against Violence* reframed and restructured her experience and in doing so, prescribed different methods of coping and response (see Kenney, 2004). As Kenney (2004) argues, depending on whether they consult friends, family or self-help groups, "[e]ach person's unique accumulation of such encounters acted as the interactional framework underpinning both their choices, and their ultimate coping ability". James and Anna described a similar concept when reflecting on the purpose of their brother's loss and what could be learnt from their encounter with *Mothers Against Violence*:

...it's given me a way of being able to use my pain to channel that into something positive so that I can see, I can see the impact of it and then it becomes itself the healing to the loss that I experienced in '99, in 1999 when my brother was murdered. [James]

I think for me it kind of makes me kind of feel like...I've been able to change something very negative into something positive. That MAV supports families where children could have been involved in crime and have given them that opportunity or experience where they've gone down another path. [Anna]

Confronting these losses, participants were able to re-story and mobilise their experiences as catalysts for change. Claire described a similar process when commenting more generally on the role of *Mothers Against Violence* in the community:

And you know it was born out of a painful situation but they've been able to bring some goodness to the community with it... [Claire]

For participants such as Eve, James and Anna, the organisation became a vehicle for mobilising and channelling suffering into activism. By providing a space to be heard, the design of *Mothers Against Violence* encouraged social support, an opportunity for empathetic understanding and, for some, prompting realisation and purpose. This increased "appreciation of one's vulnerability, sensitivity, and emotional experience" represented a change in thinking for those affected by lethal violence (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1995:33). *Mothers Against Violence* presented an opportunity for this growth.

7.2.3 Keeping Connections with Lost Relatives

Exploring James' reflections further, *Mothers Against Violence* also represented a medium for preserving connections with relatives lost to gun violence. This theme was evident solely in the conversations with James regarding the death of his brother. Whilst this theme was not a common finding identified in the conversations of other participants, it is explored here briefly to illustrate the varied purposes that *Mothers Against Violence* held for different individuals. Discussing his thoughts following the death of his brother, James considered the host of achievements that he believed were made possible by this loss:

...So, and I still do feel to this day, when I've achieved something that I've achieved it for him, as well as achieved for myself. That was the way I think I internalised things and how I dealt with things that if I could achieve anything and credit it to him then that was my way of dealing with his loss. [James; emphasis added]

Attributing his achievements to his brother, James re-stories the loss of his brother as a story of accomplishment and growth. Elaborating on this point, James states:

And, yeah, I think that my work for the charity as well has been also a way of me dealing with his loss and being able to channel and *keep in connection with who he is and what he meant to be*. And, also, because I feel I can help others who are going through this now, who are fearful of their youngsters who are involved might be in gangs.. [James; emphasis added]

Through his work at *Mothers Against Violence*, James preserves and continues an intimate relationship with his brother. To some extent, James takes ownership of his brother's story and encompasses it into his own, observing how it might reframe his own story. James' internalisation of his brother's achievements and identity allows a reappraisal of his loss as a catalyst for change and growth rather than a story which stifles and suspends action. Here, it is important to note the implications of the fraternal relationship in violent bereavement; a dynamic which is perhaps overlooked in comparison to the more frequently discussed maternal identities in bereaved family

activism. While early literature on grief claimed that continuing attachments with the deceased was detrimental to coping, more recent research has suggested that continuing these bonds are in fact healthy adaptations to bereavement and even opportunities for growth (Stroebe and Schut, 2005; Packman et al., 2006). As Packman et. al. (2006:823) elaborate, "...bonds do not need to be broken and [] individuals maintain them in many different ways, continuing to experience the presence of the deceased in their lives". By internalising his brother's story, James takes on responsibility for his brother's memory and inscribes this relationship in his own story. While James' account is distinctive in this sense, it demonstrates how the purpose of bereaved family activism can vary depending on individual relationships.

7.2.4 Learning from Others

For those bereaved by gun violence, the group responded to needs of acknowledgement and validation while for others it provided an outlet to channel harmful experiences. However, for many of those without direct experiences of victimisation, *Mothers Against Violence* also offered an important opportunity for social, moral and emotional learning as well as a practical means for achieving and resolving needs. As discussed in Chapter 3, victim movements are characterised by victim diversity rather than unwavering *solidarity* and represent a range of different means for achieving different ends. Returning to Pemberton's (2009:4) question, such a range of victim campaigns, voluntary groups and services "...begs the question whether and in what way these different experiences translate into different needs and priorities between victims of crime...". Members were motivated by community outcry, the need for dialogue and the opportunity to 're-moralize' losses which threaten to disorder our assumptions among other aims. *Mothers Against Violence* became a rendezvous for different people each with their own experiences, identities and history. Part of the practice of *Mothers Against Violence* therefore involved

learning the needs and accommodating the experiences of others. As Tara summarises:

So you've got all these *different women, different backgrounds*, all - all very different, really, really different. But what I think I learned from just being with them, which you're gonna meet women of different...life anyway but it's just within that one organisation just how people can get on and it *doesn't matter what background you're coming from, what your story is* or what you've got 'cause some of them are coming from like great wealth to having nothing and some have always had nothing. And just that ability to get on with each other and learn from each other, there was a *willingness there to learn* from each other. [Tara; emphasis added]

Members learned from each others' stories becoming familiar with different concerns and needs. Bereaved family activism is impressed by a range of experiences and needs with each member arriving at different conclusions regarding the purpose of the movement. As discussed previously, some movements can be divided in their approach to issues such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. However, the diversity of such experiences in the case of *Mothers Against Violence* was a celebrated fact rather than a point of contention. Characterised by such a range of voices, constantly entering and exiting the group, the purpose of *Mothers Against Violence* is subject to revision. As Tara describes above, the diversity of experiences did however translate into different needs, which required accommodation and adjustment. By learning from others' experiences, individuals re-storied their own experiences. For some, such as Jane, their time in *Mothers Against Violence* had prompted realisation, reflecting Denzin's (1989b) notion of 'epiphany':

For me, it was *more of a transformation* in a sense, that's all I can say. It was ridiculously difficult for us all, don't get me wrong but I kind of - and I think it's the impact of being around Eve as well, being around other mums, we kind of got strength and I *learnt a different way of dealing with things*.

For me, it *helped [me] grow so much as a person*. I can't even begin to say, I am a totally different person now than I was before 2002. Totally different. And I think MAV has a lot to answer for within that. And, also, Eve's influence. [Jane; emphasis added]

Describing her experience as a 'transformation', Jane discusses her *course* of 'becoming a victim' but also her steps to growth. Here, Jane reflects on the significance of her encounter with *Mothers Against Violence*, particularly, in helping her to learn about 'a different way of dealing with things'. Returning to Kenney's (2004) approach of understanding victims of crime, each encounter in the aftermath of violence prefigures different methods of coping – whether it is with family, the courts, or groups such as *Mothers Against Violence*. In some cases, the group provided a space for learning responses to violence. Just as the loss of her brother became a 'moment of crisis', *Mothers Against Violence* provided an opportunity for resolve and restructuring (Denzin, 1989b). Speaking more generally, Andrea and Eve discussed this process as a form of growth and maturity. *Mothers Against Violence* was just one element of this process of reflection:

... And I don't know if you've heard the saying I'm comfortable in my own skin. It's because life experiences can mould you and shape you and make you who you are and I am who I am today and I'm very happy to be who I am today, I'm very grateful and I'm greatly humbled because I've experienced a lot in life, I've been through a lot and I'm here today. So, I'm very grateful. [Andrea]

So, I'm maturing and it's a maturity that you go on to all the time because as you go from one ten years to another ten years you're learning so much and you're understanding so much and you can put things into practice and you can help other people who's coming behind you... [Eve]

Therefore, while the experience of loss could represent a catalyst for change, it did not always come to define the lives of those involved. Of course, it prompted some life trajectories to be redirected and, in some cases, reframed. However, for many, their experience of loss was one in a series of turning points. For Diane, her engagement with *Mothers Against Violence* helped her realise new qualities and abilities:

...my role in Mothers Against Violence has... it's really *played a strong part in who I am*, yeah. It's helped realise some of things and the abilities that possibly *I didn't know I had before*...

Would I have had that if I had not been taking those steps to speak out? And it's the speaking out that really the key. *I found my voice*. I was finding it because I was doing things before then that led to me finding my voice but being part of Mothers Against Violence - being forced to in a good way. [Diane; emphasis added]

Here, Diane states clearly the impact that her involvement has had on her on a personal level. Diane's work may have helped these traits materialise or consolidated qualities that were already present. Interacting with such a diversity of people also prompted some to reassess assumptions and pushed them to think differently. For example, as James discussed how his experience informed his work:

... I can't just think that because I've experienced that – that, actually, that is the key to being able to understand it, it isn't. *The key to being able to understand is learning to be open to everybody's experience*. And what I found is that even perpetrators are victims as well. Victims is some way, shape or form. And when you hear their stories, the reason they were brought up to a place where they could do such a thing to another human being is because, actually, there have been some horrific things that were done to them and this is how they have actually responded to that pain. So, yeah, I see victims as something very, very different now than I did when I started working with individuals [James; emphasis added]

Acknowledging that his experience did not guarantee transparency into the experiences of others, James highlights how the voices of others have informed his thinking. James reflects it is the very diversity of *Mothers Against Violence* and the voices it represents that has encouraged him to question his assumptions about who victims are. On the other hand, for members such as Jennifer, thinking differently meant taking stock of stories or situations she was previously unaware of:

What impact has it had on me...I think I take note a little bit more when I hear of shootings or attacks where people have died...so I think it's more that I'm more in tune whereas before Mothers Against Violence I wasn't in tuned with current affairs in our community. But now I am and I feel as a volunteer you need to kind of...*be in tune with what, in tune with the community that you're trying to serve*. [Jennifer; emphasis added]

The lessons from sharing experiences with others were variable; for some, learning meant understanding the needs of others while for others learning consisted of lessons in thinking differently or different ways of responding to violence.

7.2.5 Empowerment and Moving Forward

The drive to think differently also had implications through empowering others to move forward. By reframing these losses, individuals redeployed their experiences as stories of growth and learning. Sharing experiences allowed members to ‘draw strength’, as Jane explains, from people with similar stories. As Jane and Tara discuss, these stories helped to catalyse others’ processes of recovery:

People grieved but there wasn't...I'm gonna drag everyone else in with my grief and I'm gonna wallow it out and wallow it out it's kinda like... I'm grieving but I don't wanna drag everyone else through that with me so...
[Tara]

...we weren't a group that remained in *victim-mode*. We *empowered* each other. And the group goes from strength to strength, we're not just sat there *stuck* in the same position. It was almost, right 'this has happened to you...this is what you can do' y'know. And I think I was hoping when I went the group to just talk about how bad it was for me. And I was given a job and I didn't expect that but y'know it's so powerful that. It's really helped. And I do that now with lots of victims I work with in terms of - I mean obviously there's a period of 'This is really bad, I'm going to listen to you' and all - and then it's '*Right, okay, how can we move on from this*'. And not being labelled by the label 'victim'... [Jane; emphasis added]

Individuals were able to learn other methods of coping which were communicated through stories of the collective. In this case, encounters with this community prescribed ways of responding to violence. As Frank (2010:159) states, “communities form because people know the same stories and make sense of these stories in the same way”. By sharing these stories, individuals reconciled their personal experiences with the collective which provided opportunities for learning different ways to deal with the aftermath of violence. Alison discusses a similar process in her reflection on how sharing these experiences in *Mothers Against Violence* impacted her:

...it's almost *cathartic* to get it out and to - but to frame it around something that's positive to say rather than I'm a victim of, I'm a survivor of. So if you put it in that way and then say y'know I've been in a really shit situation but this is where I am now. It makes me feel good that I can do that for somebody else...I'll do it because what *we want to do is empower people, rather than doing it for them*, but give them the skills to be able to do it for themselves. So, yeah, yeah and... you get it out of your system and it works. And it does what it's meant to do, so it's more positive - it's really negative stuff framed in a positive way that helps other people move along [Alison; emphasis added]

Like Jane, Alison emphasises the importance that sharing these stories have in reframing her experiences. Reflecting on this encounter with *Mothers Against Violence*, Alison relocated her story to take stock of previous experiences of loss in light of new experiences of bereaved family activism. The notion of 'empowerment' was central to both Jane and Alison's discussions focusing not only on helping others move forward but learning how to move forward themselves. In this way, *Mothers Against Violence* was a mechanism for confronting and rebalancing experiences of violent bereavement. For example, James discussed how such experiences could be recast as a story of growth:

And I think that the lesson for me in this is that you can - when things like this happen to you, because *they're so unpredictable*, you can't plan for the murder of a relative - but what you can do is use it either for good or for either - I think some people get very angry and very bitter and can sometimes hate life...I think if you do I guess *address that internal pain and channel it into something positive* you can turn these things around to reach and to become something beautiful. [James; emphasis added]

Confronted by these disruptive and 'unpredictable' experiences, James recast these as stories "to represent a coherent and continuous whole" (Pemberton, 2015:18). While James recounted a vivid description of the aftermath of his brother's death, he was eager to present these experiences as but one in a series of turning points with *Mothers Against Violence* providing one of these axes. In another example, Stephanie drew connections between her experiences of loss and the impact of her encounter with *Mothers Against Violence*:

Maybe it is just solely for the fact of my cousin and his death and being able to do something because as I said before I felt like I couldn't do anything at the time of the whole out of body experience, not being able to tell anyone, you kind of feel a bit lost maybe or I don't know what the word is but yeah... [Stephanie]

For Stephanie, the impact that her engagement held for her was tied up with feelings of disempowerment she reported following the death of her cousin. Stephanie reflected on the unpredictable and overwhelming nature of her experiences of violent bereavement and the aftermath. However, through her work with *Mothers Against Violence*, Stephanie remarked how this engagement had restored feelings of control and empowerment from a previously disempowering experience. Bereaved family activism offered a mechanism in which individuals could reconcile previously disruptive experiences, restore self-concepts or realise potential.

7.2.6 Reaching Others

Empowerment was also achieved through the simple fact of being able to reach others. The role of *Mothers Against Violence* in serving others and giving back to the community was explored previously as an important motivation for engagement. As Stephanie explains, seeing the tangible impact of their efforts was empowering:

... I feel like I've actually made an impact in someone's life.

...but we were able to go in there and help some of those young people just talking about our own experiences. And maybe they *just drew on the strength that we had* to deal with whatever it was that they're going through and you just look at these people as just being - if you walked into the classroom or the room you don't know who's hurting you don't know who's in what situation... [Stephanie; emphasis added]

Here, Stephanie returns to an earlier theme on the use of moral authority in building trust and dialogue between individuals. Like Jane's reflection above, Stephanie suggests that others could draw on their experiences as a process of learning and understanding. Sharing these stories provided points of reference to catalyse recovery

or growth. Andrea speaks to this point directly when reflecting on her hopes for her future in the organisation:

I think in terms of bringing more volunteers on board not only victims but when those victims themselves get to a place where they too want to - or are strong enough - to help somebody y'know. That's how I...what happened with me, I - I could relate to Eve when she told her story about losing her son because I lost someone that was very close to me who was shot and killed and I went through a very dark time in my life... but then I realised that if somebody else is going through something like that - the shock, the loss of bereavement, a loved one - then to have someone there on the other end of the phone, someone you can talk to, to share your fears, and concerns with then that's where I wanted to give back. So, I was a survivor and I wanted to help others who was going through. [Andrea]

Learning from her own experiences, Andrea shares her story in the hopes of prompting others into action, reflecting on how this very process prompted her own work in *Mothers Against Violence*. By sharing her own experiences, Andrea hopes to catalyse the action of others. This was also reinforced by Anna who saw her work in the organisation as an investment in the future of the community. Discussing this further, Anna commented on how her efforts to reach others was just one element of this investment:

So I think for me, it kind of makes me feel like I'm contributing to the community, and to a better and more peaceful community really. A place where people are not afraid to see their children growing up and I think as a community we have a lot to offer. Some people choose to leave and go to other areas and I feel that my involvement with MAV that kind of contributes to a better community. A community that people will want to kind of live in. And there is a lot of good that comes out of our community and MAV is an example of that really and being a part of that is [phone rings] ...good. [Anna]

With *Mothers Against Violence* leading by example, personal experiences were communicated outwards to instruct and organise the responses of others. Reaching others in this way, as Anna indicates, also reconstructs assumptions of the area's image of 'Gunchester'. For these participants, sharing experiences to engage wider audiences was empowering through empowering others. In other cases, the effect of

bereaved family activism was cited simply as enjoyment. Rosa and Marie both speak to this effect when explaining their prolonged engagement in the group:

If it didn't impact my life I wouldn't be here I would've gone. So it's impacted my life in that when I see young people achieving, when I see them moving away from...violence and things like that, it makes it all worthwhile for me, that I'm here and that I'm doing what I know to do or what I can do. [Rosa]

I don't know, I enjoy my life. What I do, I enjoy. I don't do anything I don't enjoy. And what I enjoy I try to learn from. So, I've enjoyed the fact that being in MAV I get to meet so many different people. [Marie]

As these discussions indicate, sharing stories to reach others reflected hopes to consolidate their own experiences, to catalyse others or for the simple fact of enjoyment.

7.2.7 Practical Learning

Mothers Against Violence supported opportunities for social, moral and emotional learning. However, through the act of organising the group also provided an outlet for developing practical skills. During the early life of the organisation, and as a developing grassroots organisation, individuals needed to remain attuned to local priorities, reflect the needs of the community and informally organised to respond to fluctuating budgets. As a result, these early phases were described by some members as more 'chaotic' in nature, 'fumbling around' or 'working without design'. As a grassroots organisation, members learned how to respond quickly to constantly changing landscapes. Discussing the perceived impact of bereaved family activism for her, Tara reflected on the skills she had acquired:

I learnt more - I probably learnt more from the women in terms of skills at MAV than I probably did at school and college to tell you the truth. With the time that I think I spent with them looking back now - confidence, speaking to people - 'cause you didn't have a choice [laughter] [Tara]

Many commented that their work with *Mothers Against Violence* was their first experience of any type of community or grassroots activism. Those involved in the

group's early life recognised how quickly they came to learn and respond to what was required. Alison made similar remarks in her discussion on her process of learning:

So, I think it's helped me in this job in terms of people that I work with. It's helped me massively with getting our clients and trustees and everybody else to understand the gang culture and things like that... [Alison]

For some, this process of learning involved reaching out to the recently bereaved and listening to those in need of support while, for others, this meant how to manage relationships with the media and police. As Marie describes below, *Mothers Against Violence* acted as a 'resource' to draw upon for practical or professional ends:

I don't know what else to call it - it's a resource that we can use for good in every area. So, people use MAV for experience - work experience - for counselling, you know for whatever help that people need. I think it's a very unique place, I don't know any other place like this. We don't do office hours it seems [laughs]. We do any hour. [Marie]

Those involved with *Mothers Against Violence* could take on tasks in press-handling, administration, communicating with local authorities to organising events, public speaking and outreach to affected families. *Mothers Against Violence* responded to a variety of different needs; whether they were emotional, as the early discussion suggest, or practical, providing opportunities for gaining experience, fulfilling professional requirements or, even, research collaborations. With each individual contributing motivations, experiences and strategies, *Mothers Against Violence* came to reflect the needs of those involved.

7.3 Victimisation as a 'Catalyst'

Mothers Against Violence represents a meeting point for different needs and ambitions. This research provides a snapshot of bereaved family activism by documenting the experiences of individuals each at different points in their lives. Those families relaying stories of loss through gun and knife violence often described the change in direction of their lives, labelled by some as 'transformative'. Violent bereavement was

described by relatives as a 'catalytic' event in their lives; an overwhelming episode which prompted a change in direction. This catalytic event was a jarring but transformative 'turning point' taking individuals to different places. As James explained following the death of his brother:

...that *that was a catalyst of change for me* in that I wanted my life - I think how I internalised it - it was that my brother was no longer here but I was going to live his life as well as live my own so to achieve as much as I could all in his name. [James; emphasis added]

These 'catalytic' events, as several family activists highlighted, were important points of departure for change and achievement. James continues to state how many of the achievements in his life became possible following his brother's death:

And it has also been very motivating because I was able to achieve, go back to study, I was able to get a degree in professional counselling, which is not something that I thought that would ever be possible for me. And also qualified as a counsellor. And the current work that I'm doing now as [anon], *all that was as a result of a big change in the direction of my life as a result of his death*. [James, 46; emphasis added]

This was echoed by Eve who emphasised the impression that her son's death had made on the direction of her life:

And because I'm satisfied with where I am at this present moment, because of my son's death, I usually tell people if I had to live again I will do the same thing. *My son's death because it has brought me into a place that I'd never been before and it's taken me beyond what I ever thought or imagined*. I'm thinking who would have been phoning me up and sending me emails like that and asking my opinion of things you get what I'm saying [laughs] - who would have been doing that? [Eve; emphasis added]

Similarly, Jane referred to the 'transformative' nature of her experience of traumatic bereavement:

For me, *it was more of a transformation in a sense*, that's all I can say. It was ridiculously difficult for us all, don't get me wrong but I kind of - and I think it's the impact of being around Eve as well, being around other mums, we kind of got strength and I learnt a different way of dealing with things. [Jane; emphasis added]

While these events represented significant catalysts for personal development, they were also ‘turning points’ in the community which prompted organised responses:

I think it was a bit of a turning point. But what I would say is we’ve had that a few times before, so when my brother’s friend who was 12 got killed that was a bit of turning point because it was like we’ve never had anybody that young before so it was like people kind of stand up and want to do something and they’re angry. And then with my brother it was the three deaths in three weeks literally so people again are alert, they stand up, they’re angry, it’s like what’s going on, what’s being done to stop this really. [Anna; emphasis added]

Representing a ‘catalyst’ for change, victimisation can be considered as just one point in a series of events. Following the event of fatal victimisation, relatives reported a variation of effects from overwhelmedness and disruption to disbelief and unpredictability. This theme of variability continued when relatives described the motivations behind their engagement with *Mothers Against Violence*. Similarly, as the previous discussion, the impacts of bereaved family activism ranged from feelings of empowerment and meaning-making, to practical learning for others. Such variation in the effects of victimisation, motivations, ambitions and impacts of bereaved family activism illustrates how previous life experiences, current conversations, and encounters can help re-story experiences in a different light.

7.4 *Mothers Against Violence* as a ‘Vehicle’

It’s just a melting pot [laughs]. [Marie]

For those involved, *Mothers Against Violence* serves a number of purposes for different people and fluctuates over different points in time. Individuals carrying different experiences, needs and even professional backgrounds were tied together with the group acting as a meeting point for different trajectories. In this section, it is argued that *Mothers Against Violence* represents an emotional, spiritual and socially supportive space. Individuals engage, contribute and shape to this space with *Mothers Against Violence* emerging as the product of various trajectories. Simultaneously

shaped and reacting to these experiences, this space responds to a range of needs, all the while, tempered by external pressures and trends in funding priorities. This notion of *Mothers Against Violence* was summarised neatly by Marie's discussion below. When asked to elaborate on the relationship she perceived between the faith and *Mothers Against Violence*, Marie responded:

M: ...other to say you can only be who you are, where you are. Do you know what I mean? So...when we think about things, our beliefs - our thoughts are filtered by our beliefs. So, what's good and what's not good is filtered.....*I don't know how else to say it other than who I am is what I am, is what I do.* It's always about helping others, one way or the other, serving others....

I: Could you give me an example?

M: It works because of what we believe. And we believe it's about serving other people, it's not about, it's not about Marie, it's about you. I serve you, what I do for you is what I do for others, I serve, I serve others. To the best of my ability. And we believe God comes in and helps us to do that. So in whatever way we're doing it, we're giving our best always. *So MAV is just a vehicle....for what we are and who we are. It's what drives us. MAV's just a vehicle.* If it was something else, you know it could be anything but just happened to be this one.....*But yeah, I think it's just that – it's a vehicle for us to do what we are.* (Marie, 57; emphasis added)

In Marie's words, *Mothers Against Violence* represented a 'vehicle' or a space for reworking and learning about otherwise dissimilar individuals. For some, this represented an emotional space; the group provided opportunities for re-empowerment following the disruptive and disordering event of victimisation. This was a particularly pertinent theme in the cases of Eve. For Eve, *Mothers Against Violence* was situated as a vehicle for reconciling the loss of purpose with renewed structures of meaning. For others, the group provided a social space for drawing strength and legitimacy from the experiences of others. This was particularly relevant to Jane's story who repeatedly referred to the socially supportive nature of the group through sharing experiences and stories. For others, *Mothers Against Violence* responded to practical or professional needs; it provides opportunities for gaining experience, strengthening community outreach and meeting educational needs. For

example, Andrea discussed her background as a student seeking experience with community organisations which led her to *Mothers Against Violence*. The group therefore held different purposes for different individuals.

As each individual arrives and departs from *Mothers Against Violence*, and each makes his or her own contributions, the group is under constant revision. In this sense, the movement represents a *resource* for different needs with each person 'seeing a return' on their engagement. Commenting on this turnover of membership over time, Anna discussed the natural process of disengagement for those involved:

...I think a lot of people - and looking back at the kind of people who have been involved in MAV - *that they do move on because their life has kind of moved on and MAV doesn't kind of have a role in that any more really*. But I think for a lot of people it is quite healing and cathartic really, and that's just what they've done as part of their healing process. And I guess for me, I would say that I stay on the periphery really. And I do support MAV but I'm not as involved as my mum is and my brother is and some of my Aunties and stuff. But ...that's how I've dealt with the loss really. That I don't kind of throw myself in it, my life isn't all about MAV because I don't necessarily want my life to be consumed with memory of that loss of my brother. Whereas - 'cause that's not how I've healed - whereas for my mum that's been very much part of her healing process so *I think people get involved at different levels, or a certain amount of times, for different reasons really, and I think that's fine as long as they contribute something whilst they've been involved that's fine really*. [Anna; emphasis added]

With each contribution, the space is pressed or pulled in different directions which reflect the stories shared. As Frank (2010) suggests, as stories are developed and revised, it perhaps also follows that so do communities. However, these departures from the group were not viewed as jarring or unsettling but rather the culmination of a natural process. As Anna summarises above, individuals 'move on because their life...has moved on and MAV doesn't...have a role in that anymore'. This was also commented upon by Jane who explained her own reasons for 'distancing' herself from the organisation:

And there's lots of people who come in and out and I think they come in and out and leave various stages of grief. 'Cause that's how my - why I distanced myself really I think and it wasn't intentional... [Jane]

Jane refers here more broadly to the changing purpose of *Mothers Against Violence* and the different shapes this might take over the life stories of individuals. This also speaks to the interaction between personal experiences and collective ambitions and at what point they might conflict. If, indeed, the personal needs and collective purposes fall out of sync and cannot be reconciled, individuals such as Jane might see reason to draw back from *Mothers Against Violence*. However, confirming previous discussions, these disengagements from the group were described as somewhat predictable considering the varied purposes for which *Mothers Against Violence* filled. Unpacking this further, Eve discusses the natural conclusion of relationships between *Mothers Against Violence* and its members:

They're skills and they're using them, that's what they were given. So, they come and add to it and then they move and they're proud of their part of what they've done.

...you come with something that you can offer me and you have something that you can have. So, we're feeding into each other, we're caring into each other, we're making sure everybody have what they need do you get what I'm saying. [Eve]

Again, Eve repeats the notion of *Mothers Against Violence* as a vehicle or resource upon which people draw on to fulfil needs or achieve their goals. In her discussion, Eve draws upon the metaphor of building a house; consulting the skillsets of different people who contribute to the construction before moving onto the next project. As both Marie and Eve allude to, the focus here is not to measure the success of *Mothers Against Violence* in terms of achievement but in its ability to represent and serve others:

Once you've discovered it those people can come along and do what they're supposed to do to bring that to pass. *And it's not just for me, it's not just for you, the future is not about you because we're very me orientated and I orientated.* No. *It's for all of us.* So, what we are doing here it's for every - all of us - everyone's going to benefit from it... [Eve; emphasis added]

It works because of what we believe. *And we believe it's about serving other people, it's not about Marie, it's about you. I serve you.* What I do for you is what I do for others. I serve others, to the best of my ability. We believe God comes

in and helps us to do that. So, in whatever way we're doing it we're giving our best always. So *MAV is just a vehicle for... what we are, for who we are*. Yeah? It's what drives us. MAV's just a vehicle. So if it was something else, it could be anything, but just happened to be this one... I think it's chosen me in this sense because, obviously, it's family based. So, yeah, I think it's just that. *It's a vehicle for us to do what we are*. [Marie; emphasis added]

Here, *Mothers Against Violence* is more a reflection of personal needs and ambitions than a calculated product with boundaries and outcomes. To some extent, this reflects Latour's (2005) push to focus on the process of group formation rather than groups as 'ostensively' defined. In doing so, Latour (2005:29) argues this project should focus on "the traces left behind by their activity of forming and dismantling groups". With each individual leaving impressions of different ideas and strategies, *Mothers Against Violence* reflects the needs of those who populate it. Whether changes in local priorities or competitive funding climates have had the same influence in mediating individual needs is the subject of the next section.

7.5 Changes in the Field: Sustaining *Mothers Against Violence*

In comparison to the 'organic' grassroots movement that emerged in 1999, the context that saw the emergence of *Mothers Against Violence* has shifted markedly over previous years. The theme of change and comparison was a common theme for participants underlined by one major shift: the decline of gun and knife violence in the Greater Manchester area.

Nationally, the number of police-recorded firearm offences has been decreasing. For example, the House of Commons Briefing Paper on *Firearm Crime Statistics: England & Wales* recorded just over 24,000 firearm offences in 2002/03 (Allen and Dempsey, 2016). This was compared to the 7,870 firearm offences recorded in 2014/15, observing a decrease of 67%. This rate translates to a decline of just over 5% per year between 2002/03 and 2014/15. Specifically, the area of Greater Manchester saw a decrease in firearm offences in April 2007/March 2008 from 1,160 to 450 in April

2015/March 2016 (ONS, 2017). With the pressures of changing trends in gun violence, membership, competitive funding climates and evolving community needs, it is valuable to ask how an organisation can maintain its early ideas and ambitions.

7.5.1 Media Responses

While the 'Gunchester' image remained a popular media and political narrative in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the label of Moss Side and Hulme as 'problem' areas have since seen reform. As a result, members commenting on the media response to *Mothers Against Violence* more recently noted the changes in awareness and attention.

Over half of participants made reference to the relationship that *Mothers Against Violence* shared with the media. A number of participants aired concerns over the quality of engagement with media representatives; particularly, the community's attempts to shirk the label of 'Gunchester'. This was particularly pertinent in the discussions of members present during the early life of the organisation. During the early life of the organisation, when gun violence was at the forefront of the political agenda, *Mothers Against Violence* would often be approached with journalists 'trying to use the group to get access to families for stories'. Tara discussed her experience of her relationship with the media:

...just think well how they gonna put a twist on this. Y'know it's gonna be all 'mothers of grieving gangsters' you just didn't ever know what they were gonna put in the headlines. So, there was always like a distrust there... [Tara]

Continuing, Tara commented on how this distrust of the media had created an imperative to trust only those who had been 'vouched for'. These representatives were considered more invested in the community:

...deals with all us local people, people that had been brought up in the community, come from the community, and were usually black, to carry that story forward. [Tara]

Here, Tara touches upon the racialised issue of gun violence in Manchester and the media's pre-occupation with it. Drawing upon this issue further, Tara remarked:

So we were very careful about the contacts we used, because there was a lot of distrust of outside agencies... 'cause, it was almost like the violence had been, the way it had been portrayed in the media was that it was very much a black on black thing, black on black crime. [Tara]

Similarly, Alison discussed media distortions particularly the construction the problem of gun violence as a problem of race:

It *never* says *shot by a white male*. Only ever mentions it when it's black male and that sort of thing pisses me off so yeah in terms of the media I'm not a big fan, because it only seems they get in touch when something bad's going on. Rather than when something good's going on. [Alison; emphasis added]

While only commented on by Tara and Alison here, the connection between race and gun violence speaks to a broader issue of manipulation and sensationalism by the media. Again, this was predominantly an issue reported by members active in the early years of the organisation. With gun violence fuelling the image of Moss Side as a 'problem' area, the media turned to *Mothers Against Violence* as authorities on the effects of violence in inner-city Manchester. The media fixation on mothers or women as symbols of public grief is an issue that has been documented previously (Valier and Lippens, 2004; Charman and Savage, 2009; Dawney, 2013; Wright, 2016). The current research observed that families of gun violence were a point of continuous interest to the media, although the role of motherhood was not explicitly referred to. Many members engaged in the organisation's early work were distrustful and wary of the influence of the media. For example, Jane reflects on her experiences of the media following the death of her brother:

So, I'd done lots of interviews, live interviews and shows, so we was doing a lot of that as well I think. And I think possibly that was because I was the newest fix in the media jumped on and well I was possibly mislead because I wanted to make a difference and I thought getting out there was. And it's just kind of y'know media whores in a sense - not in that knowing but d'ya know

- you just want to get your brother's name out there and known and doing something. *And getting used and abused by the media really...*

...we were *prey*... [Jane; emphasis added]

Describing her relationship with the media, Jane alludes to the exploitative nature of these interactions. Diane's discussion of the media was relayed in very similar terms with both referring to the 'predatory' nature of these relationships:

I'm in an organisation of myself ...working with young people, still struggling, commissioning, tending, doing all those things we're supposed to be doing but not being supported by our local authorities. We're not seen as an issue. However, should a young person die tomorrow, we'll get covered by the media and there will be a talk of organised crime and statutory agencies will get their money topped up.

... *media are media aren't they? They're hunters, they're predators, they want what's new.* ... So yeah media does come out when they want to *sensationalise* stuff. And I learnt early in the game with Mothers Against Violence that I don't entertain media. I never have, I haven't got no patience for it. [Diane; emphasis added]

Again, the media are described here as manipulative and distorting with 'voices from below' interpreted through the agendas of others. Similarly, Matthew questioned the motives of media representatives approaching *Mothers Against Violence*:

I think that's part of problem because they wan' a soundbite or a quote for the papers [Matthew]

...lot of people just used, *used the name at the time*, like oh community groups, gun crime, gang crime, now you've got this group of mothers that are gonna deal with it [Tara; emphasis added]

The act of speaking out in the spaces organised by *Mothers Against Violence* was described previously by some as a 'cathartic' experience. These spaces for stories of suffering presented an opportunity for recovery and creating dialogue. However, as Stauffer (2015:80) argues, "if hearing is [to be] meaningful, it has to be embedded in an openness where what is said might be heard even if it threatens to break the order of the known world for those who listen". For meaningful engagement to take place, relationships between victim groups and political institutions must be more, as one

participant noted, than a 'tick box exercise'. As particular individuals or collectives become 'demarcated' to speak for others, some argue this runs the risk of being co-opted for the purpose of political expediency and at the cost of meaningful engagement. Introducing this issue, Diane observed the challenges faced when acting as the 'voice from below' and the danger of messages being co-opted into other agendas:

They rely on people telling them and the people that are telling them what's going on are so far removed from real life it's just a joke, y'know. You've got all these gatekeepers and you finally get to a community level - it changes so much, y'know, and it gets watered - it's like Chinese whispers y'know. And that's what I'm realising all the time with working and going around and talking to individuals that y'know the gatekeepers that we have, *the people that interpret our message sometimes have their own agenda*. [Diane; emphasis added]

Rather than meaningful engagement, participants reported a more tokenistic relationship with the media which risks stories becoming subordinated to ulterior agendas or what is politically expedient at the time. In comparison to the experiences of current members, *Mothers Against Violence* received much less media attention perhaps because of the changes in the trends of gun violence and re-direction of policy responses. Members who arrived at the organisation much later reported a different relationship with the media. In this cohort, experiences of media response were generally more positive than the exploitative relationships described previously. However, this also came with an acknowledgement that media seemed to be invested in particular stories; perhaps, the more 'gritty' as Stephanie discusses:

So yeah, I think the media have been quite receptive to MAV, but now they're just looking for stories. They don't just want the everyday occurrence of us just y'know getting along in MAV. They want *the hard, gritty stories* that are going to catch people's attentions. [Stephanie; emphasis added]

Stephanie notes that while, in her experience, she had known the media to be fairly 'receptive', they were nevertheless preoccupied with stories of the moment. With gun violence no longer a local or national priority, the nature of media engagement has

changed to reflect new priorities. As Anna and Rosa comment below, recognition of *Mothers Against Violence* has been sporadic of late and is often consistent with the ebbs and flows of current events:

...the media tend to come to us when there were certain things. If there was a report about gun violence coming out, they're going to get to Eve first, and says what's your thoughts about this, if there was a killing somewhere, yes, they do that. *But I don't know whether they advertise MAV enough...* [laughs] [Rosa; emphasis added]

But generally, yeah I don't think it's really had that much y'know MAV itself and the work it does, it's *usually on the back of something else*. [Anna; emphasis added]

This caused frustration among some members of the group who have voiced discontent over the media's fixation upon the label of 'Gunchester' and its associations. Four participants, again, largely from the group's early life, expressed frustration at the media's preoccupation with negative stories and their tendency to contact *Mothers Against Violence* only when sensationalised events prompted them to do so. For example, Tara and Alison expressed this frustration and questioned why the media only contacted them 'when it's bad' rather when it was 'good':

I think it's just distrust of the media gathered from years of experience of - I did reports in the community. It was never, ever, ever anything good. Y'know there was lots of good things that were going on in [PLACE] even in the peak of '82 - '92 which I found to be a bad time. [Tara]

...and basically we only got contacted when there was a shooting. So I got pissed off, why don't you ring when we're doing a bag-packing fundraiser at Asda. Why don't you come to one of the events that we do? Or why don't you do this? So for me it felt as if, which I've now reinforced in my media stuff that I do here, ring us when it's good as well as when it's bad. And anything that either glamorises or exploits or portrays it in a certain way, I won't entertain you. [Alison]

The selective nature of the media's engagement prompted annoyance in participants who questioned why there was so little attention to the positive outputs of the community. By returning to the label of 'Gunchester', the media makes little effort to detach the community from its iconic image of violent Britain. Matthew discussed

this issue and voiced his annoyance at the media's responses to the more recent instances of gun violence in Salford:

And whatever the shooting incident is, the story's always had that backdrop about Manchester's gun ... And y'know why when it was the riots - the last riots - they got in touch ... with Mothers Against Violence, can you organise a group of young people in ... to talk about the riots and why young people got involved? And you can but you're fucking 30 years late, like you're coming to [PLACE] - it's the [PLACE] and [PLACE], why you not in [PLACE] speaking to a bunch of white kids from [inaudible]. What ya coming bringing a bunch of black kids in [PLACE] and Mothers Against Violence ... *You just can't get away from it.* [Matthew; emphasis added]

Dealing with the aftermath of gun violence, the group has focused more broadly on promoting positive lifestyles for young people. The group's annual public event *Making Children and Young People Matter* is the most recent manifestation of this drive. The following research journal excerpt speaks to the importance of trying to lose the label of guns and gang by focusing on talent in the local community:

Research Journal, July 9th 2016

A long day of volunteering overall, the MCYPM has been the culmination of weeks of planning, stressing, discussion and effort – all voluntarily. Twelve hours work from 9am to 9pm in the pouring rain. But everyone involved was so enthusiastic and excited to see the outcome of their work. The atmosphere was filled with energy and, despite the long day, the volunteers and organisers seemed to enjoy every moment (although I'm not sure why I find this point surprising). There is some outstanding talent in the area – which might not have been revealed if not for this event. Perhaps some interesting themes to be drawn out here about trying to divorce themselves and the community from the label 'Gunchester' and showing the many positives that come out of the community.

By focusing and celebrating local talent, the event works to separate Manchester from the image of violence to towards an image of opportunity. James touches upon this when discussing the changes within the community:

And I think one of the things we took away from the event at the beginning was, actually, it showcased another side to the inner city, of inner city people because there was a perception that it was all about gangs and violence and things like that and I think we wanted to change that perception. I think the event in Manchester helps do that because we see lots of inner city people on

stage celebrating their talents and gifts which I think is always a positive thing...[James]

With the constant pressures of changing membership, competitive funding climates and evolving community needs, *Mothers Against Violence* has inevitably seen change with decline of gun violence in Manchester providing an important background to these developments. While gun violence is no longer a policy priority, community organisations are perhaps instead responding to what Diane has called the ‘ancestry of gun violence’. Dealing with the aftermath of gun violence looks at providing opportunity, allowing young people to contribute positively to society, and encouraging young people’s investment in their community.

7.5.2 ‘NGO-isation’ and Changing Funding Priorities

As a registered charity, *Mothers Against Violence* are also dependant to some extent upon changes in funding priorities and wider trends in the voluntary sector. Chapter 3 discussed the relevance of these debates in framing the shape and direction of victims’ movements. Trends of marketisation, managerialism and ‘new public management’ projects, in the form of payment-by results and competitive contracting, have created a state of insecurity for voluntary sector organisations (McLaughlin et al., 2001; Maguire, 2012; Corcoran and Hucklesby, 2013). As Corcoran (2014) states, underpinned by policy shifts of localisation, diversification and marketisation, there have been concerns regarding the tensions between the rhetoric of community responsibility and the pressures of managerialism and competition (see also Bowen and Donoghue, 2013). Amid these trends, there are concerns regarding the increasing dependence of voluntary sector organisations on government funding, the compromise of grassroots advocacy, resource competition, and the capacity of smaller organisations under the strain of national protocols and demands (Williams and

Goodman, 2007; Benson and Hedge, 2009; Silvestri, 2009; Mills et al., 2011; Corcoran and Hucklesby, 2013; Simmonds, 2013).

While not a subject for systematic study in the interviews, five participants referred to the perceived lack of funding available for community outreach activities such as those undertaken by *Mothers Against Violence*. For example, during the early life of the organisation, Tara remarked on the sudden demands placed upon *Mothers Against Violence* by funding bodies and local authorities:

...a group of mums that have come together now all of the sudden can do the accounts, got a constitution, you know got these links and networks was able to now advise other groups...

I think that the problem that most organisations *you've got to go where the funding streams are*. And I think the funding shapes a lot of what organisations do. [Tara]

A similar observation was made by Anna who noted how pressures for funding and changing community needs influenced the nature of the organisation:

So they have kind of evolved, which with anything if you want to keep going that's what you have to do, you have to kind of change and adapt according to what's going on in the outside world really and the needs and demands of that - and also the link to funding, because if you're not able to do that you're not going to get any funding basically... [Anna]

Rosa also commented on the difficulty of securing funding according to the seemingly elusive criteria of funding bodies.

... do all sorts of funding and people say that's what our criteria, that's not our criteria, that's not what criteria is, so we wonder what is their criteria? [Rosa]

Here, Tara, Rosa and Anna speak to pressures that funding streams place on the activities of voluntary groups. With the increasingly competitive nature of funding and the declining priority of gun violence in policy, there is perhaps more pressure to reform the direction of the group. Diane comments on an array of other issues faced by young people in the community that persist after changes in gun violence trends:

Because you have to know that we're not well-resourced, it's not everyone's favourite agenda, people like to say okay 'There's no more gun crime in Manchester, let's move on'. But what there is, is that *generational impact* and that's what we're working with currently today. [Diane; emphasis added]

As Diane points out, while gun violence is on the decrease, there are still enduring issues for young people that require attention whether in the form of homelessness, social exclusion, education and opportunity or child sexual exploitation. Continuing, Diane voiced her frustration at the competitive nature of funding despite receiving public acknowledgements from various political sources:

You've got groups like Mothers Against Violence that are still going on a shoestring. How can you have that in 2016! Do you know what I mean? We've been acknowledged by the Queen, been acknowledged by *whoever you need to be acknowledged by*...people of influence and power - we've had it all. Yeah? And we y'know we're walking testimonies to that. But, yet, year in year out, you're struggling for funding. It makes no sense. [Diane; emphasis added]

Again, Diane's discussion speaks to the tokenistic nature of political engagement with victims; a concern that one participant also phrased as becoming a 'lip service'. Participants repeated the importance of *meaningful* engagement with outside authorities. Participant observations of *Mothers Against Violence* also provided some understanding into how these pressures manifested in day-to-day activities. The new push for professionalisation placed demands for streamlining and refining of the organisation through quality assessments and documenting the extent of community impact for future bids. Funding commitments also placed obligations to manage information effectively within *Mothers Against Violence* and catalogue progress as evidence for funding bodies.

With these pressures of professionalisation and increasing technocracy, there are many critics of 'NGO-isation' that might argue that these conditions stifle dynamic grassroots organisations. In this sense, grassroots organisations such as *Mothers Against Violence* are subject to the same pressures that non-governmental organisations contend with. As part of my volunteering experience, I was given the

task of cataloguing the activities of the organisation over its 17 years to create a timeline of events. This exercise revealed the varied extent of the group's activity from community outreach events, advisory positions on Home Office roundtables, extensive media engagements, speeches and workshops. However, documenting these activities for the purposes of *evidencing* impact proved difficult, particularly as the years before *Mothers Against Violence* gained charity status were much more organic in nature. This raises the question as to whether these new funding priorities and pressures for centralisation are at odds with the energy of the *Mothers Against Violence* that has been detailed in the past three chapters.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented a summary of the varied effects of bereaved family activism upon its members. *Mothers Against Violence* held different purposes for different individuals at different points in their lives. These purposes ranged from achieving acknowledgement, giving meaning to loss, to acting as a method for re-connecting with victims and empowerment. Here, *Mothers Against Violence* became part of a process of learning from the experiences of others, community needs, and through their own encounters of sharing experiences with others. With each individual contributing stories, ideas and experiences, *Mothers Against Violence* was subject to constant revision and changed to reflect the needs of those involved. Changes in the field, such as local priorities, funding pressures and media responses, were then presented to further an understanding of how external factors might mediate the needs of individuals.

Returning to the research question, this chapter has sought to demonstrate how experiences of lethal violence can be shaped by bereaved family activism. By considering the impact of bereaved family activism upon those involved, this chapter

highlighted the interaction between 'personal troubles' and 'public issues'. Different experiences became more or less relevant at different points in the life of the organisation just as the organisation became more or less relevant at different points in lives of those involved. At the point which personal needs and collective purposes of the group become decoupled, some individuals found reason to pull back their engagement. *Mothers Against Violence* did not occupy a definitive role in all life stories of those involved at all times. Rather, *Mothers Against Violence* was situated as an emotional, social and practical space. The group responded to different needs and achieved different ends with each individual leaving marks upon the group in the form of experiences, stories, and ambitions. The next chapter presents a case study as a way of storying the variety of functions that *Mothers Against Violence* performs for those involved.

Chapter 8 - The Case of Eve

8.1 Introduction

Following the intentions of the previous chapter in highlighting the variety of functions that *Mothers Against Violence* performs, this chapter introduces a case study to deepen understanding of the different experiences of those involved. As Stake (2005:443) writes, case studies are “not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied”. While *Mothers Against Violence* provided a holistic case study, a cross section of experiences of the same issue, this chapter presents the story of Eve as an embedded case study (see Yin, 2013). As Flyvberg (2006:229) argues, representative or typical cases do not necessarily provide “the richest [of] information”. Instead, this embedded case study provides an opportunity to “optimize understanding” of *Mothers Against Violence* as a whole (Stake, 2005:443). The data collected during the interview and in conversation with Eve presented rich, in-depth context required by case study research. While Eve will have been present only to a selected set of events and interactions, her story offers one of the few accounts that covers the longevity of the group’s activity, present since the foundation of *Mothers Against Violence*.

Eve’s story represents *both* depth and variation; illustrating patterns identified in previous chapters *and* themes which are particular to Eve’s experience. The story of Eve is not presented here as a typical case or one that represents ordinariness. Eve’s story cuts across several propositions from the previous chapters; in particular, the role of bereaved family activism in making meaning, providing purpose and offering moral authority to shared experiences. However, Eve’s story also represents a critical case in demonstrating the particularity of experiences in the aftermath of fatal violence and, as a result, is not intended to be representative or provide generalising potential. Remembering that Eve’s story is deeply embedded within the story of *Mothers Against*

Violence, the decision was made to present Eve's case as the final chapter of discussion as a way of bringing together these two parallel stories.

8.2 Eve's Story

On the day of Eve's interview, I arrived at the office of *Mothers Against Violence* in the early afternoon, unaware that I would not leave until after 6pm that evening. Overall, in between our discussions and some interruptions, the interview lasted over three and a half hours spanning from the story of her childhood and growing up in the North of England, to the loss of her son and arrival at *Mothers Against Violence*. Aware that Eve shared the most intimate of relationships with *Mothers Against Violence* due to her role in its foundation and knowing that she had a longer story to tell of its development, this interview was postponed until the end of fieldwork. The decision to delay Eve's interview was deliberate to ensure that my interview questions were developed and refined in consideration of previous interviews. In line with the narrative interviewing approach explored in Chapter 4, questions were unstructured and open-ended asking '*Can you tell me about...?*' rather than '*What happened when...?*'

Eve was 69 years old at the time of the interview and grew up as part of a large family. Beginning her interview Eve discussed her role in different jobs following her leave of education eventually training as a nurse and working across the North West. Discussing her practise of Christianity, attendance at Church and using frequent references to the Bible, the centrality of faith to Eve's story quickly became apparent. Eve habitually illustrated her conclusions with episodes and passages from the Bible. Following the death of her son, faith continued to play a central role in making meaning from death. While Eve was clear to state the importance of the Church long before the death of her son, our discussions highlighted that Eve saw her faith grow stronger following her loss. The following section stories Eve's experience as a way of

showing the centrality of faith in her experience of the loss of her son in August 1999 and how it influenced the direction of *Mothers Against Violence*. However, it is important to acknowledge that this ‘reading’ of Eve’s story is a product of criminological analysis which has established theoretical frameworks and methodologies (Garland, 2011). As Ferrell (2011:66) argues, criminology is a ‘normative system’ with its own set of “normative standards regarding objectivity, replicability, and the accumulative advancement of knowledge”. This chapter therefore concludes by considering the quality of criminological engagement with the study of faith, religion and belief systems.

8.3 Role of Faith in Bereavement, Meaning-Making and *Mothers Against Violence*

I don’t work, even in Mothers Against Violence, I don’t work without God, I speak to him all the time [Eve]

The role of faith in Eve’s story manifested in three different ways: firstly, the notion of practising faith as ‘preparation’ for bereavement, secondly, to manage and re-order the disordering experience of violence and, thirdly, to realise purpose in *Mothers Against Violence*. While faith was a common theme, at least in passing reference, with other participants, Eve represented the only case in which faith was deployed directly as an explanation of suffering, agency and loss. The following section explores these three themes to illustrate the particular importance of faith to Eve’s story of the loss of her son and time in *Mothers Against Violence*.

8.3.1 Practising Faith as ‘Preparation’ for Bereavement

Eve had attended Church since childhood, describing attending Church firstly with her mother when she was younger and continuing her relationship with her faith after being baptised in a Methodist Church. Eve was a practising Christian, regularly attending prayer meetings and discovering the lessons of the Bible:

We went to church on Sundays...the family challenge on Wednesday, we had another group, young people's group and that's where I learnt quite a lot of the things that I know now in relation to God and to the life that one needs to live even though it wasn't in its fullness and I think a lot of it had a lot of misunderstanding about what the bible said and things like that. And now I can read it for myself and over the years y'know the last 10, 12, 14 years I'm reading more for myself and I'm finding out amazing things in there that nobody ever taught us... [Eve]

During this time, Eve noted the importance of 'meditating' and 'studying' these lessons, developing her conversations with God as she summarised later: 'I can hear his voice better now'. This process of 'maturity', as Eve described it, stemmed from the act of learning about the experiences of others as discussed in previous chapters as well as a more profound understanding of her own needs:

So, I'm maturing and it's a maturity that you go on to all the time because as you go from one ten years to another ten years you're learning so much and you're understanding so much and you can put things into practice and you can help other people who's coming behind you... [Eve]

In this way, Eve's understanding of her experiences was rendered by her readings of the Bible. However, it was these early lessons and developed dialogue with her faith that Eve recognised as an important preface to her experience of the loss of her son. Learning from communities of faith, her study of the Bible and reflections on these lessons, Eve saw these lessons as *preparation* for what was to follow. Eve first recognises this when discussing the arrival of Christian television in her home:

And I started [seeing] people talking about their own experience with God and y'know some people who had lost their children and all that kind of thing and how God had worked in their lives and changed their lives and they were doing this, this and this and I'm thinking ok y'know well. *But what I noticed aswell, listening to it, it was actually speaking to something that was inside me already.* I knew about Christianity and everything but it was giving much more than that, just well you get up in the morning, you say your prayers and you read the Bible and that's it. They were telling me you can talk to God, and he would talk back to you. [Eve; emphasis added]

Here, Eve is prompted by hearing the stories of others and their relationships with God. Rather than 'just' getting up, saying prayers and reading the Bible, these stories

encouraged Eve to start engaging critically with these lessons, observing how they might inform her own experiences. Eve continued to explain how her faith and newly encouraged dialogue seemed to frame her day-to-day experiences:

So, I started learning a lot of these things and they *made perfect sense to me you know what I mean and from inside me I could hear the cry* - it's like when you're crying from the inside and you don't what it is. Yeah. It was that, that things started becoming clearer to me and then I started to think well was that God that spoke to me the other when he told me to go that way and I never went that way and this happened. So, I started thinking more about that and thinking well I need to listen to this voice...he wants to protect me and walk with me and all that kind of thing. I started doing that and listening to that so *by the time my son was shot and killed, I knew a little bit more about God and one of the things - the scripture that came home to me fully was 'All things are working together for your good'...* [Eve; emphasis added]

In this process of, almost, learning to hear, Eve draws connections between these lessons and the loss of her son. In this discussion, Eve's description of this process is framed through expressions of 'destiny', 'vision' and 'journey' which speak to the notion of fate. In Eve's words, these lessons from her faith and community 'prepared' her for the death of her son. Eve draws upon the unwavering relationship between her realisation of Christianity, coping with the aftermath of her son's murder, and her subsequent arrival at *Mothers Against Violence*:

So, I believe I was being prepared as well for what happened to me you get what I'm saying? Even though I didn't fully understand everything, *now I know more now than I did then*. I know more now than I did then before my son... after my son I know more than before my son died 'cause now I speak to God on a regular basis, I speak to him he speaks to me, he tells me things and sometimes he tells me such good things I think are you really sure God [laughs] this is what you're saying to me? This is what you're going to do for us? *Because Mothers Against Violence as far as I'm concerned is birthed out of God's speaking* [laughs] you get what I'm saying. So, I knew I was here, I was saying *what is my purpose, why am I here?* [Eve; emphasis added]

Here, the experience of violent bereavement and later engagements in *Mothers Against Violence* are used as loci from which Eve reframes her relationship with her faith. In light of these new experiences, lessons from her faith are realised as preparation and guidance before the death of her son. As Eve describes, she 'didn't fully understand

everything' then. Other participants have discussed the idea of victimisation as a moment of crisis or point of transformation which prompt a realisation and a re-direction in thinking (Denzin, 1989b). For Eve, her experiences and conversations of faith are re-storied and understood as part of a plan and preparation. Eve's experience of suffering provides a point of reference to 'make sense' of previous conversations and assumptions while also a rationale for future ventures:

...So that's where I am and I think by the time my son was killed *I was ready for what God had called me to do.* [Eve; emphasis added]

Describing these experiences through terms such as 'calling', 'sacrifice', and 'purpose', Eve's story is framed through a language of destiny and fate whereby trust is placed in a higher power; summarised by Eve's term 'all things are working together for your good'. As the following section shows, this understanding of suffering through faith and spirituality provided Eve with a way of reasoning with her loss.

8.3.2 Faith and Meaning-Making in Suffering

Having explored this notion of practising faith as 'preparation', Eve then proceeded to discuss how faith informed her understanding of the loss of her son. The relationship between faith, spirituality and bereavement is well-explored within death, dying and grief literature (see, for example Doka and Martin, 1993; Balk, 1999). As Doka (1993) highlights, the ritual of faith can provide "structure and succor...comfort and conciliation" in moments of crisis. However, bereavement also presents a 'spiritual challenge' in which the disruption of violence prompts a need for understanding and resolution (Balk, 1999). In this way, faith might be challenged, questioned or even abandoned in times of crisis. However, in Eve's story of suffering, faith was central to the restoring of meaning in an "otherwise meaningless act" (Rock, 2004:414). In the following passage, Eve describes her memories of the last time she saw her son, giving particular attention to her faith and conversations with God:

And that was the last time I saw my son. He left the house and the amazing thing about that, when my son was coming down the stairs... *because I wasn't that familiar at that time with God's voice*. I thought I was hearing his voice you get what I'm saying. But there was nothing that I could pin my hat onto kind of to prove it in the sense you know what I mean. But as my son was coming down the stairs *I believe that God spoke to me and he said tell him not to go out*. And I thought tell him not to go out? This is me now thinking tell him not go out? He's twenty. You tell a twenty-year-old boy not go out? But I believe if I had obeyed he wouldn't have gone. I believe that with all my heart because he was that type of person. So, I thought I can't tell him that - not to go. Y'know. And it came...the voice came and it kind of shook me a little bit inside because I wasn't expecting that...and he took him in the car and they went in the car and never came back. He never came back, yeah? And every time I think about that *I think you know something Eve if you had obeyed, your son would have been still alive. But, again, because the bible tells me all things are working together for my good...* It might look not so good but he said I will work it for your good...So, I always thought oh maybe if I told him not to go he wouldn't have been killed. I thought that. And, yeah, I still hold on to it even up to now when I think about it. And because I'm satisfied with where I am at this present moment, because of my son's death, I usually tell people if I had to live again I will do the same thing. *My son's death because it has brought me into a place that I'd never been before and it's taken me beyond what I ever thought or imagined.* [Eve; emphasis added]

Recounting this story, Eve draws a distinction between 'then' and 'now', explaining how her familiarity with God's voice had changed since the death of her son. In this event, Eve describes hearing a voice or impulse telling her to stop her son from leaving the house, one which she now recognises clearly as part of her conversation with God. Throughout the interview, Eve sharply contrasted the inexperience and strangeness of this episode of her life with her complete understanding much later. Eve consistently returned to the phrase, 'all things are working together for her good', remaining faithful to the notion that her son's death held purpose and consequence. This is repeated when Eve specifically discusses the sense of pain from losing a child:

...well if the book [Bible] says 'all things are working for my good' then it doesn't matter what it is and how painful it is, it's working for my good and something good is going to come out of it - at the end. We want it at the beginning...

So I always said bring it on God, I'm ready [laughs]. What have you got next, you know? Pain or no pain, because the way it is, pain is gain isn't it? And I'm thinking you know what I mean - life - and I'm so excited and I think even later on in life after I've gone through the pain - because you go through the

pain of losing your son and y'know it's such, it's nothing like birth even though *it's something like birth*. [Eve; emphasis added]

As in the previous chapter, pain from the loss of a child is likened to the pain of birth, and connected to the maternal identity and grief. Eve “emotionally relocates” the pain of loss, negotiating her relationship with others – including God – to make sense of this disrupted world (Worden, 1991:10–18; Doka and Martin, 1993; Attig, 2011). Drawing upon her lessons of faith, pain is reframed as a learning experience in itself whereby her developing relationship with God re-stories this loss. Although confessing her initial anxieties, Eve recovers through re-valuing the meaning of her son's death and rethinking her own purpose in light of this. Speaking on the ‘spiritual challenge’ presented by bereavement, Attig (2011:121) writes that it is through “...self-conscious examination of belief, prayer, meditation, or other means...” that we might “...adopt postures in the world that are firmly rooted in the deepened convictions or faiths”. For some relatives, such as James, faith played a different role with bereavement ‘rocking’ his beliefs. However, for Eve, as part of her ‘relearning of the world’ (see Attig, 2011), her experience of loss reinforced her relationship with God and eventually provided meaning to suffering. Speaking of another example of the spiritual nature of grief, Eve recounts an occasion where she shared a conversation with her son shortly *after* his death:

And, all of a sudden, one day I just thought I heard him come in and when I looked back round he wasn't there...And he came to my mind and he wasn't there and a sadness kind of a came upon me and then all of a sudden I heard his voice. He said, ‘Mummy why are you so sad?’ And I looked round and there was nobody there [laughs] and I said, ‘because I miss you’. And he said to me ‘I'm alright. I'm alright’. *And that took my life in another turn because it was confirming for me what I believe and what I read*. Not only just what I believe, because I had to read it first to believe it... And I remember that never happened to me again after that. I was quite calm and normal with that. *It's like it settled me*. That he was alright and he was telling me that he was alright do you get what I'm saying? So, I think well if he's alright why am I worried? [laughs] [Eve; emphasis added]

Again, the authority of Eve's faith provides consolation on an occasion which threatens to disorder. Rather, an opportunity is presented for Eve to sustain her relationship or connection with son (Stroebe and Schut, 2005). Eve recounts these experiences with clarity with each occasion providing confirmation of 'what she had read' and consolation in 'what she believed'. As Balk (1999) has argued, violence can present a 'spiritual challenge'. However, renegotiating relationships in these ways, Eve's faith provided structure, solace and order, finding confidence amidst her initial anxieties and validation of the lessons learned thus far about her faith. As the next section shall show, *Mothers Against Violence* represented another aspect of this renegotiation.

8.3.3 Finding Purpose through Mothers Against Violence

Storying her experience of victimisation in this way, Eve re-interprets the loss of her son as a catalyst for change. Eve remains confident in the passage that 'all things are working together for her good'. Suffering through violence was framed as intrinsic to a greater purpose. Reconciling the death of her son with the birth of *Mothers Against Violence*, Eve describes how her son represented the 'seed' for change:

I was the seed - *my son was the seed that was sown into the earth to bring it about.* All the other sons I'm not saying they didn't play a part in bringing it about because they did... My son's life was never a waste. Even *when he died I never saw it as a waste.* I believed that *something good was coming out of it* do you get what I'm saying. So that's how the change has come about it. [Eve; emphasis added]

Rather than being challenged, the role of faith in Eve's story confirmed a purpose to suffering; the loss of her son became a catalyst for education, advocacy and support for many others. Eve was, and still is, confident of the significance and consequence of her son's death. Finding reassurance in this, Eve also realises her own purpose in the aftermath of violence: in the emergence *Mothers Against Violence*. Again, Eve discusses her role in bereaved family activism is expressed in terms of 'destiny',

‘calling’, and, to some extent, ‘sacrifice’. This is evident in the following discussion where Eve explains her arrival at *Mothers Against Violence* as fated:

Whatever I’m doing now, I can continue to do until my last breath because I believe it’s what I was called to do. *I was called to do it*. The circumstances that led me to here wasn’t a very pleasant one but after the unpleasantness came the joy. The satisfaction, the amazing tingle in my body, in my mind. [Eve; emphasis added]

...*It is what I was born for. God sent me* this and even though I had little knowledge of what I was doing when I started it, I believe he guided the people in and out who was needed and really that’s how things happen isn’t it? [Eve; emphasis added]

Of course, Eve recognised her many roles as a mother, nurse, and social worker. However, it was in Eve’s conversations with God that she saw realisation of another purpose. Pain is described as purposeful and ascribed this purpose through the emergence and endurance of *Mothers Against Violence*. Discussing this issue more broadly, Eve describes the purpose of pain in the story of the Paul the Apostle:

People don’t *die* like that for no reason, they don’t die if they don’t think something is real and they going to have something better you know what I mean. So those are things that actually came to me.

Although this pain is recounted quite vividly, as previous sections have shown, it is re-storied as an opportunity for growth. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995:41) argue that personal growth after trauma can manifest in changes such as an increased appreciation of vulnerabilities, “healthier connections with other people”, changes in perceptions of self-reliance as well as “changes in the overall perspective on life’s meaning and appropriate priorities”. In Eve’s case, she acts on lessons from her faith and confronts her experience of loss as one which can be harnessed as a catalyst for change and realisation of different meanings. Eve describes this realisation almost as an act of fate; on the one hand, her ‘calling’ to become a ‘vessel’ and, on the other hand, encouraged by the confidence that this ‘calling’ instilled:

He was just using me as his vessel to speak to people and to tell them the truth and I knew he was with me and I knew that he held me together to tell you the truth. Otherwise, I think I would have gone under myself. [Eve; emphasis added]

Eve reiterates the importance of her faith in confronting the aftermath of violence. Referring to her own part as a mere 'vessel', Eve might be referring the *Mothers Against Violence* as a greater project with a greater purpose. Here, Eve's reference to becoming a 'vessel', to carry out 'God's work' or to a 'calling' infers an alternative understanding of agency. In Eve's faith-based understanding of agency, agency is construed in the literal sense whereby Eve represents an agent. While typical understandings have equated agency with action, and silence with shame, Eve exerts agency by denying it and adopting an identity of agent for something else: her faith. In this way, Eve's agency as a bereaved mother is encouraged and expected in that she performs the "culturally appropriate role as 'good' mother[] and bearing witness to [her] own maternal suffering" (Burchianti, 2004:141).

In attributing *Mothers Against Violence* as a 'calling', Eve somewhat reflects the notion of vocation within Christianity: the invitation or summoning to carry out God's project. Just as Eve believes that her own arrival at *Mothers Against Violence* was fated, she describes the role of others entering the organisation as predestined:

Well I just believe they're sent - 'cause *I believe you're sent.* [Eve; emphasis added]

...and that's what God wants for every single one of us because he sends us all down here with something inside of us that needs to come out but we have to see it...Well you think it's you who want to do it but no. It was God who wants you to do it *that's why he sent you down here and put it in you to do it.* [Eve; emphasis added]

Like Eve's own role, the participation and contributions of other members are storied in *Mothers Against Violence* as purposeful and particular to a precise moment. Interestingly, this might offer some insight as to the stance that *Mothers Against Violence* hold in relation to the constant turnover of membership. Referring to my own

role within the group, Eve explains my arrival at *Mothers Against Violence* as predestined. With each member appearing and disappearing from the group, Eve describes how each individual contributes ‘what they were given’, ‘...they come and add to it and then they move...’. Viewing the purpose of each contribution in this way, Eve perhaps sees *Mothers Against Violence* as part of her conversation with God. In this conversation, Eve’s faith provides structure, meaning and confidence to anxieties and uncertainties induced by acts of violence. While bereavement might threaten ‘spiritual challenge’, Eve’s unfailing dialogue with her faith and reflection on experiences in light of this encouraged her to renegotiate her relationships and consolidate her “deepened convictions” (Attig, 2011:121). Rather than undermining Eve’s sense of self-identity, violence clarified and confirmed her perceived purpose – much like Denzin’s (1989b) notion of ‘epiphany’. This confidence and realisation of purpose was also present in others’ accounts of Eve as a matriarchal figure.

8.4 The Matriarchal Figure in Bereaved Family Activism

The image of the mother in bereaved family activism provided an effective platform of engaging broader public interest and recognition. As Helms (2013) and Wright (2016) have argued, the ‘cultural story’ of motherhood in public victimhood marks out mothers as strong and independent while also politically unthreatening and morally legitimate. Indeed, in the context of bereaved family activism, mothers appear to be visible and distinguishable figures of leadership that emerge at the head of such groups; often energetic, charismatic and, in many cases, women. For example, the controversial lead of the hard line *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, Hebe de Bonafini, or President of the *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, Estela de Carlotto, in Argentina. Similarly, Bakira Hasečić, President of the Association of Women War Victims, has been a particularly visible driving force in post-conflict Bosnia. Working within the UK, Doreen Lawrence, Helen Newlove and Sara Payne are also notable ‘public’

victims. The figure of the charismatic matriarch appears to be a recurring feature in bereaved family activism (Shute, 2016).

The case of *Mothers Against Violence* seems not to be an exception to this phenomenon. Eve represented the archetype matriarch; referred to by many as a role model in humility, an opportunity to learn from character and, for some, as the very catalyst for their own engagement. This notion of the matriarchal figure as courageous and fighting for a just cause reflects Meyers' (2016:259–260) concept of the heroic victim:

Heroic victims are admired for their strength of character, especially their allegiance to their followers, and for their courage, despite the abuse they are known to endure. Their resolute commitment to their beliefs secures their integrity and preserves their dignity. Abused for their supererogatory self-sacrifice, they are honored as moral exemplars.

While not asked directly to discuss their relationship with Eve, many participants would draw upon their interactions with Eve to explain their initial arrival at *Mothers Against Violence*. Sharing their accounts of their conversations with Eve, a number of participants commented upon the humbling experience of hearing stories of suffering. For example, Alison and Tara both make comparisons with their own situations, seeing the resilience of Eve as inspiring yet seemingly impossible if it were to ever happen to themselves. Tara comments on hearing Eve's story as a source of grounding for her own experiences:

...if you can carry on after y'know your child's been murdered, the dad didn't even show up at the funeral or y'know this has happened and that has happened and you know you've come from stuff even before your child's death...I'm sure I can carry on when I'm ten pounds short on shopping for a week. [Tara]

Similarly, Alison discussed this sense of humility in sharing experiences with Eve:

I'm just amazed - like I said I couldn't get out of bed in the morning with going through what's she's been through but y'know I'm sort of a very small fish in a big pond of some really, really good people and I love them all they're great [Alison]

And yeah Eve just makes me feel really humble and...I feel like she's my family because every time I speak to her she always says, 'love you' and I know she means it and I'll say, 'love you too'. And I know she means it. So that's what it is, that love thing that's unconditional and I do - if I turn out to be half the woman that Eve is I'll be more than happy...[Alison]

This notion of humility also speaks to a theme of a 'greater project' echoed in previous discussions with participants. Alison describes her own position within *Mothers Against Violence* as a 'very small fish in a big pond' acknowledging the diversity and value of experiences involved. Drawing strength from these experiences and acknowledging her place within these, Alison openly shared her admiration for Eve who is introduced as a role model for change.

The influence of Eve as a role model for others' engagement was a recurring theme across the discussions. For example, when asked to consider the impact of his involvement in *Mothers Against Violence*, Peter underlined the influence of a charismatic matriarch upon his own experience. Peter recounts his first meeting with Eve when he arrived at the organisation:

...I came here and I sat with Eve for two hours and I fell in love with her...as a human being I'd never met anyone like her who was so genuine and so feeling for other people and I *felt at that time that I wanted to be associated with her.*

...I think the mere fact of meeting people like Eve makes you realise how the world's not such a bad place, that there are good people in it, people working for the right reasons and I think it's through meeting people like Eve that you stand and look in the mirror at yourself and say well...can I be more like you? ...So, she is a very, very good role model ...*it's my belief in her that the belief in the work that I do has been reflected.* So that's to me - she is the prima donna. [Peter; emphasis added]

Peter describes the influence of Eve as a role model; offering grounding, humility and direction for his own experiences. To some extent, this speaks to Frank's (2013:xvii) expression of a 'wounded healer' who, through telling stories of suffering and hearing the stories of others, work through "ending silences, speaking truths [and] creating communities". Peter is prompted by and draws confidence from Eve's story. Despite

not suffering from lethal violence himself, Peter describes how Eve's presence provided inspiration for his prolonged engagement with the group:

And that's what it's come from, it's because of her, *she's been my catalyst* in her own particular way... [Peter; emphasis added]

Peter describes Eve as a 'catalyst' for his own involvement in *Mothers Against Violence*. Making comparisons between his own experiences and Eve's, Peter's convictions are reinforced. As Peter describes, it is his 'belief in her', that confirms his 'belief in the work' that he does. In this way, Peter's relationship with Eve has strengthened his resolve to continue his engagement in *Mothers Against Violence* and his belief in the cause. This notion of the strong, capable matriarch was also reflected in Stephanie's discussion, who described the charismatic and compelling qualities of Eve's character. When asked to consider the role of faith in *Mothers Against Violence*, Stephanie described the influence of Eve's presence on those in need:

I think so because I always believe that when people need help there's always someone there to help them. I believe that God always uses people to help other people, so he won't do something himself, he'll use someone else to do it. Just like Moses in the Bible, he had to help free all those slaves. *God could have done it himself but he always actually uses one person to go and help others and I see my aunt as being like a Moses kind of figure and going to help the community and she's able to do that 'cause she's got a strong spiritual background herself, very strong.* [Stephanie; emphasis added]

Here, the role of Eve is expressed through the figure of 'the saviour'; influencing the direction of others, helping in times of need, at the wish of God. Similar to Eve's description above, her role is likened to that of a 'vessel' merely acting on behalf of her faith and for others. Stephanie also refers to the charismatic nature of Eve's character, explaining the persuasive quality in 'drawing' people to the group:

...there's always like a reason that brings them to MAV and I feel like my aunt is a really strong character and kind of *draws them here.* [Stephanie; emphasis added]

This echoes Peter's sentiment above, explaining how Eve's character compelled his want 'to be associated with her'. This effect, the influence of the charismatic matriarch, provides an example of how stories raise opportunities for "social organising, solidarity" and identification (Stauffer 2015, p.143; see Chapter 6). Stories of suffering can open dialogue, encourage empathy and become platforms for engaging different audiences. The story of Eve became a story of change for others and a catalyst within the community in which it was heard. Andrea spoke to this point when discussing the empowering qualities of Eve's story for those in a similar position:

But Eve has experienced that and I think she refused to die and decided to live and *because she made that choice she is helping many, many others to live also but not just live, but to live an abundant life*, to have hope again, to embrace the future and I greatly admire that and ...it's such an honour and a privilege to work alongside her because she's so special, she really is. [Andrea; emphasis added]

As Andrea alludes to, stories of suffering attract audiences, "[s]tories gather people around them" and call for action (Plummer, 1995:174). Another participant, Alison, described the 'mesmerising' effect of hearing Eve's story:

But then when you meet Eve there's just - it's like she puts a spell on you. I can't even describe it. People have to do it to see it y'know *you have to meet her to understand the aura that she's got around her* and I remember hearing her story and another couple of stories, I'm just full of admiration for her of what she does and what the others do. Just gobsmacked really, just thinking wow what a woman, I want to be part of this. Y'know that love that you feel from them, and it's genuine, it's not bullshit, it's very as it is - what you see is what you get. [Alison; emphasis added]

And, also, Eve's influence. I've never met anyone like Eve. And she was almost like the mum of the group back then y'know. And the centre of the group. She was very endearing. And she was a nice energy to have around at the time so it was really nice - to have her there really. [Jane]

As these extracts reveal, 'admiration' for Eve and the significance of her story in reaching others was a common theme among those who shared stories about Eve. Hearing these stories prompted realisation and responses from Andrea, Stephanie, Peter and others whether catalysing their involvement, sharing their own stories or

providing a role model. In this way, some saw Eve's experience as a story of how to respond in the aftermath of violence and what responses should or could look like.

8.5 Eve in *Mothers Against Violence*

The story of Eve is not presented here as a typical case. Rather, Eve's story highlights familiar and unfamiliar themes of analysis by drawing upon both the purposes of bereaved family activism and the notion of faith as preparation in suffering. The story relayed here is particular to Eve. However, it is embedded and entangled with the life and story of *Mothers Against Violence*. Eve's story, which prized so heavily the role of bereaved family activism in meaning-making, would have taken a markedly different shape without *Mothers Against Violence*. The story of *Mothers Against Violence* would have looked markedly different without Eve's. A mutual dependency existed between the stories of Eve and *Mothers Against Violence*.

For Eve, *Mothers Against Violence* was key to realising purpose, re-storying suffering as meaningful and re-ordering previous uncertainties and anxieties. The role of faith in dealing with the aftermath of violence was central, lending significance to certain 'turning points' which punctuate and make life stories coherent. By referring to her own role as a 'vessel' in response to a 'calling', there is an inference to *Mothers Against Violence* as a greater purpose which helped make sense of the loss of her son. Eve reflects on the importance of learning about the experiences of others, developing her relationship with God and the maturity that these lessons have encouraged. Here, the life of *Mothers Against Violence* is entangled with the story of Eve. Just as Eve describes her own maturity and reflection, *Mothers Against Violence* engaged in a similar process by learning the needs of others; knowing each other's story, their concerns and the needs of the community.

For *Mothers Against Violence*, Eve is the charismatic matriarch. The story of Eve has motivated and catalysed others to become involved; however, Eve does not necessarily represent the ordinariness of experiences. Just as ordinariness was able to assemble others into action in Chapter 6, stories of difference also seemed to prompt recognition. Though a committed belief to God was a theme particular to Eve's story, Eve's role as a charismatic and 'heroic' matriarch compelled belief from others. While others did not perhaps share her beliefs and relationship with God, they did appear to hold a strong belief in Eve's conviction and faith in the purpose of *Mothers Against Violence*. In this way, despite differences in experiences, Eve's story was able to bridge divides and consolidate identification rather than create further fissions.

8.6 Conclusion

In presenting the story of Eve, this chapter has sought to deepen understanding of the types of experiences in *Mothers Against Violence*. Eve's story drew across a number of patterns from previous chapters including the role of bereaved family activism in meaning making. However, as this chapter has demonstrated, there are also responses to violence which remain particular to individuals. For example, while the role of faith in coping and bereavement was a recurring theme it was not a systematic theme in explanations of coping. This analysis showed the significance of faith-based understandings of suffering and agency; firstly, in the way that Eve understands the loss of her son as part of a higher calling and, secondly, in her denial of agency as an exertion of it. In this way, agency should not be equated to voice. Rather, Eve shows agency by choosing to deny it and becoming an agent for another purpose. This moment of crisis presented an opportunity for Eve to reaffirm her faith and confidence in her relationship with God. Viewed in this way, *Mothers Against Violence* was part of a 'greater project' which prompted Eve to realise her own purpose.

This chapter also raises questions regarding the lack of criminological engagement with the matter of faith, which is particularly interesting considering the links between religion and suffering. Having arrived at this research with a disciplinary and institutional grounding in criminology, I sometimes struggled with the reflections presented by Eve, who often used excerpts of the Bible as explanations. Unfamiliarity with the subject matter made analysis difficult and created apprehension of over-attributing social forces and concepts. To some extent, this apprehension might speak to an unfamiliarity experienced more broadly when engaging with any new subject.

However, this concern perhaps also speaks to a broader trend within criminology in academia where secularism "...becomes a fundamentalism, a privileged stance invulnerable to critique, acting as gatekeeper for legitimate discourse in the academy[?]" (Mattes, 2016:372; see Orsi, 2016). Orsi (2016) provides an insightful critique of this danger by exploring modernity's secular approach to the study of religion. In *History and Presence*, Orsi (2016:42) argues that studies of 'modern religion' have displaced the 'presence' of Gods which now "appear as tropes, metaphors, and distortions of language". Where modern states disregard 'presence' as irrational, primitive and superstitious, academic disciplines also risk reducing these experiences to social concepts and functions. In this sense, this chapter is the product of a secular 'reading' of a non-secular 'story' which perhaps risks losing Eve's *lived* experience of loss. Further inquiry would benefit from exploring the relationship between criminology and religion, giving particular attention to the possibilities of faith-based understandings of suffering, agency and justice.

Chapter 9 - Conclusion

Returning to Garland's seminal work, *The Culture of Control*, the victim has been given increasing currency in policy, public and practice, noting that "whoever speaks on behalf of victims speaks on behalf of us all..." (Garland, 2001:11). Amid this 'return of the victim', a diverse victims' movement has emerged representing a range of interests and in response to an array of suffering, harms and injustices. This thesis aimed to explore the phenomenon of bereaved family activism as one such response. The research question was presented as follows:

How do 'victim-activists' confront – both individually and collectively - their own experiences of the trauma associated with serious violence and mobilise their suffering to promote mass acknowledgement of that violence?

The thesis began by reviewing relevant literatures on the concept of trauma, its uses, and the implications for definitions of 'the victim'. Through this concept of trauma, victimisation has shifted from being solely an immediate and intimate experience. Indeed, much recognition has been afforded to the varied ways victimisation can impact not only individuals, but upon families, communities and even cultures. 'Trauma' has come to represent overwhelming experiences for individuals but also a signifier of 'social suffering' and 'ruptures' in collective identities. With questions of suffering converging with questions of trauma, categories of victims and non-victims, the traumatic and non-traumatic, and individuals and collectives risk conflation. As McGarry and Walklate (2015) argue, this conflation risks losing senses of experience, identity and history.

Victim movements were presented as offering critical insights into the ways personal experiences could be shared to engage wider interest and acknowledgment. Considering the diversity of such movements in previous discussions, victim movements offer a range of different means for achieving different ends. Victim

movements are a culmination of a variety of motivations, needs and strategies all the while tempered by external pressures of funding priorities, socio-historical conditions and political economies as Barker (2007) and Garland (2001) have argued. While these trends help to understand the contexts from which victim movements emerge, this thesis sought to explore how the experiences of victims themselves feature in and come to shape these movements. Following Pemberton (2009:4), such a diversity of campaigns and divisions within them prompts the question as to whether different experiences demand different priorities. Victim movements, such as bereaved family activism, vary in shape and scope, each using different means towards different ends. Each movement represents a diversity of voices, needs and experiences that have emerged in response to different forms of lethal violence. Remembering the array of voices entangled in these movements, it was submitted that what is required is a 'critical appreciation' (McEvoy and McConnachie, 2013). A critical inquiry of this sort avoids over-romanticising victim solidarity on the one hand and underestimating victim agency on the other. By organising and sharing stories, these movements offered insights into how 'personal troubles' could become 'public issues' and prompt change (see C. Wright Mills, 1959).

The research presented here is based upon participant observations and fifteen interviews with members and ex-members of a Manchester-based charity, *Mothers Against Violence*, that emerged in response to an intense period of gun violence and ensuing community outcry in the 1990s. Interviews were informed by a narrative approach which emphasised a search for a "whole which is more than the sum of its parts" (Goodey, 2000; Holloway and Jefferson, 2000:34). In this thesis, the stories shared by those involved are recognised as an accumulation of previous experiences, present situations, and future possibilities relayed at a particular moment and in concert with a particular audience. Such accounts are channelled through who, says

what, to who else, where, how and when. While it might be argued that such layers risk diluting experiences, this thesis accepted these accounts as empirically significant in themselves.

By hearing the stories of those involved in bereaved family activism, this research aimed to understand how people affected by lethal violence organised collective responses such as *Mothers Against Violence*. Three findings chapters were presented which aimed to story this transition. Chapter 5 asked how individuals confront experiences of violent bereavement and considered how the diversity of such experiences might manifest in different motivations and purposes later. Chapter 6 asked what role shared experience played in prompting recognition and acknowledgement of violence. Considering these investigations, Chapter 7 asked whether victim movements might be reconceptualised in a way that reflects the energy of groups like *Mothers Against Violence*. To conclude, a case study of Eve was presented to provide both depth and variation, illustrating common themes as well as themes particular to Eve's story. The case study also showed how Eve's story was embedded within the life and story of *Mothers Against Violence*. Just as the story of Eve could not be told without the story of *Mothers Against Violence*, the story of *Mothers Against Violence* could not have been told without the story of Eve. The remaining sections of this chapter summarise the original contributions of this research before proposing avenues for future research.

9.1 Summary of Contributions

The contributions of this thesis can be summarised under the following four headings: i) applications of 'trauma' in victimology; ii) understanding victim movements such as *Mothers Against Violence* as spaces for emotional, social and practical learning; iii) the notion of victimisation as one moment in a series of 'turning points'; iv) the role of

stories in prompting recognition, encouraging identification and assembling communities. This section will address each of these in turn.

9.1.1 Applications of 'Trauma' in Victimology: A Note of Caution

As a means to understanding the current state of theorising victims in victimology, this thesis began by plotting a critique of relevant psychiatric, psychological and sociological literatures on the concept of trauma. While lethal violence stems from acts against the individual, its legacy extends to families, communities and cultures with terms such as 'social suffering' and 'cultural trauma' coming to denote suffering at a collective level. A critical review of 'trauma' revealed the concept to be widely used in an array of popular, clinical and academic discourse. With its increasing popularity, the concept has attracted much criticism particularly in its statement about harm, suffering and the victim experience. As the findings collected in this thesis highlighted, the framework of trauma as a method for conceptualising suffering produces both theoretical and methodological difficulties.

At a theoretical level, the emergence of 'trauma creep' in victimology saw the conflation of trauma and suffering, running the risk of becoming preoccupied with the label of the victim rather than the realities of victims' experiences (Spencer, 2011; McGarry and Walklate, 2015:44). Chapter 2 presented a summary of these critiques, distinguishing between literatures on psychological, transgenerational, historical, cultural and perpetual trauma. Moving from the former to the latter, each concept extended across person, place and time, becoming more concerned with issues of *representation* rather than the *experience* of suffering itself; at each point, losing precision. The concept of trauma risked collapsing differences in victim identities, histories and experience and being reduced merely to a "metaphor for almost

anything unpleasant” (Hacking, 1995:183). The concept ultimately risked obscuring more than it offered to inform.

At a methodological level, this conceptual conflation between trauma and suffering also had implications for understanding the experiences of victims. The concept of trauma has been uncritically transferred across different cultures, experiences and analytical levels coming to describe a range of mechanisms, interactions and events. With this ‘assumed universal validity’, the concept has been criticised by some for ‘pathologising the normal’; taking experiences such as suffering, loss and distress as fundamentally different and atypical (Bracken, 2001; McGarry and Walklate, 2015:49). However, the experiences shared by those involved in *Mothers Against Violence* were not addressed through terms such as ‘trauma’ but through metaphors of grief. Over the course of fieldwork, it became evident that while the experience of lethal violence was disruptive and overwhelming, it was also transformative, enduring and represented but one of a series of turning points. Using a framework of trauma risked obscuring the diversity of ways in which lethal violence can be experienced, problematically assuming that all experiences of harm or suffering can be interpreted through this concept. To this end, the concept of trauma was introduced in this thesis as a framework which helps to make sense of and understand current debates in victimology. Caution should be exercised in applying the concept in victimology to the extent that it re-interprets and translates experiences of suffering rather than accurately reflects them.

9.1.2 Victim Movements as Emotional, Social and Practical Spaces

Emerging in 1999, *Mothers Against Violence* represented the organised response of a number of women to a series of fatal shootings in the community of inner-city Manchester. In the following weeks, meetings were held to discuss courses of action,

provide support for the affected and address sentiments within the community towards recent events. For nearly two decades, *Mothers Against Violence* has campaigned for greater awareness, promoting education of effects of gun and knife crime, and more generally to relieve the effects of violence for those involved. The experiences of those affected by lethal violence varied and, in turn, manifested in a range of motivations; from community outcry, to serving others and making meaning from disorder. Coping and response was contingent upon encounters with family, community or indeed, other bereaved relatives in *Mothers Against Violence*, with each interaction offering new ways of dealing with things and strategies for responding. In this sense, *Mothers Against Violence* was presented as an 'accumulation of encounters' that emerged in a particular socio-historical moment influenced by the imagery of bereaved mothers, histories of distrust in public authorities, single parent families and prevalence of domestic violence. This 'accumulation of encounters' tied together individuals carrying different experiences, histories and needs with each person engaging at different points in their lives and for different purposes.

For those involved, *Mothers Against Violence* represents an emotional, spiritual and socially supportive space. Engagement served different purposes for different people depending on their needs and experience and ranged from the need for acknowledgement, making meaning, keeping connections with lost relatives, to learning from others, feelings of empowerment and reaching others. The purpose of *Mothers Against Violence* varied by individual and fluctuated over different points in time. *Mothers Against Violence* could act as a place of refuge as well as a place for action and discussion. Different experiences became relevant or irrelevant at different points in the life of the organisation just as the organisation became relevant or irrelevant at different points in individuals' lives. It would be unhelpful to assume that the group plays an essential and constant role in the lives of all those involved. Rather, this thesis

saw *Mothers Against Violence* as a group which was weighed with different priorities over time.

This thesis presented *Mothers Against Violence* as a space in which individuals engaged in processes of social, moral and emotional learning as well as a practical means for achieving and resolving needs. As an emotional space, the group provided opportunities for 're-moralizing' and re-ordering following disruption and disordering (Rock, 2004:414). This was particularly relevant to Eve's story in Chapter 8 where uncertainty and loss of meaning was reconciled with renewed structures of meaning. *Mothers Against Violence* also provided a socially supportive space which was grounded in shared experience, empathy and identification. Sharing stories provided the opportunity for acknowledgement and validation of experiences, as Jane's story showed. However, there were also opportunities to achieve practical needs. Andrea's story discussed how her aims to gather experience through community organisations instigated her involvement while James mentioned the role that the group played in his research as a student.

Much analysis has focused on the influence on extraneous factors imposing on the character of victim movements; such as socio-historical conditions, peacetime or post-conflict settings, and relationships with the State. Indeed, changing funding priorities and policy trends have had some influence on the direction of *Mothers Against Violence* as shown in previous chapters. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, victim movements are also characterised by the needs and experiences of those involved. *Mothers Against Violence* held different purposes for different individuals and therefore reflected the experiences of those who populated it.

9.1.3 *Victimisation as a 'Turning Point'*

This research presented stories of loss as overwhelming and disruptive. For individuals such as Anna and Stephanie, violent bereavement created uncertainty and unpredictability; a departure from the assumptions of safety of the 'good Christian family'. Re-storied in light of the progress of *Mothers Against Violence*, however, the event of victimisation gained transformative potential. For some, victimisation was described as a 'turning point', 'transformative' or a 'catalytic' event in their lives. In these stories, victimisation prompted a change in direction of thinking, whether a loss of meaning or renewed purpose.

This thesis conceptualised victimisation as a series of 'turning points' or junctures; at each point, schemas being altered and rendered by previous experiences of loss, coping strategies, and opportunities for social support. Goodey's (2000) investigation of biographies within criminology emphasises the importance of the concept of 'epiphany' for connecting the personal with the social. Following Denzin's (1989a, 1989b:34) notion of epiphany as "interactional moments that leave marks on people's lives", these moments have "the potential to create transformational experiences". These epiphanal moments are determined by the individual (although, also by researchers to the extent that they 'read' such moments) (Goodey, 2000:481). These moments of epiphany lend significance to particular events but also consolidate 'personal character' (Denzin, 1989a:70). In this sense, epiphanies make sense both of and *within* the whole life story. As Goodey (2000:483) explains:

For criminology practically and usefully to employ the epiphanal, in the context of a social biography, it needs to recognize that the meaning of the individual's life story is in the whole and not in the parts or the separate epiphanal moments.

This is not to valorise the role of victimisation as decisive or definitive in the life course. Rather, this shift to understanding the course of 'becoming a victim'

recognises the layers of meaning and experience mediating victimisation and its negotiation by families, communities and social support systems. Previous life experiences represent frameworks for which victim experiences can be read, whether it is through the practice of faith or shared social bonds.

During the maturity of *Mothers Against Violence*, those involved engaged in processes of learning. This could include learning the needs of others, how to navigate these needs, or learning how the stories of others might influence or validate their own experience. In other cases, this process of maturity meant learning the history of the community, its structures and relations. These learning efforts represented a broader exercise in learning how to respond to violence, different coping strategies and, ultimately, changing ways of how individuals relate to and interpret the world. For relatives such as Eve or James, the act of sharing experiences of loss represents just one of these 'lessons'.

Encounters with those who share similar experiences, or with communities from which individuals can 'draw strength', can influence and re-story experiences in a different light. Indeed, turning points such as these are not linear or 'additive' as Goodey (2000:483) points out. Rather, epiphanies are identified as such according to the priorities of the story as told by the story-teller at that particular moment. Whether these learning experiences achieved empowerment, acknowledgement or re-connecting with lost relatives, they became one part of a series of 'turning points'. These 'turning points' represent important moments of crisis, change or reform in the individual's life story which make sense and give meaning to other moments. As one of these 'turning points', victimisation represented a catalyst for change and *Mothers Against Violence* represented a vehicle to achieve it.

9.1.4 *Stories as Making Sense of Suffering*

Stories as a method of understanding or making “the world of others visible” have been formalised in the form of narrative criminology although they manifest in various other methodologies as testimony, life stories and biographies (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011:3; Presser and Sandberg, 2015). Despite this proliferation in narrative criminology, however, the narrative turn within victimology has only recently materialised (see, for example, Pemberton, 2015; Arfman et al., 2016).

How, then, might stories be used to help make sense of suffering? This thesis has sought to foreground suffering and understand how victims make sense of their experiences, particularly in light of their roles in bereaved family activism (see McGarry and Walklate, 2015). Informed by a narrative approach, the research methodology presented in this thesis understood experiences as rooted in cultural contexts, histories, and vocabularies. Narratives provide an understanding of “connections among experiences, actions, and aspirations” drawing across experiences, encounters and identities (Presser and Sandberg, 2015:1). In this way, stories were not simply ‘recitals’ of experience. Rather, they were mediated by vocabularies, situational factors and the communities that listen to or read those stories. The aim is not, as Geertz (1975) states, to know *what* they know, but to understand *how* they know it. Learning from narrative criminology, this thesis explored what role stories played at both a personal and collective level; in one sense as the work that individuals do upon themselves, and in another sense as the ‘work’ that stories do in assembling communities.

At a personal level, stories made sense and meaning. Stories as meaning-making was evident in the story of Eve (see Chapter 8) where the loss of her son was re-storied in light of *Mothers Against Violence* to realise her own purpose. Here, Eve situated her

uncertainties about past suffering in light of her work in *Mothers Against Violence* and her aspirations for the future to re-story her experience.

At a collective level, stories catalysed and motivated others to act. Sharing stories in this way, victims reframed their experiences as a call for action, prompting and assembling different communities to 'gather around them' (see Chapter 6) (Plummer, 1995). Stories could bridge divides and encourage identification across groups of people, offering a platform for understanding, reworking and learning about otherwise dissimilar individuals. Stories, and epiphanies in particular, represent connections between personal troubles and public issues (Wright Mills, 1959; Denzin, 1989b:37). For example, when a mother loses a son to gun violence and enters a campaign to promote public and educational awareness of such violence.

Through nearly two decades of conversation, meetings, and marches, members of *Mothers Against Violence* have shared stories between themselves and to themselves. Exchanges such as these allowed some individuals to reframe their stories in concert with others who shared similar experiences. Stories could be deployed as a source of motivation for others, to build trust and understanding, or encourage identification across communities. Writing on the 'work' that stories do, Frank (2010:3) states that "stories breathe life not only into individuals, but also into groups that assemble around telling and believing certain stories". Sharing stories within such groups 'gathered' and reinforced communities. The relationship between stories and (victim) experience is ambiguous. What is made visible and remains invisible through storytelling is the effect of particular historical, cultural and situational contexts. As Plummer (1995) reminds us, there are lives beyond stories which can connect, assemble and mobilise communities.

The moral authority of the image of the bereaved mother provided an important platform for understanding and identification. Reiterating Wright (2016:327)“...we look upon the grief of the mother with horror, not only in sympathy for her, but with agony for the possibility that her pain could one day be our own”. The cultural story of motherhood and maternal loss provide a script for recognition and acceptable agency. A mother’s loss of a son creates expectations of what grief looks like and how to respond, marking out women as strong yet unthreatening (Helms, 2013; Wright, 2016). While this image created some unintended consequences, the story of motherhood also allowed *Mothers Against Violence* to consolidate across different communities and identities. In this way, stories crossed bridges and encouraged identification.

9.2 Future Research

The aim of this thesis was to consider how ‘victim-activists’ might manage and mobilise their experiences to engage in bereaved family activism, justice campaigns and support groups. This research focused specifically on the life of *Mothers Against Violence*, an organised response to gun violence in inner-city Manchester in the 1990s. A key contention of this thesis has been that the diverse experiences of victims translate into different priorities, colouring and characterising each movement differently. The purpose of *Mothers Against Violence* varied depending on the person, time and context with the organisation becoming relevant or irrelevant at different points in victims’ lives. Drawing across scripts of maternal suffering during its early life, the group maintained a culturally tolerable position as (bereaved) mothers. In this respect, *Mothers Against Violence* reflects the assumptions of innocence that the status of ‘ideal victim’ demands, with Eve’s character as the charismatic and heroic matriarch exceeding these notions. *Mothers Against Violence* therefore occupies a particular historical and cultural moment of violence and represents only the

experiences of those involved at that very moment. However, the victim movement is represented by a variety of groups mobilised around the suffering, injustice and more broadly, loss. If these movements are characterised partly by the experiences of those involved, two areas for future research can be identified.

One area of potential future inquiry would be to consider the capacity in which victim movements function for 'other victims of crime'. 'Other victims of crime' such as the families of serious offenders occupy a somewhat ambiguous position; struggling between the profound familial intimacy shared with the convicted and the expectations imposed by cultural and social scripts of victim empathy and innocence. Research on secondary victimisation in families of serious offenders provide insight into the role of such groups in supporting relatives (see Howarth and Rock, 2000; Condry, 2007). Future research might also consider the purpose of these groups in campaigning and supporting the wrongfully convicted. Similarly, hearing the experiences of families of those convicted under Joint Enterprise laws would provide insight into how marginalised groups campaign for recognition. This might include exploring the personal and political responses to loss that emerged in the social justice campaign JENGbA (*Joint Enterprise: Not Guilty by Association*) and what purpose these groups held for families of the convicted. What mechanisms for support did the Hillsborough family campaigns hold for those involved and might differences in experiences and needs have fostered divisions between campaigns? Unlike the clear-cut scripts of innocence and authority that 'ideal victims' might lay claim to, 'other victims of crime' must learn to practice a more ambiguous script of guilt, stigma and responsibility (Condry, 2007). Organisations such as *Aftermath*, which closed in 2005, can struggle for legitimacy and recognition which points to the "moral and social marginality" of the group (Condry, 2007:156). As Howarth and Rock (2000:67) explain in reference to *Aftermath*, a group of relatives of serious offenders:

After all, what scripts for public behaviour are available to those who have suddenly and unexpectedly become the father of a murderer or the brother of a rapist? How is one to make sense of the family's history now that it must profoundly and unheroically reconstructed? It is as if the families had never really known the offender and needed to rework their biographies within the frame of new knowledge. What mentors exist to guide the family through such experiential disorder?

Aside from the 'official' movements detailed in previous chapters, 'unofficial' victims movements based upon identities of race, gender and class also exist and are reflective of "broader social systems of inequality" (Spalek, 2006:29). Future research might consider the cultural scripts that make the suffering of particular victims visible and the stories of 'other victims' invisible. The tragedy of Grenfell Tower and the emerging *Justice for Grenfell* movement provides the most recent example of this, whereby prevailing structures of inequality, class and marginalisation predict recognition or denial of suffering. These complexities raise the question as to whether different experiences, for example of sexual violence or wrongful conviction, characterise different ways of recognising and responding to suffering.

The form of violence therefore represents a defining feature of the shape that organised responses to suffering take. Whether the 'slow' violence of systematic racial injustices (Ward, 2015), institutional violence (Whyte and Cooper, 2017), or gun violence in inner-city Manchester, collective responses can vary depending upon the particular quality, nature and experience of lethal violence. This presents a second area of potential further inquiry. Numerous victim movements were detailed in previous chapters demonstrating the pervasiveness of bereaved family activism in response to lethal violence. Bereaved family activist campaigns emerged across a variety of contexts, from the early archetype movement of *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* to the Mothers of Srebrenica which both organised in response to human rights violations during conflict. Future research might consider how the quality of organised *mass* violence, often occurring in conflict, manifests in the 'work' of victim

movements. The Srebrenica Massacre, which occurred when a UN-protected safe area fell to Serbian forces in July 1995, represents the largest and most well-documented atrocity of the Bosnian War with 8372 Bosnian Muslim men and boys being killed. Shortly after, the Mothers of Srebrenica emerged representing the mothers, sisters and widows left behind. Through a combination of peaceful protest and commemoration, the Mothers have campaigned extensively with the International Commission of Missing Persons (ICMP) for the identification of victims, national and international criminal courts for the punishment and accountability of perpetrators, and local authorities for the commemoration and memorialisation of recovered remains.

Extending the scope of the current research to contexts such as the Bosnian War, future research might ask whether the quality of *mass* violence in episodes such as Srebrenica prompt different forms of responses from the bereaved. Does the fact that all victims were killed in the same episode at the hands of the 'same' perpetrator change the way the bereaved relate to each other? Does this differ to the phenomenon of gun violence which, despite the underlying similarity between deaths, are fundamentally separate instances of violence? Research into this area would ask whether there is a qualitative difference between violence and *mass* violence or whether the latter is simply a quantitative accumulation of the former.

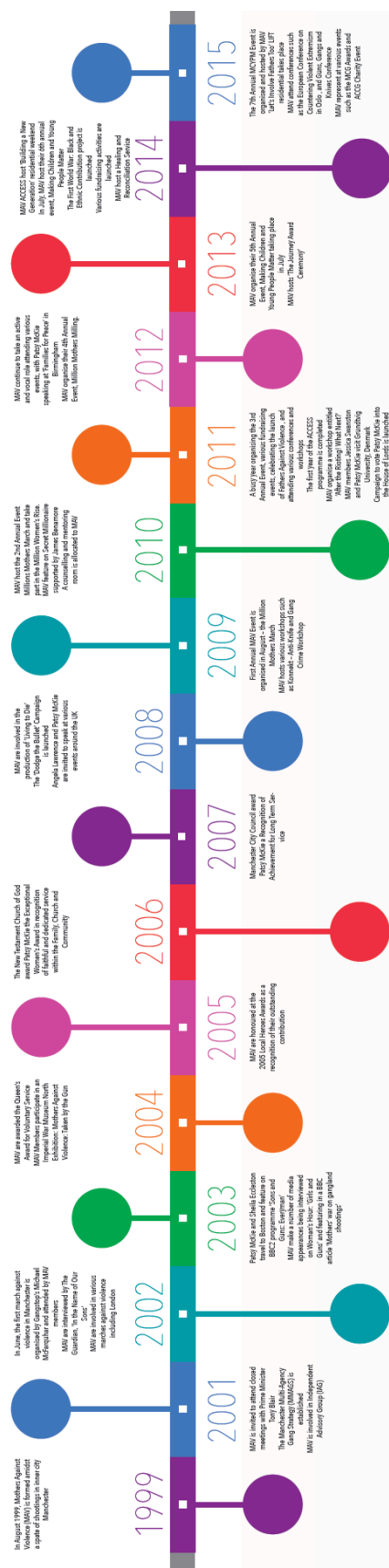
9.3 Final Thoughts

The story of *Mothers Against Violence* described here represents a snapshot of a series of courses of coping, responses and encounters. The purpose of *Mothers Against Violence* did not stay constant over the seventeen years, just as the shape changed depending on those involved. With each person arriving, new experiences, needs and motivations were added which marked and changed the space. Different experiences became relevant or irrelevant at different points in the life of *Mothers Against Violence*,

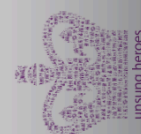
just as the organisation became relevant or irrelevant at different points in individuals' life stories. *Mothers Against Violence* simultaneously responded to and shaped a range of experiences, needs and demands, which were constrained by changing funding landscapes and local priorities. Questions of voice and representativeness arise and, while shared experience provided the necessary foundation, it was valuable to ask how those involved were able to surpass issues in identification and remain part of this collective. Learning from experiences and the needs of different people, *Mothers Against Violence* has moved to recognise the advantages of reaching beyond one community to draw connections between them. In this sense, differences consolidate identification rather than 'fracture' it (Gilmore, 2007).

However, *Mothers Against Violence* represent just one of many critical voices in the aftermath of violence. Emerging in a range of contexts, through various means and to different ends, there exist a diversity of victim movements that now feature, or are at least increasingly visible, in the criminal justice landscape. Considering the diversity of victim experience, we must ask to what extent the character of victim campaigns derive from the experiences, interests and needs of victims themselves.

MOTHERS AGAINST VIOLENCE



Mothers Against Violence (MAV) was established in 1999 and has worked tirelessly since to promote awareness of the effects of violence within the community and support young people in leading positive lifestyles.



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