

Towards (Ed)utopia?

Education and Social Transformation in Northern Ireland

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Utrecht University, 2010

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“Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable.”

Hannah Arendt (1968: 196)

Acknowledgements

Many people contributed in one or other way to the completion of this thesis. First of all I want to thank Diederick Raven for his supervision and encouragement, and Marlies Edelbroek for being my critical friend throughout the process of planning, fieldwork and writing.

The project would not have succeeded if it had not been for the teachers, planners, community workers and youth workers willing to meet and talk to me during fieldwork. I am indebted to Lesley McEvoy for sharing her insightful understandings of citizenship education in context of Northern Ireland through both written work and a conversation we had during fieldwork. Furthermore, I want to thank everyone who agreed to be interviewed and provided me with (educational) materials and useful contacts. I am especially grateful to Barbara, David, Norman and Eddie for their helpful insights and positively infectious enthusiasm for pursuing social transformation through education, be it in citizenship education, teacher education or in education as such. I can only hope I did them some justice, and wish them all the best in their important work, now and in the future. Although I could not have written this thesis without the insights and support of many others, all responsibility for faults and misrepresentations remains mine.

On a more personal note, I owe a big ‘thank you’ to my friends from Cooke and Genesis. I especially want to thank Alan, Nathalie and their children, Cecil, Karen and the girls, and Karen, for being my friends and therewith making Belfast feel more like home. Lastly, my thanks goes out to those at home, especially Norbert, who agreed to miss me for a while.

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A nation that Keeps
one eye on the past
is wise.

A nation that Keeps
two eyes on the past
is blind.

Introduction

The Troubles, the protracted conflict between Catholic nationalists and republicans, and Protestant unionists and loyalists, and the subsequent peace process have left Northern Ireland a divided society. The earliest roots of the conflict lie in the colonisation of Ireland by the British in the seventeenth century (Kennedy-Pipe 1997: 8). During this period England sponsored English and Scottish settlement on the ‘plantation of Ireland’, and favoured these settlers both politically and economically, therewith sawing the first seeds out of which the two main communities and their conflicting nationalisms have grown. The 1920 Government of Ireland Act divided Ireland into a Southern sovereign Republic, and a Northern province of Great Britain (Kennedy-Pipe 1997). Competing nationalisms have existed in the north ever since. Fenced off by so-called ‘peace lines’, many of Northern Ireland’s citizens still live in segregated neighbourhoods, attending different churches, voting for different political parties, remembering different pasts, reading different newspapers, waving different flags and sending their children to different schools. It is in this context that the necessity for change poses itself and agents of change rise to carve out the spaces from which new politics, a new civil society, a new Northern Ireland are imagined and practiced. Northern Ireland tries to imagine a more inclusive future through community relations programmes, community organisations, contact-schemes and education. Some initiatives are initiated from civil society, while others are government-driven.

The interplay between the context of post-conflict segregation in Northern Ireland and the means through which peace, normality and inclusiveness are sought lies at the heart of this thesis. I approach the subject from a specific angle for imagining social transformation, this angle being education. As a productive as well as reproductive space of social norms and behaviour¹, education stands in such a relation to society that solutions for crises in the latter are often sought in the first. During the height of the Troubles, individual teachers decided to put their classrooms – that functioned as safe spaces from the communal violence – at use for

¹ Education can be reproductive as an institute for the socialisation of the young into an already existent social body, productive in the sense that it enables young people to partly reshape the social body itself. For a discussion of education as space of social and cultural (re-)production, see Levinson et al. (1996). The difference between reproductive and productive functions of education is comparable with Mead’s (1970) distinction between post-figurative and pre-figurative modes of learning. In the post-figurative mode more or less fixed knowledge is transferred from adult to younger generations (past-oriented), in pre-figurative modes the old learn from the young (future-oriented).

making sense of what was happening outside school walls. On some occasions their teaching helped their pupils decide not to join the paramilitaries that ruled the streets.² The first official educational measure that transcended the efforts and reach of the individual teacher or school, was a contact-scheme programme called EMU, Education for Mutual Understanding. EMU took school children from both sides of the divide on joint excursions in order for them to meet and hopefully develop longer lasting friendships. Today, peace-oriented education is embedded in the broader statutory subject of Local and Global Citizenship, in turn part of Learning for Life and Work. It is in this citizenship education that issues such as sectarianism, diversity and equality are to be addressed. I place education and its success in addressing citizenship in Northern Ireland within the broader social field, its context, from which the question arises whether citizenship education can address the issues stemming from its surrounding society if its contents and underlying ideals are not embedded in the broader public realm. I seek a solution to this dilemma in the preparation and development of citizenship education on the level of teacher education.

By drawing on a limited fieldwork period in which I tracked the currents of change in both civil society and the educational sphere by interviewing and on occasion seeing in action the people behind them, I try to answer the following questions: what understanding of the conflict underlies the past and current solutions sought in civil society and education? Which understanding would best fit citizenship education in post-conflict Northern Ireland? Which factors limit the development and delivery of citizenship education? How can citizenship education be embedded in Northern Irelands public sphere? I will look at macro-, meso- and micro-levels of society to track the spheres and practices from which social transformation is to occur, as well as to establish the context faced by the agents of change involved. Through the narratives of those delivering citizenship education, I develop a notion of the ‘educational creative’³, the teacher who places personal transformation in the service of its social counterpart, and finally argue for embedding their ideas and practices in meso-supportive bodies for education, such as teacher education.

Throughout the thesis I pursue some lines of thought that constitute the background against which my understanding of the current context of Northern Ireland and its hopes for social transformation are formed. One of the arguments thus outlined proposes a reframing of

² For the full example see Chapter 3 Education as Citizenship (page 45).

³ After Ray and Anderson’s ‘cultural creatives’ (2000), a term they coin for people who are creating a new culture, or inhabiting a third cultural strand in the US that has long been dominated by ‘Traditionalists’ and ‘Modernists’.

the terms in which the conflict is to be understood and from which the path to social transformation is to be derived. With Lesley McEvoy, Kieran McEvoy and Kirsten McConnachie (2006), I argue that the predominant understanding of the conflict – informing and underlying the formation of educational initiatives to solve it – frames it as a question of (ethnic) identity and community relations. My proposal is to go beyond and beneath the empirical level where certain social mechanisms have manifested themselves, as these mechanisms might be consequence rather than cause. Instead I propose to reframe the conflict in terms of (the absence of) a framework for social justice from which the preconditions for healthy community relations can be derived and regulated⁴. The dual understanding of conflict is reflected in a duality of approaches aimed at overcoming segregation in Northern Ireland. The most visible current of change originates from agents constituting a ‘cultural middle-ground’. In this strand of social transformation, islands of re-invented civil society are springing up from segregation, calling for ‘new’, ‘third’ or ‘alternative’ ways of defining Northern Ireland, citizenship and politics. These initiatives pose themselves as an alternative perspective that counters those of what they perceive as the opposing extremes. The second current is less visible, and viewed with suspicion where visible. It is constituted by people from the abovementioned extremes, who try to start a dialogue from their respective perspectives. In the educational sphere, the community relations strand is most visible in the contact-based EMU-schemes, whereas curriculum-based citizenship education might signify a change towards content-based transformative education. However, the content around which citizenship education is to be based has not yet clearly been outlined. In order for this to be meaningfully done, a social justice framework has to be established at a political and societal level. Thus the embeddedness of citizenship education in the public sphere remains central to the argument.

In order for a meaningful Habermasian deliberative space – and a social justice framework to ensure both freedom and responsibility of those deliberating – to be (re)constituted, two factors through which the public sphere is narrowed at present have to be addressed; one being the colonisation of life world that Habermas described as a factor

⁴ McEvoy et al. (2006) propose to rethink the conflict through a human rights perspective, and argue for a human rights based citizenship education. Although my approach is very much in line with their argument, I prefer the term ‘social justice’ for reframing the conflict and its resolution to a ‘human rights’ based approach. ‘Human rights’ means attributing rights on the basis of a decontextualised idea of the human. One of my main criticisms towards the common understanding of the conflict, as translated in an avoidant approach to citizenship education, is that it decontextualises the conflict and avoids to face the issues at stake for the situated actors involved. Providing justice to these parties cannot be disengaged from their positions and claims, and should thus be attributed not on basis of their being human, or world-citizens, but take into account that they are nationalist and unionist citizens of Northern Ireland.

narrowing the public sphere in most modern western societies, the other being the segregated context that has led to Marianne Jacobs' (2009) conclusion that Northern Ireland has two, rather than one public sphere in which mutually exclusive narratives are perpetuated. Jeffrey Sluka (2009: 282) powerfully characterises the current context of Northern Ireland as “not-war-not-peace” – a semi-permanent state of ‘peace process’, which is somewhere between war and peace but not peace itself”. One of the obstacles standing in the way of a true peace is the reluctance to face past and present frictions, a reluctance born from the urge for normality, and birthing a strategy of avoidance of contentious issues in cross-communal encounters. This avoidance seems to be in line with the current approach to the conflict and peace process as it prevents communities from clashing. According to my analysis from a social justice standpoint however, a serious commitment to truth(finding) is integral part of the rebuilding of a public sphere and social justice framework in which all other peace initiatives can be embedded. As the current strategic avoidance extends from the macro-level of politics down to the micro-level of the family, the public sphere as a space for free speech has limited meaning. In this context it seems unfair to me to burden education, its teachers and pupils, with the task of breaking through this very culture they are integral part of. I do not dismiss education as part of the solution, but emphasise the precondition of its being embedded in society and underlined by a framework viably safeguarding social justice. The steps towards this end that can and are being taken are outlined in Chapter 4; they convey the building of supportive bodies for teachers involved in citizenship education and preparation and support for the task on the level of teacher education.

The argument is structured as follows: in the first chapter, a contextual background to the conflict and its repercussions in the present public sphere is provided. In this chapter the prevalent understanding of the conflict is outlined, and an alternative understanding sought. In the second chapter I will assess which of these understandings underlie the currents of change aiming for shared space and a shared future, while paying special attention to educational initiatives (Chapter 2). Here I will also argue that the preconditions for success of citizenship education are too often sought in macro-planning, which in turn is evaluated through the assessment of micro-delivery. In the third chapter I try to develop a perspective that tracks the motive behind citizenship education by providing an account of the efforts and ideals of individual teachers, who I will refer to as educational creatives. These teachers are inventing ways of bringing civic, social and cultural awareness into their teaching. I argue that the practices of educational creativity should be embedded and extended through meso-supportive

bodies modelled after the ‘peer-culture’ that is so often preached for the classroom, by paralleling it on the teacher-level and beyond the classroom (Chapter 4). In this regard I will provide two examples of spaces where something in this direction can be recognised: in teacher education, and the General Teacher Council for Northern Ireland, both inspired by teachers who have broadened their classroom, but remained educationally creative.



1. Parallel Societies

Segregation and the Public Sphere in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland was constituted as a compromise between the nationalist aspirations for an independent Ireland, and the unionist aspirations of British and Scottish settlers to remain part of Great Britain. The South of Ireland gained the desired independence, while a North-Eastern region of Ireland was carved out to meet the unionists halfway. Although many unionists and loyalists refer to Northern Ireland as ‘Ulster’, it contains only six of the nine counties belonging to the original province of Ulster. The border was drawn to ensure a democratic basis for retaining the British union in as large a territory as possible (Whyte 1990: 163). The constitution of Northern Ireland thus meant a settlement between the conflicting aspirations of nationalists and unionists in Ireland as a whole, but has since been the stage at which this very conflict has continued – albeit on a territorially lesser scale. This continued conflict has involved communal violence, nationalist/republican groups aiming at a united Ireland through violent or terrorist means, (British) state counter violence, and paramilitary violence on the part of loyalist organisations defending the British union. The most visible repercussions of what is euphemistically referred to as the ‘Troubles’ is the segregation of nationalist and unionist communities in neighbourhoods that are still often under paramilitary control. Laura Gilliam⁵ (2003: 43-44) paints a picture of what she calls the ‘sectarian geography’ of Belfast, capital of Northern Ireland:

“Belfast is a divided city. Apart from mixed middle-class areas, which are mostly found in South Belfast, the town is a mosaic of small Catholic and Protestant areas. In West Belfast Catholic areas predominate, while East Belfast is mainly Protestant with a few Catholic areas, and North Belfast a true

⁵ Gilliam refers to the main communities as ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant’. Other terms may be used: Catholics are predominantly nationalist, some republican; Protestants predominantly unionists or loyalists. Although one term is more appropriate in one context than the other, I will use the respective terms ‘nationalist’ and ‘loyalist’, as the conflict is rarely understood in religious terms, and the symbols Gilliam is referring to are political and territorial rather than religious. In some cases I refer to ‘loyalists’ as ‘unionists’ because the second term is more mainstream in political talk, loyalist more civic and with connotations of paramilitarism. The same applies for nationalism/republicanism, although they largely share the same standpoint nationalism tries to achieve Irish unity through political means whereas republicanism pursues unity through violence (Whyte 1990). For a deeper consideration of the preferable terms in context of their contentiousness see Whyte (1990). Although Whyte comes to the conclusion that ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant’ are the most neutral and overarching terms, I follow a more political line as many of the people I met during fieldwork warned me not to understand the conflict in religious terms as it was “in fact political” in nature.

jigsaw of purely Protestant and Catholic areas, together with some mixed areas. The city centre is supposedly neutral ground void of symbols, except for British flags on official buildings, but the streets leading out of the city towards the surrounding areas are understood as being the territory of the dominant group in those areas. Thus the direction from which one enters or leaves the city centre gives one's identity away, as does the number of the bus one takes to and from the city.”

Many symbols mark the transition from one to another of what Gilliam calls “Catholic and Protestant areas”. Striking to an outsider are the so-called ‘peace lines’ one may encounter when moving from one to another area. Peace lines are walls that fence off nationalist from loyalist neighbourhoods in interface areas. One may cross those lines at specific points, although some gates are closed during evenings and weekends. Loyalist territory is often marked by Union Jacks permanently waving from streetlights. Streetlights may be painted red white and blue, and curbstones either red, white and blue, or orange. From loyalist-style murals masked men stand guard as one enters: “You are now entering loyalist sandy row heartland of south Belfast Ulster-freedom fighters”⁶. With some exceptions the murals convey one straight-forward message. Journalist Denis Murray⁷ translates this message as follows: “You are now entering turf that belongs to us – not you, or, in Ulsterspeak, “us ones” or “them ones””. During elections the ‘colour’ (loyalist orange or nationalist green) of a neighbourhood can often be determined from the election-posters presented: rarely would you come across both unionist and nationalist posters within the same street, the outcome in terms of colour would be predetermined, the only relevant question which party to represent that colour⁸. Gilliam’s sectarian geography testifies to the extent of segregation persistent in Belfast – and Northern Ireland – after the Troubles. This segregation does not stop at the borders of the neighbourhoods Gilliam refers to, but extends to schools, sports, churches, elections and media.

Northern Ireland’s sectarian geography and the segregation it conveys poses serious problems for a public sphere as a neutral space for civic deliberation to take shape. Segregation puts constraints on the public sphere and civil society, and as it is here that the communities

⁶ States a mural when one enters Sandy Row from the city center.

⁷ Stated in BBC World News Broadcast (August 10, 2004) cited in Anthony C. Joseph/The Bogside Artists. 2001. *The People’s Gallery*.

⁸ Thus, in a loyalist area the election would have been a struggle between the unionist parties (UUP, DUP and TUV), in nationalist areas mainly between the nationalists (Sinn Fein and SDLP). Alternatively, one could vote for the cross-community Alliance-party.

might develop a common understanding of their history and the meanings ascribed to Northern Ireland today, it offers little hope for a common or shared future⁹. At the empirical level, the observed segregation might – and often does – serve as the answer as to why the conflict has not solved itself, and might also serve as the solution to solving it now. These answers are derived from a particular understanding of the Troubles that approaches it as a communal strife that finds its cause in the (perceived) mutual exclusiveness of two communities and their respective (constructed) identities. In this chapter I propose to add another level of understanding¹⁰, that approaches the Troubles from what I call a ‘social justice’ perspective. I therewith pose the question under which conditions those communities and identities have become and remained so relevant, and state that a public sphere as meaningful space for deliberation has to be restored by the simultaneous restoration of social justice. Furthermore, I argue that understanding the situation exclusively in terms of community relations or a question of identity comes to serve as a logic underlying the strategic avoidance of contentious issues I describe as one of the factors standing in the way of restoring both social justice and a meaningful public sphere.

1.1 Understanding the Troubles

A Community Relations Approach to Conflict in Northern Ireland

Many books have been written on Northern Ireland and the Troubles, from which paradigmatic understandings have emerged. In 1990, John Whyte added another title to the pile. However his aim differed from those of most other works, as he set out to analyse not the conflict itself, but the analyses made. In doing so, Whyte (1990: 3) noticed that up to the violent period of the late 1960s, the Troubles, there had been virtually no studies on community relations in Northern Ireland. Since 1968 community relations in Northern Ireland became a prominent field of research and writing. A new paradigm seems to have emerged from the violence of that period. Whyte (1990: 113-207) argues that up to that date, ‘External-Conflict Interpretations’ that stressed either the relationship between Britain and Ireland, or Southern and Northern Ireland

⁹ In her MA-thesis ‘What happens if one agrees to disagree?: De publieke ruimte in post-conflict Noord-Ierland’, Marianne Jacobs (2009) testifies to the impact of segregation on the public sphere in Northern Ireland, its perpetuation of a dual understanding of the conflict, the related and subsequent construction of dual narratives, dual citizenship, and thus – in my words – a truly parallel societies system.

¹⁰ I owe Lesley McEvoy for first pointing me in the direction of an alternative understanding, and critically examining the consequences of adhering to one or other understanding for conflict resolution. For her full examination of the predominant understanding and her human rights-based alternative, see McEvoy, Lesley, Kieran McEvoy and Kirsten McConnachie. 2006. ‘Reconciliation as a Dirty Word: Conflict, Community Relations and Education in Northern Ireland’, *Journal of International Affairs*. 60 (1): 81-106.

had dominated. After 1968 an ‘Internal-Conflict Interpretation’ began to dominate thought on Northern Ireland. In this interpretation the conflict is understood in terms of the relationship between the two communities within Northern Ireland. The same paradigmatic division has been noted as ‘exogenous’ and ‘endogenous’ by McGarry and O’Leary (1995, in McEvoy et al. 2006: 83). In trying to understand the internal relationship between the two communities, and why it has become and remained one of conflict and opposition, scholarship turned to social identity theory: the two communities maintained and enhanced their self-esteem by distinguishing their own social group from others, and constructed their identity in opposition to the other group accordingly (Tajfel and Turner 1979: 40-43, in Whyte 1990: 97).

Whyte’s characterisation of the paradigmatic understandings of Northern Ireland was published in 1990. With McEvoy et al. (2006), I argue that the predominant understanding of conflict in Northern Ireland prevalent today would still fall under Whyte’s ‘Internal-Conflict Interpretation’ category, as it explains the conflict as one of internal community relations. However, today’s predominant understanding is somewhat different from what Whyte describes. This difference in understanding is most visible in the difference in solutions proposed on the basis of the respective understandings of the conflict. Whyte (1990: esp. 243) proposes a regionalised constitutional solution. As different regions in Northern Ireland differ in majority attitude towards the constitutional question¹¹, each region should be able to reach its own answers. The proposed solutions dominating recent work rarely touch upon the constitutional question, which is assumed to be settled by itself when community relations within Northern Ireland are enhanced. From Whyte’s constitutional solution I derive an understanding of the conflicting community relations as one of differing standpoints on the constitutional question. The second solution seems to build on an understanding that makes the constitutional question secondary to community relations. Relations are not conflictual because the communities aspire to different constitutional solutions, but these conflicting aspirations are only there because the relations are conflictual. I will now elaborate on this second understanding and its implications for the solutions sought, after which I propose rethinking the terms in which the conflict is understood.

The understanding prevalent in both public opinion and the academic tradition of looking at both conflict as such and conflict in context of Northern Ireland, finds a translation in the measures taken to overcome (see also McEvoy et al. 2006: 83). In the public sphere,

¹¹ In short and somewhat simplified: should Northern Ireland be part of a united Ireland, Great Britain, or develop some kind of political solution as an autonomous region?

strategies of avoidance work to prevent upsetting community relations in everyday encounters with people from the other community. Underlying this avoidance is the assumption that the conflict is contained if community relations are kept neutral by the avoidance of controversy, the related assumption that violence would be sparked if conflicting views would come to the fore in context of social interaction. The conflict is understood in terms of community relations: if these are harmonious there will be peace, if they remain conflictual there will be trouble. This understanding is easily underlined by common sense, and further affirmed by academic discourse. McEvoy et al. (2006: 82) note the same “historical framing of reconciliation in Northern Ireland as “community relations””, that has become the hegemonic understanding vis-à-vis conflict in Northern Ireland. However, with McEvoy et al., I question whether this hegemonic understanding of the conflict is fully rooted in reality. More importantly, as it informs strategies for overcoming conflict, I query whether an alternative understanding would be better fit to underlie alternative ways forward. The predominant understanding may stand in the way of true peace as this understanding informs the strategy of avoidance that keeps Northern Ireland from facing the past injustices that may first have to be overcome.

The recurrent story in academic conflict-analysis tells us of the identity-clashes underlying the modern conflict or ‘new war’ (Kaldor 2006). It then focuses on the social mechanisms underlying the formation of these identities and the clashes between them, often to reach the conclusion that the clash stems from a reification of identities that are not actually as mutually exclusive as assumed. This pattern of analysis starts out from the empirical level, where factions of society often clearly stand in conflict. Translated to the Northern Irish case it tells us of the two communities, whether referred to as Catholics and Protestants, republicans and loyalists, or nationalists and unionists. In her critique of this “two traditions” paradigm, Máiréad Nic Craith (2002) argues against approaching the conflict in terms of a clash between those two communities and their respective traditions. She argues against the paradigm by drawing attention to the diversity within these supposedly fixed communities, and the similarity actually existent between the two. In succeeding, however, she explains away the only cause for the Troubles at hand and is left with a conflict that is there only because people think it is there. She is left with Baron von Münchhausen lifting himself by his own hair¹². The argument is that because the communities are perceived to be adhering to conflicting traditions, they have come to do so. In effect, Nic Craith (2002) has, in my view, located an integral

¹² Baron von Münchhausen supposedly claimed he had escaped from a swamp by lifting himself by his own hair.

problem with the predominant understanding of the conflict, but reproduced it in failing to move beyond empirical analysis herself. She reproduces the same problem on a different level by problematising the paradigm in the terms that derive meaning from exactly the same sphere: identity-theory and community relations. The identities usually assumed the problem are non-existent, consequently, as their alternative a multiple identity framework is proposed.

Nic Craith's (2002) justified critique of the two-traditions paradigm leaves us with an explanatory gap, yet does inform a proposal for Northern Ireland to move forward. This is what Nic Craith (2002: 5) proposes: "In the context of future peaceful prospects, I query whether politicians should emphasise the significance of a common Northern Irish, Ulster, or supra-national tradition. Ultimately I argue that politicians and communities should adopt a more inclusive discourse of multiculturalism and give greater recognition to minorities, to those on the margins of the two traditions paradigm, and those with hyphenated identities." She herewith subscribes to the approach to social transformation that I will refer to as the 'middle-ground-way', an approach that seeks to establish an alternative way of identification in order to move past the identities deemed the cause of the conflict. By emphasising those 'on the margins', however, the claims of a majority might be too easily dismissed as illegitimate or even false¹³. In apparent agreement with Nic Craith's proposal, Gilliam (2003: 55) argues for the conflict circle to be broken by placing children in environments that offer "continuing neutral and positive experiences of the others and for them to experience the others as part of the same community". The underlying view that segregation is cause rather than consequence of the conflict, is shared by Jacobs (2009: 10) when she states that the core of the problem, segregation, is still very much alive. The obvious answer would then be cross-communal mixing. If the conflict only exists because of the perpetuation of segregated communities, the solution must be integration and positive contact. If the issues raised by those communities only serve as legitimisation of primary feelings of hatred – as Gilliam argues on the basis of her findings that children tell names before knowing what those names stand for – what need is there in addressing them?

The means through which normality and peace are aimed at thus uncover the framework through which the conflict is understood. In line with other modern intra-state conflicts, both cause and solution are often found in identity-based thinking. The idea is that the cause of the conflict is the persistence of too narrow a view of ethnicity and identity, the solution being to

¹³ Again it was Lesley McEvoy who pointed out this consequence in an interview I conducted during fieldwork.

educate plurality and true multiculturalism¹⁴. Without wanting to dismiss the importance of community relations – the conflict has largely been fought on the communal level – I propose to adjust this approach by drawing attention to the absence or travesty of a framework to safeguard social justice, within which community relations might have been regulated. My main point being that community relations would not have escalated had there been a workable political framework to regulate them during the Troubles. As for the solution, I believe the trustworthiness of politics to assure social justice can only be restored through a joint attempt for truth and acknowledgment of the past injustices that have led to the current state of Northern Ireland. Restoring social justice implies the simultaneous restoration of Habermasian deliberation in the public sphere, in which such a conversation on social justice is to be rooted.

1.2 Rewriting the Troubles

Towards an Alternative Understanding of the Conflict

“Segregation by itself does not necessarily make for conflict. [...] What segregation can do is exacerbate conflict – by increasing mutual ignorance and fostering the growth of stereotypes – in a situation where other reasons for conflict exist” (Whyte 1990: 50). The visibility of segregation in Northern Ireland invites the explanation of conflict by reference to this segregation as the cause. The main reasons for conflict are sought in the perceived incompatibility of identities and resulting difficulties in community relations, most visible in segregation. The implications of such an understanding are that the reasons given by the communities themselves are largely dismissed as legitimization of prior feelings of hatred (as argued by Gilliam 2003), but it also means a depolitisation of the conflict which in turn implies the alleviation of responsibility of the involved states. Subscription to this understanding on an international political level would mean an evasion of blame, as for instance Britain could take itself out of the equation. As McEvoy et al. (2006: 86) note: “community relations was arguably always a softer and more palatable alternative to rights discourse with its inevitable critique of the state.” Bill Rolston (1998: 254 in McEvoy et al. 2006: 91-92) warns for a depolitisation and decontextualisation of the conflict, stating that the community relations paradigm “emphasized “two traditions” in an apparently faultless symmetry which ignores the power structures which emerged historically in Ireland and are in existence currently. History,

¹⁴ Arguably the roots for the first – essentialist – way of viewing identity lie in the same scientific thinking now mobilised to overcome the societal consequences of its former discourse.

colonialism, inequality, sectarianism are reduced to relatively simplistic explanations which rest on social psychology, post-modernist discourse and wishful thinking.”

Even in context of this community relations approach, however, many authors do acknowledge an intersection between the two-communities system and historical distribution of power, resulting in a conceptualisation of a ‘system of relationships’ (Ruane and Todd 1996: 14) transcending the level of relations on the communal level. Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd (1996: 4; 12) make the point that power and identity have historically been intertwined by drawing attention to the “overlap between [...] cultural difference and structures of power” and remarking that consequently “[...] the relationships between Catholics, Protestants and the British state were forged into a structure of dominance, dependence and inequality which changed over time and which at each stage defined the interests and parameters of action of the parties to it.” Caroline Kennedy-Pipe (1997: 13) remarks that this system of relationships has resulted in the “triangular shape of violent struggle in Ireland”. Ruane and Todd (1996: 14) derive as a solution to this struggle the need to dismantle the system: “If, as we argue, the conflict is the product of a system of relationships which constitutes two communities with radically conflicting interests, aspirations and identities, then the solution lies in dismantling that system. We conceive this process in emancipatory terms” (1996: 14), emancipatory in the sense that it is understood as a process whereby “the participants in a system which determines, distorts and limits their potentialities come together actively to transform it, and in the process transform themselves” (1996: 15).

Division of power may be the context in which the two communities have been consolidated and have come to stand in an antagonistic and conflictual relation to each other. The aim of this paragraph is to draw attention from community relations to the context in which these relations are formed and sustained. This context has been such that a small majority had the power to define Northern Ireland according to their aspirations at the cost of the aspirations of a significant minority. I take neither segregation, nor the system of relationships between the British state, nationalists and unionists to explain the conflict by themselves, rather, I take the (in)ability to deliver social justice for all within that system as key to understanding conflict and resolution. The need to address justice is currently acknowledged in conflict resolution theory, as Sluka (2009: 291) remarks: “Today, conflict resolution theory suggests that there is a fundamental link between peace and justice, and that seeking to resolve conflicts without providing justice is doomed to failure”, hence the importance of truth commissions in post-conflict situations. The division of power within Ruane and Todd’s (1996)

system of relationships, has prevented fairness in providing justice in the past, the resulting historical injustices thus have to be addressed.

The system of relationships Ruane and Todd (1996: 12) refer to has followed a certain pattern throughout history, continually resulting in the “alienation of Catholics from the established order”. This pattern started with the integration of Ireland into the British state in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The British favoured the Protestant settlers as they needed their support for retaining the status quo. Ruane and Todd (1996: 12) conclude that “Catholic pressure, Protestant resistance and British reform became the recurrent elements in the political struggle. [...] this pattern of conflict was reproduced in the newly founded Northern Ireland and still exists today. Communal inequalities are stabilized by the British state’s presence even if gradually eroded by British reforming policies. These policies are a response to increasing Catholic and nationalist pressure [...] and they increase Protestant insecurity and resistance to change.” Violent resistance on the part of paramilitary or ‘terrorist’ organisations¹⁵ has been part of this pattern of conflict, but non-violent resistance of the civil rights movement has marked the conflict as much. The civil rights march of January 30, 1972 became an international signifier of conflict in Northern Ireland. The marches were held against discrimination in housing, jobs and unfair electoral procedures (gerrymandering¹⁶) (Ruane and Todd 1996: 124). Although it was largely constituted by nationalists, Whyte (1990: 195) notes that “the civil rights movement, far from raising wider questions of national allegiance, was simply claiming British rights for British citizens.” The civil rights march of January 30, 1972 became better known under the name ‘Bloody Sunday’. During the march, British paratroopers fired into the crowd killing fourteen people. Whyte (1990: 121) places the incident in a wider pattern of military interventions in Northern Ireland: “when British troops first intervened in 1969, they came – and were seen by both sides as coming – to rescue the Catholics from Protestant and RUC violence. True, the Army was operating in support of the civil power, which remained in Protestant hands until the introduction of direct rule in 1972, and the troops therefore slid during 1970-2 into operating openly on behalf of the unionist regime, as witness their part in the Falls Road curfew of 1970, the introduction of internment in 1971, and Bloody Sunday in January 1972.” The British were thus expected to deliver social

¹⁵ I place terrorist in quotation marks because the terminology regarding different parties to the conflict has very much been part of a politics of language. Loyalist groups are usually referred to as ‘paramilitaries’, republican groups as ‘terrorist’. The latter term serves full delegitimation, therewith leaving no space for distinguishing between claims and objectives, and methods used to achieve them.

¹⁶ Gerrymandering means drawing the boundaries of an election district to ensure majority vote, in this case for unionism.

justice for nationalists at least as much as for unionists, but came to stand in a conflicting relationship with the nationalist community themselves. The way Bloody Sunday was dealt with afterwards says even more about the failure to deliver social justice. In the Widgery Report¹⁷, a first report on Bloody Sunday, state violence was legitimised as the victims were assumed to have been IRA-members and to have fired first. The unionist narrative was therewith given the moral high ground, the nationalist account of the day was falsified. However, a second commission was installed as the Widgery Report had no credibility on an international level. The second, Saville Report¹⁸, was finally completed and made public in June 2010, stating that the fourteen civilians had been unarmed, the military intervention unjustified. An apology of British Prime Minister David Cameron followed, almost 40 years after Bloody Sunday occurred.

After Bloody Sunday, and the official legitimisation in the Widgery Report, many nationalists lost faith in a democratic and non-violent path and joined the violent struggle of different groups employing terrorist tactics. The communal violence of the Troubles, that started in the late 1960's consolidated the system of relationships even further. Thus Ruane and Todd (1996: 1) remark that “the violence of that period [1968 until the 1994 ceasefires] damaged the whole fabric of the liberal democratic state and civic culture in Northern Ireland, the Republic and Great Britain. Normal judicial processes were suspended, there were repeated breaches of human rights, there was collusion between members of the security forces and paramilitaries, a ‘war culture’ emerged built around propaganda and the demonization of the ‘enemy’, paramilitaries took over the functions of policing in many areas [...].”

A politics of language legitimising one at the cost of the other narrative became part and parcel of conflict in Northern Ireland. Margaret Thatcher’s continuous dismissal of claims made by republican prisoners serves as a case in point. The claims are dismissed by depolitisation of these prisoners as terrorists and criminals. McEvoy et al. (2006: 87) characterise Thatcher’s practices as “Criminalisation, Normalisation and Ulsterisation which sought respectively to deny the political nature of paramilitary activity and to treat it as criminal”. In *Hunger*, a film recently re-staged in Belfast, Thatcher’s demonisation of the republican position forms the background against which a struggle for recognition is fought. The film deals with the last six weeks of Bobby Sands, the iconical IRA man, a strong example of the dictum that one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter. Thatcher’s dismissal

¹⁷ For the Widgery Report (1972), see <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/hmso/widgery.htm> (accessed August 4, 2010).

¹⁸ The Saville Report (2010) is online available at: <http://www.bloody-sunday-inquiry.org/> (accessed June 16, 2010).

and deligitimation is here disposed as creating its own mirror image as a legitimisation of a system of violence within the prisons. The politics of language thus disposed warrants that a precondition for restoring social justice for all would be a process of re legitimisation of what have long been considered extreme, hence illegitimate, positions. I speak of language-*politics*, as the practices serve obvious political ends. Kennedy-Pipes (1997: 16) notes that this language-politics has ultimately served to dismiss the conflict itself saying that “[...] the British Government did not want to acknowledge the struggle as a war, because it was believed that this would confer legitimacy upon the IRA”.

Seeing through the politics of language thus created and sustained becomes a precondition for a dialogue in which all voices are heard, thus a precondition for restoring social justice and a meaningfully shared public sphere. Eddie, one of the teachers serving as an example of the educational creative in Chapter 3, provided his pupils with the opportunity to reflect on their own use of language. He tells me how he used to do this during the Troubles: “I was using a piece from one of our published papers called ‘the Observer’, and it was about – the headline of the article they’d given out was ‘Zapping Gooks in the DMZ’ and it was about the Vietnam war. ‘Zapping’, a euphemism for killing, ‘Gooks’, the depersonalisation, every Vietnamese person who was found in the ‘DMZ, the Demilitarised Zone’. The Americans had a notion when you got into the DMZ you could kill any enemies you find there. Now, I gave this out to the boys, and the boys were appalled! First of all the dehumanisation of people as ‘Gooks’, second ‘Zapping’, a euphemism for killing, and thirdly the injustice of simply saying that anyone in there could be killed. Now what I then put on the board, I said to the boys: “Can you tell me, do any of you understand this word?” I put the word ‘Orangy’ on the board – ‘Orangy’ is a Protestant, it is a dismissive term for a Protestant. Same way as a ‘Taig’ is a dismissive term for a Catholic. So Catholics tend, if they want to be dismissive – ehm, vulgar uneducated Catholics if they want to be dismissive about Protestants can call them ‘Huns’, ‘Blue noses’ or ‘Orangies’. Vulgar uneducated Protestants who want to be dismissive of Catholics can call them ‘Fenians’ or ‘Taigs’, OK? Now, but the bottom line is, what I said to the boys is, I put the word ‘Orangy’ on the board and said: “Have any of you ever used this word?” And there was a sort of a shame. And I said: “That’s exactly the same, gentlemen, as ‘Gooks’.” And we had a discussion about how it was easier to deal and to do dreadful things if you dehumanise the person, if you collectivise them, if you regard them as an out-group.”

In order to restore social justice, the claims of different parties have first to be seen in a different light. The politics of language has to be overcome in order to distinguish real claims

from real ‘thuggery’, and to dismember claims and objectives from methods employed. With regard to the segregated narratives, Ruane and Todd (1996: 115) argue that “the deconstruction of these oppositions is a precondition of wider social and political transformation.” After deconstruction the question remains whether the absence of a system in which social justice was delivered for all has made violence the most viable option for pursuing the respective nationalist and unionist aspirations. If we are to derive measures to overcome the conflict from a social justice oriented understanding, they could focus on providing a political context in which social justice is safeguarded for both the majority and minority communities of Northern Ireland. It means the restoration of legitimacy in a democracy, which is not only dependent on majority support but on its ability to deliver for all. In this regard Seyla Benhabib (2001: 105-106, emphasis added) states the following: “The basis of legitimacy in democracy is to be traced back to the presumption that the institutions that claim obligatory power do so because their decisions represent standpoint equally in the interests of *all*. This presumption can be fulfilled only if such decisions are in principle open to appropriate processes of public deliberation by free and equal citizens.” I propose to add that the reverse is equally true: public deliberation by free and equal citizens implies a political framework safeguarding this freedom and equality for all. Questions of social justice and building a deliberative public sphere have to be answered as preconditions for one another, thus have to go hand in hand. In order to restore trust in politics to safeguard social justice, a conversation on past and possible present injustices has to continually be embedded in a deliberative public sphere. Before looking at the efforts conducted at the level of civil society and the public sphere, and the understandings of the conflict underlying them, I will first look at some factors constraining the public sphere in providing space for this deliberation on social justice to take shape. The first being what Habermas called ‘colonisation of life world’, which is untypical of Northern Ireland, the second being the more context-specific observation that the segregated narratives of nationalists and unionists remain unchallenged as a strategic avoidance of controversy is upheld in the broader public realm.

1.3 The Spirit of Belfast¹⁹

The Habermasian Public Sphere in Context

Arthur Square on a Saturday. On Saturdays Arthur Square belongs to the family. Parents walk

¹⁹ A picture of the Spirit of Belfast Statue is included in the attachments (page 65).

firmly towards their destination, while toddlers fix their eyes on anything but the way ahead, which they would probably abandon if it was not for the firm arm grip of their mothers and fathers. The smallest children are exploring the world from prams in which they are pushed forward by parents. Besides the family, these Saturdays in Belfast city centre are inhabited by groups of schoolchildren. Some still partially dressed in the school-uniforms you will recognise them by during the week, now reminders of the extracurricular activities pursued on Saturday mornings. The emblem on their blazers and sweaters reminds of their educational background. The rose, shamrock and thistle in Belfast Royal Academy's Crest testify grammar school attendance, non-denominational but not officially integrated. St. Aquinas' emblem conveys Catholic grammar, the extracurricular obligation attended this morning thus more likely to be Gaelic Football than Rugby. During weekdays after school, difference in outfits renders the mixing of backgrounds visible as the exception. Only the uniforms of integrated Lagan- and Hazelwood College, and some exceptions in the state grammar sector may cloak the otherwise close to non-existent diversity within schools.

Back on Arthur Square, parents still hurry their children past the living statue competing for their attention with the 'Need Healing' stand, individual distributors of biblical wisdoms, the mobile Belfast Telegraph shop, and the anti-abortion stand opposite Starbucks. The square functions as a pedestrian roundabout where people from Castle Lane, Corn Market, Ann Street, St. William Street, and Arthur Street meet around the 'Spirit of Belfast' statue marking the middle of the square. The statue reflects the movements of the people passing by: circles circling past one another, while never quite reaching each other.

The statue seems to convey not just Belfast's Spirit, but the Spirit of Modern Western Society where public space has become socially organised as a round-about where face-to-face relations are kept to the minimum. Arthur Square is often used as a quick path to different shopping lanes, instead of that space deemed public, from which rational deliberation might seep through to Belfast's segregated neighbourhoods surrounding the city centre. The city centre has this potential as it is neutral space not inhabited by one or other of the communities. People from various neighbourhoods come visiting during the day after which they return to their homes leaving the centre mostly uninhabited at night.

Habermas²⁰ described the rise of the public sphere as a deliberative space where citizens

²⁰ My primary occupation lies not with the philosophical backgrounds from which Habermas argues about the public sphere, nor with the historical account of its rise he proposes, but with the implications for, and use of the concept in contemporary social science and theory.

came together to discuss – and therewith co-construct – civil society and the life world. A space for reflection on social and political norms and practices, that offered the opportunity for social reconstruction as much as social construction²¹. Ideally, it provides spaces of opportunity for the currents of change I describe in Chapter 2, and the space that citizenship education should be embedded in (Chapter 4). Habermas' concept of society distinguishes between *Lebenswelt*, or life world, and *System*, system; society as constituted through the social action of communicative deliberative citizens, and society dominated by coercive power (Edgar 2006: 89). Today, the bureaucratic and capitalist system can be seen to largely dominate and thus narrow the life world, a development Habermas deemed ‘the colonisation of life world’.

As remarked above, Arthur Square is often used as transitional space – people use it for moving from shopping lane to shopping lane – rather than space in its own right. It therewith marks a similar transition of the use of public space. Belfast's squares have traditionally been important part of a Habermasian deliberative public space, where the life world originates. The signs explaining historical value of certain sights in Belfast tell us this story. Custom House Square used to provide a platform for public speakers, still represented by a statue of Gerry Knowles, called ‘The Speaker’.²² Custom House Square no longer being at the heart of the city, Arthur Square is probably the busier square of the day²³. But what is left of the public tradition Custom House Square is the abandoned remnant of? From my characterisation of Arthur Square as provided above, I derive some themes that may be relevant in understanding the Habermasian public sphere in context of Northern Ireland, and of Modern Western society. It occurs to me as a signifier of the colonisation of life world by a very specific system, namely the capitalist economy. If one is, as I am, to place the conflict and peace process in context of a narrowing of the public sphere, one cannot understand the state of that sphere without reference to the processes that are not specific to Northern Ireland, but effecting it in large parts of our Modern Western society. Describing the reality of Northern Irish public sphere today against the background of the ideal type public sphere proposed by Habermas, would be to dismiss the changes that would have occurred to the public sphere even if it would not have been for the conflict and successive segregation. Thus, my account of the narrowing of the public sphere includes both post-conflict segregation, and this broader development affecting it.

²¹ For a contextual background to social (re)construction, see note 1 (page 7).

²² A picture of The Speaker statue is included in the attachments (page 66).

²³ The Spirit of Belfast statue was placed on Arthur Square to “confirm its importance as a key public space within the city centre,” as remarked by the then Social Development Minister Margaret Ritchie on the Northern Ireland Department for Social Development website (http://www.dsni.gov.uk/index/news_items/public-choose-spirit-of-belfast.htm, accessed July 20, 2010).

Habermas' colonisation of life world by the bureaucratic and capitalist system, finds its extreme in an example provided by Bauman (2002) in his *Globalization: The Human Consequences*. Bauman (2002: 35) draws attention to the dual approach to space: how maps were first constructed to regulate space ('mapping space'), but space was then made to fit the maps ('spatialization of maps'). The ultimate example of this change is found in the executed planning of Brasilia, capital of Brazil, in which "The master plan [...] eliminated chance of encounters from all places except the few specifically designed for purposeful gatherings" (Bauman 2002: 44). The tendency of which Brasilia symbolises the extreme has been warned against, as it would lead to "the fall of the public man" and the "slow yet relentless curtailment of urban public space" (Richard Sennett 1996 cited in Bauman 2002: 45). This tendency finds a common expression in economised spaces, where public space is the remaining by-product only necessary for the public to reach the economically purposeful space of shops. This being the rationale behind the displays of shops distracting their attention from the eyes of passers-by to the inhuman faces of tailor's dummies smiling from behind the windows, the rationale behind the witnessed scenes on Arthur Square, functioning as efficiency-roundabout towards spend-your-money street. This is what the Spirit of Belfast seems to embody.

The people and organisations involved in community work acknowledge the point that they do not only have to deal with a context in which segregation and sectarianism limit the meaning of civil society, but are also facing a public apathy visible beyond the borders of Northern Ireland. One such organisation is the Ballynafeigh Community Development Association (BCDA). The Ballynafeigh area of South-Belfast is an interesting case as it has remained a mixed area throughout the Troubles. In an interview with BCDA-staff, the point is raised that residents have limited knowledge and involvement in this neighbourhood. Gerry explains why an initiative called 'Shared Neighbourhood Week' remains important, even in a mixed area like Ballynafeigh: "Sometimes we take it for granted that everyone here understands the significance of our neighbourhood. Because the statistics show how exceptional Ballynafeigh is in Belfast, exceptional in its diversity. But actually, when Sam and myself, we went to the different churches and they brought us in to talk about the area and diversity. And you know what? It was all news to them!" A conversation starts in which an explanation for the phenomenon is developed. Gerry: "It is also very much the case in society, you know, that the private sphere is quite strong here. And so the public sphere is not very strong, not just in this particular area. I promise you if you would talk to people on the street about 'Shared Neighbourhood' they would go "What? What's that?!" And we work continuously on

understanding this, what it means to live in this community. A lot of people don't realise they live in a community where there's a lot of development and negotiation on what's going on."

While I recognise similar trends of civic disengagement, decline of public involvement and a tendency towards the private in most Modern Western Societies, there is also a local catalyst at play. The staff explains why BCDA itself cannot be too "public about it". Tod: "Much of it is behind the scenes work. We can't be seen taking sides. Sometimes we worked on something four five years before anybody knew". Karen steps in saying, "and that is also a problem with funding, because all this work you can't document it as targets and numbers. It is working on ways to bring people together without scaring off." Gerry: "you see, what you have to understand for civic engagement in the past is that if you stucked your head out it'd be shot off basically." I asked whether he thought this still had repercussions in the present apparent apathy in civil society. His answer being that I had to understand, "even though the conflict is over people are still living here, people who do remember the conflict. There's fear..." Tod takes over: "yes fear, fear. Fear even that you may even get killed. So you keep to yourself and don't interfere. You have to be really careful!" Here, the local processes limiting the meaning of public sphere and civil society intersect with broader tendencies towards a retreat into the private sphere, together defining the Spirit of Belfast as one of living past one another, often in physical segregation. The local factor is the strategic avoidance of controversy that is rooted in the fear expressed in the conversation above. The Spirit of Belfast statue does not only tell us something about the public sphere as it is narrowed by the invisible sometimes unintended power of the bureaucratic and capitalist system. It does also embody just what it claims to: the Spirit of Belfast – albeit differently intended. In line with a tradition further narrowing the public sphere of Northern Ireland in name of normality, it expresses the avoidance of exposing allegiance to one or other version of Northern Irishness, one or other version of Belfast.

1.4 The Spirit of Belfast II

The Public Sphere in Context of Strategic Avoidance

The Spirit of Belfast was developed by an artist from New York to reflect two important historical economical symbols of Belfast: the texture of linen, combined with metal as the material used in shipbuilding.²⁴ Although both linen and shipbuilding have been of great

²⁴ In 'Artist to capture Belfast spirit', BBC November 29 2007. Online available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/7118968.stm (accessed July 20, 2010).

economical importance in the past, Belfast is internationally better known for its murals and peace lines, both reminders of the Troubles. A recent discussion on a possible whitewash of the murals expresses the local struggle to neutralise public spaces and reclaim them from the conflictual and paramilitary past. Even ‘Thanksgiving Statue’²⁵ – a statue explicitly placed to remember the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement that is seen to mark Northern Ireland’s peace (process) – makes no visual reference to the conflictual past or present perpetuation of the parallel societies within Northern Ireland. Malachi O’Doherty describes the tendency to present Belfast in neutral terms in his article ‘Why our culture war is going to the wall’ (Belfast Telegraph May 3, 2010). The article starts with the following statement: “Belfast is a city of statements. One of the biggest statements was the wheel²⁶ beside the City Hall. What it said was: Belfast is normal and friendly; Belfast is a bit like London; you will like it.” He then explains the neutrality expressed in tourist attractions and public statues as countering the history written on Belfast walls by muralists. However, since the new public art has no statements to make about the conflictual past, the understanding of this past is left to loyalist and republican muralists celebrating their own paramilitaries as freedom fighters, the others as enemies of the nation. O’Doherty explains: “While the branding of Belfast by republicans and loyalists emphasizes the city’s ethnic and militaristic traditions, the state and public bodies seek to avoid all suggestion that the city has had a history at all. [...] The most important part of the statement is its neutrality – its lack of any specific cultural or traditional reference.” His conclusion being that in absence of any public attempt to develop an understanding of the past, the republicans are winning this ‘culture war’ as their understanding is most powerfully expressed.

In the absence of the construction of a middle-ground narrative of Northern Ireland’s history, or a public sphere in which existing understandings are critically examined in an ongoing conversation, the mutually exclusive narratives of the segregated communities remain unproblematised while silence remains when an encounter between members of the respective communities occurs. This strategic avoidance of controversy works as follows. Barbara, a Belfast teacher in charge of coordinating citizenship education in her school, remembers the Troubles: “A lot of the Troubles went by – certainly amongst the middle class – in what was called a ‘social grammar’. You just did not talk about the Troubles. And if you met other people on a social occasion, you’d have talked about the weather, you’d have talked about holidays,

²⁵ A picture of Thanksgiving Statue is included in the attachments (page 67).

²⁶ The article was written at the time of the removal of the Big Wheel from Belfast’s city centre.

you'd have talked about anything except the Troubles, because it made people uncomfortable. We had the – you'd have called them the ‘social antennae’, if somebody pronounced an ‘h’ ‘aich’, they’re Protestant, if they say ‘haich’ they’re likely to be Catholic. So the social grammar said, “oh” – you know – “we are Protestants, that person is pronouncing an ‘haich’ so we’re very sure not to talk about anything that might offend them!”” What Barbara describes is a typical example of what Gilliam (2003: 52) calls “a practice of conflict avoidance in all mixed areas and situations”. The strategic avoidance of the Troubles in everyday encounters aims to avoid upsetting community relations. Many stories about communication during the Troubles closely resemble Barbara’s. Whether referred to as “a culture of politeness” (Norman, teacher educator), “conspiracies of silence” (Norman), “a culture of avoidance” (Anne, education researcher), or “a culture of silence” (Tony, education researcher) it all serves to avoid upsetting the strained community relations in Northern Ireland. Norman cites the Irish poet Seamus Heaney to explain Northern Ireland’s motto: “whatever you say, say nothing”²⁷.

If it is right to say that the Troubles are truly in the past, the strategic avoidance of controversy is its main survivor as it still has repercussions in the way people deal with their memories of the Troubles. The logic behind strategic avoidance is not to upset community relations, underlying it is the urge for normality. This urge finds expression in downplaying any current trouble. Thus, any reference to recent incidents in random conversation or formal interview settings sparks first of all the reassuring “I don’t see us ever going back to that”, followed by an account of what “that” was like, living through the Troubles. The media serve as another example. Conflict related incidents are reported almost daily, yet all comments underline one statement: these are minor incidents from the past in a peaceful and future-oriented context. A few examples of the kind of incidents that occurred between February and May 2010: February 23, a bomb explodes near the courthouse in Newry (Belfast Telegraph). Monday April 12, “Terror as bomb blasts MI5 base”, “Real IRA in no-warning attack moments after devolution of justice” (Belfast Telegraph). Wednesday April 14, 2010, a cross-community-worker’s house in north-Belfast pipe bombed. Friday May 28, “Loyalist Bobby Moffett shot dead on Belfast’s Shankill Road” (Belfast Telegraph). The Moffett-murder was followed by the warning that “Paramilitaries ‘still rule our streets’” (David Gordon in Belfast Telegraph May 29, 2010), and thus marks an exception to downplaying the significance of recent incidents. As a rule, however, these are the daily encounters with what many people consider Northern

²⁷ Heaney’s poem ‘Whatever You Say, Say Nothing’ is published in *North* a collection of his poems on Northern Ireland published in 1975 (Faber&Faber).

Ireland's past: hoax bomb alerts, car bombs, pipe bombs and sectarian shootings.

These fragments represent news from a society in transition. A society where present incidents of sectarian violence are believed to be repercussions from a past that is never to be the future. Hence the immediate and never absent reassurance at the end of each article: the evildoers are but “a few scumbags” with “no community-support whatsoever”, who – more importantly – “will not succeed” in their quest of taking Northern Ireland “back to those dark days” of the Troubles. They did, however, succeed in marking what was by many perceived as one of the most important days for the peace process, marking it with violence rather than peace. Monday April 12, 2010 the devolution of policing and justice to local government took place after a very intense period of political negotiations resulting in the Hillsborough Agreement (2010²⁸). The day of the devolution of policing and justice from Westminster to Stormont, Northern Ireland, became signified by what it was to overcome: the sectarian and violent past. But of course, the newspapers stated, “we are not going back, we will continue to move forward”, and “today’s devolution of policing and justice stands in stark contrast to the activity of a criminal few who will not accept the will of the majority of people of Northern Ireland” (Belfast Telegraph April 12, 2010). However “reckless” this attempt “to take Northern Ireland back to the past” may be, “the peace process is rock solid” state First Minister Peter Robinson and deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness in Belfast Telegraph (April 12, 2010).

The impact of this avoidance of controversy and downplaying of current trouble limits the meaning of the public sphere as deliberative space. This strategic avoidance also further enforces the tradition of viewing the conflict as one of community relations, regardless of the claims made by either of, or factions of the communities. Because the past is not addressed in public deliberation, and certain positions and standpoints are silenced by their strategic avoidance, this constraints the development of a deliberative public sphere in which the restoration of social justice is to be rooted and grounded. I will now turn towards the subject of social transformation, and examine how the two understandings of the conflict as outlined in this chapter are translated into a duality of approaches to social transformation in civil society and education.

²⁸ The Hillsborough Agreement is online available at: http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/castle_final_agreement15_2_-3.pdf (accessed June 18, 2010).



2. Towards a Shared Future?

A Dual Approach to Education and Social Transformation

We are witnessing something significant, the minister tells us. “We are celebrating and welcoming Eliza today, and she will be baptised in the Catholic Church next week” – he looks at the parents for confirmation, they nod. The parents of this newborn child sit at the front row of the Church. One is at home in this Church, the other visiting. Next week the tables will have turned. Eliza lies peacefully in the arms of her mother, as the minister spreads out for us the future he takes Eliza to signify. “In a divided society as ‘ours’, Eliza offers hope for the future. As a daughter of both the Protestant and Catholic communities, she is welcomed in both Churches. With all other children that are born from cross-communal marriage, Eliza is the new Northern Ireland.” The parents are asked to bring Eliza forward. When the minister takes her in his arms and blesses her, she sobs a little. A wave of compassionate laughter arises from the pews.

The hope for a better future for Northern Ireland is projected upon what is usually referred to as a ‘middle-ground’ of moderates between what are considered political extremes. As a societal rather than purely economical middle-class, this middle-ground is one that is carved out from the parallel societies of Northern Ireland. Many of the initiatives I recognise as belonging to the currents of change informed by a third way or middle-ground approach to social transformation are framed in terms of ‘sharing’ (e.g. sharing education and shared neighbourhood schemes). The term is institutionalised in ‘A Shared Future, the Government’s Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland’ (2005)²⁹. ‘A Shared Future’ outlines the way ahead for Northern Ireland. Although some attention is given to ensuring human rights for all, the emphasis lies on improving community relations as the means for achieving normality and peace in society. The first paragraph of the introduction to ‘A Shared Future’ tellingly resembles the community relations and identity-based analysis of the conflict. “Good community relations policy, and its outworking, is the search for the *practical* foundations of trust between all people in Northern Ireland who have been divided on the basis of *perceived* political, cultural, religious, class or ethnic background” (2005: 4, emphases added)³⁰.

²⁹ The Policy Outline for A Shared Future is online available at: <http://www.asharedfutureni.gov.uk/gprs.pdf> (accessed June 18, 2010).

³⁰ Besides the overall emphasis on enhancement of community relations, something of an intuition to a rights- or

Integration is the most obvious marker of the middle-ground: integrated education, mixed marriages and children born from them, are its promise for the shared future it aspires. At present however, children born from mixed marriages are an almost negligible minority, and integrated schools make for some five percent of the overall educational landscape.³¹ For every Eliza, a far greater number of children are born into segregated environments. However, the middle-ground narrative of a peaceful society moving steadily towards normality does seem to dominate civil society and public mood. The strategic avoidance of controversy easily confirms a sense that the heydays of sectarianism and conflict are truly in the past. This sense is rarely challenged if one experiences the Northern Irish society from an area like the South of Belfast, which is the exception to the segregation persistent in most parts of the city. I witnessed Eliza's baptism in the Ballynafeigh area of Belfast. The church I attended had been part of an inter-church network in Ballynafeigh throughout the Troubles. A community organisation (BCDA) had worked and continues to work on cross-communal dialogue within the area to deal with contentious issues such as loyalist parades, the odd flag and painted curbstone in the area. However, the regular reports of violent incidents in the media counters the sense of normality derived from living in an area like Ballynafeigh, as do most election outcomes. Whyte (1990) noted that – in line with the polite avoidance upheld in public encounters – opinion polls tend to exaggerate the support for middle-ground political parties like the cross-communal Alliance party, where in official elections the political extremes prove to attract the real votes³². This is still the case today.

A middle-ground approach to social transformation, based on a community relations understanding of the conflict, dominates the public sphere and discourse. This middle-ground current of change and its narrative of normality and peace stands in an odd relationship with

social justice-based approach is embedded in the search for 'foundations of trust'. However they are understood as practical necessities for enhancing the community relations that are primary occupation in conflict-analysis and resolution, and no explanation as to where these foundations are to be derived from is given.

³¹ Not to mention the criticism – in scholarship and civil society – towards individual integrated schools for perpetuating sectarianism regardless of its mixed environment.

³² Besides an element of avoidance and politeness, my impression is that another factor is at work as well. If we do not dismiss nationalist and unionist claims as mere narratives following their identification as nationalist or unionist, the reason for expressing more moderate views in polls than in elections, might follow from the content of their claims. If one adheres to a British Northern Ireland but is open for compromise, one might state to feel closest to Alliance or the more moderate Ulster Unionist Party in opinion polls. It does not mean one is ready to be part of a united Ireland, and as this might be the outcome if all unionists vote Alliance and all nationalists vote Sinn Féin, one might still vote the more extreme Democratic Unionist Party in elections. And the same applies to nationalists considering casting their votes on Alliance or the Social Democratic and Labour Party. If there is some truth to this explanation – and the considerations for a 'unionist unity' of the unionist parties in elections to prevent Sinn Féin becoming the biggest party points in a similar direction – moderate nationalists and unionists face a Prisoner's Dilemma in which they bid higher than they might want to in order not to lose out completely.

the segregated and sectarian geography still dominating large parts of Belfast and Northern Ireland. Sluka (2009: 282) explains the sense of normality stemming from opinion polls and general public mood about the apparently successful peace process in light of the segregated mind-set, which allows mutually exclusive interpretations of this very peace process to be developed, saying that “the peace process has not addressed the fundamental cause of the conflict and both sides believe it leads to their mutually exclusive political aspirations”. His prediction is that once the constitutional question arises anew, with the nationalist minority almost reaching majority status, the peace process will prove to have failed. The extent of segregation has led Jacobs (2009) to the conclusion that one cannot speak of a meaningful public sphere in this context, but one should rather speak of two segregated public spheres in which opposing narratives are told and retold. Although I acknowledge the truth in this conclusion to some extent, it also neglects the spaces carved out from the sectarian geography, albeit in a less physical sense. In these spaces people from both communities have come together to negotiate a third narrative that has come to dominate the public sphere, therewith delegitimizing the segregated narratives Jacobs (2009) referred to as sectarian remnants of the past.

This third way, or middle-ground approach largely reflects the first understanding of the Troubles, as it largely follows the path represented by Nic Craith (2002) in building on the niches that are not subjected to the parallel society-system and building on alternative, more inclusive identifications. McEvoy et al. (2006) criticise the hegemonic middle-ground approach to social transformation as it delegitimizes alternative understandings and approaches, and often counters the lived reality in segregated neighbourhoods and education. The prevalent idea is that “reconciliation could only be achieved through the building of a middle-ground divorced from the politics of the extreme” (McEvoy et al. 2006: 89). They propose an alternative way forward that starts out from what are often perceived as extreme political positions occupied by ‘political hardliners’ (Gilliam 2003: 41). Where these are perceived as a threat to normality in the predominant version of understanding the Troubles in terms of community relations, involving these positions is in line with the second understanding, as facing the real issues is precondition for the restoration of social justice and a meaningful public sphere. Although the middle-ground approach to social transformation dominates thought and action, some examples of an alternative way forward are at hand. McEvoy et al. (2006) refer to networks of ex-paramilitaries working together to deal with contentious issues such as parades and de-escalation of violence in interface areas. Another platform where the avoidance of

contentiousness that dominates the middle-ground approach is challenged is provided by theatre. In various theatrical productions the Troubles are rethought, because, in the words of actor Adrian Dunbar³³ “until we begin to address what is really happening, we are not going anywhere”. Recognition of the nationalist and loyalist narratives becomes a precondition for challenging them through a theatrical confrontation with the past, the idea being that true sharing is only achieved if others are taken along. In an article on *Rock Doves*, a production on paramilitarism in Belfast, Rev. Mervin Gibson³⁴ remarks the following: “I have changed and seen others change but we need to be open more to the sensitivity and need around us. We can’t move on and think everything is wonderful when those around us can’t move on.” That the same openness to different narratives and a conversation about their truths and errors is not self-evidently transferred onto the audience and civil society becomes evident from my experience during the performance of *Rock Doves*. As the play invites reflection on a personal experience of the Troubles, real memories are not entrusted to the audience:

The stage imitates an abandoned Belfast home. The paint is stripped from the walls, windows barricaded with wood. Bullet holes everywhere. A young man comes stumbling in and runs to the windows where he looks through the wooden beams. He is apparently trying to establish whether he was followed here, then sighs of relief. Upon the arrival of a drunk gutter man, the boy – called ‘the Boy’ – quickly hides in a wooden closet at the far end of the room. After some reluctance the Boy steps out, a conversation follows in which it becomes clear the Boy is on the run from the paramilitaries. The characters stepping in and out of the room during the following play connect what is happening inside with what is happening outside: a bomb-alert has driven Bella, a drinking friend of our gutter man out of her home – and mind. Now and then sounds of trouble reach us from behind the barricaded windows.

“It very much reflects what it was like during the Troubles”, Mary tells me during the break. Mary is a retired teacher I met at the entrance of the theatre. She is quite prepared to help an outsider make some sense of ‘Rock Doves’, this play that gives me an insight into life in a neighbourhood controlled by paramilitaries during the Troubles – to a large extent neighbourhoods still effectively are under paramilitary rule. I ask Mary if she wants to elaborate on what it was like. She tells me how a bomb-blast burned some houses in the street she lived in to the ground – hers as well. Then she looks

³³ In ‘Birds of a feather’ (The Irish News, April 3, 2010). Adrian Dunbar is an actor performing in ‘Rock Doves’.

³⁴ In ‘Birds of a feather’ (The Irish News, April 3, 2010) on Marie Jones’ ‘Rock Doves’. Rev. Mervyn Gibson, a former chairman of the Loyalist Commission.

around to make sure the rest of the audience is not listening and whispers: “I’m a Catholic you see, it was a Catholic area – Loyalist attack”.

2.1 Towards (Ed)utopia? Education and Social Transformation

Having introduced the middle-ground approach to social transformation, and the starting points for an alternative approach to social transformation, what follows is an account of how both are translated into social transformative efforts in education.

“The idea was to meet people from the other side. I attended a state school which means we were basically all of Protestant background. Now they wanted us to meet some Catholics, this is what I understood EMU to mean. For me this was quite new, not that I was against it, it was quite exciting. But then when we went, we went to this museum. Something about art and I don’t remember any link to what I thought we would be doing. Maybe I was just naive but I thought we would talk about why they needed a Pope while we only needed God. The things you heard about them from kids from your street,” Roisin, a Church youth worker reflects on the cross-community scheme she encountered as a schoolgirl. The result for Roisin was that she had met some of ‘them’ and saw them as exceptions as she had not seen any of the differences assumed between them, but neither had there been any talk about whether there were differences in their respective life worlds. Another reflection: “The EMU-scheme was quite fun. We would take trips to a National Trust or something, with some other school. But we would just stick together and have a fun day out. Then back to our own school. I don’t remember having said one word to the others.” These are the words of Tish, Community Worker with BCDA. She says these words during the group interview I conducted with the staff in the Community House in Ballynafeigh. We talk about the role played by education in achieving the goals outlined in ‘A Shared Future’. Gerry: “they [the government – QV] do invest in good relations in schools. It used to be called ‘Personal Development and Mutual Understanding’. But I quote my daughter: “it’s crap!”

The educational initiative referred to – Education for Mutual Understanding – was initiated in the late 1980s to ameliorate community relations in a context of segregated education. Bringing pupils from different social and educational backgrounds together, it is based on the contact hypothesis, which holds that community relations are enhanced if prejudice is countered by cross-communal contact. In an interview, education researcher Ulrike comments that the preconditions of the contact hypothesis were not always met in Education

for Mutual Understanding: “One of the preconditions in contact hypothesis is that the contact should not contain any competitive elements, EMU sometimes involved sport competitions between schools”³⁵. Moreover, the temporary nature of the contact is unlikely to have led to better community relations on a societal scale. Even if cross-communal friendship was achieved between some pupils, compartmentalisation of the ‘other’-category would have constrained the effects on this larger scale. One ‘good other’ does not undermine the category of ‘bad others’ in any meaningful way. Gilliam (2003: 53) describes her experiences with cross-community trips undertaken by schools saying, “some [children] returned with good experiences of individual children from the other group. But [...] most often they apparently understood these children as individual deviations from the group, rather than as challenges to their view of the other [...] community” She also concludes that if children learn anything from the experience, it is foremost the social grammar of avoidance (Gilliam 2003: 54).

The Education for Mutual Understanding contact-scheme is evidently based on a community-relations approach to understanding the conflict and its resolution. McEvoy et al. (2006: 98) attribute its “lack of impact” to the inability of the programme to address the issues at stake, “its failure to deal with the political nature of the conflict and to engage with more critical issues such as human rights and equality.” They consider the introduction of citizenship education as statutory part of the curriculum in 2007 a step towards a content-based approach in education that would be more in line with their human rights-based understanding of the conflict (McEvoy et al. 2006: 98). However, the community relations approach, and strategic avoidance of controversy that dominate civil society warrant the need to mediate macro-planning of such an educational measure and the micro-delivery by individual teachers, as they cannot unproblematically be expected to think outside the framework of strategic avoidance prevalent in society.

Even if citizenship education is based on an understanding of the conflict that transcends community relations, it remains to be seen whether this is realised in teaching practices as well. The problem with the idea that a more inclusive future for Northern Ireland can be achieved through education, is that education is placed outside (civil) society, as are its inhibitors. Michael Arlow (2001: 8) conceptualises Northern Ireland's citizenship education as a

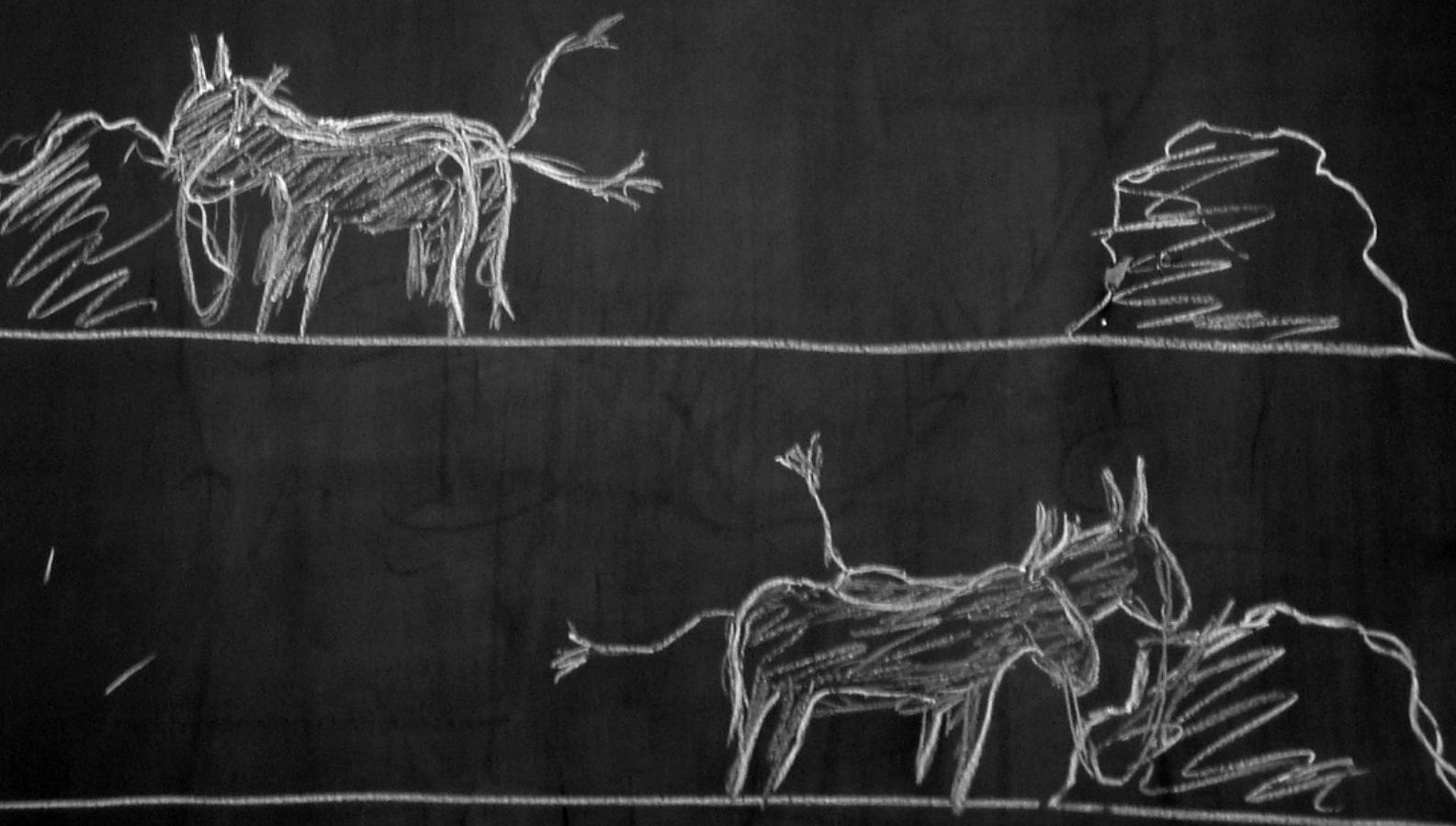
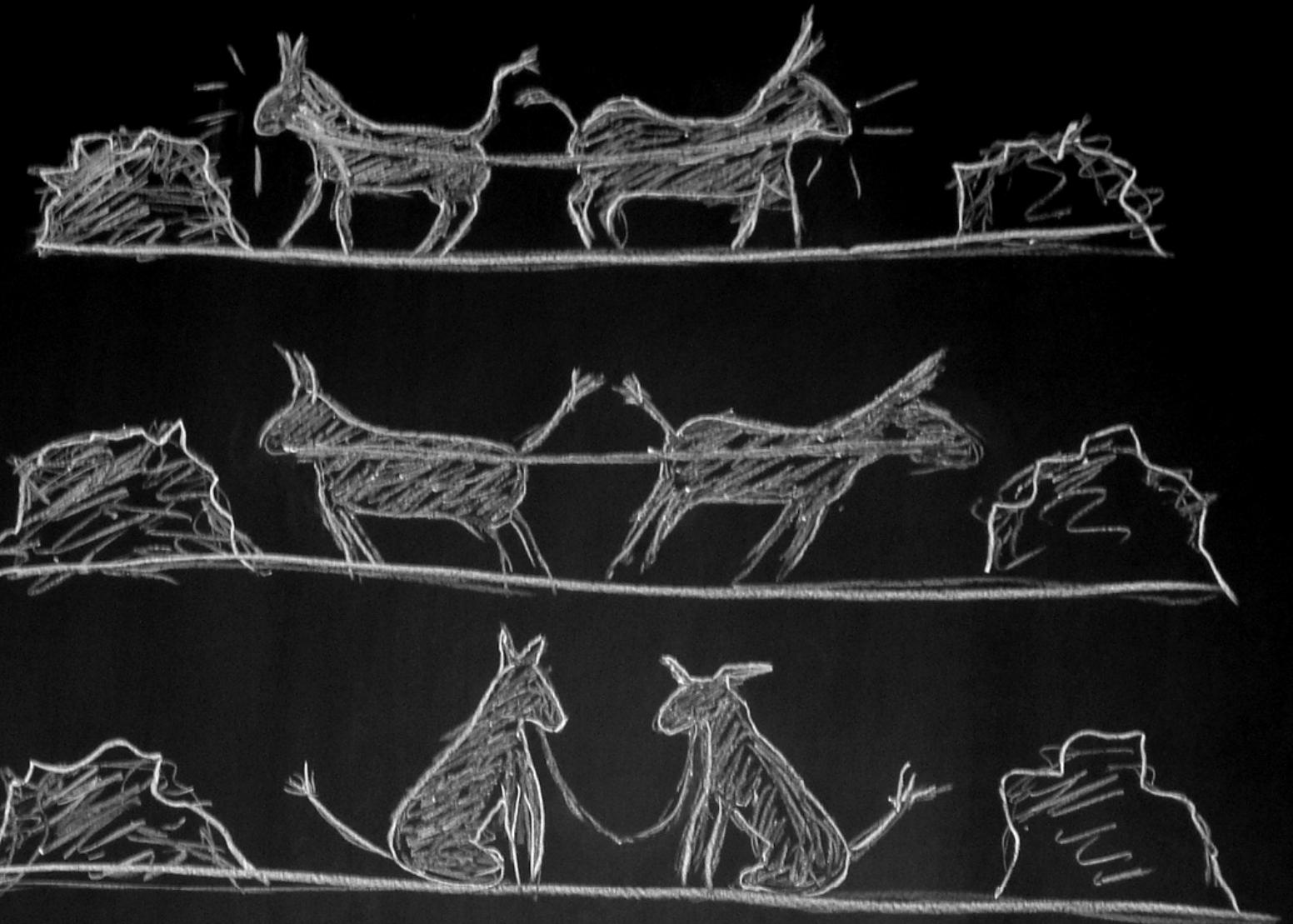
³⁵ Allport (1954 in Chryssochoou 2004: 68) identifies the following preconditions regarding the contact hypothesis, in order for inter-group contact to succeed in reducing communal tension and prejudice there is to be equal status between the groups, the encounters have to be supported socially and institutionally, there should be cooperative interdependence and there should be acquaintance potential, meaning that the contact has to go beyond shallow single encounters. None of these preconditions were met as a standard on the EMU-scheme.

dialectical process in which “young people are inducted into, what is still, a seriously flawed society, but in part they are encouraged to embark on a process of creating a new and better society”. A similar hope is expressed in a peace mural that portrays children breaking through the peace wall, where they meet children from the other side³⁶. Again we face Baron von Münchhausen carrying himself by his own hair. These young people cannot develop new understandings of society themselves, it takes teachers to challenge them to challenge old understandings and develop new ones. Thus citizenship education faces the problem that teachers who are part of a society where different understandings are rarely reflected and deliberated upon, are asked to expect exactly this from their pupils. The practical result of the discrepancy between what is to be taught under citizenship education and the contextual avoidance in which citizenship education is to be rooted is, that teachers often ignore the aspects of citizenship education in which the controversies are to be addressed (Smith 2003: 22). In the delivery of citizenship education, teachers come to focus more on issues of citizenship, equality and diversity in a global context without relating it back to the local context of Northern Ireland, by drawing heavily upon the global component of human rights (Arlow 2001: 8).

Besides this context-specific constraint on success on the level of delivery, another constraint is at work as well. In the first chapter of this thesis, I sketched out two mechanisms constraining the public sphere from serving as the deliberative space in which the understandings of conflict might be confronted and social justice restored. One was the context-specific avoidance that constrains the delivery of citizenship education in the sense just provided. The other was what Habermas called ‘colonisation of life world’ faced in the modern capitalist society in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. The reluctance on teachers’ part to deal with societal problems as deeply rooted as citizenship in Northern Ireland stems from a similar development as well. The reluctance is not only in line with the context-specific societally rooted avoidance, but also with a general reluctance to impose on pupils’ freedom³⁷. In the absence of a neutral reading of issues around citizenship in Northern Ireland, this question poses itself more strongly. In the end, the success of citizenship education, even if planned to perfection, depends on the ability of individual teachers to deliver. Some individual teachers who have been able to break through the avoidance are the subject of the following chapter.

³⁶ For a picture of this peace mural, see front page, and page 60.

³⁷ In the most extreme case, a value- and cultural relativism has become part of both upbringing and education (see Spangenberg, Frits & Martijn Lambert. 2009. *De Grenzeloze Generatie: en de eeuwige jeugd van hun opvoeders*. Amsterdam: Nieuw Amsterdam for an account of this phenomenon in the Netherlands).



3. Education as Citizenship

Micro-practices of Educational Creativity

In one of the weekly children's sermons in church, the minister takes out a towel on which “the two mules – a fable for the nations” is told in images. He walks along the row of children in front of him, asking them to explain to him what they see. The children answer reluctant at first, after some successful answers they gain enthusiasm. “Its donkeys!”, “yes, two mules – what else is there?” The fable tells of two mules tight together by a rope. Each longing for a pile of hay on either side of the towel. The rope however, prevents them from ever reaching it. The last two lines show how they start working together: eating from both piles together. The message: “Co-operation is better than conflict”. The children are gradually led to the conclusion, which after reaching it is translated to the social reality they inhabit: “so this is a lesson for Northern Ireland as well, where people have worked against each other for a long time, rather than cooperating for the benefit of all”. Afterwards the children leave for their bible lesson. The adults remain. The minister then proceeds to his adult sermon, in which he repeats the practice on a different level, but continuously comes back to the message conveyed in this obviously simplified illustration of the two mules.

A micro-practice of citizenship education which stands outside the context of educational macro-planning, capturing the idea that the success of citizenship education does not lie solely in the careful planning and programming on an institutional level, it takes teachers in their human form to deliver. Eddie remarks that “teachers are the unsung heroes of Northern Ireland’s world in the last thirty years.” Eddie professed as a teacher during the Troubles. He calls teachers unsung heroes, “because teachers effectively offered children the only experience they had of responsibility and power and authority being exercised in ways they found was clearly in their benefit and in a context that civil society had begun to disintegrate, and respect for authority had begun to disintegrate. A sense of you could do almost what you wanted. Then when they went into school that wasn’t the case. And teachers were, you know, exercising their responsibility with care, love, respect, affection. I think that was extremely important. Schools have been described as ‘oases of calm’ midst of a very violent society, and I think teachers played an enormous part in that. The very best of our teachers have always incidentally striven to bring our children to an understanding of the need for social cohesion and respect.”

The practices of the teachers Eddie hails as Northern Ireland’s ‘unsung heroes’ do not

unproblematically reflect the overall landscape of teaching in Northern Ireland, nor are these teachers representative of ‘the teacher’ as such. It takes courage and high morals to counter a society one is part of – be it one of violence during the Troubles, or one of silence and strategic avoidance at present. However, the micro-practices of those individual teachers who are putting their personal development at work for social transformation might influence the educational landscape as much as Paul Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson’s (2000) ‘cultural creatives’ are reshaping the cultural landscape of America³⁸. This is why I consider them micro-practices of Northern Ireland’s educational creatives. These teachers and their practices during and after the Troubles are the subject of this chapter.

3.1 A Safe Space? – Education During the Troubles

“Northern Ireland survived the Troubles largely because it was ignored. Schools were a safe place to come. When you came to school the Troubles were outside the gates. And that was largely maintained inside the school, so you just didn’t talk about the Troubles, you didn’t talk about division, you didn’t talk about anything that separated Catholics and Protestants.” The strategic avoidance of controversy upheld in everyday encounters thus echoed in Northern Irelands schools during the Troubles. This characterisation of schools during the Troubles is provided by Barbara, but echoed in many other teacher’s voices. Barbara coordinates citizenship education in a state grammar in Belfast, her enthusiasm and relentless effort to make these classes an enjoyable and meaningful experience for her pupils first inspired me to coin the term ‘educational creatives’ to characterise the teachers working towards social change in a context discouraging the facing of issues needed to overcome. The term is derived from the broader term ‘cultural creatives’, which I apply to the sphere of education. In *The Cultural Creatives*, Ray and Anderson (2000) describe how a new culture is emerging, or rather being created by some “50 million people [...] changing the world”³⁹. How many teachers are working towards social transformation from their isolated classrooms is unknown, as is their impact. This chapter serves to introduce some of these teachers and their practices, the next will investigate how educational creativity might be extended through teacher education, and how to be embedded in civil society.

³⁸ Ray and Anderson (2000) coined the term ‘cultural creatives’ for people who are creating a new cultural strand in the US (see footnote 3, page 8).

³⁹ Citation derived from the subtitle to *The Cultural Creatives: how 50 million people are changing the world*.

Barbara characterised schools as safe spaces during the Troubles. When I asked her if she thought the Troubles were right to be kept out of the classroom she answered hesitantly “at least I don’t think keeping it out enforced it....in the sense that for a part of the Troubles I would think it would have been quite right that schools were a haven. But by the mid 1970s you can’t stay cocooned forever, you need to look at the problems, what’s causing the problems and what you might want to do about a solution. But schools were very resistant in doing that because it was uncomfortable for teachers.” During the Troubles teachers taking an educationally creative approach to teaching seem to have been the odd exceptions to the rule of silence. One exception was Eddie, who taught English at the time of the Troubles. He tells me how he chose to use the safe space provided by the school walls during the Troubles to make some sense of what was happening outside. “I taught in West Belfast on the Falls Road [notorious Catholic/nationalist/republican area – QV] for a long time. I taught in a Catholic boys. I can remember that out of my job as far as I was concerned, at that particular time, was to talk about or to challenge in them particular understandings of Irish history and society. So for example at that time our examination had a considerable amount of freedom to the teacher to decide what he or she would teach in relation to identified topics. So one of the topics that we had was ‘war’, this is in English literature class, OK? Now, I could have taken refuge in stories about the Great War, the Second World War or whatever. Now what I chose to do was, there was a war going on outside their door. Now the Troubles were in full flight, seventy-two would have been the most violent year I think Northern Ireland ever experienced. Now, I could talk about all the usual sort of stuff. And I thought: “no, these children are being faced with propaganda and war outside their door”. So what I did was, I set out a course that effectively looked through literature at war in Ireland.”

I asked Eddie to give me an example of how he mobilised literature to teach his pupils something about this war that was going on in their streets. “Well, for example one of the things I used was ... the title escaped me now, I can’t remember the writer either, but funny enough the important lines haven’t escaped me. They come back even after thirty-nine years. But the most important thing was that it was about, talking about an event that had happened in Derry-city – we can’t even agree what to call Derry – in Derry-city. And essentially it was where as a young man the poet had seen an attack on British soldiers in what was called a ‘Crossly Tender’ – this is just the name of the vehicle, OK? – and he then sees the gunman run away. And he says: “at Auschwitz and Dallas I felt no surprise for I’d seen the dreadful future in that frightened gunman’s eyes”.” In the case of this poet, the local experience of violence

informs a world-citizenship in the sense that it underlies his connection to the happenings in Auschwitz and Dallas. Similarly the local conflict inspires a globalised citizenship based on the (assumed) shared experience of suffering, which explains the references to the Basque- and Palestinian conflicts in republican murals, and the Israeli flag waved by loyalist marchers, the consistency in nationalists taking side with the Palestinians and unionists taking side with Israel in reader's reactions to news from the Middle-East⁴⁰.

Eddie explains the poet's line as putting the local conflict in a global perspective, from which he derives a general lesson about violence. He then goes on to show his pupils that the violence committed under the banner of Catholicism – their own religion – is condemned by its own Bible. He translates the conflict in terms they are acquainted with, then condemns the means through which it is fought – by reference to a commandment the perpetrators are bound to according to the faith ascribed to them: “Now what he [the poet – QV] was actually doing was, he was linking the violence in Ireland on a continuum through to Auschwitz, the camps, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and what I was trying to point out to these guys was, there is no difference you know, violence is violence. And as Catholics for example I used to make a point – for I taught religion as well – I used to make the point to them that there is a commandment that says ‘thy shalt not kill’, now gentlemen there is no subtext at the bottom, and at the bottom it doesn't say “except in the following circumstances: British soldiers, Protestant gunmen or whatever” it says it very clear, and that's the reality. Then I did a piece of literature called ‘A Guest of the Nation’, OK? Now ‘Guest of the Nation’ is a short story and it begins with ... there's two British soldiers that were captured by the Old IRA back in nineteen-twenty. And they've been brought in and the young woman of the house says: “you've got my brother's socks”. This is because there had been kindness and domesticity between these soldiers and their captors. So these were not being held as enemies – if you know what I'm getting at – but they *were* enemies. Now what happens is, what has happened is that as they were held, the more it began that they became friends. So they would gamble around the table at night. And one of the British soldiers was a notoriously bad gambler, so he would lose all his money to the Irishmen, and the Irishmen would lose all their money to the British soldier who was the better gambler who then gave it to the other guy to lose back. They argued about ‘isms,

⁴⁰ Inversely, a global perspective can impact on the local: global injustices are translated into a local context where injustices then pose themselves stronger (see for example Eddie's educational reflection on the use of discourse in paragraph 1.2, page 23). Both Tony, a University teacher and researcher, and David, an English teacher, told me how a foreign experience changed their perspective on the local conflict – inspiring their educational creativity (see page 48).

they talked about ‘isms, talked about, you know, socialism, communism, talked about all ‘isms but didn’t mention the two – which is imperialism and nationalism. You’re never told why. And yet in many senses... Now what happens at the end is, they trust these guys so much that they let them go out and collect turf outside. So they’re not really prisoners in that sense. And note the title: “Guests of the Nation”. They were guests, the nation being the IRA, the army of the nation as it were. OK. What happens then is that the British army executes some IRA prisoners, and the IRA staff commander arrives and says: “As a reprisal we ought to shoot these two”. And there’s trauma. [QV: “do they do it?”] Oh they do! But it brings home in a sense, the awful pain and the tragedy that is life.” Drawing my attention from the story back to his teaching and the context in which that teaching took place, he says: “Now that sort of activity was very good, you know, it was important that I was challenging in my children in front of me. And by the way, our school was on the road that had been renamed ‘RP7 avenue’, that was it – RP7 is a rocket launcher, a very favourite weapon of the IRA. So what I’m saying is in the midst of republican West Belfast. My responsibility was to challenge. No one ever asked me for this task, and I didn’t ask for it either, it was just there.” Answering my question whether he had seen any recognisable effects on his pupils, Eddie says: “Well, I can tell you that years later a young man told me that he did not join the IRA, because of my class. That felt so good it was better than a medal, better than any inspection report I ever had from the government”.

In reflecting on his own teaching, Eddie comes to an understanding of what pupils needed from their teacher in such a context as provided by the Troubles: “If I had said to them in a preachy way, they would close up. But when you allow them to explore a concept and to arrive at a decision about certain activities outside of their context which they believe then were wrong, it is easier then to say: “well, why are they [these activities – QV] right in our own context?” and the answer is they’re not. So throughout my teaching career I have thought that my responsibility has been to make young people think, to reflect, to consider, and ultimately to be in a position to use the word ‘I’ with greater confidence. “I believe”, “I will act”, “I understand”. [...] The point is that teaching isn’t about simply giving the subject knowledge over to the child, teaching is about challenging and forming that individual, and creating in them the capacity to be themselves and to be critical, to be a positive force in the world. So it’s so important that it’s almost too important to be left – you know – [hesitantly] to people who don’t understand it.” This last point informs the need for developing a meso-level supportive body for teachers involved in (citizenship) education. Where – in Maureen’s words – “teachers are taken through that whole thinking process” themselves before having to take their pupils

through a thinking process as Eddie did in the example above. How did some teachers become educational creatives in a context that did not favour reflective practices regarding societal tension to be conducted in the classroom?

3.2 Becoming Educationally Creative

How did Barbara come to decide to assume responsibility for citizenship education? “Well you have to go back to 1990, 1991. There was what was called the ‘Opsahl-commission’⁴¹ which was, if you like, civic society. I was involved with organising a pupil conference about the society in which they lived, what they would like to see happening to it. And probably the most important factor and most important feature in their responses was the fact that they wanted to know more about the society in which they lived but it was never taught in schools. Now not just the society we are governed, not just politics, but the kind of society, the kind of rights, the features of a democracy were not taught in any school. Nor were the Troubles, they would have been considered to be too controversial.” Barbara came to see that the reluctance on the teacher’s part to tackle these issues was not informed by an actual need to protect pupils from controversy. “This is what we found in the Opsahl, that pupils were much more prepared to take on the controversial topics, the difficult topics and prepared to discuss things like sectarianism and racism, controversial issues. It was the teachers that didn’t want to touch them with a barchpole,” her own explanation for the generational difference being that teachers had never had to face these issues as the avoidance of controversy kept them safe from ever touching upon them, whereas according to her, the younger generation didn’t recognise the same need for upholding this politeness. According to Barbara, things have changed in this regard: “Yes, much has changed. Certainly amongst younger people. But there is still a resistance to people who have been brought up in a middle-class background. They have never had to face the Troubles as they were never on their doorstep, and they don’t want to face them now. They are not comfortable with sectarianism, racism or rights not being delivered, because they think somehow it’s safer not to talk about it.”⁴² However, Barbara goes against the logic underlying

⁴¹ The Opsahl commission was a civic initiative established in 1992, its findings were published in Andy Pollak ed. 1993. *A Citizens' Inquiry: The Opsahl Report on Northern Ireland*. Dublin: Lilliput.

⁴² I have largely neglected the role of class in the conflict and in the perceptions of the past and present situation in Northern Ireland. My impression is that cultural, or societal divisions largely intersect with class divisions. In the past this has been more obvious due to discrimination in jobs, housing and education. The middle-ground in Chapter 2 is constituted by the economical middle-class. If Barbara is right in saying they have largely been kept safe from the Troubles, it adds another factor to the keenness to move on without looking back: if they have never

the strategic avoidance prevalent in larger society – informed by the fear that facing the past endangers the peace process as it might disturb community relations – saying, “you can’t possibly deal with things if you don’t know where the problems came from, where the misunderstandings have come from. We would have a saying ‘you can’t lance a boil without doing some damage’ – a boil is like a big blister in the skin festering under the surface – but if you want to get rid, it has to be lanced at some point. You have to go through that moment of pain in order for it to heal up. And to me that is what made me interested in this, because that’s what the young people wanted.” Thus Barbara has made her pupils need and wish her motive for changing her own teaching. In order to do this she first had to go back to college “otherwise they wouldn’t employ me”, therewith making her pupils’ question her motivation for personal development which she would finally put to work for social transformation.

Barbara explains her choice for teaching citizenship education in an educationally creative way – trying to use the classroom as a reflective space for societal issues faced by her pupils outside school – in light of her experience with the Opsahl-conference. For others their choice is harder to explain, for some it is just too ordinary to teach in such a fashion to warrant explanation at all. David, teacher in a state grammar near Belfast, explains his involvement with citizenship education as a natural progression. Putting his teaching in service of understanding – and therewith possibly transforming – society through citizenship education stems from his work as an English teacher. As an English teacher, David knows how persuasive discourse can be, how important to encourage pupils to be able to use language to speak out for themselves, to encourage involvement in, and understanding of society. “It’s about empowerment and entitlement. If we teach our pupils to understand how society works and provide them the tools to access decision-making in society, we don’t expect them to actively *be* it, but make sure they know *how* to be it. Isn’t that citizenship education?” According to David it is about understanding the self as part of a whole: “we are part of society, and our society is part of an even bigger whole. We get a better perspective through the global, if we use it to put the local in perspective.” Brian Lambkin (2001) shares a similar view of citizenship education, referring to Stephen Dedalus, from James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Stephen Dedalus refers to his educational background, referring to the universe as his school’s address. Lambkin (2001: 39) makes this awareness of locality from a global perspective the ideal for and incentive behind citizenship education: “If our challenge as educators is to bring all

had to face the social justice issues that were at stake during the Troubles it does not make it easier to acknowledge them now.

pupils to [Stephen Dedalus'] kind of vision of the world and that sense of their unique place in it, we do need to move citizenship education from the hidden to the revealed curriculum. [...] The thrust of citizenship education is to extend [...] active participation to the local community and connect it with the wider world."

As my conversation with David evolves, his understanding of the relationship between education and society becomes rooted in an account of his journey to Africa. "The sense of social justice was always there", he explains, "I took a sense of importance of education for personal change and the community with me when I returned from Africa". Back in Northern Ireland, David aims at enlarging his pupils' perspectives. David is involved in a cross-communal project with his school and a Catholic school in Belfast. "We always start with a bus tour. A tourist attraction that takes you to the industrial areas of Belfast, the political and cultural venues, murals, the University. Now this serves to challenge in the pupils to see different perspectives on Belfast and different places. Our pupils have never been to a republican area, the other pupils have probably not seen the Shankill [Notorious Protestant/loyalist area – QV]. It takes them out of their comfort zone and shows them different sides to the story."

A change of perspective impacts teachers as much as pupils. For Tony, academic lecturer and education researcher, it informed a kind of personal paradigm-shift: "My political views used to be much more radical, you have to understand this in the context of the paramilitaries and everything. Then I went to work in Europe after communism and the Balkans. What I saw there put Northern Ireland in perspective. I gained a new perspective on local ongoingings. So, where at first I would have fought to eradicate the border, I learned that rather than remove the border, we should work to challenge it, make it less important."

3.3 Teaching Educational Creativity

Different teachers have followed different paths to educational creativity. David and Tony's respective journeys took them far beyond Northern Ireland's borders, when Barbara made the needs of her pupils locally, her motive for her educational creativity. The story of Eddie tells us how educational creatives potentially help others in becoming educationally creative. It might not be a very original statement, as many personal experiences and figures in literature tell the same story in which an inspiring teacher – whether formally teaching or in the shape of a teacher figure – somehow awakens a hidden talent or calling in the leading character. In trying to understand how and why Eddie became the exception in going against the rule of keeping

the Troubles out of school, he comes to reflect on his own experiences as a schoolboy. He asks himself whether someone taught him to be what I call an educational creative: “I don’t know whether I’ve always viewed life with a certain prism and therefore interpreted what was happening to me in a certain sense – do you know what I mean? Or whether or not people set out...I don’t remember people telling me that I was the keeper of tomorrow.”⁴³ When I asked him whether he recognised any teachers that might have been an example to him, he answered: “I think so. I think so and I’ll tell you. Basically what happened with me, I went to school in a very working-class district in Belfast – in Ballymurphy which is one of the most notorious districts in West Belfast. And basically what happened was, we were told continuously “what you will be is dependent upon you and what you set out to do”. Our teachers told us “don’t limit your ambitions, be who you can be.” I became a teacher because of a guy called Jim who was my history teacher. Education became my way out of a working-class environment. It was a chance to better myself. And it was I believed – thanks to my teachers – my right. I had a right to be better. And it’s interesting because my class that came through has been remarkably successful. [...] I think imbued in us was a sense of personal ambition, and a sense that – you know – if we were able to do that, then we had a responsibility to help others to do it. If the system of education had been so good to me, then I had almost a God-given responsibility to share that.” As with Barbara’s case, Eddie therewith made what he thought the needs of others into a motive for his own teaching. The difference being that Barbara recognised these needs by what her pupils literally asked of her, whereas Eddie knew the needs because they had been his own and had been recognised and met by his teachers, especially Jim. What made this history teacher so special to Eddie? He says: “His belief in us. His obvious respect for us. His sense that – his appreciation of all our efforts of what we did. [...] I went to his retirement when he retired. And I told him that I had become the person I had largely because of him. [...] And he actually – he shed tears.” Eddie’s current work at GTCNI involves speaking at conferences where he uses Jim’s example “all over the place [to make] the point that the influence and impact that a teacher has cannot be overestimated”, adding in a more serious tone: “For bad or good. For bad or good.” That Eddie in turn mobilised his influence as a teacher for the better has been proven – to him – by the example provided in section 3.1 of this thesis, where he recounts how one of his pupils attributed his decision not to join the IRA to Eddie’s teaching.⁴⁴

⁴³ Eddie’s motto “teachers are the keepers of tomorrow”, lies at the heart of his current work as Registrar to the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI), which I will come back to in paragraph 4.1 (page 53-54).

⁴⁴ See page 44 of this thesis.

However he also provides an account of how he found a positive motive for teaching not just in Jim's example of good teaching, but in the experience of its mirror-image. The encounter with bad teaching has strengthened his belief in the importance of teachers taking up their 'role as future shapers', as Eddie calls it, and mobilising that power for the betterment of society.

Eddie tells of his encounter with what might be pictured as Jim's mirror-image: "I had an appalling time in primary school. Quite the converse. [...] We were moved into this guy's class because we were too young to go to secondary school. There was four of us and he treated the four of us appalling. He just didn't treat us – he treated us badly. We were beaten we were – you know. I'm not one of these people who say "oh, I've had a horrible childhood", I didn't. But I lived for a year in fear in that class, OK? When I was in fourth year or fifth year they introduced a rule where all pupils had to stay on until the age of sixteen. And there was one class of kids who ordinarily would have left. And guess who turned up, who was given the job to mind them? This teacher from my primary school!" Eddie's reaction to the decision to give this particular teacher the responsibility for the weakest pupils says much about his sense of social justice. Instead of being pleased that at least he would not be subjected to the teacher himself, he says the following: "I remember being outraged that these kids who were not as bright as me were being subjected to this....fool! Who was an unjust man. That again probably burned into my sight the sense that every child deserves the best. Those children who are not bright were not getting anywhere near the best. And that was wrong. So that's the sort of personal philosophy that I brought to what I do here [at GTCNI – QV]".

Individual teachers can lead other individual teachers towards educational creativity, which warrants the need for teaching educational creativity on the level of teacher education. This, of course is only possible if individual teachers set an example of educational creativity on that level. Another suggestion for expanding the reach of educational creativity, and mediating the macro-planning of citizenship education and its micro-delivery, is to build supportive bodies in the mesosphere. This is the subject of the next chapter, in which we encounter Eddie, and teacher educator Norman practicing educational creativity beyond the classroom.

pedestrian blackboard

feel free to draw

4. Spacing Education

Embedding Citizenship Education in the Public Sphere

“People with similar ideas find each other”

(Norman, teacher educator)

The teachers figuring as educational creatives in the last chapter, are educational creatives because of their personal development that led them to professing as they do. They do not teach as they teach because the programme tells them to. The reluctance of many teachers to touch upon the more contentious issues within citizenship education warrants, as said earlier, the mediation between the planning of citizenship education on a macro-level, and its delivery in micro-practices of teaching. The logic behind it, is that dealing with contentiousness in class would ask of teachers to counter a society they are part of. However, some teachers have been able to do just that. My suggestion would be to encourage the development of meso-supportive bodies in which educational creatives find a platform to support each other and help others become educationally creative. The only thing – according to Ray and Anderson (2000) – setting the cultural creatives apart from the more visible American ‘subcultures’ Modernism and Traditionalism is the lack of awareness among cultural creatives of themselves as a whole people. If the same is true for educational creatives, such meso-level bodies could be the answer.

The constraints Barbara faces in coordinating citizenship education in her school say as much about the need for a meso-level to mediate macro-planning and micro-delivery in citizenship education. Having to work with teachers not interested in the subject or feeling uneasy with delivering what is conveyed in citizenship education, and never being sure of having the staff she prepared one year working with her the next, she knows firsthand how limited the influence of macro-planning is on the micro-delivery by individual teachers on the ground. This warrants, first of all, the necessity to embed citizenship education in a reflective and explicit school-ethos, which Barbara is pursuing in her school. This necessity does not only stem from the need for teachers to feel supported in their messages, the absence of a reflective school-ethos could also result in burdening pupils with conflicting expectations if it means reflection on controversial issues is asked of them in the classroom while being discouraged outside. In order for citizenship education to be effective, the community as constituted by the

school has to reflect the message conveyed in its curriculum (Wylie 2004: 246⁴⁵). Furthermore, a the development of meso-communities beyond the single school is needed in the absence of broader societal support in order to close the gap between macro-planning and micro-delivery of citizenship education. Education researcher Ulrike points towards the lack of reflection among teachers: “there are virtually no reflection opportunities for teachers, yet pupils are asked to reflect without teachers having reflected upon the issues or their practice themselves.”

4.1 Mediating Macro- and Microspheres: Meso-level Education

Eddie hailed Northern Ireland’s teachers as the ‘unsung heroes’ amidst a violent society. His characterisation seems rather optimistic in a context where education has as often been blamed for reproducing segregation and sectarianism. Eddie’s praise seems to stand in sharp contrast to the views of BCDA-worker Karen, who remarks that “the problem I have is the assumption that the people in the formal education system are not part of the society. But education is delivered in Northern Ireland by the same bigots who caused trouble in the first place! Teachers and headmasters have not been taught about conflict and negotiation techniques, you know. Some think the world is still flat. So how can you expect that kind of mentality to actually prepare a new society?! Teachers actually need support and changes as well. That’s part of the problem.” Besides an obvious difference in character, their optimism and scepticism are not just born from difference in personality. One judges teaching practices from a macro-perspective, the other from the bottom-up. Karen criticises the assumption that overall, teachers can be expected to address the issues of a society and culture they are integral part of. Eddie draws attention to the efforts and best-practices of individual teachers on the ground. Karen critically reflects on the assumptions translated in the macro-planning of social transformative education, whereas Eddie hails the best-practices developed from a micro-level. In the end their views come together on a level between their respective micro- and macro- perspectives when Karen concludes that teachers need support and change in order to be able to practice what is prescribed top-down, and Eddie builds a supportive body for teaching-practices on a meso-level.

Eddie explains why he feels this supportive body should be about teaching as such, not just citizenship education and those responsible for its delivery: “There was no Education for

⁴⁵ Wylie’s (2004) main focus is the segregated context in which citizenship education is taught. Wylie argues for a congruency between the school environment and curriculum. For Wylie, this is primarily an argument for integrated education, however I think integration has to be preceded by a content-based approach, thus I argue for a congruency in school-*ethos* and curriculum.

Mutual Understanding when I was doing what I was doing. I don't believe that, I believe EMU was in part a little bit of a mistake – a well-intended mistake. The mistake was it was an add-on, where as far as I was concerned it always was a responsibility for all teachers. It is not something the EMU teacher did, it was everyone's responsibility as a teacher. [...] I think it may have got to the stage where people thought "this is the responsibility of the EMU-person, not me." I think in many senses teachers don't realise fully that reality – of being future shapers. In some senses there's a quite a clear understanding that we don't simply serve the needs of society, we're creating society as well. So the values we bring forward, the values we inculcate, the capacity that we engender in children – that *is* tomorrow, that *is* the future. [...] Now this is a job I particularly wanted. Because I believed that teachers don't appreciate themselves. I believe teachers don't recognise how important they are. I also think teachers are overwhelmed by the immediacy of their work. Teachers are very tired people. It think they need the support, a sense of community and that is why we try to build with them a sense of professional identity. [...] What we're trying to build are communities of practice. [...] We try to get people to share – reflective practice we call it." The General Teaching Council Eddie is Registrar of, is a regulatory body for the teaching profession. It is about setting out values and competences underpinning good teaching through a Charter for Education, a teacher magazine, annual lecture, series of workshops throughout the year, funding of teacher initiatives and a research database for teachers.

Such institutions as the General Teaching Council can function as meso-supportive bodies for educational creativity. However, it only reaches those already professing as teachers. Maureen, a former teacher, articulated the primary problem with the delivery of citizenship education as follows: "We haven't taken our teachers through that whole thinking process yet. Until we get teachers to see why they are asked to do what we are asking of them, how can we expect them to take their pupils through it?" This resonates with what has been called "whole process". Ray and Anderson (2000: 9) attribute the term to Margaret Mead, it conveys "[being part of] creating something from beginning, middle, end, and through to the new beginning." A sense of this whole process, by having gone through a thinking process as meant by Maureen, would give teachers a sense of ownership over their teaching and greater commitment to the process. An obvious starting-point for taking teachers through this thinking process is teacher education.

“Come in!” I open the door and enter Norman’s office. Norman is a teacher educator at Stranmillis College for teacher education. He steps out from behind a pile of papers and welcomes me, then goes back to his desk to finish what he had been working on. I use the time to sit down, organise my own papers, then look around the room. Next to the door two versions of the Two Mules – fable for the nation⁴⁶ are pinned up against the wall: one in English, the other in Irish/Gaelic. “Yes, I used those mules in many classes. It’s one of those simple images that strike a chord with the complex reality”, he comments, quickly adding: “I’m sorry for the mess, it’s only a small room”. The room is covered with piles of books and paper, from which Norman easily finds whatever it is he wants to show me during the interview: “This might interest you as well, it’s a book I wrote as a resource for ‘Personal Development and Religious Education’ in primary education. Note the title: “People who need people: All kinds of people in all kinds of places”⁴⁷. He searches another pile to give me a piece he wrote on ‘Sharing Religious Education’⁴⁸. Oh, and if you want to talk about best-practices, this is something they did in this primary school, they did a great job”, and a map of materials comes out from under a third pile. “Take it if you want! Oh and I’ll make a copy of the book I’m currently working on. It’s not finished yet but I’ll give you the first chapters.”

Norman is in charge of Religious Education at Stranmillis College. He started as a teacher, then became involved with the development of various cross-community schemes and what he calls ‘peace-education’, then continued his work on the level of teacher education. The roots of his involvement in peace initiatives were already there when he was a student in the mid 1960’s when he was involved with Corrymeela – an inter-faith peace organisation. “Before Education for Mutual Understanding started, I was already writing resources for such a programme. All these initiatives that were already there just came together under EMU. I would say it started out as an informal movement and seven years later you had it as part of the curriculum. Now parallel to the process of EMU being statutorised I was drawn into training. This was because I saw that the resources for teachers didn’t provide enough for them to develop and understand the ideas. That just led to shelving of those ideas: they would just land on the shelves of

⁴⁶ See illustration Chapter 3 (page 40), and page 41 for a fuller description.

⁴⁷ Norman Richardson. [1995] 2005. *People who need people: All kinds of people in all kinds of places*. Belfast: The Churches’ Peace Education Programme.

⁴⁸ Norman Richardson. [2004] 2007. ‘Sharing Religious Education: A brief introduction to the possibility of an inclusive approach to R.E. in Northern Ireland’, research resources for Religious Education. Online available at: <http://www.stran.ac.uk/media/media,119910,en.pdf> (accessed August 5, 2010).

teachers who didn't know exactly what to do with it. So parallel to the EMU process we started developing courses for teachers. Now a network of people had been involved with all this, people with similar ideas find each other. And they finally became the FOCUS group. Now this is a group that is more or less informally existing around issues of cross-community and social cohesion, a whole range of groups have been involved." This is how Norman explains his step from teaching towards teacher education as a natural progression accompanying the development of social transformative education and his interest in peace-related initiatives in education and civil society.

Teacher education provides one space of opportunity for the building of a meso-level in support of citizenship education. In many ways, however, teacher education still has to overcome the same issues standing in the way of citizenship education in schools. The parallel society-system prevalent in Northern Ireland does not just involve segregation of schooling, this segregation extends to the level of teacher education as well. "We don't just educate our children separately, we educate our teachers separately as well", Norman sadly informs me. Being a teacher educator at Stranmillis College he speaks of his frustration regarding the continuing segregation in education: "I am quite frustrated with our education-system, because really it is a parallel education system. One of the issues that attracted me to education was how we learn about each other. Many people have no contact because of the divided society we have here. Education remains a symptom of that divide, or maybe it is cause, both cause and symptom maybe? Anyway it is part of a bigger problem. [...] Even in mixed areas schools have remained segregated, this is despite the recent development of integrated schools. Still over 90% of our schools are effectively separated. [...] I am trying to tackle segregation at the level of teacher education. I started here [at Stranmillis College – QV] in 1997, what I did was organise meetings between Stranmillis and St. Mary's – which is the Catholic teacher education. This is now substantiated – although there are still people who say they might not want to do this – I do think there is a stronger basis for bringing them together today. I think it is a shame that the good relation between the two colleges isn't taken any further. At present there is no teacher education for integrated schools, but I teach my students from the assumption to treat all schools in an integrated way."

The context that complicates Norman to put teacher education in service of social transformation is the same that complicates education in doing its part, the same parallel societies-system that leads so many to view the conflict as one of community relations alone. However Norman does not stop at trying to ameliorate this social reality by building new

relations across the divide. “We have to get beyond the culture of politeness”, he says. “But this cannot be achieved if we don’t address the real issues. I actually think issues have gotten worse by not being addressed. The peace process has taken this long because it is the first time that issues *are* being addressed. This is still a very slow process, it will be a process of generational change. This is why education is so important. It is just one of many means: it takes politics too and a renewal of a social contract, plus a fair environment in the workplace.” Norman combines a community relations approach with one that is in line with a more content-based approach to the conflict. Furthermore he translates this two-folded vision of the conflict into a dual approach to social transformation in his education. The first is his effort to work with St. Mary’s College for Catholic teacher education, the second is a content-based approach to contentious issues in his own classes. Norman is just one of the teacher educators that stress the societal responsibility of education, other teacher educators express similar commitment to challenging their students to reflect on the social transformative potential of education. If these practices can become more and more embedded in teacher education and other meso-level supportive bodies for teaching, it might in turn become more embedded in practices of (citizenship) education in schools, through which it can challenge hegemonic understandings of the conflict and, indirectly, play a transformative part in Northern Ireland.



Conclusion

Ideas have consequences: the understanding we have of (social) reality has consequences for the way in which we approach and – whether or not intentionally – transform that reality. The predominant understanding regarding conflict in Northern Ireland is, as I have argued in this thesis, one that explains it in terms of community relations. These relations are understood – by some – to be constrained because of historical (mis)perceptions of the mutual incompatibility of the two main communities, their identities and the political aspirations derived from them. As a consequence, this understanding informs an approach to social transformation that in effect pursues alternative identifications without addressing the issues and incompatibilities raised by the existing nationalist and unionist communities. I compared this approach with the attempt to pull oneself by one's own hair, the result, in my view, a hung peace threatened by reference to the past and the unsettled constitutional question – hence the strategic avoidance of controversial issues that currently dominates the public sphere.

In this context it would be unfair to burden teachers and pupils with the task of breaking through this silence persistent in the society they are part of as well, which also explains why many teachers deliver educational programmes – whether consisting of bringing children from different backgrounds together, or in content-based citizenship education – with as little reference to controversial issues as possible. A justified question is raised: “Why should kids be the focus of concern when it is the rest of us – the culture that is acquiring them – that arranges their trouble?” (McDermott & Varenne 2006: 4). Yet, it is a societal responsibility to provide children the tools with which to participate in and co-construct the society they were born into. Furthermore, as it is impossible to provide them a neutral societal context, nor is it possible to provide value-free education, it is our responsibility to shape societal and educational forms as well-informed as possible. From the question posed, I derive the importance to embed citizenship education in (civil) society in order not to burden them with conflicting expectations in education and society. I also derive from this question the importance of enabling teachers to develop understandings they can confront their pupils with, without burdening them with conflicting messages in what they teach explicitly and implicitly, thus without the burden of conflicting curricula. I refuse to answer the question by rejecting teaching children (citizenship education) at all. However, an alternative understanding has to be developed from which citizenship education can derive its contents, and this understanding has first to be embedded in

teacher education. In this thesis I have argued for this understanding to be formed in terms of social justice, and to be developed through deliberative processes on all levels of society.⁴⁹ Maybe it is time to replace Northern Ireland's motive “whatever you say, say nothing”, with another: “History, despite its wrenching pain,/ Cannot be unlived, but if faced/ With courage, need not be lived again.”⁵⁰

In the absence of these deliberative processes vis-à-vis the past and present contentiousness, a starting point has to be found in order to develop just that for citizenship education. The practices of educational creativity as developed by individual committed teachers, if embedded in reflective meso-supportive bodies, and teacher education, could be just that starting point towards edutopia: education serving social transformation. Utopia, rather than being just the ideal society that is unreachable nor to be reached, has its function in pointing out the weaknesses in present society. David Halpin (2003: 8) defends its function as follows: “[...] many, even theoretical, utopias are realistically grounded in actual social processes or based upon a critique of their existing limitations.” Terry Eagleton (2000: 22, in Halpin 2003: 6) stresses the social transformative function, saying “[good utopia] finds a bridge between present and future in those forces within the present which are potentially able to transform it.” In the case of social transformative education, those forces within the present may be constituted by the micro-practices of educational creatives.

⁴⁹ I have focused on civil society rather than politics alone, as I have doubts as to whether change is to be expected from the political level, for there is still – in the aftermath of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement that was signed in 1998 – some truth in Colin Irwin's (1997: 111) observation that “unfortunately, peace, tolerance and understanding are not always in the best interests of the political leaders who claim to speak on behalf of the groups they say they represent. In large measure their political futures are contingent on the continuation of social divisions.” For if the constitutional question is resolved, and all citizen's rights are safeguarded regardless of their communal background, what role is left for nationalist and unionist politics?

⁵⁰ Poem from Maya Angelou's *Pulse of the morning* (1993, cited in McDermott and Varenne 2006: 27).

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Attachments

I. Abstract

This thesis deals with the subject of education and social transformation in Northern Ireland, a divided society. Northern Ireland has long been characterised by violent conflict, repercussions of which are still present to date. The predominantly nationalist divide – between those pursuing Irish unity, and those adhering to a British Northern Ireland – is most visible by the high levels of segregation persistent in Northern Irish neighbourhoods, education, churches, political aspirations and narratives on the violent past. Segregation has become an obvious testimony of the case made by many conflict-analyses of Northern Ireland that the conflict exists by the virtue of the existence and persistence of bad community relations between the two communities with perceived mutual exclusive identifications. The solutions derived from this understanding of the conflict focus on the amelioration of community relations, primarily through cross-communal contact programmes. As education is an important focus for social transformation – it teaches the children that will be Northern Ireland's future citizens – the community relations approach has been translated into an educational programme that brought schools from the different communities together. However, the community relations understanding of the conflict also informs a strategic avoidance of controversial issues on the communal level, hence the past and issues arising from it are not addressed in these programmes aimed at social transformation.

In this thesis a different understanding of the conflict is proposed: one that understands it in terms of social justice, which has not been delivered during the conflict due to a system of relationships which has systematically favoured one political position over the other. From this understanding an alternative approach to social transformation is proposed: one that aims to restore social justice, a precondition for which is an ongoing conversation in which the segregated narratives are deliberated upon and challenged in a Habermasian public sphere. In the educational sphere, this understanding is translated into the more content-based citizenship education. In the absence of a supportive public sphere, its delivery is dependent upon individual committed teachers. The practices of individual teachers who have succeeded in challenging the avoidance of controversy in their classrooms can have greater impact if they are embedded in and expanded through teacher education and supportive bodies on a meso- or civil society level.

II.

The Spirit of Belfast





IV.

Thanksgiving Statue

