



Changing the Story: The Journey Begins

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From 13 – 15 November 2017, Changing the Story conducted its first project meeting in Leeds, UK. The meeting was part of a wider series of events called ‘Voicing Hidden Histories’, produced by the University of Leeds’ Centre for World Cinemas & Digital Cultures (CWCDC) and Leeds International Film Festival (LIFF) in collaboration with another Leeds-based GCRF project “Troubling the National Brand and Voicing Hidden Histories”. Throughout these three days the Changing the Story Co-I’s and a range of our UK partners shared our stories, our research backgrounds, and our aspirations for the four years ahead.

The three days included a project meeting, an international seminar on arts and development which included presentations from each country strand on a deeper aspect of their work, a public day of film screenings and discussions about film and activism across the UK and beyond, and a formal celebration and launch event of the project alongside a range of other CWCDC-led projects look at community film, media and social change. (For a full programme of these events visit the links below).

As well as serving as an invaluable opportunity to get to know the project partners and the practicalities of project delivery, the project meeting allowed us to explore a range of conceptual, ethical and intellectual questions regarding the wider issues of peace, reconciliation, and youth-centred civil society building, and how the tensions and specificities of these terms might need to be considered in what is a diverse and complex range of ‘post-conflict’ contexts.

Key questions for this first phase of project delivery, which includes a critical review in each country and a series of ‘pilot’ projects, included:

- How do we capture the cultural specificity of each region across the partner countries through the critical review process?
- What are the definition of terms – such as post-conflict, youth, and reconciliation – we choose to use in each country informed by?
- How do we define spaces which still carry a degree of liminality? Might ‘transition’ or ‘transitions of justice’ be a better term to describe the unifying context of our case study countries rather than ‘post-conflict’?

We also considered how we could best make use of the existing network generated by the project, as well as the expanding networks which we hope to grow as the project develops. Key to this was an enthusiasm by all partners to facilitate sharing of different epistemological backgrounds (in particular non-Western thought) across partners.



Prof. Paul Cooke officially launches the project at The 2018 Leeds Film Festival.



Prof. Alejandro Castillejo-Cuellar delivers his paper “Peace in a small scale: Colombia and the Social Imagination of the Future”

These questions, amongst others, will form the basis of our reflections as a team throughout this first phase of the project, and will also result in a blog series, informed by our project partners, who will share their reflections as the project progresses.

As one of our Co-Is noted, the project meeting proved a fantastic start to this ambitious project:

“Getting the opportunity to meet and interact with the other researchers and project partners was so necessary to understanding and shaping the future of my own project. And the face time interaction with the researcher allowed us to get more done than any of the phone calls we had prior to the event.”

The public elements of the event – the conference and film and activism day – also proved valuable for Changing the Story partners and members of the public alike and, as is reflected in the audience comment below, reflected the value of the University of Leeds’ film focus within the project:

“I got to see some films which have widened my understanding of how questions of social exclusion and inclusion compare world-wide, including the UK; and how voice can be given to those at the disadvantaged ends in societies in original and creative ways through the medium of film.”

Our next project meeting takes place in May 2018 in Pretoria, South Africa and, like our Leeds event, also sits within a wider series of public and academic events which will permit partners to explore the South Africa partners’ expertise on heritage and reconciliation. More details about these events will be added to our website soon.

For a full programme of the Voicing Hidden Histories seminar on arts and development click [HERE](#)

For a full programme of the Voicing Hidden Histories public conference on film and activism click [HERE](#)

For a full programme of the Voicing Hidden Histories celebration and launch event click [HERE](#)

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Academics, activists and filmmakers join a panel as part of our Film & Activism Event at Hyde Park Picture House, part of LIFF