Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Bath	

Unit of Assessment: C19 Politics and International Studies	

Title of case study: Changing how museums approach the memorialisation of conflict	

Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015 - 2020	

Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:

Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Anna Cento Bull	Professor	September 1987 – August 2020
Nina Parish	Reader, previously Lecturer and Senior Lecturer	September 2005 – June 2019
David Clarke	Reader	February 2003 – September 2018
Marianna Deganutti	Postdoctoral Researcher	April 2016 - September 2018
Ayshka Sene	Postdoctoral Researcher	April 2018 - March 2019

Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016 - 2020	

Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N	

1. Summary of the impact

Since 2015, the work of Cento Bull, Clarke, and Parish at the University of Bath has led to impact in the following ways at the Ulster Museum, the Ruhr Museum, the Kobariski Musej, In Flanders Fields Museum and others:

- **Generated new ways of thinking** about war memory which informed the way museum practitioners approach the memorialisation of conflict.

- **Influenced the way** war exhibitions are curated (including the creation of a new museum exhibition in Germany which attracted over 30,000 visitors).

- **Promoted knowledge transfer** among heritage practitioners on theoretical and practical issues relating to memorialisation of conflict and changes of practice, with more than 2,100 people from almost 100 countries subscribing to a MOOC devised and produced at Bath, over a third of whom are heritage or post-conflict practitioners.

- **Facilitated an increased personal understanding** of conflict among the general public through the use of innovative technologies including videogames and a MOOC, the latter of which saw 93-98% of learners reporting that they had gained new knowledge or skills.

2. Underpinning research

The research underpinning this case study has introduced an innovative concept to war memory studies: *agonistic memory.* In a seminal article that has redefined approaches to conflict memorialisation, University of Bath researcher Cento Bull worked with Hansen from Aarhus University (2016) to argue that existing modes of memorialising war heritage are not fit for purpose in a world riven by populist neo-nationalist movements. This is because prevailing modes of memorialisation either emphasise the fundamentally conflictive character of society, essentialising identities and depicting the 'other' as an enemy to be destroyed (e.g. the antagonistic mode of remembering) or decontextualise and depoliticise the struggles and

conflicts of the past and erase the perspectives of perpetrators, bystanders, spies and other agents (e.g. the cosmopolitan mode which is dominant within the EU). In contrast to the antagonistic and cosmopolitan modes of remembering, the agonistic model proposed by Cento Bull and Hansen (3.1) affirms the fundamentally conflictive character of society. Agonistic memory, a central tenet of which is that memorialisation must be reflexive and dialogic, promotes what it calls a 'radical multi-perspectivism' as an efficient strategy to provide historical and political understanding without legitimising perpetratorship, foregrounding voices and perspectives belonging to antagonistically opposed enemies, typically victims and perpetrators, alongside those of bystanders, traitors and collaborators. Cento Bull (3.3) has used the agonistic model to study the public dialogue between former perpetrators and victims of political violence in the Italian context, further advancing the argument that agonistic memory challenges divided memories to confront each other in a responsible manner. The agonistic memory theory has impacted upon museum curators, heritage practitioners, and the general public, as outlined in section 4.

The importance of this newly theorised memory mode and the pressing need to promote it among heritage stakeholders were recognised by the EU itself, when the UNREST project (Unsettling Remembering and Social Cohesion in Transnational Europe), underpinned by agonistic memory theory and co-developed by Cento Bull and Hansen in collaboration with international colleagues, obtained Horizon 2020 funding (the only project out of 80 to be funded under the Heritage of War call in 2015).

The UNREST project generated an in-depth analysis of modes of representation in European war museums and furthered collaboration with museum practitioners. UNREST offered new theoretical insights on the role of museums as agonistic spaces (3.2, 3.4). Cento Bull and Clarke (3.5) used the framework of agonistic memory to interrogate the value of competing approaches to counter-memorial practice. They argued that much counter-memorial practice today is dominated by a cosmopolitan mode that fails to offer a convincing response to the rise of right-wing populism and its instrumentalization of conflicts over public commemorative art.

Research was carried out between 2015 and 2019 by University of Bath researchers Anna Cento Bull (Professor) and Nina Parish (Reader), as well as David Clarke (Reader) in 2016-2018, Marianna Deganutti (Post-doc) in 2016-2018 and Ayshka Sene (Post-doc) in 2018-19.The underpinning research led to a new project funded by the EU (DisTerrMem, 1/2/18-31/1/22). UNREST influenced the way war exhibitions are curated, as outlined in section 4.

3. References to the research

3.1 Bull, AC & Hansen, HL 2016, 'On agonistic memory', *Memory Studies*, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 390-404. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698015615935

3.2 Clarke, D, Bull, AC & Deganutti, M 2017, 'Soft Power and Dark Heritage: Multiple Potentialities', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 23, no. 6, pp. 660-674. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2017.1355365

3.3 Bull, AC 2020, 'Working through the violent past: Practices of restorative justice through memory and dialogue in Italy' *Memory Studies*, vol. 13, no. 6, pp. 1004-1019. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698018790106

3.4 Bull, A, Hansen, HL, Kansteiner, W & Parish, N 2019, 'War museums as agonistic spaces: possibilities, opportunities and constraints', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, vol. 25, no. 6, pp. 611-625. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2018.1530288

3.5 Bull, A & Clarke, D 2020, 'Agonistic Interventions into Public Commemorative Art: An Innovative Form of Counter-memorial Practice?', *Constellations*, vol. 0, no. 0, pp. 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12484

3.6 Cento Bull, Anna (PI), Clarke, David, (CoI), Parish, Nina, (CoI), UNREST (Unsettling Heritage, Modes of Remembering and Social Cohesion in Europe), EU-Horizon 2020, 1/04/16 → 31/03/19, GBP372,745.00.

4. Details of the impact

Museums are integral in informing how people think of war and conflict, shaping the consciousness of the next generation of thinkers and citizens. The agonistic memory theory developed by Cento Bull and Hansen and the approach to heritage of war and conflict associated with this model go beyond these existing modes of memorialising war heritage. Since its inception in 2016, the agonistic memory model has impacted upon museum curators, heritage practitioners and the general public. This impact has been achieved through UNREST cultural and training products to which Bath researchers have had a direct input, and other impact activities organised by Bath researchers and/or directly informed by agonistic memory theory. The external reviewers of the UNREST project praised its "*remarkable*" impact – academic and non-academic alike [5.1, p. 2].

1. **Generated new ways of thinking about war memory which informed the way museum practitioners approach the memorialisation of conflict.**

In the context of UNREST, Cento Bull and Parish collaborated with museum curators in the UK, Belgium, France, and Slovenia through 3 international workshops in which the theory of agonistic memory and its possible applications to museum exhibitions were presented and discussed. These exchanges advanced curators' knowledge on issues *"related to war museums and how they remember and showcase the past"* [5.2] and led curators "*to revisit and rethink [their] approaches to the heritage of war and to exhibition practice*" [5.3]. The EU-appointed evaluators of UNREST acknowledged that the project "*moved empirically beyond the critique of cosmopolitan memory and worked closely with key memory curators to create enduring networks of stakeholders involved in war museums and the art world*" [5.1, p. 2].

2. **Influenced the way war exhibitions are curated, enhancing preservation of memory of war and conflict contributing to processes of commemoration, memorialisation and reconciliation**

The UNREST team co-produced a new war exhibition which opened at the Ruhr Museum in Essen, Germany, on 11 November 2018 and ran until Summer 2019 (2 months beyond the original schedule owing to popular demand). Over 700 people, including the Mayor of Essen, attended the official inauguration ceremony and toured the exhibition on the day; the exhibition attracted over 30,000 visitors overall. The exhibition was directly informed by Cento Bull and Hansen's (2016) agonistic memory theory and specifically by the concept of radical multi-perspectivism. The museum's director and curators collaborated with UNREST academics, repeatedly discussing ways of applying agonism to a war exhibition. These exchanges encouraged the curators to step out of their comfort zone in order to devise novel and unsettling ways of exhibiting war and conflict and engaging with visitors. The experience impacted on their museal approaches and practices, "*enriching and complicating [their] understandings of museum didactics*', challenging them '*to take on board new ways of displaying objects presenting contrasting perspectives*", and "*resulting in some innovative and original solutions of which [they] are quite proud*" [5.4].

Agonistic memory theory and the concept of radical multi-perspectivism also influenced another exhibition, demonstrating broader impact beyond the UNREST project. Dr Reynolds of Nottingham Trent University drew directly on agonistic memory theory to curate an interactive temporary exhibition with the Ulster museum (National Museums of Northern

Ireland's most visited site), entitled *Voices of '68*, which opened in September 2018, generating much public interest and very positive reactions. A travelling version toured almost 40 destinations in the UK, Ireland, Europe and the USA; a digital version of the exhibition is also available. The display has now been incorporated into the Ulster Museum's permanent exhibition in the section entitled *The Troubles and Beyond*, testifying to the impact that the agonistic memory approach has had on Northern Ireland's most important museum. This is captured on the official website of the exhibition: "*While we have a shared past, we do not have a shared memory and it is through engaging with this collection that we have been able to encourage and open discussion that considers different viewpoints*" (a key tenet of the agonistic memory approach) [5.5].

The concept of radical multi-perspectivism developed by Cento Bull and Hansen also inspired educational materials for schools developed by Dr Reynolds. National Museums of NI found the research of Cento Bull "*particularly valuable*", as it "*stimulated [their] own museological thinking and directly informed [their] work*" [5.6].

3. **Promoted knowledge transfers among heritage practitioners on theoretical and practical issues relating to memorialisation of conflict and changes in practice through a MOOC.**

Cento-Bull presented the theory of agonistic memory in the MOOC "*How We Remember War and Violence: Theory and Practice"*, primarily designed to engage museum professionals, educators and academics working in the field of memory. This online training module on modes of remembering war and conflict and their practical applications was devised and produced at Bath by Parish, Clarke and Sene, as part of the UNREST project. The 6-week module, "How We Remember War and Violence: Theory and Practice", was made accessible to the public on three separate occasions, at the end of 2018 and early in 2019. Data was collected via the inbuilt survey facility of the platform that hosted the MOOC (*FutureLearn*). Altogether, the MOOC was subscribed to by over 2,100 people from almost 100 countries; approximately 37% of them were heritage or post-conflict practitioners as well as students of museology, memory and conflict [5.7]. Practitioners typically commented that they "*would absolutely use agonistic memory in their exhibits*", as well as think "*very differently about [their] approach to [their] own artistic practice"* [5.6]. This was forcefully confirmed by a follow-up survey targeted to participants who given their professional background had explicitly expressed their intention to integrate agonistic memory into their work. Over half of these practitioners declared that they had already applied their learnings in their work [5.8].

4. **Facilitated an increased personal understanding of conflict among the general public through the use of innovative technologies including a MOOC (as described above) and videogames.**

The module attracted the interest of the wider public, with almost half of the learners' motivations for joining the course matching the broad category of 'leisure' [5.7]. Feedback on the module was overwhelmingly positive, with 95% to 98% of learners in each run indicating that the course met or exceeded their expectations; between 93% and 98% of learners reported that they had gained new knowledge or skills by undertaking the course and more than half of participants claimed that they had applied what they had learned. Nearly 80% of participants also indicated that they had shared what they had learned. A comment that frequently appeared in the feedback is that the module shaped participants' understanding of conflict and war memory, not least in their own country. Comments highlighted that agonistic memory helped learners to "*see a new perspective/gain new insight*", "i*mprove their understanding*", "*think critically*", and "*put theory into practice*" [5.8].

As part of the Ruhr exhibition, 2 new video games (*Umschagplatz '43* and *Endless Blitz*) were developed by UNREST postdoc De Angeli from the Dept of Computer Science, University of Bath, in collaboration with Cento Bull. Conceived as a specific agonistic intervention that uses "*as theoretical foundation"* Cento Bull's research on agonistic memory, these custom-made

video games "*engaged visitors with multiple socio-political perspectives through role-playing, requiring them to make decisions about a number of historical and memorial dilemmas, as well as gain a better sense of how such decisions are shaped by context but also by human agency*" [5.9].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 UNREST project final review report by EU-appointed evaluators (2019). The report specifically praised the impact work and achievements of the UNREST team.

5.2 Impact statement from Curator, Kobariski Muzej, 12 January 2018.

5.3 Impact statement from Curator, In Flanders Fields Museum, 1 October 2018.

5.4 Impact statement from Director,Ruhr Museum, 21 February 2019.

5.5 National Museum NI website, accessed 26 January 2021.
https://www.nmni.com/collections/history/troubles

5.6 Impact statement from Director of Collections, National Museums NI, 23 October 2019.

5.7 How We Remember War and Violence: Theory and Practice--Report (quantitative data), 3 July 2019.

5.8 How We Remember War and Violence: Theory and Practice--Report (qualitative data), 3 July 2019.

5.9 Impact statement from Co-Directors of Echo Games, 21 January 2021.