

Beyond the Academy

Applying Anthropological Research, A Case Study of Demonstrating Impact in the U.K. 2014 REF

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ABSTRACT: The 2014 Research Excellence Framework sought for the first time to assess the impact that research was having beyond the boundaries of the university and the wider academic sphere. While the REF continued the approach of previous research assessment exercises in attempting to measure the overall quality of research and teaching within the higher-education sector, it also expected institutions to evidence how some of their research had had ‘an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia’ (REF 2012: 48). This article provides a case study in how researchers in one U.K. anthropology department were able to demonstrate the impact of their work in the public sphere successfully as part of this major audit exercise.

KEYWORDS: anthropology, conflict, flags, freedom of assembly, Northern Ireland, parades, research impact, symbols

Anthropologists working at Queen’s University Belfast have long had a commitment to engaging with policy and practice and applying their research to inform communities and government in Northern Ireland. This has resulted in a number of publications over the years that sought to highlight that work (Bryan 2006; Donnan and McFarlane 1989, 1998). Much of this research has drawn on anthropological theory and methodologies to analyse and contribute to an understanding of diverse aspects of the conflict and the subsequent ongoing peace process. This ongoing commitment to having an impact beyond the academy provided a strong foundation for the Anthropology Department to submit two impact case studies to the REF.

The case studies that were submitted were based on the work of Neil Jarman and Dominic Bryan, both of whom have sought for a number of years to ensure that their academic research has a practical impact to the benefit of local society. Jarman and Bryan initially worked closely together and drew upon work that

each had carried out for doctoral studies (Bryan 2000; Jarman 1997) to inform the debates over contentious parades in Northern Ireland from 1996 onwards (Bryan and Jarman in press). The case studies submitted for the REF were based on Bryan’s subsequent and ongoing work on flags and symbols in Northern Ireland and Jarman’s work on freedom of assembly across Europe and Central Asia.

Impact Case Study 1

Neil Jarman’s case study for the REF focused on work carried out in elaborating human-rights standards for freedom of peaceful assembly across Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union (Jarman 2009a, 2009b; Jarman and Hamilton 2009). Jarman’s initial research on parades in Northern Ireland analysed their importance as cultural and political acts, but from the late 1990s research focused on their presence as a source of dispute and conflict. This led into research



on the human-rights parameters of the right to protest and comparative work that sought to understand how other countries had dealt with similar contentious public events. Initially this research was focused almost entirely on impacting the situation in Northern Ireland, but in 2004 Jarman, with a colleague Michael Hamilton, attended a conference on freedom of assembly organised by the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), part of the Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which originated in the Helsinki talks between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. in the 1970s. The OSCE tends to be little known in Western Europe, but has a high profile in many former Soviet states where it plays a prominent role in monitoring elections as well as encouraging and supporting processes of democratisation.

At the time of the conference, staff at ODIHR were in the early stages of drafting a set of guidelines on freedom of assembly, which it was hoped could be used to engage with governments, law drafters and assembly organisers and thereby increase understanding of, and respect for, this fundamental right. Without thinking about what we might be letting ourselves into, Jarman and Hamilton offered to comment on the draft guidelines and help with the subsequent revisions. At the same time ODIHR also convened a wider advisory group with academics and civil-society activists from Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Poland, Russia, Tadjikistan and the U.S.A. to help develop the guidelines. Jarman was asked to chair this. The *Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly* were published in 2007 and the same year a working group was formalised as a standing Expert Panel, which Jarman continues to chair (ODIHR 2007, 2010).

The *Guidelines* set out in some detail the human-rights standards for law and practice by drawing on the key principles that had been set out by the European Court of Human Rights, as well as by a range of national and international bodies. They have been widely used by national and international advocacy and campaigning organisations and their value was also acknowledged by the Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law (the Venice Commission) who adopted the *Guidelines* in 2008. The ODIHR expert panel and the Venice Commission have worked closely together since that time.

While the *Guidelines* set out good practice ODIHR sought to draw on the principles they contained to have a positive impact in influencing change at a local level. An early example of this was when Jarman was asked to join an ODIHR delegation in meeting with the Armenian government in 2008 to discuss possible

amendments and changes to their law governing assemblies. This led to ongoing work in Armenia on this issue and in 2010 Jarman was invited by the Armenian Ombudsman to join a working group that was tasked to draft an entirely new law on assemblies, which was eventually enacted in 2012. The ODIHR Expert Panel has also been responsible for producing numerous formal reviews of national laws and draft laws (known as Opinions) in a range of countries including Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Poland, Serbia and Ukraine, many of which have resulted in changes being made to the relevant legislation.

At the same time the Panel also recognised a need to assess how effectively the laws were being implemented and as a result Jarman worked with ODIHR to develop a training programme for civil-society organisations to enable them to monitor how the laws were being implemented in their country. This training programme was based on models that Jarman and Bryan had observed in use in South Africa and the U.S.A. as well as in Northern Ireland as part of their research on parades, and which in turn drew heavily on anthropological methods of participant observation by having teams of monitors attend a range of protests, demonstrations and other assemblies over a period of six months to a year to gather evidence of both good and bad practices. Between 2008 and 2012 Jarman was responsible for training human-rights groups in Moldova, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Serbia and Kosovo. In each country the group produced a report based on their findings, which was subsequently used to engage further with the relevant local institutions, including government, political parties, municipalities and the police (ODIHR 2011). In Moldova and Armenia, where this work was most fully developed, the monitoring led to engagement with the local police and the development of training programmes to increase understanding on human-rights issues and improve the quality of policing at demonstrations. During this period Jarman also trained ODIHR staff in monitoring practice and the organisation has since established its own thematic programme of monitoring assemblies, initially through focusing on how rights were protected or abused at Pride events and international summits across Europe and North America.

While ODIHR was developing the monitoring programmes and drafting legal Opinions the panel was also keeping in touch with jurisprudence produced by the European Court of Human Rights and various national constitutional courts. This material was incorporated into a revised and expanded edition of the *Guidelines* published in 2010. The first edition had ini-

tially been published in English and Russian (although the Russian government refused ODIHR permission formally to launch the *Guidelines* in Moscow) and then subsequently in Armenian, French, Georgian and Romanian, while the second edition was also translated into Arabic as ODIHR sought to engage with some of the countries involved in the Arab Spring protests.

At the same time as Jarman was developing his work on freedom of assembly internationally, he continued to work and engage with issues in Northern Ireland, particularly in relation to the policing of assemblies, with good practice from Northern Ireland helping to inform international standards as well as vice versa. As part of this process Jarman facilitated a series of meetings between Northern Irish groups involved in organising parades and protests with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly during his official visit to the U.K. in January 2013.

Evidencing Impact

Jarman was able to evidence the impact of the research in a number of very tangible ways. These included reference to the *Guidelines* in the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights¹ and the Polish Constitutional Court,² as well as the UN Special Rapporteur of Freedom of Assembly who cited the *Guidelines* as ‘the most advanced set of guidelines available’ in his first report in 2012. The impact statement also noted that the *Guidelines* had been cited by the U.K.’s Joint Committee on Human Rights in a report in 2009, the Equality and Human Rights Commission in its 2012 Human Rights Review, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland in their preparations for the G8 Summit in June 2013. The formal references in various reports and other documents were reinforced by letters of commendation noting the impact of the work which were obtained from two UN Special Rapporteurs, Maina Kiai, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of assembly, and Christof Heyns, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions, who Jarman had assisted with information and comment for his 2011 report on use of force at public assemblies; the head of the Human Rights Department at ODIHR and representatives of civil-society organisations in Armenia and Russia.

Impact Case Study 2

Dominic Bryan’s work on symbols arose directly from the parades research that he and Jarman had been in-

involved with in the 1990s. Throughout this work we had both identified the way in which, within the context of ‘tradition’, the use and understanding of symbols showed significant changes. In 2002 Bryan started a project funded by the ESRC³ with the simple premise of examining how, after the 1998 political Agreement in Northern Ireland, often the use of symbols might change. The Agreement (1998: 20) said little about the use of symbols:

All participants acknowledge the sensitivity of the use of symbols and emblems for public purposes, and the need in particular in creating the new institutions to ensure that such symbols and emblems are used in a manner which promotes mutual respect rather than division. Arrangements will be made to monitor this issue and consider what action might be required.

The ESRC project examined a number of case studies, including the use of emblems and flags by public bodies, contested spaces and emblems during St Patrick’s Day, and the development at civic and political events particularly around Parliament buildings at Stormont (Bryan 2009; Bryan and MacIntosh 2005, 2007).

In Northern Ireland the display of symbols in public spaces has remained highly contested and the consistent cause of public disorder so it seemed an obvious step to develop direct engagement with debates over policy. This took place in two significant ways. First, Bryan provided Belfast City Council with an evaluation of a ‘cross community’ St Patrick’s Day event in the city (Bryan et al. 2006). Second, Bryan and Gordon Gillespie, after discussion with the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), looked more closely at ongoing disputes over both the official flying of flags on Government and public buildings and displays of flags on houses and lampposts. Despite public awareness of political sensitivities around display, the research showed that thousands of flags were displayed on the main roads of Northern Ireland every year. Research demonstrated that, on the one hand, socio-political transformations were taking place in new symbols for the Northern Ireland Assembly with a recognition of changing identities, such as a new badge for the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) but that, on the other hand, contestation in certain areas around the public flying of flags increased levels of conflict (Bryan and Gillespie 2005).

The research report, *Transforming Conflict: Flags and Emblems*, was influential in the writing of a new government policy called *Shared Future* (OFMDFM 2005: 19–22) and in the development of a new interagency policy, led by the PSNI, called the *Joint Protocol in Re-*

lation to the Display of Flags in Public Areas (Bryan et al. 2010). It also initiated what became a five-year project, funded by OFMDFM, mapping the demarcation of ethnic territory through displays of flags and emblems in public spaces. The team developed a mechanism for surveying all the arterial routes in Northern Ireland, developed survey questions to test public attitudes annually through the Northern Ireland Life and Times survey, and conducted five ethnographic case studies to give more nuanced understandings of who puts flags up, when and why (Bryan 2007; Bryan and Stephenson 2009). The research provided clear evidence of how public space was controlled using displays of flags, organised by young men with a relationship to paramilitary groups. It showed that Government policy had little impact on the numbers of flags displayed on main roads between 2006 and 2010 and while over one-third of flags visible in July remained flying after September, there had been some reduction in the display of paramilitary flags. The attitude surveys suggest that over 50 per cent of people think that both the Union flags and the national flag of Ireland are put up on lampposts by paramilitaries and that this makes people less likely to use services and businesses in those areas. Importantly, the research showed that flying of flags on lampposts does not have widespread community support and that there is a commonly held sense of threat around the displays.

The evidence from the research was that new policies had achieved little in changing behaviours. Indeed in December 2012 a dispute over the flying of the Union flag over Belfast City Hall ended in serious public disorder and significant political interventions (Nolan et al. 2015). So how might the impact of the research be judged?

Evidencing Impact

The research and resulting reports were influential in policy debates at all levels of government. Since 2009, Bryan has been a member of the Flags Protocol Review Group (FPRG), constituted by OFMDFM, along with the Chief Executives of three District Councils and representatives from Community Relations Council (CRC), Equality Commission, PSNI, NI Housing Executive and four government departments. In addition in 2012 Bryan was invited to chair the FPRG under the auspices of the CRC to produce new policy guidelines. The research was discussed on a number of occasions at the Northern Ireland Assembly, was quoted by both the First Minister, Peter Robinson and Deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness and received a good degree of cross-party con-

sensus during a debate on 11 December 2011.⁴ The research team worked with District Councils and peace and reconciliation groups to help local groups engage more effectively with this highly contested policy process. In 2012 further survey work and a report undertaken for Armagh District Council and CRC showed that over 90 per cent of people surveyed do not support flags flying on lampposts throughout the year. The research findings resulted in a change of policy accepted by all political parties in the Council (Bryan and Pehrson 2012).

At the same time a range of work was undertaken with NGOs and community groups in Northern Ireland crucially enabling these groups to engage with the broader policy debates. We worked with St Columb's Park House in Derry/Londonderry on developing their flags research model which was used in Derry, Strabane, Claudy, Limavady and Castlederg (St Columb's Park House 2007). Bryan has worked with the Rural Community Network to engage with a range of groups and used the research to inform a strategic report on flags that was presented to OFMDFM (Rural Enabler Network 2012). In addition, Bryan worked closely with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission on the development of their policy and training exercises and engaging with the United Nations on the broader issue of cultural rights particularly in divided societies (NIHRC 2013, 2014).

All of this work could be evidenced through reports and references that groups were more than willing to supply (REF 2014). It represented a level of engagement that existed long before the notion of 'impact' gained significant profile in the REF. In attempting to understand the way that political identities and territory were being manifested in public space it was necessary as part of participant observation to be working with state and non-state agencies and groups.

Conclusions

Both of these case studies come from a common origin, an interest in the ways identities were expressed in public spaces and how power and control was manifest in those processes. The 1990s were an intoxicating time for undertaking research in Northern Ireland, a period of political transition of international significance during which there was a demand by both NGOs and government for research and policy ideas (Bryan and Jarman in press). As a natural development of the methods of participant observation Jarman and Bryan had both worked in partnership with groups in civil society and with those in the state, in-

cluding the police, government and local councils. The case studies that were submitted to the REF thus drew on a long experience of seeking to use academic research to have a positive impact on policy and practice and in seeing this as an essential element of undertaking academic research rather than as a chore. One of the challenges of applying academic research is the process of translation of theoretical and abstract concepts, and often nuanced findings, into the 'real world', and to try to ensure that academic interpretations of social contexts resonate sufficiently with those who are practically engaged with social and political issues. In this we feel that we have had some success. But engaging with policy and practice is a two-way process and can in turn lead to academics being asked to participate in the process of development of policy and critique the practice of governance, which in turn provides other challenges.

One interesting contrast between the studies is the level of internationalisation. Jarman began with researching an issue of importance to the situation in Northern Ireland and moved to engage internationally through utilising the participant observation undertaken locally. Bryan examined another version of the same problem that he recognised as being under-researched in Northern Ireland. In other words Jarman repeated some of the methodologies on a more comparative international basis whilst Bryan developed new methodological approaches to undertake an analysis of contest and control of public space from a very different perspective.

Underpinning all of the work has been a continuing engagement with anthropology, its theory and methods, but also the development of interdisciplinary work, in particular with academics from law, human rights, criminology, sociology and psychology. These diverse contacts, not acknowledged in the case studies, provided further added value to the research and engagement. Applied academic research has a long history, but continues to be a minority interest in anthropology and other disciplines, the 2014 REF was the first occasion when this work was more widely acknowledged as an important component of the work of the academy and will hopefully raise the profile of academic engagement beyond the academy in future years.

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Notes

1. Vyerentsov v Ukraine (2013).
2. Case No. 105/6/A/2008 (in Polish).
3. ESRC no.L219252112, (2002–2006). £114,000. PI: Dr Dominic Bryan. 'Representing a New Northern Ireland: Sites of Creation and Contest in Devolved Governance'.
4. Northern Ireland Assembly Hansard: 21/9/2009, p. 141; 9/11/09, pp. 129–30; 20/9/2011 p. 213; 11/10/2011, Volume 67, No. 4, pp. 226–34.

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