

## C.2 Responses of Wider Nationalist Community Representatives

A total of 6 people representative of various nationalist/republican victims' groups, community organisations and human rights NGOs were interviewed. Responses from these interviewees were overwhelmingly positive. Most had been aware of the work as it was ongoing and some had provided advice and support in a range of ways during its progress. This context may have been reflected in their attitudes. Similarly, many would have endorsed the general outlook and issues raised by the project. Nevertheless, it was clear that all these respondents viewed the ACP in a highly favourable and positive light.

### 2.1. Writing History, Establishing Truth

- 2.1.1. For all the nationalist/republican respondents the core value of the work of the ACP was that it offered a platform for people to air their experiences publicly. One respondent felt that 'writing history' had two key dimensions. The story of Ardoyne was one that 'needed to be told for the benefit of history and for the benefit of the people involved'. This might best be understood as a collective and an individual value of 'truth-telling'.
- 2.1.2. The first of these elements was a theme taken up by another interviewee. The book, it was suggested, was a 'valuable document' because it 'documents the truth of the people from Ardoyne. It is their truth'. The usefulness of interviewing several people in relation to each case was noted as a particular strength because it 'produced a valuable record that puts the lives of the people into the context of what happened to the community as a whole'.
- 2.1.3. One interviewee regarded placing events and experiences 'on record' in this way as helping to make up for an absence of such perspectives in other histories of the conflict. 'This is the sort of history', it was argued, 'that has not happened anywhere else. There are libraries full of books that have never told the story of what happened to people in this community'.
- 2.1.4. This was linked by another respondent to the problem of official accounts that failed to take such voices into account. 'These experiences', it was suggested, 'have never appeared in official records'. Redressing that absence was particularly important for what were described as 'status-less people', by which was meant the large number of victims of state and loyalist violence (in the 1970s in particular) who were 'all but forgotten'. Gaining access to the voices and experiences of their relatives, this interviewee felt, could allow for a more inclusive history of the conflict to be written in the future.
- 2.1.5. Another interviewee from a victims' group believed that by 'creating a means for people to speak out in a way that had not been allowed before' the project was 'challenging censorship'. This was taken up by a community representative who described Ardoyne as a place that 'many people were not interested in' and that had been subjected to 'vilification' in the media and elsewhere. Such negative images of Ardoyne, it was argued, made it even

more significant for 'people to express themselves in their own words. That was very important'.

- 2.1.6 Part of the process of 'moving the telling of history forward', suggested one person, was to ensure that 'communities have the chance to recapture their history'. This would have two main effects. First, it meant that 'things will be there 'in black and white when it comes to the whole of the history of the conflict being told'. Second, it gave people a sense of place in society as a whole as they could feel that 'their voices and experiences were not to be ignored'.
- 2.1.7 For one respondent the strength of the work 'as history' was in recording and placing the lives of ordinary people, as well as the circumstances of their death. For this interviewee the book was 'vitaly important in bringing back ordinary working class punters doing ordinary working class things twenty or thirty years later. It was their ordinariness that had shown through'. He stressed several times that what was 'very, very useful' was that the testimonies 'brought the picture of the person back to life, reviving their personalities'. It made the reader realise 'here was this person and they had a job, and a family, or they were a great football player'. It was this aspect of the work that the interviewee found 'made me want to pick up the book more and more'.
- 2.1.8. Another argued that a 'great benefit of the project' was that it was 'really important in recovering historical memory and telling factually what had happened to people'. Again it was felt that this was a way of 'writing history', providing 'an historical outline for people' that was 'exactly the sort of thing that is required for the future'.
- 2.1.9 One respondent (who had personal experience of losing a loved one) saw 'establishing truth' as of great importance at an individual level. The book was seen as a way of 'clarifying events' and 'pulling together information' that could help 'establish the facts of the final moments of a loved one's death. That is very, very important for families'. Again the value of interviewing several people in each case was stressed. As was the inclusion of eyewitnesses whose 'information may not have been passed on before, or been seen as important'. Relatives often relied upon 'snippets of information' which created a 'mysterious lapse of time' concerning the final moments leading up to the death. This, it was argued, 'could be very debilitating' and so discovering any information about these moments could help 'bring about closure for many. Just to know now what happened'.
- 2.1.10. Such 'history writing' was also seen as a value for people trying to understand contemporary social issues and problems. One community activist felt that it had provided a valuable insight into 'better understanding the legacy of the conflict'. As a result it was possible to 'contextualise some of the problems we see now; problems in families, in relationships, or dependency on prescription drugs. It contextualises all that'.

## **2.2 Partiality and a 'Community Truth'**

- 2.2.1 All of these respondents felt that the term 'truth' was not only right but also necessary to describe the contents of the book. Two main lines of argument

were put forward to support this position. That it dealt with facts and/or that 'truth' is never wholly objective anyway.

- 2.2.2 One community activist felt people in the book were 'talking about facts that had not been talked about before'. These 'facts' were that 'people had been killed', that there was 'culpability involved in those killings' and that the 'administration of justice failed and was seen to fail'. The interviewee argued that 'short of digging people up' those who wanted to deny these facts would never be satisfied and questioned their motivation for wanting to 'deny people the word truth'.
- 2.2.3. Another respondent felt that there was sometimes a problem with the word 'truth' because 'it is a big word with a lot of connotations attached to it'. Experience-based 'truth' was often subjective because 'many people might go through exactly the same events but have very different experiences and so they will have a different truth'. The result was that 'there is no objective truth on issues like these'. At the same time, however, the same interviewee also felt that the project and the book were very much concerned with 'facts, verifiable things that happened to people and which have never been officially recognised'. In these terms, it was felt, the book was dealing with events and experiences that 'could not be denied'.
- 2.2.4. One interviewee felt that 'telling this community truth' did mean that it was therefore a story told by people 'from their own perspective'. However, it was argued that 'you are entitled to tell your own story from your own perspective'. It was also suggested that if such a viewpoint 'challenged British and loyalist perspectives on Ardoyne then it has a right to challenge people to respond to it'. This might become part of a wider process in which 'people on the Shankill Road, or wherever [should] take the book away and come back with something that is their view of what happened in Ardoyne'. However, this was seen primarily as a means by which other communities would come to understand issues of culpability and responsibility. This was exemplified by one respondent who asked, 'How would they explain the Shankill Butchers?'

## **2.3 The Impact of 'Speaking Out' and 'Being Heard'**

- 2.3.1. For most if not all of the respondents the main value of the work of the ACP was in the benefit that they believed 'speaking out' would have for participants. There were a number of aspects to this.
- 2.3.2 It was extremely important, argued one respondent, that such work 'was sensitive to the needs of individuals and families'. The best way this could be achieved, it was suggested, was to 'give dead people and their families a voice'.
- 2.3.3 The question of sensitivity around 'giving voice' was linked to the need for such work to be 'community-based'. It was 'important for the welfare of the families', it was argued, that the community was 'so closely involved'. The value of this for relatives is that 'they can see that the community they grew up in is taking responsibility for history'. Another interviewee argued that 'it would have meant a lot to people that their community was there and doing something like this'.

- 2.3.4. The inter-connection between the therapeutic benefit of 'speaking out' as an individual and a wider community experience was a key theme for another interviewee. What mattered was not only that individuals were able to speak but also that 'they were able to put their experiences into a collective context. The book was able to show shared features and patterns in the deaths and what relatives went through'. This, it was argued, could 'help end a feeling of isolation that people would have and it lent credibility to what they were saying'. The individual experience expressed in speaking achieved a level of wider, collective affirmation and recognition. 'At a personal level', the respondent argued, 'it would contribute to healing and at a local community level as well'.
- 2.3.5. The potential negative emotional impact of giving testimony was also discussed by a number of respondents. One noted the need for 'clear channels of therapeutic support to be provided'. Having some knowledge of the workings of the project this commentator emphasised the positive role that community-orientated victims' organisations (such as Relatives for Justice and Survivors of Trauma) had played in this regard. At the same time community participation was itself seen as a highly beneficial form of therapeutic support: 'what was also important was that there was a community spirit there, people were supporting each other. Families were being supported because they were able to participate'.
- 2.3.6. One interviewee felt that it was important not to separate out the 'therapeutic' dimension of 'speaking out' from the question of justice. 'The core issue is the loss', it was argued, 'and in order to be really therapeutic there is a need to deliver accountability and justice in relation to that loss'. This was illustrated by using the analogy of 'cutting off an arm from a body and trying to cure it in isolation'. Another respondent echoed this sentiment in arguing that 'things would not go away until the injustice itself had been addressed'.
- 2.3.7. Another interviewee, with personal experience of losing a loved one, also felt it was important to recognise the therapeutic limits of 'storytelling'. He argued that it was difficult to generalise what impact such a process would have on different individuals because 'being a victim of violence is a very peculiar thing to yourself'. There could be a great benefit for many engaging in a collective process because 'you can only liberate yourself from what you are living with but you do not do that on your own, but along with listening to what others are doing'. It was felt that the Ardoyne project 'surely worked for quite a number of people' because it will have helped 'purge the past'. However, he advised anyone undertaking such work to understand that 'there is no single question and no single answer. It will work for some but not for others'.
- 2.3.8. A respondent active in the community sector also drew attention to the importance of 'recognition' and that this comes in a range of forms, arenas and contexts. 'There is a great value in something being put on paper', it was suggested, and 'it is about recognition'. Again it was noted that 'for some people that might open up old wounds', but for others it would be 'immensely important to get recognition in that way'.

## **2.4 Inclusivity, the Hierarchy of Victimhood and Intra-Community Division**

- 2.4.1. All of the interviewees discussed the issue of 'inclusivity' in the project in some depth. This was perceived by this group of respondents as an absolutely critical area of concern. All of them drew particular attention to the inclusion of those people killed as (alleged) informers in the list of victims and regarded affording their families an opportunity to speak as one of the most important features of the work. They also all felt that these issues drew attention to the problem of overcoming divisions within communities as well as between them. A totally inclusive approach was seen as the only way of confronting such issues.
- 2.4.2. For one interviewee the 'inclusion of informers [was] one of the really interesting things, an important step'. He argued that for a 'post-conflict scenario' to work it was necessary to 'bring closure to these relatives quite as much as anyone else'. He made a point of stating that he was a 'former republican activist' who believed that 'there has not been enough work done for such families'. It was important to remember, he added, that 'their [informers and alleged informers] families are still members of our communities and live in our areas. They need to be made to feel as welcome as any former prisoner or IRA man'. The respondent felt that the Ardoyne book had 'dealt with this issue in a very, very sensitive way. It was really inclusive, that was excellent'.
- 2.4.3. For another respondent this was also linked to the problem of an 'internal or alternative hierarchy of victimhood'. It was argued that there had always been such a 'hierarchy' and that the 'families of nationalists killed by the security forces are at the bottom of that ladder'. However, for the families of people killed as informers the situation was worse as 'they are not even on the ladder'. It was necessary to address this problem and such 'truth-telling' processes were seen as 'one way of doing so'.
- 2.4.4. Dealing with 'difficult issues', such as the deaths of alleged informers was seen by a community activist as 'incredibly important [because] otherwise you would have been censoring the truth, part of the community'. Taking on such questions was also regarded as a 'sign of confidence' because it meant that people recognised that 'the mistakes that have been made are not threatening anymore'.
- 2.4.5. A human rights activist who works specifically on victims' issues also felt that it was 'a brave and bold thing to include all those killed'. He felt that the project had been 'balanced, reflective and fair in its treatment of all the cases' and that this was 'imperative'. Such an inclusive strategy was also regarded as something that should be followed by other communities; 'it was done right and it is a template for the way that these things need to be dealt with in the future'.

## **2.5 Community Relations and the 'Can of Worms'**

- 2.5.1. The interviewees were all asked whether or not the kind of work undertaken by the ACP could damage relations between communities by focusing attention on divisive issues of the past. None felt that this was the case but all

believed that it was necessary for such projects to be conducted in various communities of whatever denomination, ethos or political affiliation.

- 2.5.2. One interviewee, who has had direct experience of losing a relative, felt that the 'whole issue of moving on is a big issue', but believed it was impossible to do so unless the events of the past were brought to light. While recognising the logic of those who advocate otherwise he felt that it was 'just clearly wrong' to suggest that 'we cannot delve into such issues'. For people who have 'lost a loved one', it was argued, 'it is very difficult if not impossible to agree with the sentiment "forgive and forget"'.
- 2.5.3. The particular circumstances of North Belfast were seen by another commentator as requiring a more open approach to the past for the sake of inter-community relations. For this respondent it was the sectarianism that he saw as an intrinsic element of loyalism that had allowed 'catholics to be regarded as dispensable and killable things'. It was therefore necessary to record the 'randomness of people being attacked and killed in Ardoyne'. This was also linked to contemporary conditions as the interviewee felt that 'those attitudes are still there'. To 'de-sectarianise politics in the North', it was suggested, 'there is need to expose the way of thinking that sees catholics as killable things'.
- 2.5.4. Another interviewee felt that the 'can of worms argument' was driven by an 'incorrect understanding of what would benefit community relations. 'Sometimes you have to get through the idea that it is just down to perceptions and that the "two sides" are both right and wrong'. There was much criticism of what was seen as a 'community relations outlook' that sought 'balance' rather than 'truth'. The point of 'truth-telling', it was argued, was not to achieve 'balance' but to 'be honest'. The 'only real way to move forward', the respondent suggested, was to achieve 'real balance by dealing with the real issues of the past and everyone taking responsibility for them'.
- 2.5.5. There was clearly a high level of distrust and suspicion concerning the political motivation of those who opposed 'truth-telling' on community relations grounds. For one it was described as 'coded rubbish coming from people who do not want to face up to reality because they don't know where to go in the future'. Again the thrust of this respondent's argument was that the only way to 'unravel division' was to 'face up to the reality of the past [otherwise] we are doomed to face the same problems again'.
- 2.5.6 All of the interviewees felt that grassroots community-based 'truth-telling' was something that therefore needed to be undertaken by unionist communities as well as in nationalist areas. One stressed that it was 'very important that this sort of work is carried out in Rathcoole, East Belfast, the Shankill or wherever'. However, the desire for such projects to be created was always accompanied by a doubt as to whether or not this was feasible. The overwhelming explanation for this was that such work would create more difficult social and political consequences for unionist communities than nationalist. For example, one respondent said that the real question was 'why is it not being done?' The answer, according to the interviewee, was that 'the truth is far more difficult there. It would mean confronting political masters and looking at why loyalist paramilitaries acted in the way they did. There are more difficult truths to come out'.

## 2.6 Single Identity, Insiders and Outsiders

- 2.6.1 Two issues that aroused fulsome responses from all the interviewees was the value or otherwise of 'single identity' work and the respective roles of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in carrying it out. All were in agreement that community-based work of this highly sensitive nature could only meaningfully be carried out on a 'single identity' basis. Similarly, all felt it was imperative that people trusted by, and rooted in, the particular community conducted such projects.
- 2.6.2 For one interviewee both the purpose and the practicalities of such work necessitated a single identity focus. He suggested that 'to take the telling of the story outside Ardoyne [would] weaken what it was trying to do'. It was necessary to speak 'from where people are' in order for them to 'tell their own story'. It was also argued that to try 'in one fell swoop' to take on 'all the work involved in telling one community story' and then to do so with another was 'a nigh on impossible thing for people to expect'.
- 2.6.3 Another interviewee asked why there was always an expectation that there were 'two sides' and criticised the 'community relations model' that always sees things in that way. Single identity work had to be done because 'it takes a particular community and looks at it in an in-depth way. That makes what was experienced far, far clearer'.
- 2.6.4 Carrying out single identity projects was 'simply a recognition of reality', suggested a community activist. This was supported by another who argued that 'we live in single identity communities and let's not pretend otherwise'. The important thing for this respondent was that single identity work needed to be replicated in different communities: 'this is a model that can be used anywhere, by any community, it shows how to go about things for anyone'.
- 2.6.5 Another respondent noted the impact of the specific tensions and division in North Belfast. This was linked directly to the necessity of 'insider' researchers undertaking the work. Echoing a sentiment expressed in similar vein by all these interviewees one argued that for an 'outsider' to take on such a project was 'absolutely crazy'. His argument was that such work had happened in the past but that 'it was very much to the detriment of the people from the community involved in it'. There were 'great sensitivities involved' in tackling such issues and 'only a nucleus of people from a similar background or experience could understand that'.
- 2.6.6 One respondent reacted angrily to the suggestion that the 'critical distance' of an outside researcher might be required for such stories to be told properly. It was argued that 'if people cannot tell their own stories then who can? It is arrogant to say that people are too involved and that they cannot have distance'. The advantages of the 'insider' carrying out this work were in 'being able to see the impact of events and experiences'. Another took up this point and suggested that because 'you are dealing with some of the worst things that happened, at the core of the conflict [then] someone who parachutes in cannot understand that'.
- 2.6.7 One interviewee stressed that 'outsiders can have a role in providing information and support, but the key issue is local control'. The benefits of such a project all flowed from 'ensuring that whatever decisions have to be

taken have come from people themselves'. A representative of a victims' group emphasised the same point. The 'local nature of the project' was a 'wonderful template' that could be summed up in one word, 'ownership'. Whatever good had come out of the work, it was argued, was because 'families owned the project. Participation was the key'. Returning their testimonies back to participants prior to publication was seen by another as 'making sure that they felt control and had control. That was important'.

- 2.6.8 This theme was expressed in similar terms by another respondent who felt that the problem with work undertaken by outsiders lay precisely in the lack of 'representation and ownership for ordinary people'. The result did a 'great disservice to people in the community' who, in addition, 'would not engage'.
- 2.6.9 A community worker also noted the potential impact of 'non-engagement with outsiders'. The problem, she suggested, was that 'people would be more guarded with a stranger'. At the same time she also felt that there was a need to be conscious of the 'things that are assumed' by being an insider. This was meant in the sense of 'not recording things' because they are 'taken as read' by both interviewer and interviewee. People engaging in community-based 'truth-telling' need to be aware that 'what they assume sometimes also needs to be recorded'.

## **2.7 Emotional Impact on the Reader**

- 2.7.1 A number of the respondents spoke of their own personal emotional responses to the work of the project and the impact the book may have upon the reader. Several described the book as 'heavy going' and 'very moving'. People also spoke of feeling a range of responses to the work including 'guilt', 'despondency' and 'admiration' for the relatives. One suggested that it made a reader consider the 'enormous capacity of people to survive'. Another talked of feeling 'voyeuristic' at times and that while he enjoyed reading about the life of a particular person he then felt 'awkward' because 'you know where it was all going to end'.
- 2.7.2 One respondent had discussed reading the book with several other people and suggested that this emotional reaction was typical. There appeared to be a high level of identification with the contents of the cases and a sense of sharing in the stories at an emotional level. Several of the respondents also made a point of saying that (as one person put it) 'it made you think how courageous people were to have gone through those experiences again for the sake of the book'.

## **2.8 Paths to 'Truth and Justice'**

- 2.8.1 The relationship between community-based 'truth-telling' and other mechanisms of 'truth' recovery was commented on positively by all of the respondents interviewed. Most of the respondents were themselves involved at a grassroots community level in campaign work and/or victims' issues and they therefore clearly identified with the ethos of the project. As noted above, the general political orientation of the work would also have been one with which most if not all of the respondents shared an affinity.
- 2.8.2 One interviewee compared the aims and approach of the project with other 'truth and justice' campaigns and the Bloody Sunday Inquiry in particular.



Both were driven by a 'need for closure and to get access to basic information'. Both also addressed questions 'around the negation of the due process of law'.

- 2.8.3 This commentator was a supporter of judicial processes as a means of pursuing justice. However, discussing the project also gave rise to comments on the potentially negative impact on relatives and witnesses of giving evidence to 'inquisitorial fact-finding' inquiries. 'There is a coldness about such processes' it was argued, that contrasted to mechanisms where people might 'volunteer what they want to say and go away feeling better in some way, purged or liberated'. The Bloody Sunday Inquiry was a 'definitive event' that might see the uncovering of much of 'the truth' but it was likely to bring 'closure to some but not for others'. The key goal that any process had to deliver, it was suggested, was 'acknowledgement and recognition from the highest levels'.
- 2.8.4. This was also linked to wider political developments and the importance of the peace as offering a 'breathing space to consider what had happened'. One interviewee felt that the project had made 'an important contribution to wider processes of truth and justice'. This was partly expressing a general sense of pessimism about the tenor of debate on 'truth and justice' issues. The main doubt this interviewee had was that 'real accountability' was not going to be achievable because the 'big player, the state' would not own up to what it had done. In such circumstances 'giving testimony might be the best we can get'. This was also linked to a distrust of large-scale state-centred 'truth' recovery mechanisms. Citing examples such as South Africa and the 'slaughter of the Mayan people of Guatemala' the interviewee questioned whether 'truth' processes had done much 'for people on the ground'.
- 2.8.5 More positively the same respondent felt that community-based projects 'may be the way forward on recognition'. This was because 'once they are given the testimonies are there, they will not go away'. The key thing again was that 'local people need to have control over it. That is imperative'.
- 2.8.6. For two other interviewees some of the principles that they believed underpinned the Ardoyne project were those needed for wider 'truth' processes to take on board. For one it was 'political generosity'. The problem with the debate on 'truth and justice' was that 'too many people are still defending too much ground'. As long as the society was in 'contested terrain' then the attempt to establish a 'historical narrative' would be 'contested terrain too'.
- 2.8.7 For another respondent the primary lesson was 'inclusivity'. There was a need to 'excavate and archive' the past in order to build a 'society based on equality and human rights'. Undertaking community-based 'truth-telling' on the basis of 'inclusivity' was an 'important contribution to that end'. Not dealing with the past, it was argued, would mean that people 'stood back and admired the veneer of peace without scratching the surface beneath'.

## **C.3 Responses of Wider Unionist Community Representatives**

A total of 6 interviews were carried out with representatives of various mainly unionist victims' and community groups. At the outset most of the interviewees made it clear that they did not want to be recorded and wished to remain anonymous. On several occasions this promoted unsolicited and frank discussion about why they felt this was necessary. These pre-interview conversations offer revealing insights about current dynamics within unionism, and loyalist communities in particular, however for ethical reasons we cannot discuss the content. The reality is that Belfast is a small place and even a very general discussion has the potential to reveal enough clues that could inadvertently reveal identities. What we can say is the topic of 'truth-telling' is sensitive, and regarded by many within the unionist community as a republican agenda. This led some interviewees' to feel that it would be problematic for them to be seen even discussing the issue with the researchers. They felt this might be perceived by some within their community as 'engaging in the debate', 'giving credence to the republican agenda' and 'another step to far'.<sup>61</sup> For other interviewees, particularly those connected with cross-community work, there appeared to be uneasiness (whether founded or unfounded) about publicly criticising aspects of the project. For these reasons most of the unionist interviewees were not recorded. Detailed notes were taken by both researchers and written up immediately after the interviews. Consequently there are fewer direct quotes than in previous sections.

### **3.1 Community 'Truth-telling' and the Problem with Partiality**

- 3.1.1 For a number of respondents the claim made in the title of the book to tell the 'untold truth' formed a core part of their concerns. In several interviews it was an issue that arose almost immediately and discussion of it was often highly charged. Most of the interviewees felt that the 'truth' being told in the book was intrinsically 'partial', both in the sense that it was 'biased and unfair' and 'not total and complete'.
- 3.1.2 For example, one local community activist argued that there was no such thing as 'truth'. To illustrate the point he cited the example of a road accident, the 'facts' of which might at first appear obvious but which would invariably be seen subjectively and differently by anyone who witnessed it. This was used as a metaphor for the conflict and the way that people in Ardoyne had witnessed not the 'truth' but merely their view of it. However, his criticism went further in two ways.
- 3.1.3 First, he suggested that the book was 'unfair' because it was full of 'half-truths' and that 'some of those who gave interviews must have been aware of that'. This criticism was mainly directed at the oral history chapters rather than relatives' testimonies. It was linked to a suggestion that the book was part of a wider 'republican revisionism', and an attempt to re-write the history of the conflict. Recounting conversations he had with others another interviewee suggested that the history chapters were a form of 'republican propaganda'.

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<sup>61</sup> This is not to suggest that there is no dialogue within unionism/loyalism or engagement with nationalists/republicans on the issue of 'truth-telling' and justice.

- 3.1.4 It was clear that respondents were far less willing to criticise the testimonies in the same way. This may simply be because the history sections were seen as distinct in tone, content and intent from the testimonies. However, it may also be that the less personal nature of the history chapters (telling the story of a community experience rather than a particular victim) also opened them up to this response.
- 3.1.5 The other main criticism about the 'partiality' of the book was that it was 'incomplete'. In this sense it was challenged for not including the 'whole story' of what had happened in Ardoyne and, more pertinently, to all Ardoyne people.

## **3.2 The Unionists of Ardoyne**

- 3.2.1 There were two aspects to the issue over partiality and the 'whole of Ardoyne'. First, the geographical extent of what constitutes Ardoyne and whether or not it should have included neighbouring (predominantly unionist) areas such as Glenbryn. Glenbryn is a small working class area (with a population of approximately 1,500 people) that is sometimes referred to as 'upper Ardoyne'. Indeed discussions focussed on whether or not the title 'upper Ardoyne' was of long and common usage or of relatively recent origin. In contrast to people within Ardoyne (who literally never use or even recognise it) those interviewed from unionist communities did see 'upper Ardoyne' as a relevant term. For example, a number of respondents pointed to the existence of the Glenbryn-based 'Ardoyne flute band' as evidence.
- 3.2.2 That said there was some sense that the title had come to greater prominence (certainly to greater political significance) in the last few years, linked to rising interface tensions and violence surrounding the Holy Cross blockade. As far as the work of the ACP was concerned the absence of 'upper Ardoyne' from the geographical remit of the book was seen by some as a limit to the project's claim of 'inclusivity'.
- 3.2.3 The debate over 'upper Ardoyne' was, though, only a minor point of discussion. A far more important criticism of the project was the absence of other Ardoyne unionist voices. This referred to those unionist former residents of Ardoyne who had either left or been forced to leave as a result of the conflict.
- 3.2.4 It might be useful to provide some background detail at this point in order to contextualise this discussion. Ardoyne always had a majority nationalist population but up until the late 1960s and early 1970s a significant number of unionists also lived there, mostly in the streets in 'old Ardoyne' that led onto the Crumlin Road and three streets (Velsheda Park, Cranbrook and Farringdon Gardens) in Glenard located in the north west of the district. However, from 1969 onward this unionist population moved out of the area. This was either the result of direct intimidation, a growing sense of insecurity or through exchanging homes with the large number of nationalist families looking to move into Ardoyne for their own safety; part of the mass population movement that characterised Belfast in this period. In Ardoyne this culminated in the events of the morning of the introduction of internment, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1971. As the tension, violence and number of casualties in the area reached previously unseen levels the unionist residents of Velsheda,

Cranbrook and Farrington moved out en masse and 194 vacated houses were burnt out as they left.

- 3.2.5 These events clearly left an indelible mark and were still a focus of deeply felt grievance reflected in the comments of a number of the interviewees. This was particularly the case for one respondent, whose family had been forced to flee from the nearby Marrowbone/ Oldpark area on the same day.
- 3.2.6 It also became evident during the research process that the absence of the voices and experiences of these unionist former Ardoyne residents was one of the most contentious aspects of the project for people in neighbouring unionist areas. While it was recognised that the project had included a Protestant woman killed on the morning of 9<sup>th</sup> August the wider context and experience of Ardoyne unionists was seen to be all but absent. It was in this sense, it was suggested, that the 'whole story' had not been told.
- 3.2.7 This issue also led to meetings initiated by two of the interviewees with a wider group of community representatives and unionist former Ardoyne residents. The focus of these discussions was whether or not some sort of future work or publication that would place these 'excluded voices' in the public domain was either feasible or desirable. Although the researchers were not present it appears that a great deal of anger and antagonism toward the book was expressed at this meeting. This also led to some difficulties in developing the research in the short to medium term.
- 3.2.8 What also became clear is that many of these former residents still very much identified themselves as 'Ardoyne people' and resented the idea that their identity had in some sense been taken from them. This may also have fed into the debate surrounding the geographical limits of the project. Three of the interviewees noted that many former residents had moved to nearby areas such as Glenbryn, or 'upper Ardoyne'.

### **3.3 Community 'Truth-telling' and the Strength of Partiality**

- 3.3.1 Despite these comments on partiality the same respondents also recognised important strengths in community-based 'truth-telling' work. The sternest critic of what was seen as the exclusion of Ardoyne unionist voices still argued that there might be a need for local communities to tell their stories. The problem, he felt, is that such a process is always framed as necessarily ending in 'agreement'. Rather, it was argued, such work should be seen as a series of 'conversations' within and between communities that might lead to understanding but that 'understanding does not mean agreement'.
- 3.3.2 For other respondents the need for local community work was even clearer. Single-identity projects were 'a necessity' for one, though they might best be seen as a forerunner to a longer term, gradual process of interchange and dialogue. Another interviewee, with former links to loyalist groups, went even further. He declared he was 'totally against' any organised 'top-down TRC-style' truth commission because it 'would not be able to get to the truth'. This was largely on the grounds that those groups and individuals who would need to be involved in order 'to get answers' [particularly loyalist paramilitaries] would be unlikely to do so. In addition he feared that any formal process would simply become another site of political and inter-communal competition.

- 3.3.3 Community-based projects, on the other hand, were viewed as the way to get to 'different truths'. The very partiality and subjectivity of this work was in fact seen as its greatest strength, giving an insight into experiences and points of view that were often excluded. It is something he felt that other communities should undertake because it allowed people 'to speak from where they are coming from'.
- 3.3.4 In addition, it was argued that this was less likely to entrench attitudes in the future. Rather it would lead to an 'empathetic understanding' of what had happened to people. This might be a difficult process, as discussion of reactions within neighbouring communities in North Belfast revealed. But again it was suggested that such single-identity work was the only way to 'open up a space for dialogue' that was meaningful because it reflected the views that people held rather than simply those that people wanted them to hold. In turn it could lead, at a later stage, to 'cross-community work' that was not practicable at present.

### **3.4 Internal Dialogue, Internal Division**

- 3.4.1 Despite such positive attitudes to community-based 'truth-telling' the ability to carry out such work in unionist areas was regarded as a much more difficult proposition. A key problem was that of divisions within unionist communities.
- 3.4.2 The role that the project had played in opening up a space for internal dialogue within the Ardoyne community was a topic of much discussion in these interviews. While seeing the value of this almost all the respondents believed that undertaking something similar in their own communities would be much more fraught because divisions were far more acute. This was due to a number of reasons.
- 3.4.3 For some any discussion of 'truth' and justice issues was likely to leave them open to accusations of 'moving too close to a republican agenda'. This was linked to the rise of Anti-Agreement unionism, making many feel vulnerable and exposed in adopting public positions on contentious issues.
- 3.4.4 Certain areas of concern, such as any discussion of collusion and its repercussions, were seen as raising extremely difficult problems. This was not only because it was a 'republican issue' but that it could also open up questions and issues within loyalist areas that would be very painful and potentially divisive.
- 3.4.5 The legacy of loyalist feuds was also seen as problematic in this regard. It was felt that issues 'could spill over' and engender dissension and conflict far more than was seen to be the case in nationalist/republican communities.
- 3.4.6 Internal divisions were also seen as likely to impact on the ability of victims' groups and organisations to work together and for any project dealing with victims to be genuinely inclusive.

### **3.5 Hierarchies and Inclusivity**

- 3.5.1 Whatever the criticisms of inclusivity of alternative unionist experiences in the Ardoyne project something that was seen as a strength was the ability to include all the area's victims, whoever they were or were killed by.
- 3.5.1 Related to this a number of respondents argued that there was a greater willingness to accept republican combatants as 'victims' in nationalist communities than there was to view even loyalist paramilitaries as such within the broad spectrum of unionism.
- 3.5.2 The Ardoyne Project originated, in part, to challenge what was seen as an emerging 'hierarchy of victimhood'; the distinction made by some victims' groups between 'innocent victims' (killed by 'terrorists') and everyone else. Many of those involved in the project saw nationalist victims (and particularly those killed by the state) as having been placed on the lower rungs of the victim ladder.
- 3.5.3 Significantly a number of the interviewees felt that a 'hierarchy of victimhood' also existed within the unionist community itself. That most of the respondents were either ex-prisoners and/or came from areas where their friends, neighbours and possibly relatives had been involved in paramilitary groups clearly impacted upon these findings.
- 3.5.4 This issue illustrates the sensitivities surrounding intra as well as inter-community 'truth-telling' processes.
- 3.5.5 For one respondent the definition of 'innocent' victims excluded the relatives and friends of victims associated with loyalist paramilitary organisations. This brought back memories of the experience of loyalist prisoners, and particularly their wives and families, being marginalised and poorly treated throughout the conflict. The interviewee felt that there was an unhelpful distinction made within the unionist community between 'respectable' (meaning security forces) and 'non-respectable' (paramilitary) victims. While recognising that some victims may have been 'bad lads' it was felt that this should have no bearing on the way in which relatives were viewed and treated.
- 3.5.6 This divide within the unionist community was contrasted with what was seen as a far less problematic attitude toward republican combatant dead within the nationalist community. The respondent insisted on a number of occasions that any testimonial work undertaken in unionist areas would have to be fully inclusive. In an area like the Shankill, it was suggested, any other approach would 'simply do more harm than good'.
- 3.5.7 Another interviewee argued that many victims' groups organised in unionist areas only recognised and acknowledged ex-service victims and their families. It was suggested that this significantly affected the whole way that victims' issues were looked at and talked about.
- 3.5.8 However, this respondent was still uncomfortable with the idea that 'all victims were equal'. By this he meant that there was a need to distinguish between all those who had made an active decision to 'place themselves in danger' (meaning all state and non-state combatants) and the 'poor Joe who was not

a member of anything'. Nevertheless, it was felt that this should not impact on the treatment of relatives, 'who are and should be equal'.

- 3.5.9 This distinction between 'combatant' and non-combatant' dead was taken up by another interviewee. He suggested that there was a 'level of denial' taking place amongst republicans if they did not see a difference between those who died on active service and those who did not. There should not be talk of 'murder', he argued, when it involved the death of people who 'knew and accepted that they were taking risks'.
- 3.5.10 It is perhaps worth noting that both these respondents had past or present links to loyalist political groups. They were also echoing sentiments that were expressed by a number of ex-republican activists in the book and during the current research.

### **3.6 'Opening the Can of Worms': Trauma and Telling**

- 3.6.1 Divisions within the unionist community meant for some that problems would be created by 'looking into issues that were better left alone'. This was also linked to fears about the possible 're-traumatising' effect of 'story-telling'.
- 3.6.2 This was a particular concern for one interviewee who deals at a community level with trauma and victim issues. While seeing the usefulness of some forms of story-telling this respondent felt that there was a danger of taking someone back through the traumatic events of their loved one's death. This, it was suggested, meant that 'an action replay is caused in people's minds and I don't think it is worth it'.
- 3.6.3 A focus on the therapeutic value of recording stories and memories of a victim's life, rather than their death, was seen as potentially more beneficial. This was linked to concerns for the welfare of the children of victims. Indeed, on a wider social level the same interviewee felt that the whole debate on 'dealing with the past' might be in danger of diverting attention away from problems facing the next generation and obscuring the view of the future. 'If you dig too deeply into the past', it was argued, 'you may find it [the future] runs past our ankles without us even noticing it'.
- 3.6.4 Formal or legal 'truth-telling' processes were viewed as particularly problematic in terms of their possible 're-traumatising' effect. Legal cases, it was suggested, are 'hurting people as much as they are helping'. This was linked to a tension between the judicial and therapeutic purposes of any truth-telling process. 'I don't believe in the legal thing', this interviewee argued, 'you can't find truth there [because] there is no truth to be had. It is just about memory recall'.
- 3.6.5 Another respondent believed that a nationalist/republican focus on victims and truth reflected a cultural difference between the two communities in the way they dealt with trauma issues. It was suggested that there was a 'level of denial' in the 'self-representation' of a victim status to be found in areas like Ardoyne. This, it was argued, was the product of a 'culture of victimhood' that was also evident in debates around other social, economic and political issues. It seemed that what was being proposed was a portrait of a community that had a tendency to feel sorry for itself.

- 3.6.6 In contrast, the interviewee suggested, people in areas like the Shankill 'just want to get on with things' and saw little or no 'therapeutic' or 'psychological' value in telling their story. Citing examples of conversations with unionist former Ardoyne residents it was argued that they saw no point in re-visiting events in the past that they had come to terms with in their own way and in their own time.
- 3.6.7 Despite these arguments concerning the belief that people had 'moved on' what was also apparent in a number of the interviewees was the level of emotion engendered by examining such issues. Even when the discussion was focusing on events depicted in the Ardoyne book on a number of occasions it became clear that various interviewees were re-living deeply powerful and possibly distressing memories of their own. Certain events were recalled with an emotionally charged vividness and clarity.
- 3.6.8 This was particularly so, for example, in one interview where the respondent described how his family had been burnt out in 1971. Directly mirroring experiences recorded by the project an acute sense of betrayal and displacement was evident in the memory of neighbours who 'stood around and watched'. Echoed too was the impact of the destruction of a home and the loss of irreplaceable and highly personal objects, particularly family photographs. The closeness of the subject matter of the book to the life experiences of such interviewees clearly impacted upon their reactions.
- 3.6.9 The interviewee involved in trauma counselling had organised a meeting with a number of victims and relatives from her area to discuss their views of the book. Some of these relatives had lost loved ones in actions carried out by people from Ardoyne in which one of the Ardoyne victims had themselves been killed. While the report of this meeting produced a generally positive response to the work of the project it was also clear that reading the book had been the occasion of a difficult, possibly traumatic re-visiting of difficult circumstances for these relatives.
- 3.6.10 The complexity of people's individual responses was highlighted by the interviewee as they 'established their own boundaries as to what they could deal with'. This was exemplified in the way that some relatives were prepared to read certain testimonies which touched on their own loss but found it too difficult to read others. The nature of these responses emphasised the acute sensitivity required for those working in this area.
- 3.6.11 Another noticeable feature of many of these interviews was the lack of discussion of the actual content of the Ardoyne testimonies themselves. There was a recognition that the stories reflected real grief and pain, that relatives had gone through terrible experiences and had a right to talk about them. However, in sharp contrast to the responses from nationalist interviewees where they often formed the main point of conversation, the substance of the cases was barely touched upon. Nor was there any real mention, discussion or acknowledgement of the role that members of the unionist community had in those events. Rather, people were far more likely to talk about their own experiences in return. This may have been the means by which people talked about the experiences contained in the book.



## 3.7 Community Relations

- 3.7.1 A major area of concern for this set of interviews was the possible impact of such projects on community relations. Opinions in this area were varied and intensely expressed. While there were some positive responses the general tone was negative.
- 3.7.2 At one extreme was the comment of an interviewee in an initial meeting who suggested that 'if you are talking about community relations, then this book has shattered them'. This was in part because the book was seen as only giving a very particular point of view. Similarly, it was felt that there had been far too little mention of the violence that people from Ardoyne had perpetrated on others. For this interviewee the result was that the book might only reinforce rather than breakdown entrenched community attitudes.
- 3.7.3 In similar vein another community activist argued that the type of work produced by the Ardoyne project, far from aiding in a process of conflict resolution might in fact contribute to the continuation of tension. He suggested that it could generate a great sense of grievance amongst young loyalists who could then channel that reaction into a justification of violence against nationalists in the future.
- 3.7.4 The representative of the community sector argued that such 'truth-telling' work was a necessary step for community relations because it could help produce 'acknowledgement' but also asked 'at what point does single identity re-iteration of what happened become truth'? Memories and experiences had also to be opened up to re-appraisal and unless there was a 'parallel process' undertaken in both communities the danger was that such work could become part of a 'zero-sum game'. In such a scenario the sense that there existed an 'uneven playing field' could produce 'feelings of resentment' within the unionist community. In order to counteract such a possibility it was suggested that there was a need for policies to be developed that could support and facilitate parallel projects.
- 3.7.5 However, the complexity of responses was reflected in the fact that the same interviewee who felt that community relations had been 'shattered' by what the book contained also felt that this sort of work was necessary. In addition he felt that the model pursued by the project was a sound one and it was the sort of thing that he might like to see undertaken in unionist areas.
- 3.7.6 One interviewee went further in suggesting that community relations could only be helped by this kind of work. It was argued that any 'truth-telling' process had to genuinely reflect the 'truth as it is seen' from particular areas. This might be a difficult process, but anything else was merely 'covering up the cracks'.
- 3.7.7 For another respondent, however, the key message and greatest strength of the book were the commonalties of experiences that it recorded. 'That book', it was argued, 'could have been about the Shankill, it could have been about anywhere. Everything that runs through that book runs through the Shankill'. For this commentator the exploration and publication of common experiences of working class communities, of women and of victims' relatives could have a very positive impact on community relations because it would humanise and 'make real' what had happened to other people.

### 3.8 Unionist Attitudes to 'Truth and Justice' Issues

- 3.8.1 From an early stage in the interviewing process it became clear that the attitudes of unionist respondents towards truth and justice issues in general (as well as the Ardoyne book) differed in significant ways from their nationalist counterparts. By and large the debate on 'truth and justice' was *not seen as a major political priority*. Certainly for some respondents it was an area that they thought was increasingly important, although they also tended to feel that this view was not one widely shared within their community. Even those who wanted to see a community-based 'truth-telling' project happen in their own areas felt that there might be great reluctance to engage in such work. In order to contextualise reactions to the Ardoyne project the researchers felt it was important to explore why this was the case.
- 3.8.2 One respondent argued that it would be difficult to carry out something like the Ardoyne project in his area because of the *limits of community development and infrastructure*. A number of reasons were given for this. People in unionist areas were more likely to adopt an individualist rather than a collective response to problems. They would not 'come out on the street unless something was happening at their door'. This was contrasted with attitudes and structures within the nationalist community. Nationalists, it was suggested, had become used to organising themselves on a community basis during 30 years of conflict and in the years before. Some of the social problems facing certain unionist working class areas (such as growing social deprivation, depopulation and low educational attainment) were also seen as leading to a 'lack of confidence'. This produced an 'inarticulacy' that could impact on the feasibility of organising community-based projects in these areas. Individualism was seen by some as part and parcel of a specifically Protestant and/or Ulster cultural milieu. This was also linked to a 'lack of leadership' and a 'culture of deference' within unionist working class areas that prevented them looking to themselves to resolve social and political problems.
- 3.8.3 It should be added that at least one interviewee disagreed strongly that unionist communities suffered from 'inarticulacy' either because of cultural or structural factors. However, for this respondent the key issue was the *relationship of unionists to the state*. This argument had a number of elements. First, dealing with the past would require facing up to the history of the state and of discrimination 'not only against Catholics but also against the Protestant working class'. There was therefore a 'sense of guilt' at not having confronted these problems before and the result was a 'denial of the past'. The alternative was to go on defending the state rather than confront such guilt and denial. In the end, it was suggested, 'we cannot rock the boat because it is our boat'.
- 3.8.4 This was linked to a critical view of the *current direction being taken in unionist politics* described as 'back to the future' and a 'battering down of hatches'. For this interviewee collectively challenging the state on the past was therefore deeply problematic because it would 'be like challenging yourself'. 'Individual' responses to particular issues (such as the Billy Wright case) were 'permissible' because it could be seen as a 'family matter', but anything else was difficult to deal with. Another interviewee echoed these sentiments when he suggested that anything to do with 'truth-telling' was a

problem because 'you still have a reticence to criticise the state'. Despite the fact that relations with state agencies (particularly the PSNI) were often very poor in unionist working class areas people 'still have in the back of their mind that they are British'. So, for example, when issues such as collusion were raised there was a reticence to see these as anything other than part of a wider attack on all aspects of the state's existence.

- 3.8.5 Indeed the sense that truth and justice issues were a '*republican agenda*' was a theme taken up by a number of interviewees. A representative of the community sector argued that unionists tended to see 'an inquiry, or a truth approach for republican areas as yet another string to the bow of republicanism to attack the state. So to take up issues against the state means they would be just acting as tail enders to the republicans'. It was further suggested that distrust of republicans in this regard was partly because of their failure to deliver for the Families of the Disappeared.
- 3.8.6 In more general terms the fact that republicans had taken up the human rights agenda 'if only latterly' has led to a shift on all aspects of this debate towards a '*win-lose scenario*' where it [human rights] is seen as a republican win'. An 'automatic rejection' of a 'rights' agenda, it was argued, was likely to be the result. In similar vein another interviewee argued that the divisiveness of the current political environment made anyone exploring truth and human rights issues open to the accusation of being 'too close to the enemy'. Taking up the agenda of post-conflict 'truth-telling', suggested another, could be seen to be taking up the issues of those opposed to the state and that there was a sense that 'an ulterior motive' was never far away.
- 3.8.7 While one commentator noted that allegations of ongoing IRA activity in terms of 'spying and targeting' was a barrier to progress far more attention was given to the problems created by inter-loyalist feuding. This meant that, for some, it was *still too early to engage in 'truth-telling'*. There was a 'can of worms' that might be better left unopened because violence was recent and continuing. 'Do we really want to know', it was asked, 'whether your neighbour was an informer? Or that someone who killed someone close to you lives a few doors away?' This it was felt might create repercussions for the future with fear of another feud never far from some people's minds. 'The Shankill is still reeling from all the duping that went on', declared one interviewee, 'Do we really want to find out things that will only make things worse?'
- 3.8.8 Some also argued that victims and members of the unionist community were more interested in *practical matters*, the desire to 'simply move on and get on with things', than nationalists. There was more that an echo here of the painting of some dubious ethnic portraits of the 'two sides'. However, there is some correspondence to the 'practical focus' of many mainly unionist victims groups as noted by the representative of the community sector. Their activities, it was suggested, tend to be centred on service-led issues such as computer classes and compensation. Whether this is due to 'cultural differences' or some of the structural issues of relations with the state discussed above is an area that would need far more comprehensive analysis.
- 3.8.9 There was also a sense that any issues dealing with *the relationship between the past and future* were seen problematically by many within the unionist community. One interviewee spoke of his sense of 'despair' at the decidedly downbeat atmosphere that currently seemed to prevail in many quarters. The

representative of the community sector argued that many within the unionist community felt that 'the media is against them' because 'they were always being seen as the perpetrators'. As a result there was little sense in taking part in 'truth-telling' because no one is interested in listening to them anyway'. Apprehension about the future made accepting the failings of the past (which any 'truth-telling' process would invariably involve) all the more difficult to deal with.

- 3.8.10 For the interviewee from the unionist community most supportive of taking this agenda forward this unwillingness to deal with the past was, in part at least, a consequence of its virtual *absence during the peace talks process*. 'We did not really think it would be so much of an issue as it has become,' he argued, ' [but] on reflection we were just sticking plasters on wounds'.
- 3.8.11 For this interviewee at least the time had come to deal with those wounds more thoroughly by adopting a local 'truth-telling' approach. After the interview the respondent wrote the following and asked that it could be included in full in the report:

*There is a need for recognition that truth is a multi-faceted thing, highly subjective and needs to be recognised and accepted as such. Indeed the hope that a community may benefit from telling its story is based on the very fact that they got to tell it from their perspective. It is not a highly legalistic and forensic exercise but a community based platform whereby people can tell their story from their perspective and express their pain in the safety of familiar surroundings and with the support of their own people. Other traumatised communities could benefit from similar initiatives.*