

## **Remembering 7/7: The collective shaping of survivors' personal memories of the 2005 London Bombing**

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### **Introduction**

On July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005, four explosive devices exploded in central London, killing 52 people and injuring hundreds of others. The devices were carried in rucksacks onto the London Underground train network by four young British men (Mohamed Sidique Khan, Shehzad Tanweer, Germaine Lindsay and Hasib Hussain). All four were also killed during the blasts. Three of the devices were detonated within a minute of each other on trains in tunnels between underground stations around 08.50. The fourth was set off an hour later by Hussain on a bus in Tavistock Square, who had apparently been forced to change his plans due to train delays. The bombings had an immediate impact, with rolling 24 hours news images of the scenes being immediately relayed as the nature of the events gradually emerged over the course of the day (see Lorenzo-Dus & Bryan, 2011). In the following weeks of heightened security and anxiety, there was a second round of bombings on July 21<sup>st</sup> and the shooting dead of the Brazilian national Jean Charles de Menezes by plain clothed police at Stockwell Underground Station, who was misidentified as one of the 21/7 bombers.

The 7/7 Bombings were one of the worst terrorist incidents in post-war UK. The bombings took place the day after the announcement of the awarding of the Olympic Games to London<sup>i</sup>. They followed the 2004 Madrid train bombings and were widely seen as part of a long expected 'backlash' for the UK's involvement in the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In the months following the bombings, public debate was centred on the significance of 'home-grown terror', since the bombers were UK citizens (and with the exception of Lindsay, British-born), and around the 'radicalisation' of young Muslims. This debate intensified with a Government led push to extend the pre-charge detention period for 'terror suspects' to 90 days under revised Anti-Terrorism laws<sup>ii</sup> and an increase in the use of 'control orders' restricting the rights and liberties of those suspected of involvement in planning terrorist acts. 7/7 also came to be key moment in how the international policies of Tony Blair's Government were publically viewed during the period of so-called 'War on Terror' between 2001-2008.

The place of the bombings in contemporary British history is now well-established, particularly following the public inquest which reported in 2011. It was also clear in the immediate aftermath that 7/7 was an event which required public commemoration. The national flag was flown at half-mast on public buildings on the 8<sup>th</sup> July, a two-minute silence was observed across Europe on 14<sup>th</sup> July<sup>iii</sup> (repeated on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2006) and a memorial service was held at St Paul's cathedral in London on 1<sup>st</sup> November. In successive years, there have been public events marking the anniversary of the bombings and a permanent memorial has been installed in Hyde Park. The process of constituting 7/7 into

an object of collective memory began very rapidly, and continues to this day with the approach of the tenth anniversary.

Commemoration of events that are within 'living memory' (that is to say, the span of three generations that Jan & Aleida Assman refer to as 'communicative memory' – Assman, J. 2011; Assman, A. 2011) typically take a different form to those that are more remote to contemporary participants. The testimony and experiences of those who witnessed the events commemorated (or of their relatives who pass on the story – see Hirsch 1997) is a crucial element in shaping the commemorative object. With 7/7, there were numerous survivors of all four bombings who were able to offer accounts of their direct experiences, along with a large number of photographic images, some taken at the scene by survivors using camera-phones, others from broadcast media coverage (see Reading, 2011). These accounts and images have been recruited into the narratives of 7/7 and underpin the way it has been commemorated over the past eight years.

In this chapter we will be exploring the relationship between individual survivor's experience and public or official commemorative narratives. As with the 9/11 attacks on the US World Trade Centre in 2001, the 7/7 bombings were immediately framed as an ideologically motivated attack on the nation, with many newspaper reports explicitly attributing the incident to Al-Qa'eda. Images of injured survivors, most notably John Tulloch and Davinia Douglass, were extensively used to represent the indiscriminate violence of the bombings. In the following days and months, survivors and relatives of the deceased were encouraged to 'tell their stories', which were typically framed as courage in the face of political terror. The most notorious example of this was when bloodied image of John Tulloch was placed on the front cover of the tabloid newspaper *The Sun* in November in an article supporting the call for the 90 day terror suspect detention law, using the strapline 'Tell Tony he's right'.

But as has become clear in the intervening years, the stories that survivors and relatives want to tell about 7/7 do not necessarily support the commemorative narrative of national resilience in the face of political terror. Indeed, in some cases the stories diverge completely, with John Tulloch taking precisely the opposite stance on Anti-Terrorist laws to the one his image was used by *The Sun* to support. However, as we will describe it, the issue here is not simply a tension between a 'collective' and a 'personal' memory of events. Nor it is the distance between direct and 'mediated' experience. Finally it does not turn around the seizing of 'private' experiences for public purposes. It concerns instead the distributed and contingent nature of the commemorative work that has been enacted around 7/7 and spaces this has offered for very different accounts of the events themselves.

### **Distributed remembering**

Before turning to the stories from survivors and relatives themselves, we will first say a little more about our reticence in using some of the well-known distinctions within (Cultural) Memory Studies to approach commemoration of the London Bombings. A great deal of intellectual effort has gone into teasing

apart the notions of collective and individual memory, and, indeed whether there is any meaning at all to the use of the term 'memory' for anything other than personal recollections. Often such debates turn on establishing what major figures such as Maurice Halbwachs or Pierre Nora 'really meant' in their writings. Whilst definitional debates are nearly always stimulating to follow, if only for the rhetorical flourishes of the rival interlocutors, they tend often to end up in precisely the same conceptual stalemate they intended to unlock. A more effective strategy, we feel, is to reinvent classic work through readings that whilst they are sympathetic to the organisation of the source material, nevertheless attempt to use it as the building blocks of an argument that would be unfamiliar to the original author precisely because the reception of their work has given rise to the problematic the new argument seeks to address.

For example, Middleton & Brown (2005) sought to overturn the received wisdom that Halbwachs' work was in opposition to the 'psychological' version of memory conceptualised by his former mentor Henri Bergson. They argue, drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze, that Bergson effectively deconstructs the opposition between the individual and the social in memory, and if this deconstruction is allowed to unfold through Halbwachs' texts, then 'personal memory' can be seen to emerge as a consequence of 'collective memory' rather than the other way round. Here we follow a version of that argument by demonstrating that the personal memories of 7/7 survivors are shaped and reformulated by their efforts to tell their stories publically. Personal memory is then, in part, a product of a collective work of sense-making.

This line of thought can be extended to suspend another classic distinction between the kind of unmediated or 'raw' experience that drives testimony and oral history, and the mediated, repackaged version of experience that ends up as the texts that circulate in news media, cinema, museums and 'official history'. Following Nora, the usual tendency is to celebrate the former, and decry its corruption by the base impulses of the latter. On the contrary, we show in our analysis that engaging with external materials and tools is critical to the mnemonic work that survivors do. In some sense their memories include or envelop these external materials. Our understanding of these processes is partly indebted to the fascinating work that John Sutton and colleagues have done in developing notions of 'distributed' and 'extended' memory. The basis of their approach is to argue that remembering draws upon a broad range of equivalent resources, some of which are located within the person (i.e. sensation, cognitive capacities), others of which are external (i.e. diaries, electronic devices), and some which transcend this distinction entirely (i.e. language and communicative practices, the memories of others).

A variant of the unmediated/mediated distinction is to posit a dualism between 'experience-near' forms of memory that come from being physically present at the recollected events and 'distal' forms of memory based on hearing stories or vicarious experience. At one pole we have 'memory' in the strictest, narrowest sense, and at the other 'cultural memory' or perhaps – dare we say it – 'history'. In what follows we attempt to bypass that debate by working instead with a concept of 'embodied connections' where survivors use sensations and shared

corporeal experiences as the basis for building collective narratives. However, in order to articulate and propagate these embodied connections, survivors need to draw upon collective communicative practices, some of which result in putative ethical dilemmas.

The material that forms the basis for this chapter arises from a study 'Conflicts of Memory: Commemorating and mediating the 2005 London Bombings' in which the first two authors collaborated. The study attempted to explore the link between memories of 7/7 itself and the media framings of the event that unfolded in its aftermath (see Allen & Brown, 2011, Lorenzo-Dus & Bryan, 2011, Hoskins, 2011). As part of the study, the second author conducted a series of interviews with persons who were directly affected by the bombings (see Allen, forthcoming). Here we discuss material that comes from three of those interviews, all of which were with survivors of the blasts. Rachel North and Susan Harrison were both travelling on the Jubilee line train on which Germaine Lindsey detonated his bomb. Rachel became well known for running a blog about her experiences on the BBC website, she set up the support group Kings Cross United, and wrote a book, *Out of the Tunnel*, which described her recovery. Susan overcame losing a leg in the blast to do promotional work for a number of charities. John Tulloch is an academic known for his work on media and politics. On 7/7 he was travelling through London and was seated next to Mohammad Sidique Khan on the Circle line train when the latter triggered his bomb. John has made many media appearances and published a book reflecting on his experiences, *One Day in July*.

In what follows we will discuss material from interviews with Rachel, Susan and John to analyse the mnemonic work that all three have engaged in to make sense of their experiences. As we will show, this work overflows the kinds of distinctions typically made in (Cultural) Memory Studies. It involves shaping their own stories in relation to those others, making use of external tools and resources as framing devices, and an ongoing reflection on sensory and felt connections to the event.

### **'Telling your story'**

The events of 7/7 dominated news coverage in the UK for many of the successive weeks. Almost as soon as they had left the underground train tunnels, survivors were immediately placed in the situation of having to tell 'their story'. Journalists from national newspapers 'doorstepped' the private homes of survivors and relatives, particularly those whose images had been prominently featured in the media, such as Davinia Douglass. Survivors who had suffered lesser physical injuries were very rapidly recruited into the unfolding media coverage of the events. Rachel North, for example, was asked to write a blog for the BBC news website after a journalist saw her posts on a London based message board (Urban75):

'I did feel incredibly responsible. I was writing the BBC blog in a way that I knew was kind of, erm ... I was writing stuff that I thought would help people. I was writing the sort of stuff that I wanted to read that would

have helped me if I hadn't been me, so I was doing that, I was very much writing for a kind of audience and trying to put out messages about, you know, keep calm, carry on' (Rachel North, 256-260)

Here Rachel describes her blog as an attempt to 'put out messages' which sought to 'help people' by calming the general anxiety, fear and anger which was present across London in the wake of the bombings. She imagined her audience to be fellow Londoners who might themselves have been caught up in the blasts, or who could easily have been. She was in effect telling her story for an 'imagined self' - 'I was writing the sort of stuff that I wanted to read that would have helped me if I hadn't been me'. From the very beginning, Rachel's story was not entirely her own. It was a narrative of her experiences that was deliberately and consciously fitted to the task of 'normalising' the extraordinary events of 7/7 and providing a framework that emphasised resilience and a measured response.

The treatment which Susan Harrison received for her severe injuries, and subsequent rehabilitation, kept her away from the media for several weeks following 7/7. She decided, however, to maintain a commitment to participate in charity event - the Oxfam 'Big Run' - which was made before she was lost her leg in the bombings. This resulted in an ongoing relationship with several charities, where she made media appearances as a survivor in order to promote the work of the charities. She sought to use her story as a means of supporting charitable work:

'I've always done it for the right reasons, you know, I've always done it, I'm quite tough really and I've always done it for the right reasons and, you know, I don't do sensationalistic stuff, I don't do it for the fame, I don't do it to get my face on the front of a newspaper, I do it so that that the charity that I'm getting there gets their website on that bit of paper' (Susan Harrison 219-222)

The distinction here between telling the story for 'right' and 'wrong' reasons implies that no personal narrative of 7/7 is ever entirely neutral. Susan here rejects motives such as seeking fame or financial reward for her media work (although note that the self-description of 'I'm quite tough really' suggests that she can understand the obvious temptation of such rewards). As she frames it, the 'right reasons' are ones where her telling her experiences is instrumental to the charities she works with 'getting their website on that bit of paper'. Placing her story in the service of charity work in this way does come with some cost. Susan was aware that having a media presence as a survivor would also likely result in her personal life being investigated by tabloid newspapers in search of a story demonstrating some contradiction between her past life and her current charity work:

'So before I did anything I was thinking, have I got any skeletons in my closet, is there anything that I shouldn't, no, OK, I'm fine' (Susan Harrison, 308-309)

For survivors, recollecting what happened to them on 7/7 meant becoming part of the media frames that broadcast and print media placed around the event. Within these frames, they were required to offer a story that emphasised their victimhood. Susan's momentary anxiety about possible 'skeletons in my closet' was well founded, since the media logic of 'victimhood' is founded in a one-dimensional representation of the survivor as being entirely faultless in all their attributes. Any personal details that cannot be subsumed within this simplistic image are taken to undermine the credibility of the victim.

Stories of surviving 7/7 also have to be formulated to acknowledge the 52 people who did not survive. John Tulloch, for example, tells of a media appearance he made on the BBC primetime television programme 'The One Show'. At this point in his recovery, John had resumed work as a Professor in Media Studies and had begun to write a book about his experiences that was subsequently published as *One Day in July*. When he was initially contacted to appear on The One Show, the theme that was proposed for the segment in which an interview with John would feature was 'moving on'. John agreed on the condition that he would speak about how, for him, developing an argument around the political use of the bombing by the UK media and government was enabling him to 'move on'. However, the television interviewer chose to focus on other issues, and none of the 'political' material was featured in the heavily edited interview that was eventually broadcast. Despite his dissatisfaction with this process, John describes his realisation, upon viewing the programme, of how inappropriate that narrative of his recovery would have been:

'cos the other two people in that One Show, er, interview, their stories, both of them, tragic loss, one his wife, one of, er soul mate sister, were so, so moving, there's no way I would have wanted to be giving a kind of confident move forward into the politics of the world's images, no way ... I still think, still thought at the time I saw it, still think that, that the quality of what they did in that thing was so powerful in a way it was a privilege for me to be even in it' (John Tulloch 233-239)

John's academic work afforded him a familiarity with media practices of editing and producing broadcast work. In this way, any media coverage of 7/7 is likely to be shaped by the format of the programming in which it appears (in this case a popular 'magazine' type prime-time show). But the juxtaposition of the politicised version of events John intended to tell with the stories from bereaved relatives would have disrupted the emotional tone established in the other interviews and ultimately undermined the overall 'power' of the segment. Many of the survivors who participated in the study spoke of the difficulty of engaging in commemorative activities alongside bereaved relatives (see Allen, forthcoming). Survivors tend to focus on how they have found a variety of meanings in their experiences, as they come to terms with 7/7 as part of the personal biography. But for the bereaved relatives, sudden loss remains the dominant theme of their recollections. Hence, many survivors consider formal commemorative activities, such as the Hyde Park memorial, to be 'for the relatives' rather than for themselves.

In The One Show example, John's story was depoliticised to accommodate the stories of others. However, the converse may also be the case. Media reporting has sometimes sought to recruit survivors into a discourse around national and international politics. Susan Harrison speaks of this as part of the 'angle' that journalists seek to bring to their reporting:

'They're trying to, there's always, you know, initially obviously they're reporting and because it's an interesting story and people are interested in ... and there does seem to be a sympathy thing, but they always want an angle and it's usually are you moaning about compensation, or do you want a public enquiry, did you feel you got the best out of the government, you know, there's always something ... let's get a juicy story on this and actually there is no juicy story for me, there is nothing' (Susan Harrison, 359-364)

The 'juicy story' here is one where Susan's recollections and experiences are fitted into a narrative of government failing in their duty of care towards those affected by 7/7. Here Susan is represented as someone who is 'doubly victimised', first by the actions of the terrorists and secondly by an uncaring public administration. But other 'angles' are possible in these kinds of media stories:

'I absolutely would hate to, for a view of mine to be put in a paper and like that, and I would hate to ... I absolutely would hate to, for a view of mine to be put in a paper and misconstrued and actually suddenly I'm a racist, you know, or suddenly I hate all Muslims, or suddenly I hate, you know, Tony Blair or ... it's just not me and I do have views, but they're personal' (Susan Harrison, 369-371)

Susan here draws equivalence between these very different perspectives on 7/7. To be represented as 'hating Muslims' is, for her, no different in kind from 'hating Tony Blair'. Both are media frames that attempt to subsume survivor's stories into crudest form of political discourse in a sensationalist manner. John Tulloch describes the well-known case of his image being used in tabloid newspapers as a series of appropriations:

'I began to notice during the first few months, I was being used like a political football and you would know The Sun issue in November 2005 when, you know, I was my ... supersaturated colour, in supersaturated colour there I was on the full front page of The Sun, supporting legislation, anti-terrorism legislation, which I didn't support, and where words were put next to my mouth as though it came from me. And then you'll get the Daily Mail a few months later having an attack on Blair after so some so-called independent inquiry and there was a cross-party inquiry, and this time I'm used against Blair, so, erm, the whole ethics of that, erm, the whole experience of living with that' (John Tulloch 111-118)

The fact that John's image and story could be used on different occasions by different tabloid newspapers to support entirely different positions pro- and

anti- Blair, indicates that his experiences can be re-assembled into collectivised narratives of 7/7 that are remote from his own personal perspectives on the bombings. And yet this appropriation of what John went through became itself part of his story. John engaged with the media re-framing of his experience at the same time that he was attempting to come to terms with the physical and psychological effects of the blast:

'I'm faced with Rupert Murdoch's mob and others, er, just using me, constructing me, reconstructing me, at the very same time I'm trying to reconstruct myself' (JT 133-135)

We may summarise these issues which survivors confronted in 'telling their story' by proposing that the person or individual recollections of the bombing are not clearly distinct from the collective narratives of event which rapidly emerged in media and political discussion. The experiences of survivors were more or less immediately recruited into these broader, shared narratives. As a consequence, survivors made sense of their own experiences through their participation in media frames. Or to put things slightly differently, the personal meaning and significance of surviving the bombings emerged through the collective work of framing 7/7.

### **Mediating memory**

The personal memories of survivors of the bombings are, of course, 'individual' in the sense that they are bounded by their own unique spatial and temporal perspective on the events. However, what is striking is the extent to which the participants in our study discussed using tools and external resources to reframe their experience. Take, for example, Rachel North's description of using the Urban75 message board once she had returned home following the bombings:

'I posted to my account and it was just one of loads, of about 900 people advising and contributing to one thread that day, erm, and as soon as I wrote it I felt a bit better, cos I ... I'd managed to get the memories out of my head and onto ... onto a screen and which kind of calmed me down, I was, as you can imagine, very adrenalized by what had gone on that day' (Rachel North, 37-41)

The key phrase here is 'I'd managed to get the memories out of my head and onto a screen'. Rachel offers this description of the activity of telling her story to the other users of the service. She did this by making a series of posts, responding to other posts, and answering queries. The activity generated a narrative organisation for her recent distressing experiences. This framework was collaboratively developed in so far as it emerged from the interaction between the users of Urban75. But we might observe that the ordering of the recent past in the contributions to the message board differed in kind to the memories 'in her head'. The effort to communicate her experiences in this collaborative electronic setting resulted in a reframing of personal memory. As a tool for memory, the Urban75 messages extended and translated Rachel's experiences, and became in themselves part of 'her memory' of the events.

Susan Harrison engaged with the media coverage of 7/7 later, following her immediate recovery. One image in particular attracted her:

‘They released a picture of inside my train and that, I was actually fascinated with that picture, I’ve a copy of it, because I was trying to work out where I was in that train, er, and trying to ... to figure out, you know, memories, trying to install some memories and were the things I was thinking real and ... clearly it didn’t come from the picture’ (Susan Harrison, 122-126)

Following the blast, Susan had been trapped in the wreckage of the Jubilee line underground train. During this time, she had assessed her own injuries, and using her medical training had made a tourniquet for her severely injured leg. During the 2010 inquest into the bombings, Susan described reassuring a fellow passenger, Shelly Mather, who was trapped beneath her and unfortunately later died from her injuries. Such intense and distressing experiences in the dark of the tunnel would be clearly disorienting. Susan used the picture as a way of organising her experiences. She comments on looking at the photograph in order to place her experiences spatially – ‘work out where I was on the train’. The layout of the wrecked train in the image serves as a device to establish the chronology of what happened: here is where she sat, there is where the bomber must have been, that piece of floor is where she was thrown and then trapped, over there is where the paramedics entered the train and ultimately found her.

The image does a particular kind of mnemonic work for Susan. On the one hand, it works as a piece of evidence against which she can ‘test’ what she remembers – ‘were the things I was thinking real’. This was a particular concern of Susan’s because in her initial interviews with Police officers investigating the bombings, Susan had provided a description of the bomber as an ‘Asian chap carrying a rucksack’ (SH: 136), who was actually a fellow passenger (Germaine Lindsey was Afro-Caribbean). On the other, the image provides a way for Susan to rehearse and reorganise what she recalls, using the train layout as a ‘map’ in which she can ‘install some memories’. As with Rachel North, the process of ‘externalising’ memory, of placing experience in framework that emerges from an outside source (the Urban75 message board, an image published by news media), appears important in making sense of what happened. This process was also performed collectively by groups of survivors. Rachel North co-founded a support group, Kings Cross United, which brought together survivors of the Jubilee line bombing<sup>iv</sup>. During their meetings, they used a drawn image of the train as tool to support their exchange of stories:

‘We had a book, which I drew a kind of crap diagram of the train, layout in it, so people wrote their names where they remembered themselves as having been, which, and we kept taking the book back to every meeting so people would kind of plot themselves and then that way they would be able to work out clusters of where they are, so there were, sometimes people would come in and you’d get these incredibly emotional, oh my God, you’re the woman who da, da, da, you know, you’re the one who said

you were going to a job interview and we all said, oh you should go, you'll get the sympathy vote' (Rachel North, 137-143)

The diagram of the train served as a tool to co-ordinate the different stories told by each survivor. By writing themselves into the diagram, the group members were able to build collective narratives of the bombing, such as the one Rachel tells above of the woman who was travelling to a job interview. The tool provided a means for the otherwise disconnected individual experiences to be fitted together to assemble cohesive stories.

In both of the previous examples, the spatial layout of the train provided a framework around which recollections could coalesce and be stabilised. For John Tulloch, a similar mnemonic work was performed by three pieces of luggage. John was travelling on the westbound Circle line train towards Paddington when Mohammad Sidique Khan, who was sat next to him, detonated his device as the train pulled out of Edgware Road station. The three large cases that John was carrying absorbed the blast sufficiently to protect him from major injury. These cases have become central to his narrative of the event, acting almost as talismans of his good fortune in surviving despite being so close to the bomb. However, he describes an episode that occurred at a memorial event at Edgware Road on the one-year anniversary. A fellow survivor approached him, having recognised John from his media appearances. The survivor told him that had attempted to help some of the injured in the carriage, in particular a seriously injured man who has lost his lower limbs in the blast. But he was unable to reach the man because John's cases blocked his way – 'He said, erm, I didn't see you and he said I know I saw what I now know to have been your bloody cases' (JT: 1193). This comment turned around the significance of the cases:

'Ok, so my bags had always been part of a really positive narrative, a part of my good luck story, in my book, everywhere. Ok, now what this guy said was I now know to have been your bloody bags, and it was worse than that, because, and he wasn't being unpleasant, er ... what had happened, he'd found a man, grievously injured, he'd had the bottom half of his body blown off, erm ... he couldn't get at him properly because of my bags, that's how he said it [...] so now my bags were in this horror story, because the people who were trying to help him couldn't help him as much' (John Tulloch, 1210-1221)

The passenger who told this story had seen John on television giving his 'really positive narrative' about his bags. He had then realised that these same 'bloody bags' had formed an obstacle in the carriage. The two narratives – one positive, the other a 'horror story' – intersect around the bags that simultaneously feature in both. John is then confronted with a very different version of events that he is obligated to engage with in his recollections of 7/7.

The three objects that we have discussed – the photograph, the diagram and the cases – play significant meditational roles in the recollections of the survivors. They act initially as forms of evidence, material features of the event that assist in the effort recall what happened. But they also provide an external spatial

framework in which to develop narrative coherence around confusing and distressing experiences, accompanied by recollections of intense and disorienting sensations in the near darkness of the tunnels. Finally, they act as communicative tools that hold together different narratives – sometimes neatly, and sometimes, as with the story of John’s cases, in tension – and make it possible to build collective accounts of surviving the bombs.

### **Embodied connections**

Clearly all experience, and therefore recollected experience, is in some sense embodied, meaning that it is imbued with complex sensory and affective components. However, these embodied aspects of memory can be minimised or fall out of narratives of past events, particular when these stories are tied to broader historical accounts. For the 7/7 survivors the opposite appears to be case. Bodies are central to their recollections. For Susan Harrison, the loss of her leg serves as a permanent marker of the bombings. But even for those who have not been left with life changing physical injuries, the body acts a particular locus of remembering. Here John Tulloch recalls an episode which occurred several months after 7/7:

‘I came out of the first few days of that, doing that, into my garden about, in Australia, about 5 in the evening, and it was drought, it was hot and I’d bought a little native tree and I was going to put it in the ground and the spade wouldn’t even get into the soil and I thought what am I doing, what am I doing? I mean, this is ridiculous. But then I looked down at the foot and it’s on the blade of the spade, and I say, hey, I’ve got legs’ (John Tulloch 173-177)

Legs and feet have a particular significance for John because of his memories of seeing the severely injured passenger who lost his lower limbs on the Circle line train carriage. Here the sudden realisation that his injuries could have been far worse interrupts a moment in the garden. The futility of his efforts to plant the tree in the hard, water-starved soil is overtaken by the overwhelming sensation of having a whole body.

In this recollection, the body acts as an anchor to memory. The physical organisation of limbs and torso provide a synecdochal link to the bombings. John moves in his recollection from the presence of his foot, to the broken bodies of some his fellow passengers and the carnage of the blast itself. The body is here a living conduit of memory. 7/7 marks the bodies of survivors, literally (in Susan’s case), symbolically (in the presence/absence of feet in John’s recollection) and affectively. We can see the latter in a passage from Rachel North’s book *Out of the Tunnel*, where she describes the moments after the explosion in the following way:

‘Sharp grit in my mouth. Choking, lung-filling dust. It was no longer air that I breathed but tiny shards of glass, and thick heavy dust and smoke. Like changing a vacuum cleaner bag and pushing your face into the open dust bag and taking deep breaths. It made my tongue swell and crack and

dry out like leather. I never covered my mouth because I had nothing to cover it with, and there didn't seem any point ... There was an acrid smell of chemicals and burning rubber and burning hair. It filled my nose. It took over the memory of every smell I remembered and wiped it out' (North, 2007: 38)

The smell and taste of the explosion left many survivors with an indelible sensory impression of the immediate damage caused by the bomb. It also left a strong legitimate suspicion that breathing the toxic fumes could have resulted in further 'hidden' effects on their health. These concerns were shared in exchanges of electronic messages between survivors:

'Somebody would write how's everybody doing today, I'm feeling a bit freaked out, I don't like Thursdays, anybody else having this, and someone goes yeah I feel weirder on Thursdays too, and someone else I've got a cough, anyone else got a cough ... yes, I'm smoking loads at the moment but I wonder if it's related to the smoke that we breathed in the tunnel, Oh God, that's really worried me' (Rachel North, 68-72)

In this description, the survivors appear to be state of hyper-vigilance, monitoring feelings and sensations. Each 'weird' feeling is referenced directly to the bombing, taken as a sign that links back to 7/7. For example, physical sensations such as developing a cough or feeling the need to smoke more are seized upon as possible symptoms of an undiagnosed illness caused by inhaling smoke in the tunnel. The body here is marked both visibly and invisibly by the bombings. Survivors carry forward an embodied connection to 7/7 in the affective work they do with one another, such as discussing their anxieties about particular sensations. The body is the means through which they collectively constitute their ongoing, shared relationship to the bombings. This is apparent in the discussion of the effects of noisy celebrations:

'Lots of people noticed that fireworks, and in London, you get fireworks like a whole week, because you get, you know, Diwali and Hindu festivals, then you get the kids who'll buy the fireworks and then let them off in the parks for a laugh, there is a constant bang, bang, bang, erm ... and that really got people psyched up, as did the Buncefield disaster, the people, some people lived in Hemel Hempstead and they really didn't like that all, when there was a big bang and the cloud of smoke went up ... and everybody ... the great charm of it was everybody went aha, I know exactly what you mean' (Rachel North, 187-193)

We tend to think of sensation as private, personal event that is subjectively experienced in a unique way by individuals. Here, sensation operates in a very different way. The sound of fireworks immediately reminds survivors of the blast. They physically respond to the noise in a way that places them back in the moments following the explosion, which leaves them distressed or 'psyched up'. But this reaction also serves as a point of mutual recognition. As Rachel describes it, the 'great charm' of the exchange of message was in allowing survivors to immediately recognise and accredit the physical sensations

reported by others – ‘I know exactly what you mean’. Relationships between survivors are built here through a felt sense of shared ongoing experience along with a running commentary on feelings and sensations. This is a web of collectively shared embodied experiences that connects survivors to one another.

There is a further ethical dimension to these embodied connections. As noted earlier, a division between survivors and relatives of the 52 deceased victims emerged in the course of commemorative activities in the months and years after 2005. In the same way that John Tulloch described an accommodation between his story and those of relatives, so Susan Harrison comments on feeling the need to not speak publically of some details of what happened in the tunnel:

‘If someone asks me to describe something in particular about the tube and I would say that, you know, it was messy and it was nasty, but I wouldn’t say oh, and this person’s arm was hanging off as they were hanging half out of the tube, it’s just not necessary and that person’s got a family, you know, whoever they are, or potentially whatever, do you know what I mean? So ... and I don’t think we need to necessarily ... people need to know it was horrific and people need to know, but unless you were there I don’t think you can experience and I that that’s ...’ (Susan Harrison 511-517)

Susan has given public accounts of what happened on the Jubilee line train. She also gave testimony to the 2010 inquest, where she spoke of her conversations with Shelly Mather whilst both were trapped, and was commended the presiding judge, Lady Justice Hallett, for offering ‘great comfort’ to the relatives by telling of how she sought to reassure Shelly and how neither were in any pain. But Susan here reflects on the potential negative effects of speaking about the horrors inside the carriage. She prefers to use the somewhat abstract language of ‘messiness’ and ‘nastiness’ rather than provide graphic details on the grounds that relatives would then be forced to dwell on these images in their commemorative efforts at reconstructing what happened – ‘that person’s got a family, you know, whoever they are’. There is then a tension between providing a veridical account of the results of the bombers’ actions (which is what Susan feels is often demanded of her by the media) and giving relatives access to details that will be extremely distressing and difficult to manage. If bodies connect together survivors, they can also connect together relatives with the dead. But whilst the connection amongst survivors is productive, because of their shared experience, it would not be so for relatives, who would be thrust into the position of helpless witnesses to the suffering of their loved ones.

The embodied aspects of memory work at numerous different levels. They give survivors an intense personal connection to the event that is effectively ‘written’ across their body. This ‘writing’ is partly legible and partly illegible, such as with the signs like the coughing that provoke such anxiety. It is also a kind of writing that can be shared and which can serve as the basis for making connections with others who share the experience. The power these embodied connections to 7/7

may potentially have on others creates ethical dilemmas. Talking about everything that was seen on the carriages may accentuate rather than ameliorate the distress of relatives.

### **The end of the story**

The stories that survivors tell of 7/7 demonstrates powerfully that memories of significant public events are never entirely personal. Over time, personal memories become collectively shaped as they accommodate and respond to both the memories of others and to broader narrative frameworks. The memories becomes populated and engraved with things – images, diagrams, objects. They are woven around intense embodied connections, where survivors connect with one another and the event itself through sensations and feelings. This does not, of course, make these stories any less credible. On the contrary, the shaping of the stories and the blurring of the personal/collective distinction is precisely what makes these stories such valuable testimonies to the ongoing commemorative work around the London bombings.

But does such work every come to an end? Is it really possible for any of the survivors to escape the long shadow that 7/7 casts on their life after they exited the tunnels? Will any of them be allowed to fully disconnect themselves from the formal, national narratives that have attempted to recruit their experiences? As we approach the tenth anniversary it is still, perhaps, too soon to say. But all three survivors have reflected on and envisaged what form that 'end' to their storytelling might take. Susan Harrison offers the following:

'I think you get to the point, like I said, where you're quite bored by your own story (laughs) and erm, maybe there comes a time in that point when you think, do you know what, actually this is getting boring' (Susan Harrison 760-762)

Susan here highlights the element of repetition that has crept into telling her story: there are only so many times you can tell your story before you become 'bored' by it. She projects forward to a time where, despite the 'good reasons' she has for recounting her experiences in her charity work, she may simply have grown tired of doing so. For John Tulloch, the way out has been to refuse a straightforward story of victimhood:

'I've tried to draw Mohammad Sidique Khan into my story and I actually say in one of the better interviews that in terms of representation, there's not so much difference between the way the newspapers, certain newspapers, er, represent me and him, even though one's a good guy and one's a bad guy, there were both locked into this kind of, one dimensional, he is a victim, he is, er ... crazed killer' (John Tulloch 194-197)

The dominant media frame for 7/7 is one where misguided young men become radicalised by extremist ideology and commit a horrific act of indiscriminate terror. But John has attempted to tell a different story. If he is a more than just a simple victim, if 7/7 does not define him as a person, then so too there must be

more to Mohammad Sidique Khan than being a 'crazed killer'. John conducted a televised interview with young people in Beeston, Leeds, where Khan had worked as a school classroom assistant. He discovered what, for him, was a different story of Khan, one that was most complex and nuanced than the dominant narrative. However, he also notes that it was Khan himself who facilitated a 'one-dimensional' story through his actions on 7/7. Drawing Khan into his own story is then a means for John to escape his own limited definition by the media, and to begin to escape the commemorative pull of the bombings. Rachel North similarly has found a way out in rejecting the narrative of extremism and victimhood:

'You know, 9/11 became a carte blanche for the Republican administration to go where the hell they liked, just by waving themselves, you know, wrapping them round flags, you know, I think that's really quite distasteful and I would be happier if ... if 7/7 became like the Kings Cross fire disaster, you know, it was, you know, a tragic event that people who were directly involved feel sad and sorry about and, erm ... that becomes part of the fabric of the city. You know, people don't remember the IRA bombings, or ... I just missed the, erm ... the bombings at the, erm, Admiral Duncan by about 3 minutes, erm ... so when I know it's the anniversary I always feel that, you know erm ... I spare a thought for everybody, but then I just go about my day ... and I think, I hope that eventually 7/7 will become like that as well, I hope so' (Rachel North, 553-561)

Rachel lists here a series of tragedies that have occurred in recent times in London (a fire at Kings Cross underground station; the bombing of the bar, The Admiral Duncan, at the centre of London's gay community by a neo-nazi militant; the bombing campaigns by the Provisional Irish Republican Army in the 1970s and 1990s, which together injured and killed more people than on 7/7). For her, the way to disconnect 7/7 from the 'war on terror' is place it alongside these other events, to remove its 'special significance'. She talks of wanting 7/7 to 'become part of the fabric of the city'. It ought to become part of rich, and at time tragic, history of London, an object of memory for 'people who were directly involved', but no more than one piece in the social and historical landscape. By extension, we have to imagine that Rachel envisages a similar future for herself.

Very rarely is the work of commemoration performed on an entirely individual basis. It is a mnemonic labour that is divided up and distributed across communities. As such, to participate, either through choice or not, in this labour is to find that one's memories are never fully one's own. Personal experiences become collected and connected to those of others, through ties of bodies, words, images and objects. Lives become shaped by the living conduit they supply to the object of memory. And whilst we can understand the personal and collective importance of keeping that connection going, we can also fully empathise with the desire for it to gradually unhook and disappear, for the sake of the living.

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<sup>i</sup> There is evidence to suggest that the bombings were in fact planned for the 6<sup>th</sup> July, when they would have co-incided directly with the planned announcement.

<sup>ii</sup> This Government led proposal was defeated, with an increase to 28 days introduced, although this was reduced back to 14 days in 2011.

<sup>iii</sup> That two minutes of silence was called for is significant. This number of minutes (rather than one or three) is associated with the annual Remembrance day 11<sup>th</sup> November commemoration of the First and Second World Wars. A two minute silence is therefore usually a 'war silence' (see Brown, 2012)

<sup>iv</sup> The use of Kings Cross rather than Russell Square – the two underground stations which the southbound Jubilee train was travelling between when the blast happened – is important. Due to the position of the bomb in lead carriage of the train and the subsequent wreckage, many of the less severely injured exited the train at Kings Cross, whilst those with major injuries (including Susan Harrison) were taken through the tunnels to Russell Square. The two stations therefore have very different memorial significance for these two groups of survivors.