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## **Children and the Conflict in Northern Ireland: The Experiences and Perspectives of 3-11 Year Olds**

**Paul Connolly and Julie Healy**

**2004**



Office of the  
**First Minister and  
Deputy First Minister**

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**Paul Connolly and Julie Healy**

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The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of OFMDFM.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report presents the findings of a detailed study of the experiences and perspectives of children aged 3-11 years in Belfast. Based upon in-depth interviews it outlines and explains the differing ways in which the conflict impacts upon their lives and comes to influence and shape their attitudes and identities. The implications of the findings of this study are considered in relation to the development of future community relations work with children of this age range.

### **Methodology**

The report is organised around two case studies – comparing and contrasting the experiences and perspectives of children living under the shadow of sectarian tensions and violence with those living relatively free from it. As such, the children were accessed via local primary schools and nurseries in four areas of Belfast: two areas that have experienced relatively high levels of violence and sectarian tension over the years (one Catholic, the other Protestant); and two areas that have had very little direct experience of the violence (again, one predominantly Protestant, the other Catholic).

Three age-groups of children were focused on within this: 3-4, 7-8 and 10-11 year olds. The research took place over a two-year period (between January 2000 and March 2002) and, during this time, the children were observed in class and while playing in the playground over extended periods. In addition a total of 276 interviews were conducted with small friendship groups of children. These were largely unstructured and provided the children with the opportunity to raise and discuss whatever issues concerned them. All of the children's interviews were then transcribed and systematically analysed.

### **The findings**

While living in the same city, the children were found to inhabit very different social worlds. In terms of their day-to-day experiences, there was little to distinguish the Protestant and Catholic children. Rather, the major source of influence on the children's lives was where they lived and, more specifically, their experience of the violence. To illustrate this, each case study begins with an analysis of local areas within which the children live before then examining

how these impact upon the development of their attitudes and identities as they progress through the three age groups. The key findings are summarised in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: The Impact of the Conflict on the Experiences of 3-11 Year Olds Living in Belfast**

	<b>Case Study One: Children Living Under the Shadow of Sectarian Violence</b>	<b>Case Study Two: Children Living Relatively Free from Sectarian Violence</b>
<i>Social Worlds</i>	<p>Neighbourhood-focused. Children live in relatively deprived working class area. Limited ability or resources to travel regularly outside of local area. Threat and fear of sectarian violence if they do.</p> <p>Sectarian tensions relatively high. Sporadic incidents of violence. Stone-throwing and conflict common between children and young people at nearby interface areas.</p> <p>Local area strongly reflects tensions and divisions that exist with peaceline and flags, murals and painted kerbstones.</p> <p>Many children spend most of their time playing locally. Develop strong sense of attachment to local neighbourhood.</p>	<p>City-focused. Children live in relatively affluent, middle-class area. They tend to be engaged in a variety of after-school clubs and activities that take place in various locations across the city.</p> <p>Children limited to playing in their gardens and do not generally play outside in the streets and surrounding area.</p> <p>Friends tend to live in a variety of areas across the city rather than live locally.</p> <p>No direct experience of the violence and sectarian tensions that exist.</p> <p>Children tend to have no sense of locality or attachment to immediate neighbourhood.</p>

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3-4 Year Olds	A small minority of children beginning to re-enact violent incidents and events through their play.	No evidence of the children showing any awareness of the violence or divisions that exist through their play.
	A large proportion of children able to recognise and demonstrate some awareness of particular events and symbols associated with their own community.	The children tend to recognise some events and symbols. However, they tend to locate these within a much broader framework (i.e. in terms of rugby matches, foreign cities and countries they have visited). Little ability to associate these with local events.
	Strong tendency evident for children to prefer the events and symbols associated with their own community.	No tendency demonstrated between Protestant and Catholic children to prefer the events and symbols traditionally associated with own their community.
7-8 Year Olds	Vast majority of the children aware of the distinction between the Protestant and Catholic communities.	Growing awareness of the violence but seen as happening elsewhere, in 'bad' areas.
	The general preferences the children had already developed for particular events and symbols now being used as markers of difference between the two communities.	Very little understanding of the violence or divisions that exist. All violence is the same and caused by 'bad' people. No distinctions made between different types of violence or between different groups of people.
	Strong, negative attitudes and prejudices evident towards the other community.	Growing awareness that some of the activities and events they engage in are associated with one community or the other. Some children begin to regard themselves, therefore, as belonging to that community as a consequence.
	Majority aware of local paramilitary groups and some identifying with them.	

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	Limited knowledge of broader political and historical events. Understanding that exists tends to be partial and contradictory.	Very little negative attitudes or prejudices evident towards other community.
<i>10-11 Year Olds</i>	<p>Acquisition of broader and more detailed knowledge about local events. This tended to be interpreted and understood within their existing frameworks.</p> <p>Increased awareness of historical and political events associated mainly with their particular community.</p> <p>Greater knowledge of local paramilitary groups and stronger identification with them by some.</p> <p>Many maintained strong negative attitudes and prejudices towards the other community. However, some also developing more positive attitudes alongside this. Some individuals from the other community seen as OK.</p> <p>A small number of children regard the violence and divisions that exist as bad. However, tend to be resigned to it as natural and inevitable.</p>	<p>Increasing tendency to pathologise certain areas and the people that live there as violent and bad.</p> <p>Some children developing negative and stereotypical attitudes towards poor, working class children and communities more generally (regardless of whether they are Protestant or Catholic).</p> <p>Strong sense of identity evident based upon the view that they are different from and above those engaged in violence.</p> <p>All of the children aware that they are either Catholic or Protestant. However, some of the children, while accepting this, see it as irrelevant to their lives.</p> <p>Others, while seeing themselves as above the conflict and tensions that exist, have developed an identification with, and allegiance to, a community. This, however, tends to be reflected mainly in a recognition of being different to the other community rather than in the expression of negative or prejudiced attitudes towards them.</p>

It is stressed in the report that these two case studies only represent the typical experiences and perspectives of the children in both areas and that a certain degree of variation was evident between children within this. Also, it is emphasised that these are just two accounts of what life is like for two sets of children; they are not representative of all children who either experience high levels of violence or who live relatively free from it.

With these points in mind, it is not possible to use the findings from these two case studies to develop a detailed series of recommendations regarding the nature and direction of future community relations work with children within this age range. However, it is possible to draw attention to a number of broader principles that can be derived from the findings that should provide the basis for a more fundamental review of existing work in this area and thus the starting point for the development of more detailed and appropriate strategies and initiatives for use with younger children.

Six key principles arising from the case studies are identified and discussed in the concluding chapter of the report:

1. From the age of three, all children should be encouraged to explore a range of different cultural practices, events and symbols and to appreciate and respect diversity and difference.
2. From the beginning of Key Stage Two, children should be introduced to and encouraged to understand some of the key historical, political and social developments that have taken place in Northern Ireland.
3. From around the age of seven, targeted conflict resolution work should be undertaken with children in particular areas.
4. In areas characterised by significant levels of sectarian tensions and violence, any conflict resolution strategies need to be part of a broader set of community relations initiatives within the area.
5. While cross-community contact should form an important element of work with children it needs to be carefully planned and organized.

6. While there is some value in addressing community relations issues with children by focusing on more generalized and abstract topics, emphasis should be placed on initiatives that are based upon the children's own experiences and perspectives.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Research on children's attitudes in Northern Ireland

From the late 1960s through to the mid-1990s, Northern Ireland has experienced relatively high and consistent levels of violence. Over 3,600 people have died as a direct consequence of the violence during this period and well over 40,000 have been personally injured. A particular concern, running throughout this time, has been with the plight of children and the effects that the violence and deep social divisions were having on their lives. From the early 1970s onwards, a plethora of research studies have been undertaken focusing on a range of issues from children's attitudes through to their moral and emotional development (for detailed summaries see Cairns 1987; Gough *et al.* 1992; Trew 1992; Cairns and Cairns 1995; Cairns *et al.* 1995; Connolly with Maginn 1999).

The vast majority of this work has been conducted by psychologists and based around a wide range of innovative experimental designs aimed at assessing the impact of the conflict on children's attitudes and types of behaviour indirectly. Three examples will suffice to give a flavour of the type of work that exists. The first, by Jahoda and Harrison (1975), involved a number of tests with 60 boys aged six and 10 from Belfast and a further 60 boys of the same age from Edinburgh. One test involved them being asked to sort a collection of 16 items that consisted of four circles, four semi-circles, four squares and four trapezia. Each group of four shapes was coloured differently – one green, one orange, one red and one blue. Overall, Jahoda and Harrison found that at the age of six, the boys from Belfast and from Edinburgh displayed no significant differences in whether they chose to sort the items by shape or by colour. However, at the age of 10, while all the boys in sorted the items by shape, all of their counterparts in Belfast sorted them by colour. For the boys in Belfast, they found that this reflected an increasing awareness of the political significance of the colours. Over half of the 10 year olds spontaneously mentioned religion when explaining their method for sorting with one boy, for example, arguing that: 'cause red and blue are Protestant colours and orange and green are Catholic colours' (p. 14).

The second study, conducted by Cairns *et al.* (1980), compared five and six year old children from a fairly trouble-free area of Northern Ireland with a control group from a South London suburb. Each were shown a photograph of

a derelict row of houses and asked to explain what they felt had happened to them. Cairns *et al.* found that the children from Northern Ireland were much more likely to make reference to 'terrorist bombs' and 'explosions' in their explanations than the group of children from South London. Finally, the third study undertaken by McWhirter and Gamble (1982), involved a standard word definition test with a total of 192 children aged six and nine from three different areas of Northern Ireland; one from an area that had a history of sectarian conflict and the other two from different relatively 'peaceful' towns. The children were asked to define a series of words including those of 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' which were embedded within the list so as to disguise the focus of the research. Their conclusions, to quote, were that 'about half the children in Northern Ireland, at six years of age, have some understanding of at least one of the category labels, Protestant and Catholic, and that by nine years of age the majority of Northern Ireland children are aware, to some degree, of what both terms denote' (p. 122).

As indicated in these three studies, a general and consistent picture has emerged from the variety of studies conducted over this period regarding the development of children's attitudes and awareness with age. As shown above in relation to their ability to recognise the political/cultural significance of colours or names, while some awareness is evident among children as young as five or six, the research has found that they are only able to demonstrate a strong and consistent ability to do this at the ages of 10 or 11 (Cairns and Cairns 1995). This overall pattern has also been shown in terms of the ability, for example, to distinguish between stereotypically Catholic and Protestant first names (Cairns 1980; Houton *et al.* 1990) and faces (Stringer and Cairns 1983) and also between Belfast, Dublin and standard English accents (Cairns and Duriez 1976).

## **1.2 The need for further research**

While this body of work has played an important role in increasing our understanding of the particular ways in which the conflict has influenced children's attitudes and behaviour, it is not without its limitations. The use of indirect methods and highly structured experimental designs do place significant constraints on our ability to appreciate the complexities of children's experiences and perspectives and the particular factors that tend to impact upon their social worlds. This can be seen in three main ways.

First, the structured nature of the studies conducted to date have largely failed to fully capture the perspectives of the children themselves. Rather than being given the opportunity to raise and discuss what concerns them, the research has tended simply to probe the children about very specific issues that concern the researchers. Ultimately, this has led to a situation where researchers have used adult ways of thinking and making sense of the conflict to test children's attitudes and levels of awareness. The problem is that the conflict and social divisions associated with it may well exert a significant influence on children's lives but they could quite possibly think about and make sense of this in different ways to adults. Just because younger children may not be aware of the cultural significance of different first names or different accents, this does not mean that they are unaware of the cultural divisions that exist. It may simply be that they use different markers and social cues to represent these differences to adults. The danger exists, therefore, that because of this tendency to overlook the voices of the children themselves then we may be underestimating the extent to which the conflict impacts upon their lives, especially for younger children.

A relatively recent study directed by one of the present authors certainly seems to add support to these concerns (see Connolly *et al.*, 2002). The study consisted of a survey of 352 children aged 3-6 years selected randomly from across Northern Ireland and made use of much less structured and focused methods. Each child was interviewed separately and was shown a wide range of pictures, photographs and symbols associated with the cultural divisions that exist in the region. For each item they were simply asked what they knew about it and their responses were recorded verbatim. The qualitative data gathered was then coded and analysed statistically.

While the study was still relatively large-scale and quantitative in its design, it did benefit from starting with the children's own attitudes and perspectives. As a result it showed that the divisions that exist within Northern Ireland do tend to impact upon children's lives at a much earlier age than suggested by the more experimental designs outlined above. As the results summarised in Table 2 show, for example, significant differences were already emerging among three year olds in terms of their attitudes towards certain groups and events. As can be seen, Catholic three year olds were found to be twice as likely to state that they did not like the police or Orange Marches compared to their Protestant counterparts.

**Table 2: Differences in Cultural Preferences Between Catholic and Protestant 3 Year Olds\***

	<b>Catholics</b>	<b>Protestants</b>
Percentage of Children Who:		
Do not like Orange Marchers <sup>a</sup>	18% (22)	3% (35)
Do not like the Police <sup>b</sup>	34% (35)	15% (33)
Prefer the British Union Jack Flag <sup>c</sup>	36% (31)	60% (37)
Prefer the Irish Tricolour Flag <sup>c</sup>	64% (31)	40% (37)

Total numbers of children that expressed a preference and thus to which each percentage relates are given in parentheses. Significance of differences (directional hypotheses): <sup>a</sup>p=0.023,  $\chi^2_1=3.964$ ; <sup>b</sup>p=0.035,  $\chi^2_1=3.317$ ; <sup>c</sup>p=0.025,  $\chi^2_1=3.882$ .

\*Source: Connolly *et al.* (2002)

Moreover, all of the children's comments were also analysed and coded in relation to whether they demonstrated any awareness of the cultural and political significance of the items they were shown and also whether they tended to see themselves as part of the Protestant or Catholic community and whether they made, without prompting, any sectarian statements. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 3 below. As can be seen, children are already demonstrating some awareness of the events around them at the age of three and this awareness grows significantly over the next few years. Moreover, by the age of six, the findings suggest that around a third of children in Northern Ireland already see themselves as belonging to one of the two main communities and just under one in six are making sectarian statements.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 3: Overall Levels of Ethnic Awareness, Group Identification and Prejudice Among Young Children by Age (%)<sup>a\*</sup>**

<b>Percentages of Children Demonstrating:</b>			
<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnic Awareness<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>Ethnic Identity</b>	<b>Ethnic Prejudice</b>
3	51	5	1
4	75	7	3
5	88	13	7
6	90	34	15

<sup>a</sup>Total children in the sample is 352, split evenly across the four age groups.  
<sup>b</sup>Defined in terms of demonstrating at least some awareness of the cultural and/or political significance of one or more of the Symbols/events shown.  
\*Source: Connolly *et al.* (2002)

Overall, this study has certainly helped to focus more explicitly on the perspectives of the children themselves and thus to have partly overcome this first problem associated with the more structured and experimental designs outlined earlier. However, while this type of design may provide us with a more accurate picture of the general trends and patterns that exist in relation to the development of children's attitudes and perspectives on the conflict, it still has its limitations. This takes us onto the second and third problems associated with the type of experimental studies outlined earlier; problems that are equally applicable to this latter study as well.

The second problem is that, in adopting experimental designs and also larger-scale survey methods, the children's attitudes tend to be divorced from the social contexts within which they have developed. While such studies may help us to understand the nature and extent of children's attitudes towards the divisions that exist in Northern Ireland they therefore tell us very little about

*why* the children think in these ways. What is it, for example, about children's experiences that lead them to categorise others as different? Are there particular events or situations that encourage them to develop negative attitudes towards others?

The third and final problem follows on from this last one. Without studying children's attitudes and behaviour within the particular social contexts within which they occur, a tendency is created to reify sectarian prejudice. In other words, there is a tendency to portray it as a fixed and given part of some children's lives – as almost natural and inevitable. Experimental designs and survey methods, by their very nature, attempt to measure children's levels of awareness and the extent of their prejudiced attitudes. Without any reference to social context, this can easily encourage the view that such attitudes are fixed and that they will therefore maintain their significance in children's lives and continue to influence their behaviour uniformly wherever and whatever the child is doing. Of course, things are far more complex in reality. Children may express prejudiced attitudes in an artificial environment created by an experimental test but this does not mean that they will maintain those prejudiced attitudes as they go about their day-to-day lives. Where a child does subscribe to a particular set of prejudiced beliefs, the salience of those prejudices may also vary from one social context or situation to the next. Moreover, they are likely to exist alongside more positive and egalitarian views that the child also holds.

Overall, these three points suggest that an alternative method is needed for understanding the impact of the conflict on children's lives and social worlds. More specifically, it is clear that a more unstructured and qualitative approach would help to foreground the experiences and perspectives of the children themselves and thus allow them to raise and discuss what issues concern them, in their own words. By studying the children within their own social contexts, such an approach would also help to highlight the complexity of children's experiences and perspectives and their contradictory and contingent nature. Most importantly, it would avoid the tendency to view sectarian divisions and prejudice unproblematically and as almost fixed and inevitable. Rather, a more qualitative and contextualised study would help to understand the socially constructed nature of sectarianism and the particular events and social processes that tend to encourage its emergence in children's lives.

### **1.3 The present study**

The purpose of this present study, therefore, is to get beneath the surface of the broader statistical findings provided in the studies described above to offer a more indepth understanding of the impact that the conflict is having on the lives of younger children and, more specifically, the ways in which the broader social divisions tend to influence their attitudes and identities. With this in mind, the research has focused on three age-groups of children: 3-4, 7-8 and 10-11 year olds and has attempted to map out how their attitudes and identities surrounding the divisions in Northern Ireland tend to develop with age. The research itself was conducted between January 2000 and March 2002 which is particularly significant given the fact that, as Trew (1996) has commented, most of the studies conducted on children in relation to the conflict in Northern Ireland took place during the 1970s and early 1980s. There is, currently, very little information available concerning younger children's experiences and perspectives following the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994.

Given that the aim of the study is to provide a detailed and indepth account of the children's experiences and perspectives, it has not been possible to focus on a large number of children drawn from a range of differing backgrounds. Rather, it has been necessary because of the limits of time and resources to select a small number of children. In identifying which groups of children to focus on we were mindful of the fact that children's experiences of the conflict and continuing divisions that exist in Northern Ireland differ markedly. As Smyth (1998: 52) has argued: 'a substantial number of children have little experience of the Troubles, and a relatively small number of children have very intense and concentrated and prolonged experiences of life-threatening Troubles-related events.' Children from different communities and backgrounds in Northern Ireland therefore tend to inhabit very different worlds.

To give a real sense of the nature of these differences it was therefore decided to focus on children from just four areas in Belfast: two areas that have experienced relatively high levels of violence and sectarian tension over the years (one Catholic, the other Protestant); and two areas that have had very little direct experience of the violence during this period (again, one predominantly Protestant, the other Catholic). What we have done, therefore, is to select children whose experiences of the conflict differ markedly and thus who can be seen as representing the two ends of the spectrum in relation to the range of experiences that face children in Northern Ireland.

As will be seen in the chapters to follow, such an approach is useful in three respects. First, it vividly highlights the fact that children's experiences of the conflict in Northern Ireland are not all the same but do vary enormously, even within the confines of one small city. Second, and by focusing on the two extremes, it also helps to give some feeling for the range of experiences that exist. Third, and finally, the indepth nature of the case studies also helps to identify some of the reasons for the differing attitudes and perspectives that emerge between the two groups of children.

The children that provide the focus of the study comprised a nursery class and also a P3 and P7 class from each of the four areas. Most of the data collection was undertaken by one of the current authors (Julie Healy) who spent a term with each class, visiting them for two days per week on average over that period.<sup>2</sup> Her time was mainly spent with the children in the class, helping them with their work, and also in the playground. This enabled a good rapport to develop between her and the children. The main method of data collection used was relatively unstructured interviews with friendship groups of usually three children at a time. This has been a method developed and used successfully by one of the authors elsewhere (see Connolly 1998, 2004; Connolly with Maginn 1999).

The interviews took place in rooms away from the main classroom and the children were generally left simply to discuss whatever events, issues or concerns they wished to. The role of the researcher was just to facilitate discussion by asking general questions such as: 'What do you like to do after school?', 'Who do you play with?' and 'What were you doing in the playground today?' Beyond that, her role was confined to seeking clarification or further information on topics that the children had already raised. At no point did the researcher introduce the topic of sectarianism or the divisions associated with it. It was left to the children to raise this as and when they felt it appropriate. The strength of this approach overall lies in the way it enabled the children to discuss the conflict and the divisions associated with it in their own terms. Moreover, in leaving it up to the children to raise these issues, it also gave an invaluable insight into the general significance of these matters in their day-to-day lives.

Given the younger age of the preschool children and their more limited capacity to engage in detailed discussions, a slightly different approach was

taken. Much of the time in the nursery classes was simply spent playing with the children and listening to their conversations and observing their interactions and behaviour. Over the extended period of time available, this enabled an assessment to be made of the extent to which the conflict impacted upon their social worlds. Towards the end of the fieldwork in each of these classes, short individual interviews were undertaken with each child. These interviews were organised around showing the children a number of common items associated with the Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland (i.e. flags, Ranger and Celtic football shirts, a photograph of an Orange March and also an Irish dancer and so on) and simply asking each child if they knew what the item was and also what they could say about it. The items used were those that formed the basis of the much larger survey of 3-6 year olds mentioned earlier and that took place during the same time as this fieldwork (see Connolly *et al.*, 2002). If the child did not express any knowledge about a particular item, the researcher simply moved onto the next. As with the discussions with the older children, at no point did the researcher share any knowledge with the children concerned. For those who had no awareness of any of the items concerned, therefore, these interviews would not have significantly increased that awareness.

Overall, a total of 276 interviews were conducted with the children from these three age groups. For the children in the P3 and P7 classes, most took part in at least three separate group interviews, allowing for a considerable amount of rapport to develop with the researcher. The written permission of the parents/guardians was gained for every child prior to them being interviewed. The limits of space prevent a more detailed discussion of the particular methodological and ethical issues raised by the approach used in this research. However, the key issues are covered in detail elsewhere (see Connolly 1996, 2001).

#### **1.4 Structure of the report**

In beginning to analyse the data it soon became apparent that the most significant factor that divided the children in terms of their experiences and perspectives was not whether they were Catholic or Protestant but rather what area they lived in. In this sense, the attitudes and beliefs of those Protestant and Catholic children living in the areas characterised by relatively high levels of sectarian tensions and violence were remarkably similar, as were those of the children living in the areas that remained relatively untouched by the

violence. It is with this in mind that the chapters to follow have been organised around two case studies – focussing on the lives and experiences of children living under the shadow of sectarian violence and those relatively free from it respectively. For both case studies, some time will be spent outlining the general areas and social networks within which the children are located before assessing how their attitudes towards the conflict develop through the three age-ranges chosen.

Following the two case studies, a final chapter assesses the implications of these findings for the development of community relations work with younger children. Before presenting the two case studies, however, it is important to begin by outlining briefly the conceptual tools that will be used to make sense of and explain the development of children's attitudes and identities in relation to the conflict in Northern Ireland. This provides the focus for the next chapter.

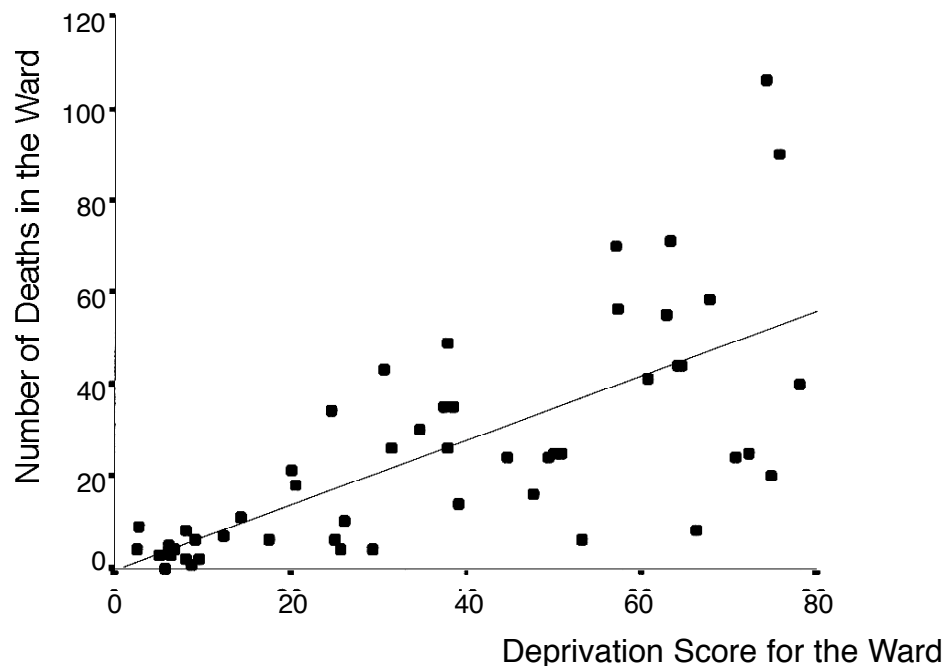
### **1.5 A final note of generalisation**

While these two case studies provide rich insights into the social worlds of these two groups of children and the very different effects that the divisions and violence have on their lives, it is important to stress that we cannot generalise from these findings. It would be misleading, for example, to conclude that the children in the first case study – from areas characterised by high levels of sectarian tensions – are representative of all children who live in areas experiencing high levels of violence. Similarly, not all children who live relatively free from the effects of the violence are like those children in the second case study. All that can be deduced from these two case studies is that this is what some children's lives are like who are situated at either end of the spectrum.

This is an extremely important point to understand while reading the chapters to follow because, as will be seen, the children in the first case study are from working class areas suffering from relatively high levels of social and economic deprivation while those in the second case study are from relatively affluent, middle class areas. It would therefore certainly be tempting to generalise from this that sectarian tensions and divisions are associated with working class areas and also that middle class areas are relatively free from this. However, in reality things are less clear-cut. To illustrate the point, Figure 1 below plots the 51 wards in Belfast in terms of the number of conflict-related deaths that have

occurred in each ward against the multiple deprivation score for that ward (higher scores reflecting higher levels of deprivation).

**Figure 1: Relationship Between Levels of Deprivation and Number of Conflict-Related Deaths in Belfast Wards, 1969-2001**



(Source: Data relating to number of deaths taken from Smyth and Hamilton, 2002: 28-9; deprivation scores relates to the Noble Measure of Multiple Deprivation and are taken from NISRA, 2001)

It is clear from Figure 1 that a definite relationship does exist such that increases in levels of deprivation are associated with increases in the number of deaths in particular wards. Statistically, the strength of the correlation between these two variables ( $r=0.704$ ,  $p<0.0005$ ) suggests that multiple deprivation can account for about one half (49.6 per cent) of the variation in the number of deaths between wards in Belfast. However it is also clear that the relationship is not a perfect one given the variation around the line of best fit. Some of this variation may be accounted for simply by the fact that average measures of deprivation at ward-level do not always capture accurately the diversity that exists within particular areas. Thus there are some relatively affluent wards that contain pockets of high deprivation and/or high levels of violence.

Overall, however, two points can be drawn from Figure 1 of relevance to the two case studies contained in the chapters to follow:

- Those wards that have experienced the highest levels of violence (say, for example, those that have witnessed 50 or more conflict-related deaths) also tend to suffer from higher than average levels of multiple deprivation.
- Conversely, those wards that have experienced the least levels of violence (say, for example, those with under 10 conflict-related deaths) are more likely to also be the more affluent wards in Belfast. However, in relation to this latter point, it should also be pointed out that there are also wards that suffer from relatively high levels of multiple deprivation that fall into this category.

The key point to stress from all of this is that while a clear trend does exist – for higher levels of sectarian violence to be associated with higher levels of multiple deprivation – there is also sufficient variation to suggest that it would be misleading to make sweeping generalisations about the relationship between deprivation and violence. As Figure 1 shows, there are certain wards in Belfast that rank among the most deprived that also seem to have evaded much of the violence over the years. Similarly, there may well be certain relatively affluent areas within Northern Ireland more generally that have also suffered from significant levels of violence. These points need to be kept firmly in mind when reading the two case studies to follow.

## **2. Theorising the development of children's attitudes and identities**

There is no getting away from the fact that the development of children's attitudes and the impact that the conflict continues to have on these are complex phenomena. If, in our attempts to understand and explain these, we restrict ourselves to the use of only non-technical terms and concepts then we will simply find ourselves with explanations that fail to account for the complexity of the processes involved. This will, in turn, pave the way for the development of policies and practices that are also limited in their reach and are thus, ultimately, ineffective. It is sometimes necessary, therefore, to make use of a handful of more specialist theoretical concepts to help illuminate the key processes and issues involved. This is certainly the case for the present study where three concepts will be used throughout the chapters to follow to underpin the two case studies – those of ethnicity, habitus and field. As will become apparent these three concepts are essential in helping to highlight the ways in which the conflict impacts upon children's attitudes and experiences and, moreover, in helping to identify what policies and practices will be most effective with regard to community relations work with children of this age range.

Each of the three concepts will be briefly introduced below in this chapter. Their meaning and applicability will then be further demonstrated through their use in the two case studies to follow. The underlying rationale for using these three concepts is a recognition that, in the context of Northern Ireland, there is nothing that is either natural or inevitable about the identities associated with Catholics and Protestants. They are, to coin a phrase, 'socially constructed' – reflecting the particular sets of relations and divisions that have developed within the region. Nobody is born with an inbuilt sense of being Protestant or Catholic. Rather, these are identities that are learnt over time and grounded in and shaped by a person's experiences. The three inter-related concepts of ethnicity, habitus and field provide the necessary theoretical tools with which to help explain this more fully.

### **2.1 Ethnicity**

In its simplest sense, an ethnic group is a group of people who see themselves as sharing something in common and thus being different from others. Moreover, an ethnic group also tends to be regarded as different by those

outside of that group. What makes any particular ethnic group distinctive will vary from one group to the next. It can range from skin colour and nationality to a particular culture or shared heritage. The key point to understand is that ethnic groups are not natural and fixed but evolve and change. They tend to emerge due to the combination of specific events and processes that tend to draw particular groups of people together. Over time and because of their shared circumstances such groups will begin to develop common customs and practices and thus forge a distinct identity for themselves. As that identity and the culture and traditions associated with it are passed on from one generation to the next, this sense of ethnic identity tends to become experienced and understood as something deep and natural; a fundamental aspect of oneself that cannot be changed.

With this in mind, one of the most useful definitions of ethnic group is that offered by Hughes (1994: 91):

An ethnic group is not one because of the degree of measurable or observable difference from other groups; it is an ethnic group, on the contrary, because the people in it and the people out of it know that it is one; because both the *ins* and the *outs* talk, feel, and act as if it were a separate group. This is possible only if there are ways of telling who belongs to the group and who does not, and if a person learns early, deeply, and usually irrevocably to what group [he or she] belongs. If it is easy to resign from the group, it is not truly an ethnic group.

*(quoted in Jenkins 1997: 10)*

The key point from this definition is that ethnic groups are not objectively defined. Rather, they are socially constructed through a process that identifies and gives significance to a number of particular traits (whether physical and/or cultural) and uses these as a basis upon which to decide group membership. What particular traits are used and why will depend upon the specific sets of circumstances that certain groups of people find themselves in at any one time. In relation to Northern Ireland we can identify a range of ethnic groups including those that are in the minority (and hence the term 'minority ethnic groups') such as the Chinese, Indians, Pakistanis and Travellers. However, there are also ethnic groups that constitute the majority and these comprise the Protestant and Catholic communities – the two 'majority ethnic groups' in

the region. In this sense, everyone in Northern Ireland is at least tacitly a member of an ethnic group. As already stated, these ethnic groups are not natural nor objectively defined but have emerged due to the combination of particular sets of historical and contemporary circumstances. The importance of using the concept of ethnicity in relation to Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland lies in its ability to constantly remind us that these two groups are socially constructed. This, in turn, encourages us to not only try to understand the particular circumstances that have led to their emergence but also, moreover, the specific processes that tend to maintain and reproduce these two distinct identities and the divisions that exist between them. It is this latter concern that forms one of the key aims of this present study of Protestant and Catholic children.

## **2.2 Habitus**

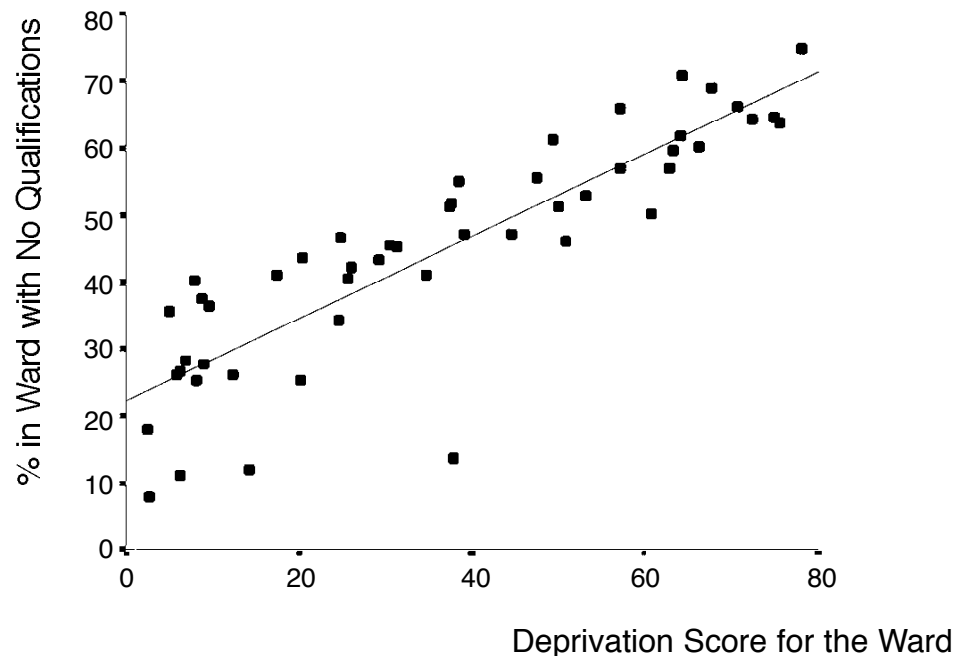
As already indicated, while ethnic groups may be socially constructed their power lies in the fact that they are experienced as natural and given. The quote from Hughes reproduced above certainly suggests that one of the ways this is achieved is through the learning of an ethnic identity at a very early age. In this sense a person's ethnicity can become a taken-for-granted aspect of their life – something they may have grown up with and that they know no different from.

In order to understand how ethnicity can become internalised so strongly in this way, it is useful to draw upon the concept of *habitus*, first used by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990). For Bourdieu, the habitus represents a particular set of taken-for-granted or *habitualised* ways of thinking and behaving. It is something that is developed over time and reflects a person's particular experiences of the social world. One of the ways in which Bourdieu first used the concept was to explain why there was a tendency for some working class children to have low educational aspirations (see Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). For a child living in a community where most people tend to leave school at the earliest opportunity he suggested that it may be beyond that child's experience to even imagine the prospect of continuing on into further or higher education. Unemployment may be high in the local area and the only jobs available could be manual, low-paid and part-time. For that child, all she may see is her family and those others around her who have left school, continue to live locally and attempt to scratch a living together from the temporary work they can secure. In such circumstances, the local community

can represent the horizons of her world and can consequently come to shape the way she thinks about her own life and future. In terms of education, it can lead to her reaching the conclusion that it has very little meaning or relevance to her life. She may therefore be likely simply to follow in the footsteps of those around her and do 'what she knows' – leaving school at sixteen, living locally and looking for work in the local area. This, then, is her habitus – the way that she has come to internalise her immediate social context into a set of subconscious or habitualised ways of thinking and behaving that then come to influence her consequent attitudes and actions.

Of course not all children living in areas such as the one described above will follow this pathway and there are examples of children who have struggled 'against the odds' to do well in education and possibly to go onto university. Life is always more complicated than any one theory can grasp. Nevertheless this should not detract us from the fact that a strong tendency exists for children in areas like this to have poor experiences of education and to leave school early. This is clearly evident in Figure 2 overleaf that, for illustrative purposes, plots Belfast wards in terms of their levels of multiple deprivation (higher scores reflecting higher levels of deprivation as before) and the percentage of adults in those wards with no formal educational qualifications. As can be seen, a strong relationship does exist between levels of deprivation and educational attainment.

**Figure 2: Relationship Between Levels of Multiple Deprivation and Proportions of Adults with No Educational Qualifications in Belfast Wards, 2001**



(Source of data: %ge of adults with no qualifications taken from 2001 Census; deprivation scores relates to the Noble Measure of Multiple Deprivation and are taken from NISRA, 2001))

Indeed the strength of the correlation ( $r=0.868$ ,  $p<0.0005$ ) suggests that three quarters (75.3 per cent) of the variation between wards in terms of the proportions of adults with no educational qualifications can be accounted for by the levels of multiple deprivation.

It is this general and underlying tendency for children from more deprived areas to perform less well in education that Bourdieu was attempting to explain with his notion of habitus. Rather than suggesting that this form of habitus is applicable to each and every child living in areas such as the one described above, he was simply suggesting that it was likely to represent the average or typical experience of such children. In this sense the habitus is no more than a useful analytical device to help identify the key features of a particular social context and then show how these tend to influence the specific perspectives and ways of thinking of those living in that context. However, this can only ever represent an underlying trend and can never explain the experiences and attitudes of each and every individual.

With these general points firmly in mind, what we want to do for this study is to extend Bourdieu's concept of habitus to the area of ethnicity by using the notion of an 'ethnic habitus'. Through the two case studies we want to compare and contrast the typical ways in which children develop their sense of ethnic identity – of being Protestant or Catholic – in those areas that experience high levels of violence and those areas that tend to avoid the violence altogether, respectively. As will be seen, this notion of an ethnic habitus is particularly useful as it allows us to examine the ways in which the children's sense of ethnicity (in this case their sense of being Catholic or Protestant) is developed over time and comes to reflect their specific experiences of living in particular areas. Moreover, it also enables us to understand how being Protestant or Catholic becomes a taken-for-granted aspect of children's lives and is thus experienced as natural and given.

Again, however, what these two case studies offer is only an outline of the typical or average experience of the children living in these two contexts. They are not meant to imply that the type of ethnic habitus to be described below are applicable uniformly to each and every child living in such areas. However, in analyzing and writing up these two case studies we had to decide whether we should attempt to outline and account for the many different attitudes and identities developed by the children at each age and in each area or whether we should limit our focus to drawing out and comparing and contrasting the broader trends that exist for the children that comprise the two case studies. In the interests of clarity we decided on the latter approach. While we lose some sense of the variation that exists in terms of the children's experiences and perspectives, we do gain a much clearer appreciation of the general tendencies that exist and how these differ markedly for different groups of children.

A final point to stress about the concept of habitus is that it is not meant to be regarded as a universal nor all-encompassing entity. The differing forms of ethnic habitus to be described in the case studies to follow are therefore not meant to be read as complete personality traits that fully capture the nature of the children's identities and which rigidly determine the ways they think and behave. Children, like adults, have multiple identities that are not fixed but that are contingent and contradictory and also develop and change both from one context to the next and over time. What we are drawing attention to through the case studies is just one facet of the children's sense of identity – that of

their sense of being Protestant or Catholic – and the typical ways in which it tends to be developed by children in differing contexts with age. Again, this is not to suggest that all children in a particular context will share the same sense of ethnic identity. Moreover, nor is it to suggest that these ethnic identities are closed and fixed. While we will be drawing out the general tendencies that exist for children in the two case studies, it needs to be remembered that each child is located in a slightly different set of social relationships and networks and their experiences gained through any of these will continue to impact upon how, precisely, they come to see themselves as Catholic or Protestant. It is this that accounts for the variation that exists between children in terms of their sense of ethnic identity.

### **2.3 Field**

It should be clear from the above that it makes little sense to talk of the habitus without reference to a particular set of social relationships or processes within which it has developed. It is with this in mind that Bourdieu introduced the concept of ‘field’ to represent the particular social context within which a person’s habitus is developed. In this sense, a field is not a geographical plot of land but rather could represent a local community and/or a particular network of social relationships – whatever it is that represents the boundaries of a person’s day-to-day experiences and thus the context within which they develop a particular form of habitus.

In focusing on the particular form of habitus that constitutes the children’s ethnic identities then the specific fields of relationships we are primarily interested in for this study are those that constitute their local communities. For the children in the first case study – living in essentially segregated areas experiencing high levels of sectarian tensions and violence – then their ethnic habitus is developed within a field that is constituted largely by their immediate locality. As will be seen, for many of the children the local area tends to represent the boundaries of their social worlds. They typically live, play, shop and go to school in the same area. It is the place that they come to identify strongly with and with which their ethnic habitus becomes strongly associated. As will be seen, for many of these children their sense of being Catholic or Protestant tends therefore to be relatively strong and intense and constructed as fairly clear and unambiguous.

In contrast, it will be seen that the children in the second case study – living in more affluent areas that have been largely unaffected by the violence – tend to be located in a very different field of relationships; one that is not tied to nor defined by locality. The school they attend is often not in the same neighbourhood as where they live. Where they play and the social activities they are involved in also tend to be geographically dispersed and located in various parts of the city and sometimes beyond. As such, many of these children tend to develop a worldview that is much more broadly defined than their counterparts in the first case study and that leads to the development of a very different ethnic habitus (again, in the sense of being Catholic or Protestant) that is more open, fluid and less intense.

## **2.4 Conclusions**

As will now be seen, these three inter-related concepts of ethnicity, habitus and field provide the framework for the two case studies to follow. They provide the basis from which we can understand more fully the ways in which the conflict has come to impact upon the attitudes and identities of children and, more specifically, how we can account for the differences that exist between children located in very different social contexts. Within this, two final points are worth stressing. First, the use of the concept of ethnicity in relation to Protestants and Catholics ensures that we avoid the tendency to treat these two groups as fixed and natural. Rather, it encourages us to examine the particular processes by which these two communities are actively maintained and reproduced. In relation to the present study with its focus on children, this leads to an emphasis on the ways in which young children first learn what it means to be Catholic or Protestant and then what specific events or experiences lead some children to regard this as an important part of their lives.

Second, the related concepts of habitus and field play an important role in helping to understand the precise mechanisms by which children come to incorporate their Protestant or Catholic identity and experience it as a natural and given aspect of their lives. More specifically, and as explained above, the two concepts help to maintain a focus on the way that these identities are learnt and internalised over time and as a consequence of the children's day-to-day experiences. As will be seen, this has important implications for how community relations work with children can be developed in an appropriate and meaningful way. Once it is understood that children's attitudes and

identities are an engrained aspect of their lives and a reflection of their lived experiences, then it will become clear that that the negative attitudes and behaviour that flow from this are unlikely to be successfully challenged solely through abstract classroom debate. Rather, and as will be argued in the final chapter, for any educational initiatives to be effective they also need to be part of a process that fundamentally changes the day-to-day lives and experiences of the children.



### **3. Case study one: children living under the shadow of sectarian violence**

This first case study focuses on Protestant and Catholic children growing up in an area of Belfast that has experienced and continues to experience high levels of sectarian tensions and violence. It focuses on the three age groups of children in turn – namely the 3-4, 7-8 and 10-11 year olds – and in doing this shows how their experiences of and perspectives on the conflict typically tend to develop with age. More specifically, it will show how their experiences of the local area and the violence and divisions associated with it come to be internalised over time through the development of a particular ethnic habitus. As explained in the previous chapter, to fully understand the development of this ethnic habitus, it is necessary to first identify the particular social context – the field – within which the children are located and thus their ethnic habitus is formed.

The case study therefore begins with a brief outline and discussion of the local area within which the Catholic and Protestant children live before examining, in turn, the experiences and perspectives of the three age groups of children.

#### **3.1 The importance of locality**

As will be seen, the local neighbourhoods within which these children live tends to represent the parameters of their social world. Given the fact that they are both areas characterised by high levels of social deprivation, many children and their families do not have the resources to travel outside of the confines of their local community on a regular basis. Moreover, the persistence of sectarian tensions and violence in the area means that it is often very risky to venture out of the local area. For many of the children in this case study, therefore, the horizons of their knowledge and experience of the world is set by their local neighbourhood. It has become the main source of their experience and the key reference point against which their knowledge and understanding of the world around them is developed. It represents, in other words, the *field* of relations within which their attitudes and identities are forged.

The two areas in which the Protestant and Catholic children live, respectively, are neighbouring ones separated by a peaceline. The peaceline itself is a rather imposing structure comprising a fortified five-meter high brick wall.<sup>3</sup> At the end of the peaceline is a small field that provides an interface between the

two areas. It has become a site where older children and young people regularly clash and often taunt and throw stones at one another. Given this, many of the houses overlooking the field have metal grids protecting their windows. More generally, graffiti, political murals and painted kerbstones mark out the two areas as Republican and Loyalist respectively; quite clearly displaying the very distinct identities and allegiances of each community. At another level, however, the two areas share much in common. Both share some of the highest levels of social and economic deprivation in the region reflected in such indicators as high levels of long-term unemployment and poverty, poor health and significantly low levels of educational performance.<sup>4</sup> In relation to the Noble Index that represents an overall measure of multiple deprivation, both areas would be ranked within the top five per cent of the most disadvantaged wards in Northern Ireland. Reflecting this position, both areas also suffer from high levels of anti-social behaviour such as car theft and 'joy-riding' and also general vandalism.

The majority of the residents in both areas seem to have spent most of their lives in the area and many would have their extended family living locally. Given the poor levels of educational attainment, there is also a tendency for young people to leave their local school at sixteen and to seek work – often temporary and/or part-time – in the local area. A strong sense of identity and attachment to the local area therefore exists, partly due to the existence of significant local networks of family and friends. However, it is a sense of attachment that is also undoubtedly reinforced by the history of sectarian violence in the area and the persisting and real threat posed by some of those living on the other side of the peaceline. Indeed, despite the ceasefires, particular paramilitary organisations have maintained a high presence in both areas.

All of these factors therefore combine to create the specific field of relations within which the children in this study are located. It provides the parameters of the children's lived experience and, as such, the basis from which they develop a particular set of attitudes and sense of identity that represents an internalisation of the strong ethnic divisions and tensions that characterise these neighbouring areas. As will now be seen, this emergence of an ethnic habitus among the children begins at a very early age and it is this that can partly help to explain why the sense of being Protestant or Catholic becomes one that is experienced as being so natural and inevitable.

### **3.2 3-4 year olds**

For children at the age of three and four, they are at a stage of their lives where they are moving beyond the confines of their immediate family home and becoming more aware of the broader environment around them. Many will be attending nursery and/or pre-school groups and a small number will already be playing outside, often with older brothers or sisters. It is a time, therefore, when children are developing an awareness of other people and the differing roles they perform (whether that be the role of mother, father, teacher or police officer) and also of particular events and items and symbols they see around them. At this age, children's awareness tends to be limited to their immediate experience. They tend to make sense of that experience through careful observation and, moreover, role-playing and rehearsing specific events they have seen or people they know and/or have come into contact with.

Given the areas in which these young children live, it is not surprising to find that some of them have directly witnessed particular incidents of violence and also specific events associated with their community. These can then form the basis of children's play as they attempt to re-enact and thus begin to understand such incidents and events. During the time spent observing the children in the two nurseries, a small number of incidents were observed in terms of the behaviour of the children that tended to directly reflect the broader violence and tensions that exist within and between the two areas.

Interestingly, all of these incidents involved boys. The first, in the Catholic nursery, occurred after lunch where a group of boys were observed making guns out of lego and pretending to shoot one another. One of the boys had his gun hitched over his shoulder and could be heard telling the others that he had a rocket launcher. As soon as one of the nursery staff saw this she intervened and encouraged the boys to play something else – reflecting a policy of the nursery that prohibited children making or playing with toy guns.

During a second incident, two boys were observed in the Protestant nursery playing with lego and toy cars on the carpet. They had constructed an extremely elaborate scene that they had worked on for a considerable amount of time. When they were asked what they were playing, one of the boys pointed to some cars that were overturned and explained: 'These are burning cars!' He then went on to explain that: 'The police are shooting and chasing the bad boys!' In the same nursery and on a different occasion, two other boys were observed pretending to be a marching band. One boy was marching

confidently and pretending to play the flute while the other boy, in front of him, was twirling a make-shift baton and throwing it in the air. Again, when this was noticed by staff they intervened and encouraged the boys to play something else. Finally, staff in the Catholic nursery recounted an incident that they had previously observed whereby one boy was organising a small group of other children to help re-enact a paramilitary-style funeral. This involved the children pretending to march either side of a coffin carrying guns.

Overall, however, these tended to be relatively isolated incidents. From observing the children over an extended period of time it was clear that the conflict and the divisions associated with it did not tend to figure prominently in their day-to-day play. This, in turn, can be interpreted in one of two ways; either the majority of children are simply not aware of the events and symbols around them associated with the conflict or they are aware but do not view these as particularly significant. In order to ascertain which of these possibilities is true, each child was interviewed towards the end of the fieldwork. As explained in the introduction, the aim of the interviews was simply to assess what awareness the children had of various events and symbols associated with the Protestant and Catholic communities that could commonly be seen around them. This was achieved by showing the children a range of items including small hand-held flags, pictures of a police landrover, an Orange March and an Irish dancer and also miniature Rangers and Celtic football shirts. For each item, the child was simply asked whether they knew what they were and what they could tell the researcher about them. The children were not given any information about each item and, if they did not know what it was, the item was just removed and the next one produced.

Overall, the evidence tends to strongly support the second possibility highlighted above – that many of the children are aware of some of the events and symbols around them but that they do not play a particularly significant role in their lives at this age. Indeed, as some of the children's comments will show, while these items did not seem to figure prominently in the children's play, many of the children were aware of them and some held quite strong views about them when asked directly. This can be illustrated by the children's discussions concerning three themes: football shirts; flags; and Orange Marches.

## Celtic and Rangers

The wearing of Celtic and Rangers football shirts is probably the most visible and common way in which a person's ethnic identity is demonstrated within the context of Northern Ireland. Overwhelmingly, Celtic tends to be associated with the Catholic community and Rangers with the Protestant community. Several children in the two nurseries, particularly the boys, were dressed in Rangers or Celtic football shirts. A number of the children also had Rangers or Celtic hats, scarves and even coats while a small number of boys had rings and necklaces bearing the emblems of the two teams. It was not surprising to find, therefore, that some of the children have already developed strong associations with one of the two football teams. This is evident, for example, in the following conversation with James<sup>5</sup> and Kyle (both Protestant) that occurred after James had been shown the miniature Rangers top<sup>6</sup>:

*Researcher:* Who does he [*his friend*] support?

*James:* [*Points to mini football top*] Rangers!

*Researcher:* He supports Rangers or that's Rangers? [*Referring to the top*]

*James:* That's Rangers.

*Researcher:* Very good. How did you know that was Rangers?

*James:* Cos ... I have a top.

*Kyle:* [*Walks over the the table and notices the football top*] What's that? .... [*It's*] Rangers! [*very excited*]

*Researcher:* It is Rangers, you're very clever [...] Do you like them?

*Kyle:* Yes [*lifts jumper and looks at his top*]

*Researcher:* Do you have a top like that?

*Kyle:* Yes

Moreover, for some of the children, a preference for one team was also matched with a dislike for the other. This can be seen in the following conversations with Adrian and Patrick (both Catholic):

- Researcher:* Well so you know this is Celtic football team  
[*holding up the Celtic football top*], do you like them?
- Adrian:* Yeah.
- Researcher:* And [you say] this is Rangers [*holding up the Rangers football top*], do you like them?
- Adrian:* No.
- Researcher:* Why not?
- Adrian:* Cos they're crap!
- Researcher:* Are they? But Celtic are good?
- Adrian:* [*nods*]
- Researcher:* Do your friends like Celtic?
- Adrian:* Yes.
- Researcher:* Do you know anybody who likes Rangers?
- Adrian:* No!
- Patrick:* [*Pointing to the Rangers football top*] They beat me, they beat me!
- Researcher:* Rangers beat you?
- Patrick:* Yeah.
- Researcher:* At football? ... Or [did] they beat you up?
- Patrick:* [*Angrily*] I'm going to beat them up!
- Researcher:* Do you not like them?
- Patrick:* I'm going to knock them all down [*knocks over Rangers top*]
- [...]
- Researcher:* Which of these two do you like the best?
- Patrick:* Celtic!

From conversations such as these, two points are worth drawing out. First, a clear pattern emerged in terms of the young children's preferences for the two football shirts. 11 out of 12 of the Catholic children interviewed said they

preferred the Celtic shirt while 9 out of the 11 Protestant children said they preferred the Rangers shirt. Second, while such clear and at times strongly held preferences were evident, none of the children interviewed at this age was able to demonstrate any awareness of the fact that these shirts were associated with the Catholic and Protestant communities.

## Flags

A very similar picture also emerged in relation to flags. The children were shown, in turn, a British Union Jack and an Irish Tricolour flag and asked if they knew what they were. They were then shown both and asked if they liked one the best and, if so, which one. Even at the ages of three and four, the children were beginning to demonstrate a preference for one flag over another and, for some, to regard a certain flag as their own. This can be seen in the two discussions with Roberta (Protestant) and then Aileen (Catholic):

Roberta: I seen that one [*Union Jack*] but not that one [*Tricolour*]

Researcher: But if you had to pick one which one would you pick?

[...]

Roberta: [*points to Union Jack*] My one.

Researcher: That's your one?

Roberta: Cos that's the one that was up on the wall.

Aileen: [*reaching out for flag*] Aye I've seen that there one, green white and orange, my granny gave me that one.

Researcher: Do you like that one?

Aileen: Yes

Researcher: Where else have you seen this one?

Aileen: In my street [...] and in my school.

Researcher: Right, so which flag do you like the best [*showing her both flags*]?

[...]

Aileen: This one [the *tricolour*]

As before, a clear tendency emerged for the Catholic young children to say that they preferred the Tricolour flag (9 out of 12) and the Protestant young children to say they preferred the Union Jack (8 out of 13). However, this was also accompanied by the fact that there was little evidence to suggest that many of the children actually understood what these flags represented. The most that some children were able to demonstrate any awareness of the cultural significance of the flags was seen in relation to some of the Protestant children who were able to associate particular flags with the bands that would often accompany Orange Parades. This can be seen in relation to the discussion with Natalie (Protestant) below. Moreover, as the separate conversation with Richard (Protestant) that follows demonstrates, the children's awareness sometimes extended beyond the immediate item being discussed:

*Researcher:* Now what is this?

*Natalie:* A flag.

*Researcher:* You're waving it about. What flag is that?

*Natalie:* A band flag.

*Researcher:* Does daddy's band have one? [*Prior to this she had been talking about her daddy's band*]

*Natalie:* No but I have one of those at home with my toys.

*Researcher:* Have you seen that flag before?

*Richard:* It's a flag for the bands.

*Researcher:* [...] Do you get a flag when you go to see the bands?

*Richard:* Not like that, I get a King Billy one but [*inaudible*] lost it

[...]

*Researcher:* What was on it?

*Richard:* King Billy.

- Researcher:* A picture of King Billy?
- Richard:* And his horse.
- Interviewer:* Really? What colour is his horse?
- Richard:* It was white on it.
- Researcher:* A white horse. And who is King Billy?
- Richard:* I saw him on TV.
- Interviewer:* What was he doing on TV?
- Richard:* He was beside the bands.
- Researcher:* Does he like the bands?
- Richard:* He loves the bands.

### **Orange marches**

As regards the children's awareness of Orange Marches a clear difference was found between the Protestant and Catholic children. Given the fact that these marches are exclusively associated with the Protestant community then it is not surprising that the Protestant children tended to demonstrate much greater awareness and knowledge of the marches compared to Catholic children. For most of the Protestant children, as the last quote already illustrates, they tended to find the marches colourful and exciting and expressed a strong level of enthusiasm for them. The majority had personal experience of the marches, either by being taken along to watch one or through the direct involvement of a family member. This is evident in the discussion with Claire below. Along with all the other children, she was shown a photograph of a traditional Orange Parade with the marchers dressed in black suits and bowler hats and with orange sashes. No bands were present:

- Claire:* My granda wears one of them [collaret]
- Researcher:* Does he? One of these [collaret's] do you go and watch them?
- Claire:* Yes
- [...]
- Claire:* [looking hard at picture] I can't see my granda in there

*Researcher:* Maybe he's in a different one

*Claire:* Maybe behind them

*Researcher:* Could be. Where do you watch him?

*Claire:* I think he's behind them?

For the Protestant children, therefore, Orange Marches tended to represent a significant and positive element of their lives. In contrast, the Catholic children demonstrated much less knowledge and awareness and some appeared quite confused. Patrick, for example, when asked what he thought they were doing explained that: 'I think they're getting somebody buried' whereas Sean thought they were 'singing'. Moreover, a small number of the children expressed rather negative attitudes towards the marchers as the following comments from David and Kieran illustrate:

*Researcher:* What about these people in this photo, what are they doing?

*David:* They're marching

*Researcher:* Very good

*Kieran:* They're marching, they're soldiers

*Researcher:* Have you seen them before?

*David:* No

*Kieran:* You can't see their guns

[...]

*Researcher:* Do you like them?

*Kieran:* No

*Researcher:* Why not?

*Kieran:* Cos they're soldiers

*Researcher:* You don't like the soldiers?

*Kieran:* No

*Researcher:* Why do you not like soldiers?

*Kieran:* Cos they shoot people

Finally, besides recognising and showing preferences for these common cultural symbols and events a small handful of children were also beginning to pick up and use the language of sectarianism as illustrated in the discussion with Patrick and David (both Catholic) below. It is not possible to state whether Patrick was aware of who the 'Orangies' are that he mentions in what follows or what they represent. It is also likely that he is embellishing and exaggerating his account for the benefit of the researcher. However, regardless of what the 'truth' actually is and the fact that he may not know why he dislikes these people, this does not stop him recognising that such a group of people exists and consequently developing strong attitudes towards them:

*Patrick:* We go up to the field and there's Orangies up there.

*Researcher:* There's Orangies up in the field?

*David:* Yes.

*Patrick:* And dogs.

*David:* Soldier dogs.

*Interviewer:* *Soldier dogs? ... What are Orangies?*

*Patrick:* They have knives ... my daddy. They kill you.

[...]

*Patrick:* [My daddy has a gun and] there's bullets in it

*Researcher:* What does he have a gun for?

*Patrick:* To shoot the Orangies.

*Researcher:* To shoot the Orangies?

*Patrick:* Aye we go to the field.

*Researcher:* Does he take you with him?

*Patrick:* Yeah.

*Researcher:* Yeah? Why does he do that do you think?

[...]

*Patrick:* There's Orangies and there's ones who go there  
[...] They have knives, and guns and bullets  
[*excitedly*]

*Researcher:* My goodness and why do they have those?

*Patrick:* They have a bomb!

*Researcher:* A bomb? Why?

*Patrick:* Aye and they shoot the bomb and the blows.

*Researcher:* And why do they do that Patrick?

*Patrick:* Cos.

## **Conclusions**

Overall, the general picture that emerges from the 3-4 year olds tends to confirm the findings of the recent survey of a much larger sample of children aged 3-6 drawn randomly from across Northern Ireland discussed earlier (see Connolly, Smith and Kelly 2002). While the violence and the divisions associated with it tends to express itself through the play of a small minority of children, it does not tend to feature in any significant way in the play of most children of this age in this case study. However, this does not mean that these children are unaware of the events around them. Indeed, on closer examination, the children were able to demonstrate significant levels of recognition and preferences for the events and symbols associated with their own community.

The most interesting fact that emerged in relation to this latter finding however is that while they exhibited clear preferences for particular events or symbols they could offer little evidence that they were aware of what these represented. The vast majority of children interviewed did not appear to be aware that they belonged to a particular community nor that the specific item(s) they preferred were associated with that community. What is evident here, then, is the beginnings of an ethnic habitus that is developing within these children. While they may not know what these things represent as yet, they are clearly developing and internalising a set of predispositions to prefer certain events and symbols over others. Within this, the power of the local area – the specific field of relations within which these young children are located – is also quite apparent in the way that it tends to feed and shape this emerging ethnic habitus. The painted kerbstones, the flags, murals, Celtic and Rangers shirts and Orange Marches represent just some of the cultural symbols and events that characterise the young children's local areas and which they are now beginning to recognise and assimilate into their sub-conscious.

Even at the age of three and four, therefore, some of these young children are already beginning to learn and internalise an awareness of and preference for a range of social markers and cues that are commonly used to set the two communities apart. As will now be seen in relation to the older children, these predispositions represent the embryonic form of the children's ethnic habitus that then tends to influence and shape their future acquisition of knowledge and interpretation of events and experiences.

### **3.3 7- 8 year olds**

By the time the children in these areas reach the ages of seven and eight, many are likely to spend much of their time outside playing. This certainly results in an increased exposure to the various events and cultural symbols that could be found in their respective areas. However, it also means that they also tend to develop an awareness of the fact that there is another community that presents a threat to them. This becomes evident to them in relation to the existence of the peaceline but also, moreover, the field at the end of the peaceline that represents the main interface area between the two communities. While most of the children are not likely, at this age, to be directly involved in the stone-throwing and other forms of confrontation that take place at the field, they are certainly likely to have witnessed this on many occasions. Given that they are also mixing with older children and listening intently to their conversations, then they are also being introduced to the explicit language of difference; based around the terms Catholic and Protestant and also the more negative variations such as 'Orangies', 'Prods' and 'Taigs'.

Given this new context that the children find themselves in by the ages of seven and eight, they are required to do much work in relation to assimilating all of these differing experiences and making sense of them. It is here where the embryonic ethnic habitus that is already present is developed much further and consolidated. As will be seen, the general preferences and predispositions that the children have already internalised become the main conceptual framework within which their experiences and the new knowledge they acquire from these are organised.

#### **Sectarian tensions and fear of the other side**

Underpinning the majority of the children's experiences and perspectives in these two areas is the ongoing violence and sectarian tensions that exist in the area. Both sets of children have tended to develop by this age a recognition of

the very real threat posed by those across the peaceline. This is clearly evident, for example in the following discussion with Chloe, John and Mandy (all Protestant):

*Researcher:* Do you ever go over there [*across the peaceline*] to play?

*Chloe:* Aye and get my head bricked in!

*Researcher:* Why would that happen?

*Chloe:* Cos they're bad.

[...]

*Chloe:* They throw bricks and all over at us.

*Researcher:* Why?

*Chloe:* I don't know.

*Mandy:* Ivor got chased by the Fenians in three cars.

*Researcher:* Who's Ivor?

*Mandy:* My brother.

*Researcher:* Oh dear, who chased him?

*Mandy:* The Fenians.

*Researcher:* Who are they?

*Mandy:* Catholics. Bad people, throw bricks at all our houses.

*Chloe:* My wee friend got her windows put in by one of them.

It is clear from the above that the violence and divisions that exist are now clearly understood by these children. They are fully aware of the categories Catholic and Protestant and have also learnt and are using a variety of other terms and knowledge in making sense of the differences between these two groups.

This level of awareness and way of thinking is equally strong among the Catholic children. As can be seen from the following discussion among Louise,

Aine and Rosie, they are distinctly aware of the threat posed by the neighbouring community and the dangers of playing in the field:

*Louise:* And then I'm going to sneak up the mountain to catch bees and butterflies and greenfly

*Researcher:* Why do you have to sneak up?

*Louise:* Cos there's Orangies

*Researcher:* What's that? [*looks around at the others who laugh*]

*Louise:* You don't even know what that is?

*Aine:* Orangies is Protestants

*Interviewer:* Why do you call them that?

*Louise:* It's a bit of the thing, the war. The Catholics are on the other side and I'm a Catholic

*Aine:* I'm a Catholic

*Louise:* Cos they're in the war

*Rosie:* They're bad to you

*Researcher:* [...] They're bad to you?

*Rosie:* Yeah the Orangies kill people, they kill people in our country

*Researcher:* Where did you hear that?

*Louise:* That's true I heard it from my granny

*Rosie:* They're like the hoods they kill people like us

*Researcher:* When did you find that out?

*Rosie:* I always knew that, my mummy told me when I was only six

[...]

*Louise:* I thought they were going to kill me [*serious voice*] I went up the mountains and the Orangies were hiding in the bushes and they had guns so they did, and they had their guns ready and all and I

said, Daddy, Mummy there's guns and the Orangies and we all had to run away down the hill, and the Orangies were nearly following us

It is clearly not possible to fully distinguish truth from fantasy with some of the children's accounts, including the one above. In many ways, however, this is not the point. What is clear is that these children have certainly witnessed violent events that have taken place, particularly at the interface area of the field. Moreover, whatever the underlying truth behind the discussions above, what they do clearly indicate is the sense of threat these children feel and the negative attitudes they have developed about children from the other side because of this. Finally, while some of these attitudes may be passed on by family members (in the case above by granny and mummy respectively), it is too simplistic to explain the acquisition of such attitudes completely in these terms. The main reason why these attitudes have been appropriated and used by the children is that they help to make sense of and explain real experiences that they have. In this sense, the children's growing sense of identity and awareness of difference is grounded in and is thus a reflection of their experiences. It is this point that reinforces the usefulness of the notion of the ethnic habitus.

The children's growing knowledge of and attitudes towards a variety of other events and symbols take place within the overarching shadow of the violence and tensions that exist between the two communities. To illustrate this it is worth briefly returning to the three themes discussed in relation to the 3-4 year olds – football shirts, flags and Orange Marches – and assessing how the attitudes of these slightly older children have developed.

### **Celtic and Rangers**

The strong recognition and preferences that the three and four year old children already had for Celtic and Rangers tops provided the basis from which they soon became aware of the cultural and political significance of these two teams and what they represented. By the ages of seven and eight, the children's conversations about football routinely led to them expressing sectarian attitudes. This is evident, for example, in the following conversation with Chloe, John and Mandy (all Protestant):

- Chloe:* I don't like Celtic
- Researcher:* Why not?
- Chloe:* They make me sick!
- Researcher:* Why?
- Chloe:* Just, ... Cos everytime, one time just because they got, they beat Rangers 3 – 2, they were up on that big wall across the street [*the peaceline*] from my house and they were going all shouting and all
- [...]
- Researcher:* John, do you like Celtic?
- John:* No!
- Researcher:* Do you like the people who support Celtic?
- John:* No cos they're ugly [...] They are Catholics
- [...]
- Chloe:* They throw bricks and all over at us
- Researcher:* Why?
- [...]
- Mandy:* Cause they're bad and because we don't support Celtic
- Researcher:* Is that the only reason?
- Mandy:* Yeah

As can be seen, the preferences and predispositions that the children had developed a few years earlier for Celtic and Rangers respectively now provided one of the key markers of difference that they use to distinguish between themselves and those from across the peaceline. Being a Celtic supporter and being Catholic, for these children, has become one and the same thing. Extremely similar sentiments were found among many of the Catholic children as the following discussion with David and Stephen illustrates:

- David:* I'm doing Celtic and .. what else?

- Researcher:* What about Celtic and Rangers?
- David:* Can't do Rangers
- Stephen:* Rangers are Protestants ... they're tramps
- Researcher:* Why?
- Stephen:* They are...Protestant teams
- Researcher:* Who told you that?
- David:* They're scum
- Researcher:* Why do you say that? Do you not like them?
- David:* They're scum [...] and they beat Celtic all the time

The mixing together of Protestants, Rangers and the sense of threat that these children feel and how they are all seen to be inextricably inter-linked is also evident from the separate conversation with Louise and Aine (both Catholic):

- Louise:* Protestants support Rangers.
- Researcher:* Why is that?
- Louise:* Because Rangers are Protestants.
- Researcher:* So what are Protestants, what does that mean?
- Louise:* It's bad to be a Protestant and/  
[...]
- Researcher:* What was that Louise?
- Louise:* [*quietly*] Protestants come down and shoot ye.
- Researcher:* Do they?  
[...]
- Aine:* They shot a man down our way.
- Researcher:* Why did they do that?
- Aine:* I don't know.

## **Flags**

A very similar process can be seen in relation to the children's developing attitudes towards flags. As before, the early preferences and predispositions

they had learnt through their emerging ethnic habitus was now providing the lens through which the children were beginning to understand the broader divisions that existed around them. As can be seen from the discussion below with Catherine and Stephen (both Catholic), not only did they see themselves as part of a particular community (or ethnic group) but they saw particular flags as representing their community:

*Researcher:* What kind of flag will you have?

*Catherine:* A green white and orange [*very quickly*]

*Researcher:* What one?

*Catherine:* Green white and orange

*Researcher:* And what flag is that?

*Catherine:* Ours

*Researcher:* Who do mean when you say ours?

*Catherine:* Ours

*Stephen:* She means our country's flag!

This tendency for the children to begin to see particular flags as representing their own community is equally true for many of the Protestant children as evident in the following discussion with Brittany, Karen and Davy:

*Brittany:* There's loads of flags in my street

*Researcher:* What flags are they?

*Brittany:* Red, white and blue, yeah red and white and blue

*Researcher:* Who put them up?

*Brittany:* I don't know [laughs] probably the red white and blue people

*Researcher:* Why are they red, white and blue and not a different colour?

*Karen:* Cos that's our colour, that's our kind of flag

*Researcher:* When you say our colour who are you talking about?

- Karen:* Us!
- Brittany:* The UFF [*a Loyalist paramilitary group*]
- Karen:* The UFF?
- Researcher:* Is that their colour?
- Karen:* It isn't the UFF
- Brittany:* I was only joking
- Researcher:* But who are they?
- Karen:* My daddy put some flags up
- Brittany:* So did my daddy
- Karen:* Aye, about a year ago
- Davy:* That was, that was this Christmas so it was
- Researcher:* Why do people put flags up?
- Davy:* For the bands you see

It is also interesting to note from Brittany's comments about the UFF the way in which children tend to associate particular flags with certain paramilitary groups (even if wrongly in this case). This is certainly evident in the following discussion with Ryan and Andrew (both Catholic) that also shows how the children's growing understanding can be a little incomplete and confused at times:

- Ryan:* Look at [my flag] Miss!
- Researcher:* That's very good. What flag is that?
- Ryan:* IRA's!
- Researcher:* Is it?
- Ryan:* Yeah, green, white and orange
- Researcher:* So does that make it the IRA's?
- Ryan:* The IRA live in thing ... castles as well, don't they?
- Andrew:* Yeah
- Ryan:* [*chanting*] IRA! Dirty Orangies! Green, white and orange

- Researcher:* Who is the IRA?
- Ryan:* Orangies, peelers
- Researcher:* That's the IRA?
- Ryan:* Yeah IRA
- Researcher:* And what do they do?
- Andrew:* They beat the living daylights, don't they?
- [...]
- Ryan:* Yeah, green, white and orange. That's what they wear, Orange. And it's for the IRA.

### **Orange marches**

Finally, the differences that were already evident among the three and four year olds in terms of their awareness and attitudes towards Orange Marches were also found to have become more defined and pronounced at this slightly older age. For the Protestant children, some were likely to have begun participating in various activities and to gain much enjoyment from this as the following discussion with Steven and Phil (both Protestant) illustrates:

- Steven:* Have you seen the Lodge, the Orange lodge? I'm in it
- Researcher:* Are you?
- Steven:* And my granda
- Researcher:* And what nights do you go to that on?
- Steven:* Umm. Tuesday, Wednesday
- Researcher:* What do you do when you go there?
- Steven:* Walk
- Phil:* You just walk
- Steven:* And I swing my band pole
- Researcher:* Very good, can you throw it away up in the air?
- Steven:* And we go in to the bar and all [very excited!]
- Phil:* Aye we go into the bar and all

- Researcher:* And are you allowed in the bar?
- Steven:* Aye everybody/
- Phil:* I just drink Coke/
- Steven:* Even people from this school, Karen, Phil ....Paula
- Researcher:* Do they all go as well?
- Steven:* Ben doesn't
- Phil:* Wee Ben doesn't go
- Researcher:* Who doesn't go?
- Steven:* No his daddy doesn't walk in the lodge

More generally, Orange Marches gained a particular significance for these children in relation to the 12th July celebrations. In the following discussion with Karen, Brittany and Davy, even though it was only April, they were already talking about collecting wood for the bonfires. Note also how, through reference to the Republican leader Gerry Adams, these children were also beginning to learn the political significance of the divisions that exist:

- Karen:* We had millions of fireworks last year, 6 big boxes
- Researcher:* Brilliant, for your house or for the street?
- Karen:* For our family and the whole street
- Researcher:* Did you have a party in the street?
- Karen:* Yes
- Brittany:* Was it good?
- Karen:* We had bonney [bonfire] wood but it's all gone
- Researcher:* Where did it go?
- Karen:* The workmen took it all away
- Researcher:* So what will you do about the bonfire?
- Davy:* We got a whole lot of wood and the just took it away
- Researcher:* So how many bonfires do you have?
- Davy:* Lots

*Researcher:* That's right, you were telling me that you put things on the top

*Karen:* Aye, Gerry Adams

*Brittany:* Guess what, see on my bonfire we put him, a false face of him up there

*Karen:* That was like ours

In contrast, the Catholic children's perspectives on Orange Marches remained inconsistent and varied in terms of their awareness and knowledge. While the term 'Orangies' had become a staple part of their vocabulary, many of the children had limited understanding and very little experience of Orange Marches. As such, for some of the Catholic children Orange Marchers were simply the same as Protestants and the 'Orangies' they talked about and thus they represented a threat. This is evident in the discussion with Matthew, Ryan and Andrew (all Catholics):

*Andrew:* I hate the Orangies

*Researcher:* But why?

*Andrew:* Cos before one of them booted me in the privates

*Researcher:* And how did you know this boy was an Orangie?

*Andrew:* Easy! He had the orange thing round here  
[*indicating a sash around neck*] and a hat and all on

*Researcher:* He had an orange thing round his neck?

*Ryan:* And he had guns, Orangies have guns

*Andrew:* So the boot me in the privates, so I booted him up the privates too

[...]

*Researcher:* All of them were ....?

*Andrew:* Had brown hair except for one

*Researcher:* And is that how you know them?

*Andrew:* Yeah

- Researcher:* Sure David and Stephen from your class have brown hair
- Andrew:* Aye I know, but I mean Orangies! Orangies!
- Researcher:* So how can you tell who is an Orangie?
- Andrew:* I can tell if the man has orange/
- Ryan:* Orangies are big giant things
- Researcher:* They're big giant things?
- Ryan:* 34 and 54 and all, but they're not 7s or 8s or 9s
- Researcher:* I'm not sure what you mean, are you talking about their ages?
- Ryan:* Yeah
- Researcher:* So they're only old people?
- Ryan:* They're big people, not over 7s, 8s, 9s and 10s
- Researcher:* So could someone be the same age as you and be an Orangie?
- Ryan:* No
- Researcher:* Why not?
- Ryan:* [*A little exasperated*] Cos, how could they be an Orangie when they can't get their size of the suit and wouldn't give them the guns

### **Paramilitary groups**

As already touched upon through some of the discussions above, most of the children in both areas had developed an awareness of the local paramilitary organisations. For the vast majority of the children they simply regarded them as a fact of life in the area. The generally matter-of-fact and accepting way in which the children talked of the local paramilitaries is evident in the following conversation with Rosie and Louise (both Catholic). In what follows, Rosie is describing a street fight involving several adults. She is disappointed that despite trying to reach the IRA only the 'Peelers' arrived in time:

- Rosie:* No sure we phoned the IRA and everything but they didn't come in time, only the Peelers came in time.

*Researcher:* So did you phone both?

*Rosie:* Yeah we phoned the IRA and the Peelers were only down the street from us and they came up anyway, and Frances phoned the IRA and thing, they didn't come in time.

*Researcher:* What do you think they would have done?

*Rosie:* They would have stopped it and all cos we had to get the IRA or somebody up, or a/

*Louise:* /A big strong man to beat them.

*Rosie:* We get the IRA anytime there's fighting so we phoned the IRA and Frances tried to phone everybody.

[...]

*Researcher:* What do you know about the IRA then, what do they do?

*Rosie:* They always, we tried to phone everyone to come to get the Provos to come around but no one came, only the Peelers. See when the Peelers came everybody throwed big bottles of glass at them, at the Peelers and the Peelers had to stop and talk to Marty in our street cos he was throwing bottles at them.

*Researcher:* Why were they throwing bottles at them?

*Rosie:* I don't know, they always do it.

For some of the boys, especially, they were also developing strong associations with particularly paramilitary organisations and fantasising about being members of them. This is seen, for example, in the following discussion involving Phil and George (both Protestant) illustrates:

*Phil:* The UDA, they're men and they have guns.

[...]

*George:* I work for the UDA [*laughs*]

*Phil:* [singing] We all work for the UDA! We all work for the UDA!

*George:* They're good.

*Phil:* Sometimes they're good and sometimes they're bad.

*Researcher:* What good things do they do?

*George:* Hundred guns in your head!

*Phil:* I don't know.

*George:* I know something good they do, they won't blow up this school.

*Interviewer:* Will they not?

*George:* Cos we're all Protestants.

*Phil:* Cos we're all Prods, everyone here in this here whole estate is all Prods.

*Researcher:* Why is that?

*Phil:* Just is, I don't know.

## **Conclusions**

Overall, it can be seen that the embryonic ethnic habitus that was beginning to emerge among children at the age of three and four provides the basic framework that tends to influence and shape their attitudes and behaviour as they grow older. By the age of seven and eight, these children are now finding themselves exposed to a much wider range of experiences. The general preferences they have already internalised towards particular cultural events and symbols now provide the lens through which they come to identify, make sense of and organise a wide range of new experiences. Whether it is flags, football shirts or a range of other cultural symbols that the children were predisposed to, they were now transforming these into clear and distinct markers of difference.

However, this is still a time of learning where the children's actual understanding of the terms they use and of the symbols and events they refer to is often limited and, at times, contradictory. Nevertheless, this partial and sometimes confused understanding has not prevented many of the children

already developing a strong perception of the other community that is very negative and stereotypical, with little ambiguity or recognition of the complexities that exist. This in turn reflects the particular field of relations within which they are located. As seen, for these children it is a clearly defined local area that is characterised by sectarian tensions and violence. As has been shown, it is not surprising to find that the children's growing sense of identity and the attitudes and behaviour that they internalise and take for granted through their ethnic habitus reflects the clear and deep divisions that exist. It is only as the children grow a little older, as will now be seen, that they are more likely to begin to revise these simplistic attitudes and start to appreciate the complexities of their own identities and those of children from the other community.

### **3.4 10-11 year olds**

The main difference between the ten and eleven year olds and those aged seven and eight discussed above is that this older group simply have much greater experience of living with sectarian tensions and the ever-present threat of attack and conflict. This has brought with it a much greater level of knowledge and awareness of events around them and a growing appreciation of the complexities that accompany these.

#### **Locality and Threat**

At this older age, the children were more likely to have developed a greater awareness of areas beyond their own locality and experience of visiting these. However, given the levels of sectarian violence and tensions that the children have to deal with, this greater experience tended ironically to consolidate their general sense of threat and a desire to stay locally. This increased understanding of territory and the boundaries that marked out differing areas is evident in the discussion with Christine and Anne-Marie (both Catholic) below:

*Researcher:* Christine can you finish what you were saying about why you never go over to [the neighbouring loyalist estate]?

*Christine:* Cos you'd get beaten up!

*Researcher:* Why?

- Christine:* Cos we're Catholics! [*said as if this was self-evident*].
- Researcher:* How do the people there know that, how do they know you're not from there?
- Christine:* I know, that's what I always say/
- Anne Marie:* /I know but you're walking from that there direction.
- Researcher:* And even if you were alone, would you get into bother?
- Anne Marie:* Probably ... yes. My brother got beaten up by Orangies by goin over.
- Researcher:* Was he on his own?
- Anne Marie:* [*Nods*].
- Researcher:* And if someone from there came over here would they get beaten up?
- All:* Yeah [*Christine laughs*].

The sense of danger that some of the children felt when they did venture out of their local area is also illustrated by the same two girls in comments made later in the interview:

- Anne Marie:* See I used to always go down the town and I went in til [*names a Loyalist area*], me and our Orla, and because it was quicker than goin around. We cut through this here wee alley thing and we were walking down the street and this wee fella said you's better go cos they're gonna beat you up for no reason and we had to run and hide in the alley and all. And they all just run past us chasing somebody [*else*]!
- Christine:* Frig!

This level of anxiety was also found among the boys as illustrated in the following discussion with Michael and Liam (both Catholic):

*Michael:* We drove past [the Shankill Road] with [the youth club] going to Mallusk. We were driving past the Shankill and Pat had a flattened tyre and we had to get out and fix it.

*Researcher:* Were you not worried?

*Liam:* Yeah I was geeking [*hiding from*] them like! Sitting in the car like that there [*pretends to hide*]. Do you know Tommy lives up [near us]? [...] Well him and his daddy were down and he had a mate and he was blocked [*drunk*] and they were in the back and they were in the Shankill and they had a busted tyre and this man walked past said: "Do you need help there?" and he said "aye!" So he said to him, "Could you get me a new tyre" or something. "No I can't do that, but I can try to get you a couple of wheels like" so they pushed him down onto the Shankill Road and I don't know about where he told us anyway, the man that was blocked waked up and said where are we now and our Tommy said we were at the Shankill Road and the Shankills pushed us down and he didn't believe us and all.

Part of this increased sense of threat is undoubtedly due to the fact that many of the children, by this age, have direct experience of participating in clashes with children from the other side. Indeed, stone-throwing and sporadic violence had become a routine and taken-for-granted part of life for some of the children and thus was embedding itself in their habitus. This is illustrated in the following discussion with Debbie and Shauna (both Catholic). It is because of the ritualised nature of incidents such as the one they discuss that they tend to also provide a source of humour and a wealth of stories to tell:

*Shauna:* There's Orangies up there [*at the field*] ...see the Orangies, there was a big riot and they had bricks and daggers/

- Debbie: /The Peelers and all came [...] Didn't the peelers chase us and not chase them uns [*the Protestants*]?
- Shauna: Aye [*angrily*]. The Peelers drove up and/
- Debbie: /And we didn't even start it.
- Researcher: Did they start it?
- Debbie: Yeah and the Peelers had the cheek to chase us and not them uns.
- Shauna: The Peelers came up and went WHAA! [*shouts*] like, and we had built a wee road so they couldn't past, so they couldn't chase us and the broke it... cos/
- Debbie: /They had the cheek to chase us and not them uns
- Researcher: Does this happen often?
- Debbie: Most of the time.
- [...]
- Shauna: I didn't go up, I'll tell you why, cos I was too scared of getting killed.
- Debbie: You do be afraid/
- Shauna: /I just stand back and watch them going [*shouting*] "Go On! Go On!". See one time we went up and they all hid behind trees, all the Catholics hid behind trees and all, and here's me [*shouts very loudly*] 'Peelers!' and they all came running out and there wasn't even any Peelers or nothing! All you could see was all these wee white tops and Celtic tops all running from everywhere.

### **Knowledge and identification with local paramilitary groups**

This greater sense of threat and of the importance of territory could also explain the more indepth and detailed knowledge that the children were also able to demonstrate in relation to local paramilitary organisations in their areas. The Protestant children showed an awareness of the diversity of opinion and groups within Loyalist paramilitarism. Many were familiar with the divisions

within these groups and the history of the Loyalist feud that reached a head towards the end of the fieldwork (i.e. the summer of 2000). In the following conversation, Robert and Martin (both Protestant) discuss one of the incidents they had witnessed personally on the Shankill Road during the Loyalist feud:

*Robert:* And then the UVF started shooting in the air, and everybody ran and it was mad, and they were in the Bar blocked the way off and [...] we got as far as there [the chip shop] and some woman gave us a lift up and see five days after that I was still scared.

[...]

*Martin:* ... and then when it all started [the feud] we didn't go down again [to the Shankill Road] for about two months, that was the next time you saw us down the Road.

Many of the Protestant children spent a significant amount of time discussing the Loyalist feud and demonstrated some awareness and understanding of its history and nature. In the following, Elaine and Gillian (both Protestant) discuss the implications and complexity of being aligned to one group or the other.

*Elaine:* Miss, know the way when all the fighting was on the UDA was fighting with the UVF [...] And do you know what I think would be smart, just going altogether Miss.

*Researcher:* Why do you think that?

*Gillian:* Know who I hate? Johnny Adair and Michael Stone, I hate them uns.

[...]

*Elaine:* Somebody says they're Johnny Adair's cousin ... who is it?

*Gillian:* Sonia

*Elaine:* Sonia! But Sonia likes the UVF!

Later in the same conversation Gillian tells us how she would like a UVF mural on the side wall of her house:

*Researcher:* And what would it [*the mural*] be of?

*Gillian:* Probably people with a gun, know like my daddy's picture/

*Elaine:* /Her next-door neighbour is in the UDA too!

[...]

*Researcher:* How do you know they're in the UDA?

*Gillian:* Cos ... they have the flag and all in their house and know Mack, he's never out of their house [...]

*Elaine:* So if you get that UVF thing there and about 10 UDA people walk past your house and all that fighting starts again you'd get thrown out of your house.

*Gillian:* I wouldn't/

*Elaine:* /People told me you were getting thrown out of your house.

As illustrated in this last discussion, the presence of paramilitary organisations in their respective local areas was a fact of life for many of these children. It was a normal and take-for-granted part of their social worlds and formed part of their worldview or ethnic habitus. For some of the children, this led to them developing a strong identification with particular paramilitary groups. This was especially the case for the boys who spent a significant amount of time discussing the presence and activities of local paramilitaries in their area. As can be seen in the following discussion that took place between James, Paul and Thomas (all Catholics), they were also attempting to gain status by claiming knowledge of individual IRA men in the area:

*Thomas:* The Provies [*i.e. Provisional IRA*] give out these wee lists of people in the park who are like are smoking and drinking, know like teenagers and that. Something about telling their mummies and all, the Provies like to stop you from sniffing [glue]

and all, if they see you sniffing and all. It's a wee bit bad on the some ways and a wee bit good on others.

*Paul:* I like some of the things they do.

*James:* I like Brian/

*Paul:* /Aye I like Brian Smyth.

*James:* Brian Smyth's all right.

*Paul:* I like Connor.

*James:* Who's he?

*Thomas:* Black hair.

*Paul:* Aye he thinks he's dead important.

Such knowledge, however, tended to be confined to the local paramilitary groups in the children's own area. Most of the Protestant children had certainly heard of the IRA and saw them as a significant threat but knew little beyond this. For the Catholic children, they also had only a partial knowledge of the various Loyalist paramilitary groups and, as the following discussion with Thomas, Paul and James shows, there remains some confusion:

*Researcher:* So what about on the Protestant side there's groups as well do you know the names of those groups?

*Thomas:* The DUP

*Researcher:* They are politicians, do you know any other groups?

*Paul:* Like the IRA here?

*Researcher:* Yes

*James:* Orange men

*Paul:* The RUC

*Researcher:* Do you think that they're a Protestant group?

*Paul:* Yes

**Political knowledge and understanding**

Alongside a more detailed awareness of local paramilitary organisations and their activities, these children also tended to show a growing appreciation of the broader historical and political background to the conflict in comparison with the seven and eight year olds. This is illustrated in the following comments from Thomas, Michelle (both Catholic) and Martin (Protestant):

Thomas: Because, because years ago like in Bloody Sunday and all they just lifted you and all for nothing. My grandad got lifted for nothing, he was just walking down the street and they lifted him and put him in the back of the van.

Michelle: I remember when, we got stuck between the barricades and we had to go and stay in a hostel filled with all people from here and it was away down in the country and we had to stay for a couple of nights until they had stopped you know throwing and shooting and all. It was terrible.

Martin: Beside that wall [...] that's where all the Catholics live and so they put that wall there .... When [my brother] was a wee baby we used to live up here, but I wasn't born up then, and then the war and all started and they didn't have the wall then. So they put that wall there so that people couldn't get over. But people threw petrol bombs over, but I was never alive then and see the army, they were trying to shoot over. And see my old house? They were shooting bullets, the army, and it just missed my wee brother.

As with the knowledge of paramilitary groups, however, this growing awareness and understanding was still only partial and sometimes punctuated with misunderstandings as the following discussion among Declan, Thomas and Paul illustrates:

- Declan:* Bobby Sands. Aye Bobby sands. His ma took him off the hunger strike
- Thomas:* Sure he's dead
- Paul:* Course he's dead now!
- Researcher:* And why did people go on a hunger strike do you think?
- Declan:* Because they didn't want food
- Paul:* And they didn't want to eat anymore
- [...]
- Thomas:* It was too dear
- [...]
- Paul:* Aye and they weren't allowed to the toilet
- [...]
- Declan:* They weren't allowed to go to the toilet and all that there, so they wiped it on the wall?
- James:* Do you know what that was called?
- Others:* No what?
- Declan:* Graffiti?
- James:* A dirty protest
- Thomas:* They did, grown men did that? [Incredulously]

Such confusion is also evident in the following discussion among Gavin and James (both Protestant) illustrating how they tend to confuse world events with those in Northern Ireland:

- Gavin:* Miss some of them are starting to bomb England, the Real IRA that's what they call them [laughs] the Real IRA. They blew up Omagh too
- James:* No it wasn't it was the Israel troops that blew up the Omagh bomb
- Researcher:* Why do you think that?

- James:* I heard it on the news
- Researcher:* Why do you think people from Israel would try to blow up Omagh?
- James:* Because they don't like people from Omagh
- Researcher:* Do you know where Israel is?
- Gavin:* It's on the other side of the world
- James:* Oh maybe it was the Yugoslavians

### **Cross-community contact and community relations**

Finally, alongside the prejudiced and negative attitudes that these children tended to express about one another, there was also emerging among children of this age an additional strand of thinking that was more positive and constructive. This appeared to reflect the broader knowledge and experiences the children were gaining through such channels as the television and cross-community contact. Inevitably, however, the two sets of opinions did not sit easily against each other and led to a series of contradictions as illustrated in the following conversation between Shauna, Debbie and Natasha (all Catholic) about a past cross-community school trip that they had been on with children from a Protestant school:

- Researcher:* So was spending time with [*the Protestant School*] a good experience?
- All:* No!
- Shauna:* No way, I never want to see them again.
- Debbie:* I don't like them.
- Shauna:* It wasn't their fault like but you ... and you get a partner/
- Debbie:* /Aye partners/
- Natasha:* /There was some of them OK.
- Shauna:* Some partners were all right. My partner was nice.
- Debbie:* Aye we bought each other presents I bought mine a Barbie.

The types of cross-community schemes that these children were more likely to have had experience of by this age appeared to lead to contradictions like the one illustrated above where positive attitudes towards specific individuals co-existed with blanket rejections of the community from which those individuals come from. The tendency for this age group to be able to express more positive and reconciliatory attitudes towards those from the other community is also evident in the following discussion involving Robert and Martin (both Protestant):

*Robert:* They [*Catholics*] don't like the [*Orange*] Lodge

*Martin:* They just don't like Protestants, it all happened away hundreds of years ago.

*Robert:* I don't know why, Catholics are just the same as us, although they talk differently from us, but they're just the same.

[...]

*Robert:* Yeah, there's some good Catholics.

*Martin:* My mum and dad tell me to try and get on with Catholics.

Given the tensions that exist between the children, however, the potential for conflict between the two groups – even on cross-community trips – is ever-present as the following comments from Liam and David (both Catholic) illustrate:

*Researcher:* Why did you not like [the Protestant school]?

*David:* Cos they're Protestants [*they giggle and look at interviewer in amazement as if it is obvious*]

*Liam:* Cos they were slabbering [*i.e. calling names*] to us all and all, and we were like messing about.

*David:* They were slabbering to me so I ...

*Researcher:* Why did they slabber at you?

*Liam:* Cos they don't like us.

*David:* See the wee Protestant am, I was beside, he said

to me [*whispers*] I'm going to knock you out and I said [*leans forward as though he didn't hear him*] 'Wha?' and he was going to dig me.

More generally, the positive attitudes that some of the children expressed did not appear to be sufficient to counteract the overarching influence of the divisive geography and continuing tensions that existed in the area. When asked about mixed relationships, for example, a number of the children indicated that they would personally be happy to marry someone from the other side but that this would just cause too many problems. As the following discussion with Gemma and Una (both Catholics) indicates:

- Researcher:* And would you go out with a Protestant person?
- Gemma:* Yeah there's nothing wrong different about them except for religion
- Una:* Except, I wouldn't go out with them when till I'm over 20
- All:* Why?
- Una:* Did you hear about that woman on the TV? Aye and she was going out with a Catholic man and she got her brothers and all to beat him up because he was a Catholic [...]. He was in bed too! See that's why, over 19 cos I'm afraid
- Gemma:* If they have a good personality and they don't do nothing to you just live along with them

A similar view was also evident among the Protestant children as illustrated by the discussion below with Laura, Elaine and Dione. As can be seen, given the troubles that mixed relationships would cause, this level of social segregation had now become internalised and was simply a taken-for-granted aspect of their lives:

- Laura:* See James, he wants to go out with Kelly
- Elaine:* She's a lovely wee girl
- Researcher:* Is he going to ask her out?
- Elaine:* No she won't go out with him/

- Laura:* Because he's a Protestant, he asked her out last night
- Researcher:* Why would that stop her?
- Laura:* Because Protestants and Catholic don't go out with each other
- Researcher:* Why not?
- Laura:* Because
- Researcher:* Would no one from up here go out with a Catholic?
- All:* No
- Laura:* No Miss, my sister was going out with a taig and a wee lad hit my sister in a pub. The wee lad slapped her
- Researcher:* What happened?
- Elaine:* Probably hit her cos she was a Protestant and he only found out
- Laura:* No he knew ... they were kissing each other and he just went ... smack
- Researcher:* Why would there be trouble over going out with a Catholic?
- Elaine:* Just is
- Laura:* We know a mixed couple and they always fight  
[...]
- Researcher:* But if you met a boy and you did like him and he was a Catholic would you go out with him?
- Dione:* I don't know miss
- Elaine:* See Joanne in P5, she said she went out with a Catholic when she was with the Quakers
- Researcher:* And would you be able to bring a Catholic friend over here, to your homes for example?
- Dione:* No miss, that would start a big riot
- Laura:* Definitely would!

*Researcher:* Really?

*Dione:* Miss you should see all the people down in my street they're all mad

Overall, the weight of these sectarian tensions and divisions tended to leave many of the children resigned to the reality of segregation. It had become an accepted and taken-for-granted part of their lives – of their ethnic habitus – with little desire left to integrate with others. As Elaine (Protestant) commented during one interview:

*Elaine:* Ach I'm sure they're [*Catholics*] all right like, but we don't really need them, we've loads of people to hang about with.

These were sentiments echoed by Debbie and Shauna (both Catholic):

*Researcher:* Would you like to be on better terms with the Protestants?

*Shauna:* No not really.

*Debbie:* I'm alright.

*Researcher:* So you don't think you're missing out by not having them as friends?

*Shauna:* No I've got my own friends.

## **Conclusions**

By the age of ten and eleven, therefore, these children are being bombarded with a diverse range of knowledge and information from a variety of sources. They are also increasingly gaining experiences both of the tensions and divisions within their local area but also of life outside of their area and experiences of direct contact with children from the other community. As has been shown, for many children all of these new experiences have tended to be organized and understood within the existing frameworks they have learnt and internalized from an early age. This framework can best be understood as their ethnic habitus; characterised by a set of predispositions towards certain cultural events and symbols and a deep sense of belonging to one community

in opposition to the other. This ethnic habitus was now, at this older age, providing the lens through which the more detailed knowledge and experiences the children were coming into contact with were being interpreted. Moreover, a complex circular process is also evident as the ethnic habitus not only provided the means by which particular experiences were selectively interpreted but these experiences – so interpreted – then acted to further consolidate the ethnic habitus.

As is also evident, however, the effects of the ethnic habitus are not simple and fixed. The children's experiences are wrought with complexity and contradictions and these, inevitably, are reflected in the children's attitudes and perspectives. Alongside strong negative attitudes and prejudices towards those from the other side, there also existed more positive, egalitarian views. Such views certainly indicate the potential, at this age, to encourage children to reflect upon and think through their existing attitudes and behaviour and some of the practical starting points for encouraging more positive views.

### **3.5 Conclusions**

It can be seen from the evidence provided in this chapter that the conflict plays a significant part in the lives of these children. This is not surprising given that they live in areas characterized by a history of sectarian divisions and continuing violence and tensions. Their physical space is testament to this, with the over-shadowing presence of a fortified peaceline and with ever-present reminders – in terms of painted kerbstones, flags, graffiti and political murals – of the distinct and opposing identities of the two communities.

This, then, represents the field of relations within which the children's ethnic habitus can be seen to develop. At the ages of three and four, it can already be detected in embryonic form. The majority of children of this age have already developed the ability to recognize certain cultural events and symbols associated with their own community and are internalizing preferences towards these. These cultural predispositions, in turn, provide the basic framework which comes to influence and shape how the children interpret and make sense of the increasing information and experiences they encounter over the coming years.

By the ages of seven and eight, the children tend to be acutely aware of the divisions that exist and of the threat posed by those from the other community.

The events and symbols they have already developed a predisposition towards are now transformed into the key markers of difference. It is at this age where sectarian attitudes and prejudices have become a salient part of many children's lives as they provide a language for describing and making sense of the divisions they experience. However, given their as yet limited knowledge and experience, these attitudes tend to be fairly simplistic and crude and show little awareness of the broader complexities and contradictions that exist.

As the children grow older, they are exposed to even greater information and experiences through friends and family, television, trips outside of their local area and also involvement in cross-community schemes. It is by this age that they are actively seeking out explanations for what is going on. As has been seen, many children are quickly developing an awareness of historical events and processes and of broader political events. However, as also shown, these tend to be interpreted through the lens of the ethnic habitus that the children have already internalized. History and politics are interpreted, therefore, in a way that tends to confirm and explain their existing experiences. It is this, therefore, that tends to consolidate the children's ethnic habitus further as it becomes built upon a growing range of experiences and detailed knowledge.

Finally, it is by this age that children's widening experiences also alert them to some of the complexities of the situation around them. Most notably, while their levels of prejudice and/or sense of fear towards the other side does not seem to have diminished and nor does the strength of the association they have with their own community, they are more willing to recognize the contradictions within their own views. Thus, there is an acceptance that not all of those from the other community are 'bad'. Indeed, some of the children may know and possibly have developed a friendship with a children from that community. However, the power of the ethnic habitus at this age is clearly evident. While some of the children may hold these more positive beliefs, they are still resigned to what they regard as the inevitability of segregation. The social divisions that surround them have therefore become truly internalized in many of these children as they cannot envisage a situation where integration would be practical or possible. Segregation is all they have experienced and thus all they know. It is thus at the heart of their ethnic habitus.

## **4. Case study two: children living relatively free from sectarian violence**

The diverse range of experiences that children have of the conflict in Northern Ireland and the dangers of attempting to generalize about all children was a point stressed in the introduction to this report. The reality of these differences in experience will now be demonstrated in this chapter when focusing on the children in the second case study. As will be seen, while they may live in the same city as the children of the previous chapter, they inhabit a very different social world. These children live in a relatively affluent, middle class area largely free from sectarian tensions and violence. They are therefore located in a very different field of relations that then tends to influence and shape the development of their ethnic habitus in very different ways.

To aid comparison, the case study will follow the same structure as the previous one. It will therefore begin with a brief outline of the field of relations within which these children are located before then examining the experiences and perspectives of 3-4, 7-8 and 10-11 year olds in turn.

### **4.1 The absence of locality**

It will be recalled from the last chapter that locality tended to play a pivotal role in the experiences and perspectives of the children in the first case study. Their immediate local area provided their main source of experience and point of reference. Their emerging sense of identity and thus their ethnic habitus tended therefore to be constructed around a notion of territory and a strong attachment to their local neighbourhood. Perhaps the most stark contrast between these children and the children that provide the focus for this second case study is that locality had very little relevance or meaning to them. As will be seen, their field of relations tended not to be defined geographically. Rather, the much greater social and economic mobility that characterize this group meant that their extended family were likely to at least live in different parts of the city and, more likely, to live elsewhere in the region or in Britain or Ireland. There was an absence, therefore, of the type of familial sense of belonging to the local area that the other children felt.

Moreover, for these children, their social activities also tended not to be geographically defined. The greater resources that the children's parents had access to meant that they were able to attend a variety of social clubs, play

groups and activities dotted around the city. In this sense, anecdotal evidence suggested that parents would sometimes ‘complain’ about how they spent half of their lives acting as a ‘taxi service’ for their children. This increased sense of mobility and the diversity that came with it was also reflected in the nurseries and schools that these middle class children attended. Because of the good reputation that these nurseries and schools had gained, some children were more likely to travel a little farther to attend with a significant minority traveling from various parts of Belfast and one or two making 30 mile round trips. The schools themselves also had a more multicultural influence. The nurseries, for example, included minority ethnic children who did not speak English as a first language and several others who were bi-lingual.

Within this context, the immediate local area within which the children lived had much less significance to them. Most children were not allowed to play outside in the streets at this age. Moreover, the larger houses and the gardens that accompanied them meant that families tended to be more spatially distant from one another. The local neighbourhoods that these children lived in were free from flags, murals and painted kerbstones. The leafy suburban streets gave no indication of whether an area was Catholic or Protestant. As a result, the local area was simply the place where children actually lived. It tended to have little salience to them and exerted very little influence over their lives and thus their emerging attitudes and identities. As will now be seen, their frames of reference were typically much broader both geographically and socially.

## **4.2 3-4 year olds**

Given the very different field of relations that these young children are located in it is not surprising to find that no incidents were observed during the time spent in these nurseries of the conflict impacting upon children’s play. Indeed there was nothing in their play that would indicate that these children lived in Belfast. More generally, they had much less awareness of the key cultural events and symbols associated with the divisions in Northern Ireland and certainly had not developed the preferences for these that their counterparts in the first case study had. As already stated, they had very little exposure to these with none being present in their local areas. Also, at the ages of three and four, these children’s experiences were largely mediated through their families and as will be seen from the discussions below, they were generally unlikely to be introduced to these cultural markers or symbols by family members. Indeed, and as will also be seen, attempts to locate and explain particular items that they were shown reflected their wider social experiences.

By way of comparison, it is worth returning to the three key themes discussed in relation to the three and four year olds in the previous case study – Celtic and Rangers, flags and Orange Marches – and looking, in turn, at these children’s awareness and knowledge of each.

### **Celtic and Rangers**

While the wearing of Ranger and Celtic scarves, tops, hats and jewelry was common among the children in the previous case study, this was absent in these nurseries. Interestingly, only two children were observed wearing any shirts associated with sport and these were both Belfast Giants tops (an Ice Hockey team with cross-community support). Football, in general, appeared to be a much less significant part of these children’s lives. When shown the Celtic and Rangers football shirts, many did not even recognize them as football shirts and only on one occasion was a child able to actually name the team associated with one of them. This is illustrated in the following discussion with Roger (Protestant) that was fairly typical of the children’s responses:

*Researcher:* Do you know what football team it is?

*Roger:* No

*Researcher:* It’s Celtic, have you heard of them?

*Roger:* No

*Researcher:* OK what about this one?

*Roger:* Celtic?

*Researcher:* No they’re called Rangers have you heard of them?

*Roger:* Power Rangers! [*fantasy cartoon characters*]

Even where a child was able to associate the shirts with football, they tended to mis-identify them as the following comments from Paul (*Catholic*) indicate:

*Researcher:* Do you know what this is?

*Paul:* Is it Man United?

*Researcher:* No it’s a team called Celtic, have you heard of them?

- Paul:* No
- Researcher:* OK what about this one?
- Paul:* Man United?
- Researcher:* No this one is called Rangers, have you heard of them before?
- Paul:* No
- Researcher:* Do you know anybody who supports Celtic or Rangers?
- Paul:* Gareth supports Spurs

As shown above, the children's frames of reference, even at this age, appeared to be much wider than their counterparts in the previous case study. This is certainly shown in the following comments by Frank (Catholic) when also asked about the football shirts:

- Researcher:* Do you know what team it is?
- Frank:* Erm...no
- Researcher:* It's Celtic have you heard of them?
- Frank:* Yeah [*uncertainly*] I like Barcelona
- Researcher:* Really is that who you support?
- Frank:* I've been to Barcelona, it's a part of Spain

## **Flags**

A very similar picture also emerged in relation to the children's awareness and knowledge of flags. Given the absence of flags in their local neighbourhoods, the children had not developed an association with or a predisposition to liking one particular flag as the other children had. Rather, their preferences for flags tended to be based simply on the colour, with the majority of Catholic and Protestant children preferring the British Union Jack because of its bright red and blue colours. And, as before, when asked where they saw the two flags and what they knew about them, the children's answers tended to reflect their much wider frame of reference. This can be seen from the following comments taken from separate interviews with Roger and Aaron (both Protestant) and Cora and Charlotte (both Catholic):

- Roger:* Oh yes I have [seen it] at the rugby
- Researcher:* Very good, why do people bring flags to the rugby?
- Roger:* To cheer [*waves flag and cheers*]
- Researcher:* [.....] Now I have a different flag, have you seen this one before?
- Aaron:* [nods]
- Researcher:* Where did you see this one?
- Aaron:* On boat
- Researcher:* And where did you see [this flag]?
- Cora:* In Strasbourg
- Researcher:* Very good, when were you in Strasbourg?
- Cora:* When I met Sophia my cousin
- Researcher:* And have you seen this [*Union Jack*] before?
- Charlotte:* At football
- Researcher:* Who was playing football?
- Charlotte:* People were holding it and doing this [*waves flag*]
- Researcher:* Very good, and what about this one [*Tricolour*]. Have you seen it before?
- Charlotte:* Yes I saw that one but I saw the other one [Union Jack] in our country
- Researcher:* Where did you see this one?
- Charlotte:* In France

### **Orange marches**

Finally, given the significance of Orange Marches in Northern Ireland, it was not surprising to find that a greater number of these children were able to demonstrate awareness of these. For a significant proportion, particularly the Protestant children, they were also able to talk about their direct experiences

of being taken along to watch them. This can be seen in the following discussion with Leo (Protestant):

*Researcher:* Very good, what else can you tell me about bands?

*Leo:* There's a big parade

*Researcher:* Did you go and watch it?

*Leo:* Yes, but do you know what? There was Police on their motorbikes and they kept driving past and we were trying to see the band and we couldn't see the band [*annoyed*]

*Researcher:* Oh dear

*Leo:* And there were lots of people trying to see...we were trying to get up with the bands to see them

*Researcher:* Were you walking?

*Leo:* No we were in our car and we should have let you see what happened

A similar response was also found in conversation with Aaron (also Protestant):

*Researcher:* A band. Why do you think it's a band?

*Aaron:* Me see one before

*Researcher:* Where did you see one before?

*Aaron:* Erm ...

*Researcher:* Who took you to see them?

*Aaron:* My daddy, my mummy, my [*inaudible*] and me

*Researcher:* Very good. Did you watch them?

*Aaron:* [*nods*]

*Researcher:* What did they do?

*Aaron:* They they ... march

*Researcher:* Good, what else did they do?

*Aaron:* They [*pretends to bang and covers ears*]

*Researcher:* Oh they were noisy?

*Aaron:* [nods]

As with the working class three and four year olds in the previous case study, these children tended to be attracted by the noise and colourful nature of the parades. While the Catholic middle class children tended to have less direct experience of Orange Marches than their Protestant counterparts, they nevertheless tended to talk positively about them. None of the Catholic children expressed any negative nor prejudiced attitudes towards Orange Marches. As the discussion with Ciara (Catholic) illustrates, she is very much attracted to what she regards as the theatrical nature of the marches:

*Ciara:* They're ...marching bands

*Researcher:* Very good, how did you know that?

*Ciara:* Because I saw them before in the circus

*Researcher:* Really, what were they doing in the circus?

*Ciara:* There was funny clowns .. and the clown fell off the bicycle and he fell off the back

*Researcher:* And did you see men like this at the circus?

*Ciara:* No

*Researcher:* So have you seen marching bands before?

*Ciara:* Yes

*Researcher:* Where did you see them?

*Ciara:* Outside my house

*Researcher:* Were you watching them?

*Ciara:* Yes

*Researcher:* Very good, do you like them?

*Ciara:* I was inside my gate

*Researcher:* And they walked past?

*Ciara:* Yes they were outside on the road

*Researcher:* Did you like watching them?

*Ciara:* Yes ... it was too loud, I put my hands over my ears

[laughter]

For other children, however, while they demonstrated some awareness of the marches they tended to show much less interest. This can be seen, for example, in the discussion with Helena (Protestant):

*Researcher:* Do you know who these are?

*Helena:* Gentlemen

*Researcher:* Gentlemen, why do you call them that?

*Helena:* I don't know

*Researcher:* What do you think they're doing?

*Helena:* Marching

*Researcher:* Why do you say that?

*Helena:* Because they're in a line

*Researcher:* Very good, and do you see these things around their necks. Have you ever seen anybody wearing these?

*Helena:* No, what are they?

*Researcher:* They just wear them when they go marching. Have you ever been to see people marching?

*Helena:* No. What time is it?

This general lack of interest in the Orange Marches as such can also be seen in the discussion with Liam (Catholic):

*Researcher:* Now what can you see in this photograph?

*Liam:* Marching

*Researcher:* Very good, how do you know they're marching?

*Liam:* Because they are

*Researcher:* Have you seen them before?

*Liam:* I saw them on the news ... and we were on the news! [*excited*]

*Researcher:* Why were you on the news?

*Liam:* Because...mummy saw us on the news

*Researcher:* Very good, where you marching?

*Liam:* No!

*Researcher:* Have you seen anybody marching?

*Liam:* Soldiers go marching, and the army

*Researcher:* Very good, how did you know that?

*Liam:* Because

*Researcher:* So do you like these marchers here?

*Liam:* Yeah [*not very interested*]

## **Conclusions**

Overall, it is clear that the sectarian violence and the tensions that exist within Northern Ireland tend to have very little impact upon the lives of these children at this age. Their social worlds – and the field of relations that constitute it – are very distinct and different from the children discussed in the previous case study. These three and four year olds have very little exposure to the main cultural markers and symbols associated with their respective communities. Moreover, their general experiences, even at this age, tend to be much more widely focused and diverse. It is interesting that when these children are asked where they have seen Celtic or Rangers shirts or the Irish Tricolour and British Union Jack flags, for example, they rarely mention having seen them locally in Belfast but are more likely to associate them with wider events such as rugby matches and cities and countries abroad. The only real exception to this is in relation to Orange Marches where the children (especially the Protestant children) were able to recognize these and many tended to have some knowledge and experience of them. However, as opposed to the children in the previous case study where a division of attitudes tended to exist with Catholic children tending to express negative attitudes and Protestant children positive ones, there were no such differences between the children here. While the Catholic children were slightly less likely to demonstrate awareness than the Protestant children, there appeared to be a similar mix of responses ranging from positive and excited ones to more ambivalent attitudes.

As can be seen, therefore, the type of embryonic ethnic habitus that was found to be emerging among the working class three and four year olds in the previous case study is largely absent from the children here. Their much wider frame of reference – as manifest through a more diverse field of relations both geographically and socially – tends at this age to actually undermine the development of such a habitus at this age and the type of ethnic preferences and cultural predispositions that are associated with it.

### 4.3 7-8 year olds

As mentioned in the last chapter, by the age of seven and eight, children are much more likely to be aware of and involved in a much greater social network. As was seen, for the children in the first case study at this age, this network was strictly defined by their local neighbourhood. Most of the children played outside their houses, in and around the local streets. All of their friends also lived locally as did many of their extended family. In contrast, the children here tended not to play outside in the local area and certainly had very little knowledge nor conception of the local area. To the extent that they were allowed to play outside, this was usually confined to playing in the garden as the following discussion with Rachel, Annette and Anna (all Catholic) illustrates:

*Rachel:* I can't play outside because I was getting a new kitchen and extension in and all my garden was all messy

*Researcher:* But what about in your street can you play there?

*Rachel:* I never play out there....only in the summer really do I play outside. I can't play on my bike because that's at our holiday house

*Researcher:* Do you go out and play in the street Annette?

*Annette:* No I go to the Park on my bike. I bring my mountain bike to Ballycastle and go down the hills

*Researcher:* So does no one ever go outside and play games in the street?

*All:* No

*Annette:* No can't

*Researcher:* Why not?

*Annette:* Mum doesn't allow us

*Researcher:* Why is that?

*Annette:* No because of all the plants and that, you can get caught in them. And my brothers were throwing worms at each other

[laughter]

*Researcher:* What about the pavement at the front of your house, can you play there?

*Annette:* Erm...no well there's glass on it

This, in turn, means that many of the children rarely come into contact with those in their local area, even those living in their own street. This is clearly illustrated by the comments made by Ralph and Owen (both Catholic):

*Researcher:* And what about the people who live there?

*Ralph:* Well I don't even know my next door neighbours yet cos it's just brand new in

*Researcher:* Do you know the people in your street?

*Owen:* No I never really see anybody

For many of these children, therefore, the immediate local area where they lived played little part in their day-to-day experiences and their emerging identities. The friendships that they were involved in tended not to be geographically-defined but, rather, involved friendships across the city. As the next conversation with Katie and Angela (both Protestant) demonstrates, this in turn relied heavily on parents to facilitate these:

*Researcher:* Do you all live near each other?

*All:* No.

*Researcher:* Would it be difficult for you to play together after school –or do you do that?

*Angela:* Yes, our Mums need to organise it.

*Researcher:* So you couldn't get there otherwise, Angela, could you not?

*Katie:* No.

*Angela:* I had a friend at this school and I could just walk up to her house because it was just down the road.

As will now be seen, it is in this context that the children develop a very particular view of the violence and conflict – one that is viewed from a distance and that, consequently, tends to be quite incomprehensible to them.

### **Perspectives on the violence and paramilitaries**

The majority of these children had no direct experience of the violence. The most direct way it tended to impact upon them was in relation to interrupting their journeys across the city. As the following discussion with Angela and Denise illustrates:

*Denise:* I don't know anything but my Daddy goes to collect rent and he goes down with me and I see these paintings of bad people shooting.

*Researcher:* Really, and do you know why they're there?

*Denise:* I think it's a still warning. It might just be a warning.

*Researcher:* What would it be a warning about?

*Denise:* Bad people.

*Researcher:* Right, Denise yeah.

*Angela:* I was coming home once in the car and there was this club of boys and they were looking like they were going to fight and so we had to go half way round the town to get home. Because Mummy told me why cos she said that they looked like they were going to fight and they could just like want to take our car and they would throw us out and all. Dad said, when we got home, when we told him, he had saw some bricks when he went on Monday

and he thought, he said they might have been throwing bricks.

*Researcher:* This was last Monday was it?

*Angela:* Yeah.

*Researcher:* Yeah and so was it kind of scary when you were in the car with your Mum?

*Angela:* Yeah.

A similar experience was recounted by Justin, Jeanette and Amy (all Catholic) in the following discussion:

*Justin:* There's very bold boys

*Researcher:* What do they do?

*Justin:* They throw bottles/

*Jeanette:* Yes and once we got caught because we were going out/

*Justin:* /and they set a car on fire/

*Jeanette:* /We were going to our granny's and the way we normally go boys had made fire right across the road to the other side and we went the other and we got stuck the other way as well. But we did get there

*Researcher:* Why had they made a fire?

*Jeanette:* I don't know

*Researcher:* And who were they throwing bottles at?

*Jeanette:* At cars because my mum got hit by a stone in her car

*Researcher:* Would that happen in your street or near your street?

*All:* No! [*shocked*]

*Jeanette:* No it was on the Ormeau Road I think

*Amy:* Yes they build fires on that road

Violence is therefore something that generally happens at a distance and it is usually avoided. Moreover, and as the last few comments illustrate, tends to be associated with particular areas in Belfast – a theme to be returned to shortly.

Because the children's role is typically limited to one of spectator – and even then at some distance – it is not surprising to find that they have very limited knowledge or understanding of what is going on. All they tend to hear about is isolated incidents of violence often with no context or explanation. Distinctions between paramilitary and criminal violence and between Loyalist and Republican organisations are generally lost and all that is left are 'evil men' and 'terrorists' bent on causing harm. As Paul, Sam and Peter (all Protestant) illustrate in their conversation:

*Researcher:* Would you like to be a policeman when you grow up?

*All:* No.

*Paul:* You'd get shot.

*Researcher:* Really? Is it still dangerous do you think?

*Peter & Paul:* Yes.

*Researcher:* Do you think has it got any better?

*Peter & Paul:* No.

*Sam:* I watched a fireman programme last night and it is really hard to put out car fires because people are throwing bottles and bricks at them.

*Peter:* And bombs too.

*Researcher:* Really – and why are they doing that Sam do you think?

*Sam:* Because they want the car to burn down.

*Researcher:* Oh dear – and why do they want to do that.

*Peter:* They're just evil.

*Paul:* They're just very, very bad.

[...]

*Researcher:* And what do you think of people who do things like that?

*Sam:* Very, very, very cruel.

For the most part, the children simply gained their information about the violence secondhand, mainly through family and friends and also through watching television. The following conversation with Matthew and Daniel (both Protestant) illustrates this and shows how they simply use the term 'terrorist' to describe those involved rather than attempt to associate them with a particular group:

*Matthew:* I saw this man and he's a terrorist and he shoots people and he shot a man in the head.

*Researcher:* Where was this Matthew?

*Matthew:* And he started kicking and punching him.

*Researcher:* Where was this Matthew?

*Matthew:* It's on my television.

*Researcher:* You saw it on a television.

*Matthew:* He started kicking and punching him.

*Researcher:* And the man was, what did you say the man was, a terrorist?

*Matthew:* Yeah, terrorists are dead now.

*Researcher:* Yeah, terrorists are what?

*Matthew:* Terrorists. [...] They have bands over their head.

*Daniel:* Hats over their head.

*Matthew:* Yeah, they (*can't make out*)

*Daniel:* Yeah, wee holes cut in their eyes.

*Matthew:* Yeah, like this here and there's black, black hats all over their face.

When the children did actually name a particular group this tended mainly to be the IRA. This is evident, for example, in the following discussion with Justin, Jeanette and Amy again (all Catholic). As can also be seen, they seem to have

no awareness of any other paramilitary organisation. The children are discussing the events of September 11th:

*Justin:* Bin Laden! Did he really cause it?

*Researcher:* That's what they think

*Justin:* They are bad boys

*Researcher:* There are bad boys here too isn't there?

*Justin:* The IRA!

*Researcher:* What do you know about them?

*Justin:* They're a bad army, my mum never lets me say the IRA [*laughs*]

*Researcher:* Really?

*Justin:* They're always called letters those people

*Researcher:* Do you know any other ones called after letters?

*Jeanette:* Erm...

*Justin:* No I don't know

*Researcher:* Had you heard of the IRA before?

*Jeanette:* No...but I know a shop called letters?

*Amy:* Yes JJB Sports and JD's

The fact that Justin's mother does not appear to allow him to even mention the name of the IRA suggests that it is not a topic that is encouraged for discussion at home. In spite of this, it is clear that many of the children are becoming aware of some of the key political events happening around them. However, possibly because of the lack of opportunity to discuss these events, as the following discussion with Denise and Amanda (both Protestant) illustrates, it tends to be extremely limited and often confused. Denise begins by making reference to the recent release of the Loyalist prisoner, Johnny Adair (nicknamed 'Mad Dog'):

*Denise:* I heard Bad Dog's out of prison now.

*Researcher:* Did you? Is that his nickname? Bad Dog is it or Mad Dog?

*Denise:* Bad Dog I think.

*Researcher:* What's his real name?

*Denise:* Don't know. But he was in prison for a long time.  
But he's out of prison now.

*Amanda:* 7 years, no 10 years.

*Denise:* But he's served his time, he's served his time in  
prison.

*Amanda:* 20 years, he stayed in prison for 20 years and he  
was allowed to.

[...]

*Denise:* He's served his time and I've been getting these  
odd feelings that he's not going to get back in  
prison. But if he's still doing bad things he will be  
back in prison.

*Researcher:* Yeah and do you think he's going to do bad things?

*Denise:* Yeah. [...] It's hard, you know, to come out and say  
I'm not going to do bad things anymore.

*Amanda:* It's hard to do it because he knows that his name's  
called Bad Dog and he might try and follow his  
name and try and be Bad Dog again instead of  
being Good Dog.

*Researcher:* Yeah so should we change his name Amanda?

*Amanda:* Yeah.

The overall picture emerging in relation to the children at this age, therefore, is that the violence tends to have little impact upon their lives. Essentially, it is something that is going on in the background that they can choose whether to take notice of or simply to avoid altogether. Given that their nearest direct experience of it is when they are forced to take detours to avoid certain areas, the children are beginning to develop a perspective that tends to associate the violence with specific places. As can be seen from the discussion with Jenny and Amy (both Catholic), these places in turn tend to become pathologised:

*Jenny:* Near my grannies house I find that there's all skips around there.

[...]

*Amy:* You know whenever I drive through places that have graffiti I just think [*shivers*] and you can see children running about everywhere and they're quite cheeky.

*Researcher:* Would you like to live there?

*Amy:* No way!

*Researcher:* Why do people write graffiti do you think?

*Amy:* I don't know.

[...]

*Researcher:* And the children who live in places with graffiti are cheeky?

*Amy:* Yeah all those places with graffiti have cheeky children.

A similar view can be found in the discussion with Natalie and Katie (both Protestant). The following discussion is also interesting for two further reasons. First, it indicates the role of their parents in influencing their attitudes. Given their lack of direct experience, and thus emotional investment in what is going on, they tend to be more willing to accept their parents' perspectives. Second, the quote also demonstrates that while the children have very little knowledge of events in Northern Ireland, this is beginning to contrast with a growing appreciation of events elsewhere in the world, even if they are still a little confused at this age:

*Natalie:* Some of the parts of Belfast like North and East have been fighting and there have been some murders and stuff. People died and/

*Katie:* /And people's robbing people sometimes and stealing really valuable stuff.

[...]

*Researcher:* Why is that happening?

*Natalie:* I don't know. They just, I think that there are these baddie groups who just think maybe, Mummy says that it's money is the cause of all the evil and those people maybe don't have much money and some people are saying, if you go round murdering and making car crashes and really badly injuring then we will pay you loads of money and they think "yippee! money, money, money, money." And that's why they're doing it.

*Researcher:* And you think that's why they're doing it? Jade, have you ever heard anything about that, about the fighting?

*Jade:* Well I heard that this war in Africa.

*Researcher:* And did you ever hear about what Natalie was talking about in North Belfast?

*Jade:* [...] I think that African people fought Northern Ireland.

*Researcher:* African people fought Northern Ireland? Do you? [...]

*Natalie:* Once, back, just two months before my birthday they were talking about the Twin Towers collapsing and Afghanistan attacking America and then now I'm hearing that some people are attacking Afghanistan, the good people instead of the bad people. And the good people aren't getting enough food and some of them are dying.

### **The development of Protestant and Catholic identities**

In contrast to the children in the previous case study, the violence and the divisions associated with it did not tend to influence the development of an ethnic habitus among these children. As has been seen, they were too socially and spatially removed from the violence for it to have any significant effect in their lives at this age. However, this does not mean that they were not beginning to develop an awareness of the existence of two main communities and of the fact that they tend to be a member of one of these. Many of the

cultural symbols and events that exist and which the children are increasingly coming into contact with tend to be clearly associated with one community or another. As the children are being introduced to some of these and develop preferences for them, so too do they begin to recognise that this locates them within one community as opposed to the other. One of the most obvious examples of this at this age can be found in relation to football. Here, Aidan and Kieran (both Catholic) have been talking about how they support Celtic. However, as can be seen, they are aware of the divisions that exist and how supporting Rangers is associated with being Protestant (and thus, by implication, is different from what they are, as Celtic supporters):

*Aidan:* Rangers and Celtic just don't like each other

*Researcher:* Why is that?

[...]

*Aidan:* I think some people might support Rangers, Protestants. They live down the road from me

*Researcher:* What are Protestants? ...What does it mean to be a Protestant?

[...]

*Kieran:* You know those badges Mara [*teaching assistant*] gave us? They are for Protestants. That's a wee badge of Protestants.

*Researcher:* Why do you think that?

*Kieran:* Because they wear badges

*Researcher:* I think that was a little badge from Mara's home town.

[....]

*Aidan:* I know where the Protestants live you go along my street and then keep going and then go along [...] the street and keep going and it's just there. I know one of them

*Researcher:* Do they go to a different school?

*Aidan:* Yes

*Researcher:* Do you know why, why don't they come here?

*Aidan:* I don't know

As can be seen, the basis of an ethnic habitus is evident among some of these children. However, it would seem to be based simply upon a recognition and an acceptance of difference rather than reflecting any negative or prejudiced attitudes. This is also evident in the following discussion with Daniel, Steven and Matthew (all Protestant). Again, they appear to have learnt and internalised the fact that not only do they support Rangers but that this means that they cannot then also support Celtic. Moreover, while they are aware of the antagonism that exists between the two, this is not something that they seem to associate themselves with:

*Daniel:* You're only allowed to support five teams.

*Researcher:* Really who said that?

*Daniel:* That's the way it is.

*Researcher:* And do you support five teams?

*Daniel:* Yeah – Rangers, Manchester United, I don't know  
[...] Never Celtic!

*Researcher:* Never Celtic?

*Daniel:* No.

*Researcher:* Why would you never support Celtic?

*Daniel:* If you support Rangers you never support Celtic.

*Researcher:* Why do you think that is?

[...]

*Daniel:* They fight, I don't actually know why they fight.

*Matthew:* I know why they fight.

*Researcher:* Do you Matthew? Why?

*Matthew:* Cos that's the way it happened when they went to score in the nets.

Finally, only rarely were the children found to express negative attitudes towards those from the other community. One of the only examples is provided

below with Danny and Ralph (both Catholic) who are discussing an Orange Parade. As mentioned before, given that many cultural events and symbols are explicitly associated with one community or the other then it is not surprising that some of these children will begin to pick this up as well as some of the negative attitudes that go with it, as in this example:

*Ralph:* Yeah we got stuck in the traffic once because of a parade

*Researcher:* What kind of parade was it?

*Ralph:* It was a Loyalimalist [*cannot pronounce 'Loyalist'*] parade

*Researcher:* What kind?

*Ralph:* A Loyalimalist

*Danny:* Bad people

*Ralph:* Bad people in a parade and they try and kill people, they had guns and all

*Researcher:* Guns?

*Ralph:* Yeah

[...]

*Researcher:* So why did you think they were bad people?

*Ralph:* I thought that they were going to shoot at our car

*Researcher:* Why?

*Ralph:* Because one of them looked at us with a gun and I was saying 'please do not shoot, please do not shoot'

*Researcher:* Are you sure they had guns?

*Ralph:* Yes

*Danny:* Yeah I've seen them in the red coats with guns walking like that [marches]

## **Conclusions**

Overall, by the age of seven and eight, an emerging ethnic habitus can also be found among some of these children. In contrast with their counterparts in the previous case study, however, it is not one that is based upon and shaped by the violence and sectarian tensions that exist. Indeed, for the vast majority of these children, the violence is only something that occurs in the background of their lives. Interestingly, little distinction is made between the types of violence or those involved. It is therefore something that simply occurs elsewhere, in 'bad areas' and is caused by 'bad people'.

The source of the emerging ethnic habitus for these children is therefore elsewhere. More specifically, it can be found in the fact that many of the cultural events and symbols that the children are becoming exposed to tend to be directly associated with one community or the other. Thus, by default, as the children are introduced to and come to develop preferences for particular events and cultural markers they are also inevitably beginning to learn about the divisions that exist and the fact that they are located on one side of these. As seen in relation to some of the discussions, the fact that some of these children have recognised that they have fallen on one side or the other seems to just be taken-for-granted by them. Even at this age, it seems to be accepted simply a fact of life. However, as opposed to the other children, the ethnic habitus of these children tends simply to be based upon difference and does not, except for a few isolated cases, involve negative or prejudiced attitudes at this age.

## **4.4 10-11 year olds**

### **Social class and the ethnic habitus**

The core processes identified in relation to the seven and eight year olds can be seen to be developing further with this older age group. By the time these children have reached the ages of ten and eleven, the experiences they have gained via living in a relatively affluent, middle class community tends to provide an increasingly influential lens through which they come to make sense of the violence. Generally, they tend to have firmly disassociated themselves from the violence which tends to occur in clearly defined, 'bad' (working class) areas. As Richard (Protestant) indicates:

*Richard:* My Mum keeps locking the doors of the car any time we are in a bad area. I think she's worried because one time she got her handbag stolen – this guy was pretending to sell newspapers and he opened the car door and said: "Do you want to buy a newspaper?" and snatched her bag and ran away.

As before, little attempt is made to distinguish between the activity of general criminals or paramilitary groups or even, within this, between different paramilitary organisations. The general tendency is simply to label particular areas as 'bad' and to associate them with all types of violent and criminal behaviour. In the case of David, these perceptions can sometimes be reinforced through the experiences of others. This can also be seen in the discussion below with Luke and Steve (both Catholic). Here, Luke is talking about the shop his mother owns in an interface area:

*Luke:* My mum owns a shop there, it's dangerous

*Researcher:* Why?

*Luke:* No matter what they have it's ruined. She got a big new shutter put on and they burnt a hole in it..and they were poking big poles through it

[others laugh]

[...]

*Luke:* Yeah, it's crazy....red, white and blue and UVF everywhere

*Researcher:* So why do people up here not do that?

[...]

*Luke:* Well I think people up here all more politer than further on down and that's what makes the difference

*Researcher:* When you say 'more politer' what do you mean?

*Steve:* Like better/

*Luke:* /Like more sensible/

*Steve:* /We know how to look after things

This last quote is important as it illustrates the development and consolidation of these children's attitudes and how they are now becoming internalised as part of their ethnic habitus. The awareness that many of the seven and eight year old children had of 'bad areas' has now developed for these older children into a more deeply-held sense of being quite different from those who live in such areas. In this way, the children are developing and internalising a sense of identity that reflects their social (in this case middle class) background and that constructs themselves as being part of a group that is essentially different from those living in (Protestant and Catholic) 'bad' areas. To this extent, for these children it is an ethnic habitus where social class background rather than religion is the more salient defining feature. This is also evident in the comments of Connie, Clara and Sarah (all Catholic) who are discussing the popular regional comedy television series: 'Give My Head Peace'. Here they mention Uncle Andy, who represents a bigoted, working class loyalist character:

*Researcher:* Who is your favourite person on it?

*All:* Uncle Andy!

*Researcher:* [*laughter*] I thought you might say that, he is class!

*Connie:* [*broad Belfast accent*] Uncle Andy!

*Sarah:* It's a laugh

*Researcher:* Do you think it's like real life?

*Connie:* Not our real life anyway [*laughter*]

*Clara:* No thank goodness!

This is not to say that religion has lost all significance for these children. Rather, the interplay between their social class and religious background tends to produce a more complex range of identities. By this age, all the children are aware of the divisions that exist between Protestants and Catholics. However, at one end of the spectrum, there are those who see such divisions as being related to particular groups living in certain areas and is thus something they

wish to rise above. This is certainly the case for Luke and Gerry (both Catholic) as can be seen, who recognise that these religious divisions exist but that they are nothing to do with them:

*Gerry:* It's all a waste of time really

*Researcher:* What is?

*Gerry:* All this talk about religion

*Luke:* I know...I mean who cares really/

*Gerry:* /I know it doesn't really have anything to do with us

This is also a sentiment shared by Lawrence and Neil (both Protestant) in their discussion below:

*Neil:* You see people fighting say Protestants fighting against Catholics it's just a different way of praising. It doesn't really make much difference, you know we are all just a different religion. Just because someone has a different religion doesn't meant that you can't be friends with them.

*Researcher:* Yeah Neil

*Lawrence:* Some of the parents are bringing up some of the children to like hate say ...Protestants are being brought up to hate the Catholic. So sometimes it's the parents fault maybe.

*Researcher:* Do you think there is anything you can do about that?

*Lawrence:* The parents could go to like counselling and stop them being aggressive because people have a different religion

For children towards this end of the spectrum, no attempt is made to identify with one side or the other; all violence and divisions are bad. However, towards the other end of the spectrum, while violence is still regarded negatively by the children there is a recognition and acceptance that they are

on one side or the other. This can be seen in the following discussion between Matthew, Steve and Gareth (all Catholic). Here, they are talking about football and their support for Celtic. While they recognise that religion should not have any bearing on this, it is clear that they have nevertheless simply internalised the fact that it has:

- Steve:* I've been to two Celtic matches/  
*Matthew:* /I went to the one in Derry/  
*Steve:* /I went to Celtic versus Kilmarnock and Celtic versus Rangers  
*Researcher:* So does no one like Rangers then?  
*All:* No! No!  
[laughter]  
*Steve:* I wonder why? [said sarcastically]  
*Gareth:* Yeah [in agreement]  
*Researcher:* Well why not?  
*Gareth:* Yeah as if! [meaning 'as if any of us would']  
*Steve:* Because they're/  
*Gareth:* /Not as good as Celtic [laughter]  
*Steve:* Because technically we're not their religion/  
*Matthew:* /And they wear blue and I don't like blue and they're not our religion  
*Steve:* Yeah red, white and blue  
*Researcher:* What does religion have to do with football?  
*Gareth:* Well that's just the way it is/  
*Matthew:* /I know it's not right but that's the way it is/  
*Gareth:* Well Celtic was founded in Ireland you see and the Irish Republicans/  
*Steve:* /So if you're found in a Celtic bar wearing a Rangers top you'd be dead [laughter and agreement] Cos that's what people are like, that's what people are like. I think it's so ... eh.../

*Matthew:* I mean we all have a right to live here but/

*Steve:* /But people don't really take action and help and all that we don't think it's a good thing

*Matthew:* It has been like that for a long time

*Steve:* I know the world would be better without it

There are contradictory messages in the discussion above, reflecting the tension between the significance of these boys' social class and religious backgrounds. On the one hand they set themselves apart from the religious divisions and tensions that exist and yet, on the other, clearly identify themselves as Catholic and also seem to also gain some enjoyment out of the rivalry that exists between Protestants and Catholics through football. The ability of religion to maintain a significant influence on the children's sense of identity and allegiance is also evident in the following discussion with Rod, John and Johnathan (all Catholic). Here they have been asked what politicians they know. As can be seen, they clearly distinguish between those that are 'their kind' and those that are not:

*Rod:* Gerry Adams

*John:* Er ... Bertie Ahearn

[*silence*]

*Jonathan:* Not Ian Paisley anyway!

[...]

*Researcher:* Why not Paisley?

*Jonathan:* Well I mean none of us have anything to say to anyone like him?

*Researcher:* Like him? What do you mean?

[*laughter*]

*Jonathan:* He's ...not our kind of politician

Overall, therefore, these children all seem to be aware of the divisions that exist between Catholics and Protestants at this age and also are aware of which tradition they are associated with. However, their ethnic habitus is

significantly mediated by their middle class backgrounds that tends to distinguish themselves from the violence and sectarian tensions that exist. Their identity is therefore one based upon a lifestyle and set of values that they tend to see as being 'above' and set apart from the conflict. For most of the children, therefore, no efforts are made to distinguish between different types of violence or between the different organisations that are engaged in it. They are all 'as bad as one another'.

The fact that these children live in a deeply divided society however means that they cannot escape the impact of religion completely. As stated, they all recognise that they are at least tacitly a member of one community or the other. The contradictions between being Protestant or Catholic but also regarding themselves as 'beyond' such divisions leads to a range of responses from the children as they attempt to negotiate these tensions. At one end of the spectrum, some children develop an ethnic habitus that seeks to deny the significance of religion altogether. For these children, they may be from one community or the other but, in reality, they stress how this does not matter to their lives. At the other end of the spectrum there are children who still disassociate themselves from the violence and sectarian tensions that exist but, nevertheless, have accepted their own identity as either Catholic or Protestant. While some seem to simply be resigned to this, others as has been seen are also developing a stronger sense of belonging and allegiance.

### **Political knowledge and awareness**

For some of the children, this attempt to disassociate themselves from the violence and accompanying divisions that exist can also be seen in relation to their attitudes to local news. As can be seen from the conversation with Jemma (Protestant), she is simply not interested in news about the violence:

*Researcher:* What about stuff about Northern Ireland – do you ever listen to news about Northern Ireland?

*Jemma:* Depends what it's about

*Researcher:* What do you mean Jemma?

*Jemma:* It's usually about violence and stuff, so ...

[...]

*Researcher:* So what do you do then?

*Jemma:* Turn it over because it's always about violence and stuff like that.

*Researcher:* Does that upset you?

*Jemma:* No – it's just I'm fed up with hearing it.

This is also a view shared by Neil (Protestant) in the following comments. Interestingly, it is not news as such that he finds boring but just news in relation to Northern Ireland:

*Researcher:* What sort of things would strike you about the news? Can you remember what was something interesting you heard recently, Neil?

*Neil:* Erm – nothing much. Just sometimes there's something that say, goes on in another country and I think well, that's quite interesting. Most of the stuff that happens in here is just – boring.

*Researcher:* Is it really?

*Neil:* Some of the stuff's quite boring but some things in other countries I think are quite interesting.

This tendency to avoid local news but show a growing awareness and interest in international affairs was found among a number of the children. In a separate discussion, Neil and his friends Lawrence and Mark (all Protestant) displayed limited knowledge of local events, other than those relating to the rivalries between Celtic and Rangers supporters. However, when they were asked whether people fight about anything else, other than football, they mention religion and show an awareness of a range of international examples:

*Researcher:* Do people do that [*fight*] about anything else?

*Mark:* Religion.

*Researcher:* How many examples can you think of that?

*Lawrence:* Here.

*Neil:* Israel –there's the Palestinians and Israel.

*Researcher:* Can you think of anywhere else?

*Lawrence:* Hitler when he killed all the Jews.

*Researcher:* Yeah, that's true. There are lots of examples.

*Mark:* Bin Laden would have done that too. That's why he decided to hijack the planes and knock the Twin Towers down.

*Researcher:* Do you think that was a religious thing?

*Neil:* It mightn't have been religious he maybe just hated Americans because they were getting so much money and Afghanistan then was really not that famous it was just another country.

*Lawrence:* Power [...] I think they are trying to get more power over other countries cause if it is like a wee small country and then they decide to overpower another country and then once they've overpowered that one they are all bound together as one big country in lots of different places.

*Researcher:* So you think power is at the bottom of it.

*Lawrence:* If they have more coal and oil it would be a more rich country and stuff.

The above discussion is useful as it demonstrates the ability of children at this age to have an awareness of a range of political events internationally and also the potential for them to discuss and develop an appreciation of the issues involved in these. In contrast, while most of the children were aware of particular events and incidents that have occurred locally – especially the violent and newsworthy ones – their understanding of these tended to be extremely limited. As the following discussion with Thomas, Philip and Michael (all Protestant) illustrates, while they are aware of the term 'sectarian' they have little understanding of what it means:

*Philip:* I don't know what it was but I heard something about a riot in North Belfast

*Researcher:* Did anybody else hear about that? Michael did you?

- Michael:* I just heard that people had started fighting them and throwing petrol bombs.
- Researcher:* Did you see anything or was this something that you heard?
- Philip:* I heard about it on the news.
- Researcher:* Who started it have you any idea? Thomas do you know anymore about it?
- Thomas:* It might have been a sectarian something
- Researcher:* Do you know what that means 'sectarian'? Have you talked about it?
- Thomas:* It has something to do with Northern Ireland's two groups. Like Rangers and Celtic.
- Researcher:* When you say sectarian what else would it cover
- Thomas:* I don't know I've only heard it at the football matches

This lack of understanding was recognised by some of the children who felt that they would benefit from being able to discuss some of the events more in school. This can be seen in the following discussion with Katrina, Jemma and Vicky (all Protestant). Here they were talking about what issues they would like to see covered in class:

- Katrina:* Whenever there was that violence at the school in Ardoyne, it would have been good to talk about that a bit more.
- Researcher:* Was there any talk about it at all?
- Katrina:* No. We talked about September 11, but that was with our old teacher.
- Vicky:* We also talked about it in November with our American teacher.
- [...]
- Researcher:* And do any of you know much about it – why it's going on or? ...

*Katrina:* It's about a Catholic road or a Protestant road or something and the school is Catholic and so all the Catholic children have to walk through the Protestant road to get to their school and they don't like them walking through and they want them to take a back route cos that's the Catholic route but they don't want to because its easier to go the Protestant road.

[...]

*Vicky:* It's kinda stupid because they believe in the same God, who was born on Christmas Day ... its just they have a different way of putting it.

*Researcher:* So do you think is it more than just religion; is there something else other than religion involved in it?

*Vicky:* I think like its Catholic and Presbyterian are sort of rivals sort of thing and they are sort of against reach other.

*Katrina:* And they kind of take any opportunity to beat each other up.

[...]

*Researcher:* How would you stop something like that happening? Anything you can do to help people to get on better together?

[...]

*Katrina:* You could have like centres or something where Catholic people and Protestant people could come together and some people who work there are Catholic and some people who work there are Protestant; so you are just in a place; and you'd have security guards and stuff, just in case they decide they want to fight each other. And they could do things like play games or something together.

The above discussion not only demonstrates how some children would welcome more help in school in being able to discuss and attempt to understand some of the significant events that surround them but it also shows how they are also capable of thinking through ideas and strategies aimed at promoting good relations. There is clearly scope for encouraging and facilitating discussions and work in class around these themes at this age. A point that will be returned to in the final chapter.

### **Cross-community contact**

Finally, some of the Catholic children talked about their experiences of cross-community schemes that their school had organised. As can be seen from the following, their experiences of going on trips with Thameshill and Riverview Primary School (a Protestant school located in a middle class area) tended to be extremely positive. However, this was not the case with the latest school they had been partnered with (Aston Primary School):

*Clara:* Thameshill were OK, I liked it when we were going on trips with them.

*Sarah:* Yeah I liked them.

*Clara:* I liked them if we were going on EMU trips with Thameshill instead of Aston [Primary School] it would be much better because Thameshill are really really nice.

*Connie:* Riverview [Primary School] were nice.

*Sarah:* Yeah I liked Riverview [*enthusiastic*] We done that with them in Year 5.

*Researcher:* So why did you like these other schools and not Aston?

*Sarah:* In P5 we had to do this big dance thing with Riverview and we got on really really well didn't we?

*Connie:* Yeah. But I don't have any problem with religion/

*Sarah:* /Neither do I/

For these girls, the problem with Aston Primary School was not one of religion as they stress. Indeed they were quite happy to mix with Protestants from Thameshill and Riverview. Rather, the problem they had with the children from Aston was that they were working class and from an area they associated with being 'bad'. As the following discussion with Gerry and John (both Catholic) also illustrates, they have a view of these children as 'rough' and different from themselves:

*Gerry:* Every time I've been out with Aston there has been something that happened, like one of them pushed and slapped me the last time

*Researcher:* Really?

*Gerry:* Yeah, and they kept stealing my hat on the bus

*Researcher:* Did you get chatting with any of them?

*John:* No you wouldn't, because ... they just act tough and ...you'd just end up backing down

*Researcher:* Why do you think they act tough?

*John:* It's just the way they be/

*Gerry:* It's to make them look cool

*John:* Yeah ... and they wear all these necklaces and big rings, golden ones and all/

*Gerry:* Yeah rings!

*John:* The only rings that I would like are the ones in Fresh Garbage [*an alternative clothes shop in the centre of Belfast*]

*Gerry:* The only I've saw and I liked was it was silver and it had a wee tiny eyeball on it

The way in which these children have constructed themselves as above the violence and sectarian divisions and thus as essentially different from the people who engage in this, as outlined earlier, is clearly evident in the above discussion. The tendency to pathologise the children from Aston Primary School as rough and criminal is also evident in the following discussion between Marie, Suzanne and Donna (all Catholic). Here they were talking about some of the children from Aston:

- Marie:* There was one [girl] called Linda, she was very nice.
- Suzanne:* Marie you always find nice people! ...on the first day I got stuck with this boy, you know for partners and he was like/
- Marie:* *[using really broad Belfast accent]* And they're all called things like 'Blackie, Punchie, Speedie' *[laughter]* Aren't they?
- Suzanne:* *[same accent]* Jimbo! *[laughter]* And the way they talked *[laughter]* And then there was this wee boy who wore a hood with a hat on top of it!
- Marie:* Oh yeah *[laughter]*. Maybe he put the hat on to keep his hood up! *[laughter]*.

The experiences of cross-community schemes that these children had as illustrated above, together with those of the children in the previous case study, do suggest that careful consideration needs to be given to the type and nature of the contact that is organised. This is something that will be considered in more detail in the final chapter.

## **Conclusions**

Overall, while they may live in the same city it is clear that these children inhabit a very different social world to their counterparts in the first case study. As has been seen, the field of relations in which they are located is not socially nor geographically bound in the same way as it was for the other children. For these children the notion of locality and their local neighborhood held very little significance for them. The local area was simply the place where they lived. They tended not to play outside nor to mix in any significant way with their immediate neighbours. Rather, the activities they engaged in and the relationships they had developed were spread across the city. The areas where they lived and most of the places they visited also tended to be free from the cultural markers and symbols of the divisions that existed in the city. They therefore had very little exposure to painted kerbstones, political murals and flags. Moreover, none of the children interviewed had had direct experience of the violence. The nearest they tended to come to this was being in a car that was forced to re-route its journey to avoid an area where violence was taking place.

With this in mind, the impact of the conflict on the lives and identities of these children was very different to their counterparts in the previous case study. Very little influence was detected among the three and four year olds. At that age, they had very little exposure to or awareness of any of the cultural markers and events associated with the two communities. No differences were noted between the Protestant and Catholic children in terms of their preferences for or predispositions towards particular symbols or events. The only exception to this was a greater awareness of Orange Marches among the Protestant children in comparison with the Catholic children. However, even here, the differences were just restricted to awareness. There were no differences between the two groups of children in relation to their attitudes towards these marches.

It was only with the second age group – the seven and eight year olds – that an awareness of the violence and of the divisions that are associated with it could begin to be detected. However, it was an awareness at a distance. For the vast majority of the children, the violence was simply something that happened in the background of their lives, somewhere else. The children had little knowledge and understanding of it and generally failed to make any distinctions either between the differing types of violence or of the differing groups engaged in it. The violence was therefore simply something that ‘bad people’ engaged in and was also something associated with particular, ‘bad areas’.

The ethnic habitus that was beginning to develop among the children at this age, therefore, was not related to the violence and sectarian tensions that existed as it was for the children in the first case study. Rather, it was based mainly in a growing awareness that many of the different events and activities that they engaged in tended to be associated with one community or another. In this sense, some of the children were simply taking on board and internalising the fact that they must be part of one community or the other on the basis that they, for instance, liked a particular football team or engage in a specific activity. While there was a growing recognition among some of the children that a division existed and that they tended to belong to one of the two main communities, this did not translate into the children either developing strong in-group preferences or, alternatively, negative attitudes and prejudices against the other community. It was simply being accepted as a natural and given part of their lives.

By the ages of ten and eleven, these emerging attitudes had developed further and had become consolidated. All of the children at this age were aware of the violence and of the divisions that existed between Catholics and Protestants. They were also aware of the fact that they belonged, at least tacitly, to one of the two communities. However, their ethnic habitus reflected a complex relationship between the effects of, in this case, their middle class and religious backgrounds. In terms of social class, the children had developed a distinct sense of identity that disassociated themselves from the violence and those who engaged in it. In terms of culture, lifestyle and attitudes on life, they saw themselves as very different to those who were influenced by and/or involved in the violence and sectarian tensions that existed. As before, little distinction was made within this by the children. Those involved in the violence – whether Catholic or Protestant – were equally culpable and labelled as ‘bad’ or ‘terrorist’. Indeed, as was seen, this tended to lead a number of the children to pathologise and develop negative stereotypical views on working class communities and children more generally, whatever their religion.

Within this overarching influence of social class, religion tended to have differing influences on the children. At one end of the spectrum, some children tended simply to take these general views further to argue that religion was not important to them. While they recognised that they were either Protestant or Catholic, these children strongly maintained that this did not effect their attitudes or behaviour. In contrast and at the other end of the spectrum, some children not only accepted that they were Catholic or Protestant but also tended to associate themselves and develop allegiances with their particular community. This did not generally tend to result in the development of negative and sectarian attitudes, however, but did result in the internalisation and acceptance of the fact that they belonged to one of the communities and that they were different from the other.

## 5. Conclusions and implications for practice

Overall, this study represents the first major attempt to map out the ways in which the conflict tends to impact upon the experiences and perspectives of children aged three to eleven. As such, it has provided important evidence in relation to the range of children's experiences and how some children's attitudes and identities typically tend to develop and change with age. The findings contained in this report certainly have significant implications for the future development of community relations work with children. This provides the focus for this final chapter.

Before looking in more detail at the key implications, however, it is worth reiterating two points about the foregoing case studies. First, the forms of ethnic habitus outlined for the two groups of children are only meant to reflect the general ways in which the children in these specific areas tend to develop their sense of ethnic identity. They represent, in other words, how these particular children *typically* learn to be Protestant or Catholic. These forms of ethnic habitus are not meant to be applied uniformly to each and every child in these areas. As one would expect, there is a certain amount of variation between the children within each area in terms of the nature and extent to which they have developed their sense of ethnic identity. All that has been offered here is the underlying trend that many of the children tend to share, to varying degrees, in relation to the ways in which they have come to see themselves as Catholic or Protestant.

Second, these two case studies only represent two accounts of what life is like for younger children growing up in Northern Ireland. Many children will probably find themselves located somewhere between these two extreme cases. Moreover, these two case studies should not be seen as entirely representative of the two ends of the spectrum. As has been pointed out, not all areas that continue to suffer from high levels of violence are like the type of urban areas outlined in the first case study. Each area will have its own unique history and particular social dynamics and sets of relationships. Similarly, not all areas that are relatively free from violence are necessarily affluent and middle class as those described in the second case study. Again, it could be that while a particular area has tended to avoid the direct effects of the conflict it suffers from relatively high levels of deprivation and/or harbours strong political (and possibly sectarian) sentiments. All that has been offered in this

study, therefore, is a detailed account of the experiences and perspectives of children from two specific types of background that are located towards opposite ends of the spectrum in relation to their experiences of the violence in Northern Ireland.

Given this latter point it would not be wise nor appropriate to attempt to generate a detailed list of guidelines and recommendations for community relations work with younger children on the basis of the findings of these two case studies. Children's experiences and needs will vary significantly from one area to another. What might be an appropriate strategy for one group of children may well be counterproductive, if not harmful, for another. However, it is possible to draw out a number of key principles that could provide the starting point for a more fundamental review of how we could begin to approach community relations work with younger children. There are six key principles that will be outlined below that have been derived from the findings of these two case studies. They are not meant to represent a definitive statement of what should be done but, rather, are simply meant to encourage dialogue and debate in this area. Should any or all of these principles be generally accepted then much work is still required in terms of how to translate them into practice and, equally importantly, how to interpret and apply them within particular local contexts.

- i) From the age of three, all children should be encouraged to explore a range of different cultural practices, events and symbols and to appreciate and respect diversity and difference.**

The early years represents an extremely important and formative period in children's lives. As we have seen, it is a time when they are rapidly becoming aware of their broader environment and are struggling to make sense of their increasingly diverse range of experiences and to organise them into a coherent framework. What the notion of the ethnic habitus has shown is that the frameworks that children form at this age tend to provide the foundations upon which their subsequent identities are built. The problem arises when these experiences are partial and limited. For the children in the first case study, for example, the nature and strength of the divisions that existed in their local areas meant that they were only being exposed to one set of cultural events and symbols. Even at the age of three, therefore, they were already internalising a preference and predisposition for those events and symbols

associated with their own community. As shown, these then formed the basis upon which some children progressively came to develop negative attitudes and prejudices about those from the other community.

It is worth stressing that this point is equally applicable to the children in the second case study as well. While they did not tend to develop the same type or level of negative attitudes as their counterparts in the first study, they did tend to grow up largely ignorant of the people and events around them. This, in turn, provided the foundations upon which some of them eventually came to develop negative and prejudiced attitudes towards children from deprived, working class areas.

Simply as part of a good, all-round education therefore, it is important that every opportunity is taken to increase children's exposure to and experience of as wide a range of cultural practices and events as possible. This is not meant to undermine or dilute the children's own identities but, rather, to ensure that they learn to appreciate and respect diversity and difference. In practical terms, this is something that already takes place in some preschool settings that have embraced a multicultural approach. What this study suggests, however, is that this needs to be extended to include a focus on some of the cultural symbols and events associated with the Catholic and Protestant communities. Fortunately, some work in this area is now beginning to be developed but much more is needed.<sup>7</sup>

- ii) From the beginning of Key Stage Two, children should be introduced to and encouraged to understand some of the key historical, political and social developments that have taken place in Northern Ireland.**

The evidence from this present study suggests that children are certainly capable of learning about and understanding elements of the politics and history of Northern Ireland from an early age. It is clear that at the ages of seven and eight, the children were already becoming aware of and actively exploring some of the key political events around them. By the ages of ten and eleven it is also evident that they have a considerable capacity to understand a range of issues relating to the history and politics of Northern Ireland. Again, and as highlighted through the two case studies, the problem at present is that children either tend to develop a partial and essentially one-sided

understanding of what is going on (as with the children in the first case study) and/or tend to be largely oblivious to the major local historical and political events altogether (as in the second case study).

While it is undoubtedly an extremely difficult task, it is therefore important that children are encouraged to develop a much better and more rounded appreciation of the key political, historical and social issues relating to their own society. Again, this is no more than what one would expect from a good, well-rounded education. The precise detail of what is taught will obviously depend upon the age of the children. Also, a great deal of thought and planning needs to go into how such material is delivered. Given the emphasis placed on the notion of the ethnic habitus there is always the danger that discussions of history and politics can simply be interpreted by the children from within their existing frameworks and thus possibly reinforce the attitudes they already have. A way needs to be found, therefore, for children to be introduced to local history and politics in ways that are exciting and challenging and that encourage children to actively consider and reflect upon their existing beliefs. While this may well be a challenge, the evidence from this study is that even at the ages of seven and eight, and with the right type of scaffolding and support, children are capable of dealing with these types of issues.

**iii) From around the age of seven, targeted conflict resolution work should be undertaken with children in particular areas.**

The two case studies have clearly shown that the violence and sectarian tensions that accompany it do not impact equally on all children. For some children in particular areas it tends to represent a significant aspect of their lives. For other children, it is merely something that occurs to other people, elsewhere. For these latter children, the type of cultural diversity work and political and social education advocated above could achieve much in increasing their awareness and understanding. However, for those living in the shadow of conflict this is unlikely to be sufficient. As was seen through the discussions with the children in the first case study, by the ages of seven and eight many have already developed relatively rigid and negative attitudes towards those from the other community. For these children a more focused conflict resolution approach is also required.

Practically, the way this is done will obviously depend upon the particular area concerned and should be sensitive to the specific experiences and needs of the children who live there. However, it could potentially include:

- encouraging children to discuss and explore their own experiences and attitudes and to think through and reflect upon any prejudices they may have;
- increasing their awareness and understanding of the negative effects of prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory behaviour on those subject to it; modelling out alternative and more positive ways for the children to deal practically with conflict and violence; and
- sustained and meaningful cross-community work (see below).

The evidence presented in relation to the seven and eight year old children in the first case study suggests that not only is such work appropriate with children with experiences such as these but given the level of sectarian prejudice that has already developed it is also necessary.

**iv) In areas characterised by significant levels of sectarian tensions and violence, any conflict resolution strategies need to be part of a broader set of community relations initiatives within the area.**

This principle is really an extension of and should go side-by-side with the previous one. Through the two case studies, the concept of ‘field’ has been used to show how children’s attitudes and identities are inextricably linked into and have come to reflect the particular environments within which they live and are growing up. As has been seen, these environments play a powerful role in shaping their experiences and providing the lens through which they come to interpret and make sense of events around them. This, in turn, has important implications regarding the challenges facing community relations strategies in terms of how they can be most effective and successful.

Most obviously, and as already pointed out, simple educational programmes aimed at increasing children’s awareness and understanding are likely to only be partially successful with regard to children who live in areas characterised by sectarian tensions and violence. As we have seen in relation to the children in the first case study, the negative attitudes and prejudices that the children

may have about those across the peaceline 'work'. In other words, they fit in and explain well the very real sense of threat and ever-present danger posed by members of that community that these children are living with. Given the risks that these children face, it is a completely rationale and appropriate response in such circumstances to develop an aversion and mistrust of anyone who comes from a different area.

The basic conclusion to draw from this is that in such circumstances children's attitudes are only likely to fundamentally change alongside changes to their experiences. On the one hand, this points to the fact that any community relations initiatives with children need to incorporate more than just awareness-raising lessons, important though these are. Initiatives that also aim to provide children with significant alternative experiences to effectively counter those they already have are likely to achieve more success. However, this means more than sporadically organised cross-community events. To effectively challenge the day-to-day experiences that the children already have, intervention programmes are needed that are consistent and long-term and that involve meaningful contact and relationships being forged between children from different backgrounds locally. This latter point is crucial. Organising cross community events with Protestant or Catholic children from a completely different area is unlikely to challenge the attitudes that children have of the Protestant or Catholic children that live directly across the peaceline.

On the other hand, recognising the relationship between children's attitudes and experiences suggests that limited progress will be made in challenging children's attitudes and perspectives if the sectarian violence and tensions that surround them remain the same. This points to the need, ultimately, for any initiatives aimed at children to form part of a broader community relations strategy within particular areas. This, in turn, underlines the fact that community relations work with children cannot be treated as a magical panacea, able in itself, to address the problems and divisions that exist in Northern Ireland. It can only ever be regarded as one part of a much broader and multi-faceted solution.

**v) While cross-community contact should form an important element of work with children it needs to be carefully planned and organised.**

The importance of meaningful cross-community contact, especially in areas characterised by significant levels of violence and division, has already been stressed. However, the evidence from this present study suggests that great care needs to be taken in relation to how it is planned and organised. The experiences of the children in both case studies suggest that while cross-community contact can have an extremely positive effect, if it is poorly organised it can actually result in the reinforcement of children's existing negative attitudes and prejudices. As has been argued elsewhere, the nature and purpose of cross-community does need to be carefully thought through (see Connolly with Maginn 1999; Connolly 2000). More specifically, it needs to avoid encouraging competition between children and, instead, should involve them in a meaningful and cooperative project. The simple point being stressed here, then, is that ill-thought-out cross community contact can be more harmful than having none at all. Any such contact needs therefore to be carefully planned and to form part of a broader community relations strategy for any nursery or school that aims to work with and build upon the children's experiences gained through contact.

**vi) While there is some value in addressing community relations issues with children by focusing on more generalized and abstract topics, emphasis should be placed on initiatives that are based upon the children's own experiences and perspectives.**

Finally, the concept of the 'ethnic habitus' has been used as a way of stressing the fact that children's attitudes and identities are deeply engrained. In other words, they are not free-floating and abstract notions that can be changed easily. Rather, they represent the way in which children's experiences become internalised over time so that they powerfully and subconsciously shape how children think and behave. In this sense the children's attitudes and identities relating to the conflict are experienced as natural and given. This suggests that any community relations strategy will only be successful ultimately if it engaged directly with the children's day-to-day experiences and perspectives. In other words it needs to be 'real' to them and to begin from 'where they are at'. This has two implications for practice: a) indirect ways of encouraging children to

understand and respect diversity and difference (possibly through studying conflict in different societies or through environmental projects) are likely to be less effective than actually dealing directly with the diversity and conflict that the children are actually experiencing; and b) children need to be consulted in relation to the development and planning of specific initiatives. At the very least this latter point means gaining a much better appreciation of the experiences and perspectives of the children and thus of their needs and concerns. However, it is also possible to talk directly with children about what issues they would like to consider and address. It was seen from the case studies, for example, that some of the 10-11 year olds were actively volunteering suggestions. There is no reason why some of the younger children could also not be consulted in a similar way.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> As these figures have been calculated from the sample data, they are only estimates of the actual proportions of children within Northern Ireland as a whole. As an indication of the accuracy of these estimates, the 95% confidence interval for the figure of 34% of six year olds that already see themselves as belonging to one of the two main communities is  $\pm 9.9\%$ . In other words, we can be 95% confident that the true proportion of children lies within the margins 24.1 – 43.9%. Similarly, the 95% confidence interval for the estimated proportion of six year olds making sectarian comments (15%) is  $\pm 7.5\%$  (i.e. lies within the margin 7.5 – 22.5%).
- <sup>2</sup> Interviews with the children in a P3 and P7 class in the Protestant area that has had little direct experience of the conflict were undertaken by Ursula Birthistle.
- <sup>3</sup> Some of the details regarding the local areas have been altered to maintain anonymity. The alterations made do not, however, significantly effect the nature or interpretation of the children's experiences or perspectives.
- <sup>4</sup> Specific details regarding such social and economic indicators for both areas are not given in order to maintain anonymity.
- <sup>5</sup> All of the names of the children and of the nurseries and schools have been altered to maintain anonymity.
- <sup>6</sup> Key to transcripts:
  - / Indicates interruption in speech
  - [...] Indicates extracts edited out of the transcript for clarity.
  - [text] Indicates word(s) added to help clarify what is being said.
  - [text] Indicates descriptive text added to clarify/highlight the nature of the discussion and/or behaviour of the interviewees.
  - ... Indicates a natural pause in speech
- <sup>7</sup> The Media Initiative for Children is one such project led by NIPPA (Northern Ireland Pre-School Play Association) and Pii (Peace Initiatives Institute). It is aimed specifically at pre-school children and deals with diversity in all its forms from disability and race to religion here in Northern Ireland. Further details can be found at <http://www.mifc-pii.org>.



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