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**Sectarianism in Scotland: A ‘West of Scotland’ problem, a patchwork or a cobweb?**

**Abstract:** Drawing on research carried out for the Scottish Government in 2014, this article explores how people experience sectarianism in Scotland today. For some, sectarianism is manifestly part of their everyday experience, but for others it is almost invisible in their social world. The article sets out a metaphor of sectarianism experienced like a cobweb in Scotland; running strongly down the generations and across masculine culture particularly, but experienced quite differently by different people depending on their social relationships. Using the examples of song and marching, the article suggests that sectarian prejudice should be conceived of as much as a cultural phenomenon as in social and legal terms. A multidisciplinary and intergenerational approach to tackling sectarian prejudice would help emphasise its cultural and relational construction. Much can also be learned from examining the broader research on prejudice worldwide, rather than treating Scottish sectarianism as if it is a unique and inexplicable quality of the national character.

**Keywords: (4 or 5): sectarianism, prejudice, music, marching, generation**

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## **Introduction**

This article draws on data gathered during a recent Scottish Government-funded research project that explored community experiences and perceptions of sectarianism (Goodall et al, 2015). Our project used qualitative research methods to study five case study sites across Scotland (visiting one local community area within each of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee, the Western Isles and North Lanarkshire). We examined if and how sectarianism affects particular communities, and how it might form part of people's everyday experiences. The study provided insights into people's perceptions and experiences both in areas where sectarianism still appears to persist and where it seems to be less of a problem.

In this article we contend, based on our ethnographic fieldwork in several communities across Scotland, that sectarianism today is a complex, cultural and 'relational' phenomenon. For some, sectarianism is manifestly part of their everyday experience; for others it is almost invisible in their social world. We set out here a metaphor of sectarianism experienced like a cobweb in Scotland; running strongly down the generations and across masculine culture particularly, but experienced quite differently by different people depending on their social relationships. That is why we argue here for a multidisciplinary and intergenerational approach to tackling sectarian prejudice that emphasises its cultural and relational construction.

We contend that research has more to contribute beyond studies of how prevalent sectarian prejudice is in Scotland (valuable as these studies can be for establishing such things as levels of public concern). Our suggestion is that sectarian prejudice should be conceived of as much as a cultural phenomenon as it is in social and legal terms. Songs, flags, colours, football strips, names and many other cultural signifiers are as important as religion, age, ethnicity, gender and place of residence. That is why we need a multidisciplinary approach to understanding and alleviating sectarianism in Scottish life, as the three projects discussed in this special issue of *Scottish Affairs* have shown. We also argue that much can be learned from examining the broader research on prejudice worldwide, rather than treating Scottish sectarianism as if it was a unique and inexplicable quality of the national character.

### **Song as a microcosm of the definitional debate surrounding 'sectarianism'**

We start with an example of one of the most contested areas of the sectarianism debate at the moment: song. As the growing corpus of research on sectarianism, semiotics and song suggests (Rolston 2001; Radford 2004; McKerrell 2012; Millar 2015), ethno-religious offence can be transmitted and received in the absence of overtly sectarian language. That some of our participants identified certain songs as 'sectarian', despite these not referring specifically to Catholics or Protestants, is a microcosm of the current definitional debates surrounding 'sectarianism' in Scotland. Although we were not surprised to hear participants refer to 'The Billy Boys' and 'No

Pope of Rome' as sectarian (both being songs which feature overt and derogatory references to Roman Catholics) several participants identified 'The Fields of Athenry' as an offensive and sectarian song, despite its lack of religious references.

Written in the 1970s, by the Irish singer-songwriter Pete St. John, the song laments the effects of Ireland's Great Famine and charts the journey of an impoverished man who steals corn for his starving family, before being apprehended and transported to an Australian penal colony for his crimes. The song was adopted by Celtic football fans and has become one of its supporters' most popular anthems—a consequence of the team's nineteenth-century Irish roots and heritage. However, in a 2009 series of *Celebrity Big Brother*, Channel 4 censored Tommy Sheridan's singing of 'The Fields of Athenry', owing to its controversial nature. Reverend Stuart MacQuarrie, chaplain at the University of Glasgow, spoke out against Sheridan's rendition of the ballad, calling it 'anti-British' and 'racist' (Williams 2009). Yet such calls were resisted by prominent Celtic fans, including the composer James MacMillan and sports academic Joseph Bradley. For those who identified 'The Fields of Athenry' as a sectarian song within our project, this seems to have been the result of how the song is used, as opposed to its lyrical content.<sup>2</sup>

When asked if there any particular songs or pieces of music that he thought were particularly offensive or sectarian, one participant replied:

*I mean a piece of music that is done with a particular view of winding up another set of people. In the case of the Rangers supporters whenever they would be asking for you to sing or play The Sash then that is only done for one purpose. Erm... and similarly some of the Rangers fans and the Rangers support will be offended by The Fields of Athenry, which in another context, meaning, it won't [be offensive]. (Man, Interview 2, Western Isles).*

When questioned whether a song could be 'sectarian' without religious references, another participant replied: 'I think it can be' (Man, Interview 4, N. Lanarkshire). Others also identified 'The Fields of Athenry' as 'particularly offensive', while one participant singled it out as 'one of the touchstone songs in Scotland' because of the way it has become politicised (Man, Interview 5, Glasgow). He stated: 'a lot of people from my Irish/Catholic heritage rant about that', and felt that Irish Protestants affected by the Famine had been 'written out' of history. As a result, he saw the song as polarising people within both communities.

As with 'The Sash', which was also identified as 'sectarian' by some participants, despite its lack of direct critique or attack on any religion, the sectarianism of 'The Fields of Athenry' seems to reside in how the song is used and understood. When sung by some Celtic fans, the additional lyrics 'Sinn Fein', 'IRA', and 'Fuck The

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<sup>2</sup> 'The Fields of Athenry' is commonly sung by supporters of the Ireland rugby team (a cross-border team), and by Republic of Ireland football fans, without being interpreted as sectarian.

Crown' are included, thus sectarianising it and heightening its offensiveness.<sup>3</sup> Given the widespread knowledge of such 'add-ins', particularly in West-Central Scotland, it could be argued that these additions have fused with the original, forming a composite which, while once inert, is now active, having created a replacement meaning. This point was articulated by one participant from Dundee, who remarked:

*The Catholics and the Protestants in Ireland and the West Coast, they've got meanings to the songs. They're just songs here. We just sing ... If we like the words we might sing it. But to them it is... It is their marching songs.* (Woman, Focus Group 1, Dundee).

For many in West-Central Scotland in particular, songs acquire sectarian agency, rendering much of their original meaning redundant in favour of how they have come to be used against—and received by—the opposing community.

More overt references to the 'IRA' are—of course—found in other 'rebel songs' sung by Celtic supporters and, when asked if they thought singing about the IRA was sectarian, a group of men in one focus group were unanimous in their agreement: 'absolutely' (Focus Group, Glasgow).<sup>4</sup> Yet debates over the IRA as 'sectarian' have been the subject of much media focus.<sup>5</sup> Such debates revolve around two competing perceptions of the IRA, both referring to the modern IRA and its terrorist links, rather than to the 'Old' IRA associated with the War of Irish Independence.<sup>6</sup> Those who identify the IRA as sectarian often infer that because the Provisional IRA killed more Protestants than any other organisation during Northern Ireland's Troubles (Fay et al. 1998), it was—itself—an anti-Protestant organisation. IRA-related organisations reject and resist this inference (English, 2004:173). Yet given that 'IRA violence against so-called "legitimate" targets of the State has been experienced . . . as ethnic cleansing' and that 'anti-Britishness easily blends into anti-Protestantism as Protestants perceive it' (Higgins and Brewer 2003:109), songs invoking the IRA are

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<sup>3</sup> There are, again, parallels here with 'The Sash', where audiences sometimes conclude the song by chanting the offensive and sectarian 'Fuck The Pope'.

<sup>4</sup> Those in the interview did not specify which 'IRA' they were referring to. Some Celtic fans draw a distinction between songs invoking the War of Irish Independence (1919-1921) led by the 'Old' IRA of the 1920s and those relating to the role of the Provisional IRA and several other IRA-titled organisations, during Northern Ireland's Troubles (these later organisations are proscribed and hence in law associated with terrorism). However, that these groups became known simply as 'the IRA', and that chants invoking them are often shortened to 'IRA', renders such distinctions problematic (Millar 2016). Such interpretations mirror loyalist debates where supporters of flags, songs, and memorabilia commemorating the UVF insist these are in homage to Edward Carson's Ulster Volunteers, many of whom went on to join the 36<sup>th</sup> Ulster Division where they would fight and die in the Battle of the Somme, as opposed to the loyalist paramilitary group that emerged in the 1970s.

<sup>5</sup> Although such discussions can be found in traditional media outlets, such as *The Scotsman's* conveying T.M. Devine's argument that singing IRA songs is not sectarian because the IRA was not sectarian in intent (*The Scotsman* 2011), much of the debate around what is and is not 'sectarian' is conducted via social media.

<sup>6</sup> For more on football fans' competing, and conflicting, interpretations of such songs and chants see Flint and Kelly 2013:3-16.

*experienced* as sectarian for large sections of Scottish society, by their repeated usage in divisive social contexts over time (Millar 2016).

We argue that if Scotland is to move beyond literalist or narrow, solely religious definitions of sectarianism, then it is useful to recognise that both the intent of the speaker and/or the perceptions of the audience can constitute sectarian prejudice. Thus, arguing for or against the 'sectarianism' of IRA or rebel songs becomes a moot point when they are clearly perceived as sectarian performances by their audience. Chains of assumptions involving 'Britishness', 'Irishness', 'Protestantism' and 'Catholicism', as well as those regarding football affiliation, run deep throughout certain Scottish subcultures and groups. Therefore we argue for retaining the plurality and ambiguity of cultural meanings such as those heard in song, because they can be understood in so many different ways, and at different times.

Cook (2001) attributes this to music's semantic ambiguity, its having various emotional and semantic affordances. Each act of listening can have both personal or individual 'nuanced' meanings, as well as shared or broad 'un-nuanced' meanings. These are understood simultaneously, at the point of perception. Thus, music can suggest very broad and un-nuanced meanings, such as being happy or sad, but also affords us group meanings and personal meanings depending upon the social context of the listener, viewer, and audience. As Cook contends, 'it is wrong to speak of music *having* particular meanings; rather it has the potential for specific meanings to emerge under specific circumstances' (Cook 2001:181). In our fieldwork, respondents laid emphasis upon the context and audience of particular songs and chants in constructing sectarian agency, supporting this relational view of cultural meaning.

In this way, we argue that sectarianism in Scotland be understood as cultural, relational, and complex. One of the key findings of our study has been that music, colours and other cultural signifiers such as names, flags and football strips, have the ability to construct sectarian agency in Scotland. This particularly relies upon the perceived sense of ethno-religious belonging of the Self and Other, and as much upon a relational reading of cultural performances, such as songs, as with the voicing of literalist or overt sectarianism against Protestant and Catholic religious beliefs. Our research therefore echoes what Abby Day has recently empirically demonstrated: that religious beliefs are less significant than religious belonging, and that group religious belonging has more salience than individual beliefs—or religious institutions—in contemporary Britain (Day 2011).

In the fieldwork we conducted in our five case studies across Scotland (see our full report, Goodall et al, 2015) we found that songs and music are deeply implicated in the perception and construction of sectarianism, and that sectarianism exists as much in the hearing and context of the performance, as it does in the intentions of the performer. (A similar and related phenomenon occurs in Irish Republican and Loyalist marching, which we consider next.) At the heart of much of this sectarianism

in Scotland lies the essentialising and reduction of Others via chains of assumptions such as Rangers-Protestant-British-Orange-Others and Celtic-Catholic-Irish-Green-Others. Given voice in key cultural signifiers such as songs, strips, colours, names and stories, it can be seen that often these chains of assumptions about the Self and Other rely upon a lack of communication between people of different faith, culture and institutions. However, they usually break down in the face of increasing familiarity with our Others and their life and culture.

Social psychologists have attempted numerous lab-based approaches to reducing prejudice, and these studies suggest that the most successful method is to leave the prejudicial beliefs and usage intact but to reduce the mental categorisation of Others through the introduction of shared identities (Nelson 2008: 11). We also know, from applied research conducted in other regions around the world, that music and intercultural education projects can have a profoundly positive effect in alleviating prejudice, and discrimination against, and between social groups (Hemetek 2006; Pettan 2010; Sweers 2010). In Scotland, we could benefit from recognising the useful role that music and cultural anti-discrimination projects can play, and help us to alleviate sectarianism and bigotry through increasing our relationships and understanding of each other. A key component of these approaches, from applied ethnomusicology and elsewhere, is the empowerment of minority and marginalised groups and the emergence of intercultural dialogue.

One of our key research findings (discussed later) was that some people in Scotland find it difficult to even discuss or recognise sectarian behaviour. Perhaps, in the light of this, it is time to begin tackling it by recognising the religious and special cultural differences between different kinds of Scots. The focus of the debate in Scotland needs to change. A focus instead on the relational and the complex, and on recognising the cultural and contextual elements of sectarianism, offers the potential to move forward. We have spent too long mired in a polarised, simplistic and essentialised debate about this enduring problem in Scottish life.

## **Marching**

Another aspect of sectarianism that brings out this cultural aspect is public perceptions of Loyalist and Irish Republican marches and parades. Our report gave little coverage to the subject of marches<sup>7</sup> because this was the focus of the *Processions* study (Hamilton-Smith et al 2015a, and this volume, 2015b). However Loyalist and Irish Republican marches were raised many times throughout our interviews. Although a question about marches was included in our questions for

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<sup>7</sup> We use 'march' here so as not to distinguish between marches and parades (which in Scots public order provisions, such as the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 and the Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2006, are treated together as 'processions'). It was furthermore the term most often used by the participants in our study.

participants, our interviewees and focus group members raised marching spontaneously more often than it was raised by us. This was particularly noticeable in the locations where marches were most frequent.<sup>8</sup> We did note in our research however that marches themselves have sectarian 'agency', helping to produce public perceptions of sectarianism, again underlining the analytical point that sectarianism relies as much on the perception of culture as it does upon performers' intent.

The majority of participants discussed marching during interviews. That most spoke about these as individual and community experiences of sectarianism is illuminating in itself. This reinforces the findings of the ScotCen study, that marches were the second most commonly mentioned factor people believed contributed to sectarianism (behind football), with 79% and 70% of respondents mentioning Loyalist and Irish Republican marches respectively (Hinchliffe et al 2015: ii). The majority of marches mentioned by our participants were Loyalist, with most of those being described as 'Orange'. Republican marches were the second most referenced, with one participant mentioning the far-right Scottish Defence League. This imbalance may be attributed to the relative proportions of different marches that take place in Scotland. In 2012, 773 Loyalist marches took place compared to 41 Irish Republican (Hamilton-Smith et al 2015a: 21); as such the greater prevalence of Loyalist marches can help explain the higher number of participants referencing them.

Even though some areas had few or no Loyalist or Irish Republican marches,<sup>9</sup> most of our participants still mentioned marches, pointing to a widespread association of Loyalist and Irish Republican marching with sectarianism. One possible explanation, as mentioned in the *Processions* report, is media representations of these events (Hamilton-Smith et al 2015a: viii). Another possible explanation is that some participants had family and friends living in areas where such marches were more frequent and thus could have formed opinions through visits or second-hand accounts. Glasgow and North Lanarkshire hold many more marches than our other three research sites; both areas are sites of long-standing contestation, with reports of violence from their inception.<sup>10</sup> Glasgow hosts more Loyalist and Irish Republican marches than both Belfast and Derry/Londonderry combined (Braiden 2009).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For example, all of our Glasgow participants mentioned marching; only half of the participants in the Western Isles spoke of it.

<sup>9</sup> In the Western Isles, for instance, the only experience participants had had of Loyalist and Irish Republican marches was during trips outwith the islands.

<sup>10</sup> Glasgow's inaugural procession, in 1821, was marred by fighting, while North Lanarkshire suffered 'serious outbreaks' of sectarian violence from the mid-nineteenth century through to the late twentieth. For more, see McFarland 1990; Bradley 1997 and Millar 2015.

<sup>11</sup> A Freedom of Information request made during the writing of this article revealed that from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 Belfast hosted 517 Loyalist parades as opposed to Glasgow's 249. However, these figures have been overinflated by protest demonstrations at North Belfast's Twaddell Avenue, where Loyalist bandsmen and Orangemen from Ardoyne have held a small, daily protest parade since 12 July 2013. If one removes these protest parades from the statistics, Belfast hosted 152 Loyalist parades last year, while Derry/Londonderry

The vast majority of participants who spoke about marching did so negatively. In many interviews and focus groups, marches were spoken about in ways that associated them with groups or organisations perceived as sectarian. In Dundee, participants immediately conflated marches that one described as 'Orange or IRA':

Participant 1: *Well, you shouldnae have these marches for Orange or IRA, or something like that. Because it causes trouble.*

Participant 2: *That is trying to bring sectarianism in...*

In the same focus group, Remembrance Day parades were contrasted to these:

*Yeah, that is different. The soldiers. That's not sectarian. That is everybody.*

The implication that 'Orange or IRA' marches are exclusionary in contrast to Remembrance Day parades, as well as their association with organisations perceived to be sectarian,<sup>12</sup> appeared to be an important element in what endows Irish Republican and Loyalist marches with sectarian agency in Scotland. One woman interviewee described 'Orange' marches in Edinburgh as 'a right to spread hatred'. A Glasgow participant, himself a practising evangelical Christian, described 'Orange Walks' as 'inflammatory', an opinion shared by many others interviewed, although occasionally participants discussed the followers alongside as the problem rather than the marchers themselves. This again highlights the importance of a relational understanding of sectarianism that accounts for perception by different social groups, as well as the intentions of those marching.

Several participants in the Glasgow and North Lanarkshire case studies described sectarian violence associated with marches, such as street fights, bottles being thrown towards parades, and chairs being used as weapons inside pubs in close proximity to marches.<sup>13</sup> These eruptions of violence lead to associations between marches and the most severe kinds of sectarian animosity.

Not all opinions were negative: some can be described as indifferent:

*Yeah, no-one's really bothered about it. I don't, there's the odd march now and again but they make a big deal of it in Glasgow and stuff, get their banners out and but over here it's just no-one really cares. Like. It's not a big thing. At all. (Man, Interview 7, Edinburgh)*

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hosted 20. Last year, Glasgow hosted 19 Irish Republican parades, more than Belfast (17) and Derry (1) combined.

<sup>12</sup> As we observed when discussing the IRA and sectarianism in note 4 above, how the symbols of Scottish 'Orangeism' are interpreted likewise needs to be understood in the contexts of its changing history. Kaufmann (2006: 286) analyses membership data of the Loyal Orange Institution (Orange Order) to argue that its sectarian period was the 1920s to the mid-1960s. From the 1970s onwards, Scottish 'Orangeism' has been 'tied more firmly to family tradition than to sectarian competition'. Notwithstanding this, popular perceptions of Loyalist marches as sectarian remain widespread, as we have noted.

<sup>13</sup> In these instances, specifically 'Orange' marches. On the association of parades and disorder see Hamilton-Smith et al 2015a, 2015b.



Others were not favourable to the marches themselves but defended their right to march on liberal grounds:

*I have got a lot of friends who say 'och just ban them, these are terrible really'. I have always believed in somebody's fundamental right to assemble and march.'* (Man, Interview 6, Glasgow)

One participant was hopeful that marches could one day be inclusive and celebratory. Yet while in favour of marches in principle he still thought this was something that would not happen for a long time:

*I would love one day for an Orange walk to be almost like a Mardi Gras. For people really being able to celebrate their culture in as much that when I see it I feel certain things, but I would love that.* (Man, Interview 5, Glasgow)

Although some diverse opinions on Loyalist and Irish Republican marches were present throughout our research sites, the vast majority of participants remained negative, associating them with sectarian animosity. The *Processions* study posits that people who reported lower levels of social cohesion were more likely to be negative about these types of processions (Hamilton-Smith et al 2015a: viii), although stating that this association is complex and tentative. We encountered instead generally negative views across the board, regardless of opinions on social cohesion. The other possible explanations for negative views on marches in the *Processions* report<sup>14</sup> are more in tune with our findings.

### **A 'West of Scotland problem', a patchwork or a cobweb?**

These strongly-held views about marching must however be contrasted with the noticeably different ways that many participants spoke about other aspects of sectarianism in their communities. We remarked above that several of our participants found the subject difficult to discuss. In our report, we sketched out what we called a 'discursive deficit' about sectarianism. Some of our participants not only said that they were unaware of it in their communities; they also came across as unfamiliar with the term and unused to speaking about the problem itself. This was not just something we encountered in areas not currently associated with sectarianism: we also for instance heard from a Glasgow woman who had once been a member of the Orange Order but who appeared hesitant and unsure about what the term meant.

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<sup>14</sup> These include people's previous experience of marches; media representations; and perceptions of what these types of marches represent (Hamilton-Smith et al 2015a: viii).

We suggested several possible explanations for this discursive deficit. It is possible that very little or no sectarianism does exist in some communities. Or, it may be that some people are motivated to ignore problems that they do not feel affect them directly (this is something which, as we said in the report, social psychologists have extensively explored; see also Goodall 2013). It may be too that the declining public role of religion in everyday life makes prejudices less obvious. Yet another possibility is that a lack of social support makes it difficult for people to discuss personal experiences of sectarianism. We also however came across individuals who seemed to have 'normalised' the problem: who stated initially that they encountered none but later on described significant local problems as sectarian (see also Deuchar and Holligan 2008: 5).

There seemed to be a pattern to this, though. When people did speak of encountering or suffering sectarianism, they spoke of specific places and times. A large body of research now suggests that sectarianism is not equally spread geographically across Scotland. But what also came over strongly to us is that Scotland is not a patchwork, either. It is not that Glasgow or North Lanarkshire are 'hotbeds' of sectarianism and Dundee or Edinburgh are not. Rather than a patchwork, we might say that what we encountered was a cobweb. The web might be thickest in West-Central Scotland, but even there it is full of gaps. The problem occurs across the country but it seems to run like the scaffolding of a cobweb, down family histories and along the routes of masculine culture in particular.

As we noted earlier, chains of assumptions are rife within much debate on sectarianism in Scotland. We see that notions of 'Britishness', 'Irishness', 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' can differ and can all be informed through family narratives. Our analysis of community experiences can help untangle some of these complexities. It is in the familial spaces that we can begin to explain some of the gaps in the cobweb. Our evidence does not allow us to map sectarianism in accordance with any socio-economic groupings or class based categorisation. Such is the intricate nature of sectarianism that it can permeate cultures; it often does so through an 'inheritance'. This inheritance of culture (Richardson 2014) helps explain a tacit nature of sectarian sentiment. The chains of assumptions can be learned (often through story and song) and shaped by families; more specifically, shaped by and through dominant masculine behaviours within these family units. Furthermore, the relational nature of sectarianism is not only to 'the Other' (those from different schools, churches, communities, colours and football teams) but also to *others*. If we posit that the Other is someone of a different faith or culture, then there is great diversity within communities of perceived sameness. There exists a multitude of others within communities and these changes can often be explained through generational differences which account for an uneven prevalence.

As Brannen (2012: 270) explains, 'intergenerational transmission involves the transfer of material resources and services, aspirations, values, practices, social

learning, and models of parent-child relations'. It is in the values, practices and social learning where we can locate sectarianism. We analysed the relationships between generations (see also Hopkins et al 2011) and of particular note was how our participants distinguished between forms of 'bitter' and more 'casual' forms of sectarianism (such as the careless use of offensive language). It was the bitter, deep-seated and virulent sentiment that was passed down more successfully. The following exchange was typical of how our respondents located a root cause of sectarianism:

Participant: *I suppose ... well ... I mean my general opinion on beliefs is they usually start from either an inability to understand something, or a lack of knowledge, so, you know your sectarian beliefs are gonna be passed down through the generations without almost a reason.*

Interviewer: *Em ... and when you said like families pass it down is that, do you think that's kind of where it comes from?*

Participant: *Yeah definitely.*

Interviewer: *Or is it peer, is it peer influence?*

Participant: *Peer influence as well but the source is family.*

(Man, Interview 5, Edinburgh)

The significance of the root causes highlights the relational and intergenerational nature of sectarianism. There are both peer pressures (within generation) and familial inheritance (across generations) and these horizontal and vertical threads of the spider's web have different resilience against social change; some are thicker than others:

*So if you are doing something deliberately to provoke a reaction on the basis of what their religion is, knowing that, if you do something knowing that it will offend them, that for me is sectarianism ... Which is slightly different from I suppose casual or non-conscious sectarianism, which ... I will accuse maybe a lot of older folk of. I wouldn't say older folk are ignorant, I would say that they have been brought up in a different time and generation and things that were acceptable to them, are no longer acceptable now. So I wouldn't say they are out-and-out bigots. So ... if I said to my granny, 'Look granny, I am ... I am marrying a Muslim' or something, she would say, 'That is fine, just make sure it's in a Catholic church'. (Man, interview 6, Glasgow)*

It is worth noting that often in our interviews, the more virulent and less casual sectarianism was described as being 'bitter'. This term was used by several participants to separate those who use sectarian terms as part of a more jovial 'banter' from those who are more likely to harbour a deep-seated dislike of others because of their religion. A 'casual' (tacit) and 'non-conscious' sectarianism was perceived to contrast with the 'bitter' sectarianism that was often cited by participants as inherited by some young people. We do not necessarily agree with this distinction;

for some people their bigotry is so ingrained that bitter sectarianism can be expressed casually. It is however the 'casual' sectarianism that is challenged through a lens of political consciousness which younger people seemed able to resist. Positively, much of this was linked to what was being claimed as multicultural influences in Scotland.

### **Distinctively Scottish?**

Scotland is not an institutionally sectarian nation (Rosie 2004; Bruce 2012).<sup>15</sup> Nor is it a society where sectarianism is everywhere and anywhere to be found. But we did find that those of our participants who had suffered sectarian prejudice and bigotry tended, it seems, to have done so in silence. It is important to be aware that there is very little evidence of systematic sectarian discrimination in Scotland, but it is also important to emphasise that the impact of experiences varies. If sectarianism is not spoken about, the impact on individual victims may be more severe. We need to have a public debate both about what is not happening *and* what is. One interesting finding in our study was that the Western Isles participants, in an area where Catholicism and Protestantism remain strong and the two groups interact frequently and deeply, tended to speak in a relaxed and confident way about even personal experiences of sectarianism.

One benefit of the three Scottish Government projects may be that we are able to move away from only focusing on the prevalence of sectarianism, in whichever form it takes. A useful next step would be to link this particular study of prejudice to other studies of prejudice. For example, a literature review of the topic of sectarianism brings up academic literature predominantly dealing with Scotland and Northern Ireland, but a review of work on anti-Catholicism brings up an immense literature, detecting a history of it across the Western world (see e.g. Werner and Harvard 2013: 17) that is still present today in many states (see e.g. Jenkins 2013). Less research has been carried out on modern-day anti-Protestantism:<sup>16</sup> given the relative dominance of Protestantism compared to Catholicism in many (although not all) Western states, it would require a more complex study that examined, for instance, ideological components of political minority and resistance movements. We also suggest that analysis of the hegemonic position of being white, Scottish and ancestrally 'Protestant' should have a place in future research on sectarianism.

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<sup>15</sup> There are isolated examples of institutional discrimination, such as the requirement in the Act of Settlement of 1701 that the monarch must be a Protestant, join in communion with the Church of England and not marry a Roman Catholic; furthermore marriage to a Roman Catholic excludes anyone from succession to the throne. Another example is the present position in Scottish schools under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, s.21, whereby teachers must be approved by the church or denominational body to teach in denominational schools, effectively limiting non-Catholic participation. However, there is no evidence of *systematic* institutional discrimination along sectarian lines in Scotland.

<sup>16</sup> For an interesting recent example, exploring mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Spain, see Vincent (2015).

But too often, when research or popular commentary looks for explanations of what sectarianism still persists in Scotland, it focuses on peculiarly Scottish phenomena. However, the roots are not just in resistance to Irish migration, or in old Scottish religious enmities, or the defeat of the royal Stewarts, and its expression today is not just through football fandom. We could learn much from other, already existing research.

Some particularly interesting work has been done recently to analyse quantitative research that might throw light on anti-Catholicism across Britain. An aggregate analysis of around 180 British surveys over several decades found that animosity toward individual Catholics had diminished since the 1950s (Field 2014). Negative attitudes towards the Catholic Church, however, had increased, although the reasons for opposition could be interpreted as secularist rather than bigoted (for instance, criticism of its position on birth control).<sup>17</sup> Unfavourable views of the Papal visit in 2010 were widespread, but this did not appear to have an impact on attitudes towards individual Catholics: rather the survey responses appear to focus on a broader antipathy towards Christian influence on public life (not only Catholic). In contrast, Islamophobia did appear to be directed toward individual Muslims, albeit that it was found to be weakest in Scotland.

An interesting feature of surveys in Scotland, as several researchers have noted, is that Scots perceive anti-Catholicism or anti-Protestantism in Scotland more than they either express those prejudices themselves, or say they have been the victim of them.<sup>18</sup> Field's analysis does not have anything to say about the Scots who say that they *themselves* are prejudiced. It would be fascinating to gain some insight into the Scottish samples within implicit and explicit prejudice surveys (which do ask such questions). It is rare that we have access to survey data specifically on Scotland where participants have been asked questions that might tell us more about such anti-Catholic or anti-Protestant bigotry. Given the absence of such data, ethnography and multidisciplinary research can help to explain how sectarian prejudices exist on the ground.

The British Social Attitudes surveys do periodically ask questions about self-reported *racial* prejudice, such as '[h]ow would you describe yourself ... as very prejudiced against people of other races, a little prejudiced, or not prejudiced at all?' (see NatCen, 2014). Also, some major surveys have sought opinions about for instance inter-marriage between groups, or the desirability of having persons with a certain characteristic as a neighbour. The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey has three times

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<sup>17</sup> On this as a widespread phenomenon in the Western world, see also Wolffe, (early view, 17 Dec 2014).

<sup>18</sup> See most recently Hinchliffe et al (2015) ch.3 and pp.46-47, and Ormston et al (2015) in this volume.

explored whether people say they would be unhappy if a family member formed a close relationship with such a person. The 2010 survey asked this about ten types of person, including someone who was Muslim or Christian. None of these however were broken down into Catholic or Protestant (see ScotCen, 2011). One exception is an NFO study in Glasgow in 2002. This asked several interesting questions about personal prejudice. Again, it mostly did not provide a breakdown of the responses by the respondents' religion, but it did distinguish their views in one instance: a question about how they would react if a relative married someone of a different religion. Most of the respondents who had described themselves as Catholic or Protestant said that they would be unconcerned - only 12% of Catholics and 18% of Protestants expressed any level of concern (NFO: 2003, 23-24).

It would be interesting to see studies conducted that did separate out these attitudes. That is not essential, though; indeed it might even be destructive. Instead, perhaps, we could begin by framing the problem differently. Sectarianism in Scotland is not as unique as it seems. We could apply insights from research which has already been carried out on tackling prejudice in its many different forms, worldwide, rather than focusing only on sectarian prejudice. This would also give us a better chance of tackling difficult problems of methods, such as how to study the elite and the privileged, for instance. Is their role in the perpetuation of sectarian prejudice any greater, any lesser, any different? More generally, we might ask whether there *is* something distinctive about sectarian prejudice or whether it is in fact difficult to distinguish from similar forms of prejudice elsewhere. We in Scotland miss much when we ignore parallel work elsewhere merely for the reason that it is not about 'our' 'sectarianism'.

## **Conclusions**

Based upon the *Community Experiences* fieldwork and our experiences of multidisciplinary analysis of sectarianism, we suggest that ethnography and multidisciplinary analysis are useful contributions to the ongoing scholarship on Scottish sectarianism. Statistical studies of sectarianism and perceptions of its prevalence indicate that there is public concern and policymaker interest in a better understanding of it. It is generally accepted that sectarian prejudice (rather than significant institutional discrimination) is a live issue in some important areas of Scottish life and that we need to address it through intervention (some of which needs to be state-funded) and social action. One of our research findings was that local initiatives appeared to be particularly helpful.

What we suggest should be key to this future scholarship is that it recognises the cultural and social aspects of sectarianism and its complexity. We argue from the stories we were told in our fieldwork that this multidisciplinary approach must take account of the social issues (masculinity, age, religion, social class etc.), the cultural

issues (performance, signifiers, songs, Othering) and the policy and legal issues. Sectarianism is not simply a religiously- or ethnically-focused problem; it is experienced in profoundly cultural ways that demand detailed cultural analysis which can help inform the public debate so that it better represents the everyday experience of Scots.

Furthermore, research has tended to present sectarianism in Scotland as distinctive and unique. This has been valuable insofar as it has distinguished the Scottish experience from the Northern Irish, and has encouraged government investment in local anti-sectarian initiatives. One disadvantage however has been insufficient interest in those features of sectarianism that resemble other sorts of prejudice in other nations and that have been addressed in international studies. We could benefit from examining this other research.

We believe also that looking beyond our own borders to international best practice in educational and intercultural understanding could provide Scotland with useful models for future applied work, as well as nuanced scholarship that assists the Scottish Government ambitions of eradicating sectarianism in Scottish society. We note also the positive benefits of this recent Scottish Government programme of publicly-funded research that has enabled ethnographic and cultural analysis to contribute to a debate about ethno-religious discrimination and prejudice, and the progress that has been made in de-polarising the public debate surrounding this issue.

The advantages of multidisciplinary are that it reflects the social and cultural realities that exist in people's everyday lives, and enriches the debate on sectarianism, rather than compartmentalising it and narrowing the public debate. We recognise from our research that there is much work to do in understanding and alleviating sectarianism in Scotland, but this expanded policy and scholarly approach to the complex cobweb of Scottish sectarian prejudice is helping us to recognise both how sectarianism is actually experienced in everyday life, and to offer explanations that may contribute to improving tolerance and understanding in Scotland.

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