

“Symbolic Associations of Violence Among Northern Irish and South African Youth”

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Abstract

The period of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland from 1969 to 1998 known as ‘the Troubles’ and the era of apartheid from 1948 to 1994 in South Africa were both characterized by violent sociopolitical conflict involving youth as active participants in paramilitary organizations and violent sociopolitical protest. While youth violence of the past was signified politically, persistent youth violence in these two nations is often regarded by scholars as purposeless, being attached to no direct political goals. So, what is the place of violence in the symbolic universe of post-conflict youth? How do youth in South Africa and Northern Ireland experience and understand violence in their everyday lives? And how do their approaches to violence determine their abilities to function in society? To answer these questions, I have conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews in both Northern Ireland and South Africa among seventy street children, gang members, and high school and college students. Respondents were asked to define themselves as youth, describe their understanding of justifications for violent behavior and experiences of violence in their communities, and propose solutions to address violence in their nations. In interpreting the results, I employed a conceptual framework of youth agency which argues that violence is part of the discursive processes through which youth position themselves in their communities as purposive actors. The comparative findings indicate that South African youth have a much more personal and nuanced understanding of both youth agency and violence than do Northern Irish youth, who regard violence in spatially and emotionally remote terms. By acknowledging that young people are purposive agents engaged in a process of interpreting and attaching significance to violence, my research aims to provide an innovative perspective to aid conflict resolution by empowering the subjects of violence with the capacity to become protagonists in its overcoming.

Keywords: Youth, violence, Northern Ireland, South Africa, agency

Symbolic Associations of Violence Among Northern Irish and South African Youth

In the Summer of 2009, I was teaching basic literacy and math skills to a class of street children through a local non-profit in Worcester, South Africa when some friends asked me to spend a weekend in Cape Town. All weekend, my introductions were followed by a, “You would simply not believe the place she is staying in,” amended with a hasty, “But we forget that good people live there too.”

Like too many white South Africans, my friends held on to the sensationalized opinion that former blacks-only townships are unique hotbeds of violent crime, rampant drug abuse, and gangsterism. Esselen Park was certainly a far cry from their gated fortress in their wealthy Cape Town neighborhood. Yet, after living in the Coloured¹ township of Esselen Park a mere three weeks, I was already persuaded that this place could be anywhere in the world, plagued by the same social problems common to deprived communities elsewhere.

Speaking with students at a local high school in Esselen Park, I learned of the ways in which violence impacted their everyday lives. The students recounted an incident earlier in the week in which a shooting had occurred inside their schoolyard. The victim was a former classmate who had dropped out of school after joining a gang, and was targeted after he tried to desert. In the wake of the incident, many students described feeling at risk as they were forced to cross gang lines on their daily walk to school. Others were themselves gang members, or had family members in gangs. Some sympathized with those involved, believing them to be defenders of the community against unwanted outsiders. Each was engaged in interpreting and internalizing events like this on an individual basis.

¹ ‘Coloured’ was one of the racial categories established during apartheid and is still used today to refer to the offspring of the Khoikhoi and white settlers or the Griqua and the Khoikhoi.

These youth were not simply passive victims of violence, nor merely marginalized hoodlums who perpetrated it, but actors engaged in assigning meanings to the violence they experienced. Their signification of violence, in turn, shaped not only their perspective on its causes, but also the ways in which they addressed it. Some chose to ignore it, others spoke out vehemently against it, while still others sympathized and even participated in violence themselves.

Overview of Relevant Research

While young people's own views on the place of violence in society are often nuanced and complex, scholars often regard youth violence today as less rational and more anomic when compared with a past where militant politics addressed political oppression or socioeconomic exclusion. South Africanists have looked at violence during the apartheid-era as a multi-layered phenomenon signified politically within the direct confrontation between liberation movements and the oppressive policies of the Apartheid regime. However, in the democratic context of post-apartheid South Africa, persisting violence is often regarded as simply disruptive and irrational, as it is less clearly attached to social and political goals.

A similar shift from politically significant to anomic violence has occurred in Northern Ireland, another society characterized by recent sociopolitical conflict, which I visited in Autumn of 2010. While in Northern Ireland, I met many young people who described the recent rise in rioting and anti-social behavior among youth since the 1998 comprehensive peace agreement as 'recreational,' stemming from boredom and lack of alternative activities. This was in contrast to the violent struggle of armed groups during the conflict, which was signified within opposition to the Orange State and British government. Nevertheless, Northern Irish youth were employing

their condemnation, support or indifference towards persisting violence as part of the way they positioned themselves in their community and society in general.

Research Questions

It was clear that the meanings both Northern Irish and South African youth assigned to their daily experiences with violence were an important part of strategies and discourses that defined their place in their communities. Yet, literature on persisting violence in Northern Ireland and South Africa rarely focuses on young people's agency. So, what is the place of violence in the symbolic universe of post-conflict youth? How do youth in South Africa and Northern Ireland experience and understand violence in their everyday lives? And how do their approaches to violence determine their ability to function in society?

Statement of Purpose

As British dependencies, both Northern Ireland and South Africa experienced a history of anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggle where young people were both victims and perpetrators of violence. Both conflicts were imbued with political, heavily masculine symbolism, from the murals of the Shankill Road in Northern Ireland to the rhythmic stomping of the *toyi-toyi* dance in South Africa.

In the past, such political symbolism organized violence in ways that connected it to broader goals and channeled its capacity for social disruptiveness. However, now that transition to a more inclusive political order has been achieved in both cases, the persistence of violence in these societies seems rather to testify to their enduring social inequalities and economic uncertainties. How these societies address persisting violence in their young people will be of

decisive importance in both preventing civil unrest and challenging social division among future generations.

Further, having undergone successful peace processes, Northern Ireland and South Africa are unique laboratories to observe and test strategies addressing the persistence of youth violence in other emerging post-conflict nations. A study of youth violence in these two nations can indicate practical approaches to serving young people in post-conflict societies throughout the world. As such, my thesis and continued research in this area can contribute to the conversation on conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies not only in Northern Ireland and South Africa, but in other transitional and post-conflict societies.

This thesis will explore how youth in societies suffering from recent conflict and its accompanying social traumas understand violence when past signification of violence as functioning to attain political goals are in decline. To this purpose, I will use the concept of “symbolic associations” of violence, which assumes that violence is not simply the result of marginalization, nor as the output of a behavioral pathology, but is part of discursive processes through which subjects position themselves in their communities.

By acknowledging that young people are actors engaged in a process of interpreting and attaching significance to violence, my approach understands the disruptive conduct of young people as neither inexplicable nor irrational. It rather takes such signifying capacities as the basis for interventions to resolve conflict. As such, my approach to studying the relationship of youth and violence in post-conflict societies aims to provide an innovative perspective empowering the subjects of violence with the capacity to become protagonists in its overcoming.

Thesis Organization

This research will focus on a broad range of Northern Irish and South African youths' engagement with and interpretation of their experience with violence in a post-conflict context. I will begin with a brief overview of the historical context of the conflicts in both Northern Ireland and South Africa, followed by a critical analysis of relevant literature defining youth violence and explaining its causes. Here, I will provide the conceptual framework which I have utilized in discussing the findings of this study, one which identifies youth violence as a form of youth agency. Next, I will explain my methodology and describe the biographical characteristics of the study sample.

Then, in discussing the results of the comparative fieldwork associated with this study, I will first address the ambiguities associated with the term "youth" itself, and the ways in which it refers to both young people's social status and their own process of self-identification and belonging in this category. I will then assess to what extent youth in post-conflict Northern Ireland and South Africa justify violent events not only through moral evaluation, but also through the purpose they attach to violence in relation to social and community problems. By considering the opinions of the youth in question, I will be attentive to determining their proposed alternative approaches to social problems. Finally, I will conclude with policy recommendations, which incorporate the perspectives of post-conflict youth, as well as emphasizing questions for further study in this area.

Historical Overview

In order to study the symbolic associations of violence among youth in Northern Ireland and South Africa today, we must first understand the historical context in which they live with particular regard to the sociopolitical role of violence. In this section, I provide an historical overview of South Africa from apartheid to democracy and Northern Ireland's development from the context of political violence roots known as 'the Troubles' to the current post-conflict reconstruction.

South Africa

Literally translated as 'apartness,' 'apartheid' was a policy of political, social and economic separation on the basis of race pursued by the National Party regime in South Africa from 1948 to 1994 (Clark and Worger 2004: 3). Although apartheid legislation was in effect for less than fifty years, the policies pursued during this period, and the violent means with which they have been implemented have had a profound impact upon the historical memories of today's South Africans. For South Africa's black youth, the legacy of apartheid's "separate development" has been one of persistent socioeconomic inequality, high unemployment, and unequal access to education.

Apartheid.

The roots of apartheid derive from Dutch colonization in the seventeenth century and British colonial domination from the early nineteenth century. Colonial rule was established through the violent destruction of African societies and their subjugation under the country's capitalist economy, maintained through economic exploitation on the basis of racial segregation. This system of racial segregation was predicated upon the political dominance of whites, both

English-speaking and Afrikaners, while political rights and representation were simultaneously denied to non-whites.

Segregationist policies turned Africans into a cheap labor force employed first in European-controlled agriculture, then from the late nineteenth century, in the country's burgeoning, white-owned mining industry and manufacturing sector (Thompson 2001: 121). African men migrated from rural areas to work in the mines for months at a time, earning nearly eight times less than the average white worker (Thompson 2001: 121). They suffered from terrible working and living conditions and were forbidden from organizing, unlike white workers, who effectively appealed to racial protections from the government to establish their privileged position in skilled jobs (Thompson 2001: 121). These economically exploitative practices on the basis of race would form the foundation for apartheid-era policies, formally initiated with the rise to power of the National Party in 1948.

A cornerstone of these policies were laws that denied political rights to Africans and confined their property and residence rights to rural "homelands," poor and overcrowded territories whose predecessors were already established with the 1927 Native Administration Act (Clark and Worger 2004: 22). As Clark and Worger (2004: 22) write: "The rural areas quickly became unable to support the African population and as people sought to work elsewhere they were forced into a system of migrant labour, moving between workplaces where they had no rights, back to rural homes where they could not survive." When working in the cities, legally defined as "white" South Africans, most African workers were required to carry passes, limiting their movements and binding them to their place of employment. It was in this context of

coercive control of the black majority by the white minority that organized opposition to segregation and socioeconomic oppression developed.

The Afrikaner-controlled National Party took power in 1948 with a minority of the votes but a majority of the parliamentary seats, promising that Africans would “develop along their own lines in their true fatherland, the [segregated] Reserves” (cited in Clark and Worger 2004: 42). The policies enacted by the National Party over the next decade reinforced the system of racial segregation in the name of a political program of “apartheid” (Clark and Worger 2004: 3, 4). Under apartheid legislation, individuals were classified racially through arbitrary tests as either white, coloured, ‘asiatic’ (Indian), or ‘native’ (‘Bantu’ or African), and such classification on a racial basis determined rights to residence, marriage, political representation, employment, education, and use of all public facilities, including transport, cinemas, restaurants, and even beaches (Worden 2007: 106).

Organized resistance to apartheid and state intransigency.

During the 1950’s these policies were met with resistance from African organizations, especially with the African National Congress’s and the Communist Party’s joint Defiance Campaign, the Federation of South African women’s anti-pass campaign, bus boycotts, worker’s strikes and attacks on local ‘chiefs’ in rural areas (Worden 2007: 110-112). Nevertheless, the anti-apartheid movement was divided among those who supported the ANC’s ‘Freedom Charter’ advocating equal rights for blacks, whites, Indians, and coloureds in a new democratic South Africa and those who favored an ‘Africa for Africans’ philosophy proposed by the Pan Africanist Congress (Worden 2007: 116-117).

On March 21st, 1960, police fired upon a crowd of peaceful demonstrators protesting against the pass laws, killing sixty-nine and wounding more than a hundred people (Worden 2007: 118). The ‘Sharpeville massacre,’ as it came to be known, generated international condemnation and the imposition of economic sanctions against South Africa (Worden 2007: 118). The apartheid regime remained undeterred, instituting a state of emergency banning the ANC and the PAC, as well as detaining and imprisoning key resistance leaders (Worden 2007: 118-119). Although both the ANC and PAC embarked on an armed campaign, their status as illegal, clandestine organizations left a vacuum in nonviolent resistance politics until the 1970’s (Worden 2007: 127-128).

In the early 1970’s, it was South Africa’s youth who took up the mantle of resistance. Following widespread worker strikes from 1973 to 1976, 15,000 students in the township of Soweto in Johannesburg staged a protest against the imposition of Afrikaans as a language medium of instruction in their schools (Worden 2007: 130-131). After the police fired on the crowd of demonstrators, killing several students, widespread riots and school boycotts spread across South Africa’s townships (Worden 2007: 131). This radicalization of African youth galvanized the erstwhile dormant resistance, even as police brutality and detention without trial continued (Clark and Worger 2004: 77-78).

The regime intended to appease the masses by granting limited rights and socioeconomic improvements for non-whites, but these partial reforms did not go so far as to provide political representation to the African majority (Clark and Worger 2004: 82). Recognizing that these ‘changes’ were merely a continuation of the status quo of apartheid, the United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed in 1983 to mobilize to end the racist regime (Clark and Worger 2004: 85).

The organization adhered to the basic ideals of the ANC's Freedom Charter and drew vast popular support (Clark and Worger 2004: 84). The apartheid regime declared another State of Emergency in July of 1985, as the ANC, the UDF and black trade unions fought to 'render the country ungovernable' (Clark and Worger 2004: 95).

Escalation of youth violence in South Africa.

The struggle to end apartheid reached its apex in 1985, as during the late 1980s and early 1990s, South Africa's youth were directly involved in violent sociopolitical confrontation which placed further pressure on the apartheid regime to address dissidence through stricter law enforcement and hesitant alliances with black leaders. Township youth became mobilized through the Azanian Student's Organization (ASO) and the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), both affiliates of the UDF, and began boycotting schools with the 1985 slogan 'liberation now, education later' (Dlamini 2005: 70).

Militant youths commenced toyi-toying in the streets, and in what came to be known as the 'comrades movement' many of these youth became comrades in arms with the ANC (Beinart 2001: 259). These 'comrades' established popular courts, punishing informers by 'necklacing,' or lighting fire to a gasoline-soaked tire placed around the accused's neck and also killed those whom local *ngakas* (diviners) identified as practicing witches (Beinart 2001: 261). While the violent political mobilization of South Africa's youth was often nominally in support of anti-apartheid organizations, it nonetheless also threatened to destabilize and divide the leadership of these organizations, who argued that they could not longer contain destructive tendencies of their youthful supporters.

Further, in addition to youth violence perpetrated in the name of resistance to apartheid oppression, many militarized youths subverted support for the ANC and UDF through their involvement with the Inkatha Youth League. The Inkatha Youth League was associated with Mangosuthu Butulezi's Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), a Zulu-based political party covertly supported by the apartheid regime and presented as an alternative to the ANC (Beinart 2001: 267). The Inkatha Freedom Party sought greater political representation within the apartheid state, opposing armed struggle to end the apartheid regime, sanctions and socialism (Beinart 2001: 267).

Ideological differences between the IFP contra the ANC and UDF descended into violence as *impis* (Inkatha youth brigades) wielding traditional Zulu weapons and *amaqabase* (comrades) clashed in the peri-urban settlements around Pietermaritzburg (Beinart 2001: 267). Forbidden by the IFP from participating in school boycotts, and angered by *amaqabane* policies of destroying and looting 'government-owned' property (often actually owned by residents), Inkatha youths often attacked or prosecuted UDF student demonstrators (Dlamini 70-71). The situation in South Africa rapidly deteriorated in the early 1990s as, in addition to this internal unrest, the United States imposed political and economic sanctions on the apartheid regime (Clark and Worger 2004: 95).

Collapse of apartheid regime and democratic elections.

Confronting sharp criticism from international anti-apartheid movements and internal resistance organizations, the new administration of President F.W. De Klerk lifted, in February 1990, the ban on the PAC, the ANC and other organizations and released Nelson Mandela, leader of the ANC, from prison (Clark and Worger 2004: 103). Negotiations for a democratic transition

took place between the ANC and NP government throughout 1993 and early 1994 amidst continued violence which lasted practically up until the week of the first national elections of April, 1994 (Clark and Worger 2004: 109). About ninety percent of registered voters cast their ballots in four days of national elections and on May 9th, 1994, Nelson Mandela became the first democratically elected president of South Africa (Clark and Worger 2004: 110).

Youth in post-apartheid South Africa.

After apartheid, South Africa has continued to face numerous challenges in its efforts to build an inclusive multi-racial democracy. Not least of these are its high unemployment rates of over thirty percent, the second worst socioeconomic inequality in the world (behind Brazil), corruption at the state level, high crime rates, poor educational performance, and the rise of gangsterism and drug trafficking (Worden 2007: 162-163). It is in this context that many of today's youth in South Africa are being stereotyped as a 'lost generation' without purpose or opportunity, but socialized to violent behavior.

Northern Ireland

Similarly, in the recent history of Northern Ireland there has also been considerable and recurring public concern that young people growing up in contexts of political conflict would develop into 'children of violence,' acting out the tensions and antagonisms of their parents' generation. As Byrne (1997: 23) argues: "Children's political awareness and inclinations towards conflict and political authority have a historical and cultural basis....It is important to trace the historical forces separating [Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland] if we are to understand the political world Northern Irish children experience, feel, and absorb." Although the heightened period of violent political conflict in Northern Ireland, known as "The Troubles,"

occurred from 1969 to 1996, these ‘historical forces’ date back to the experience of British colonization of the island.

Colonization and partition.

Discriminatory laws denying property rights, educational access, and employment to Catholics, Methodists and Presbyterians were introduced by the end of the seventeenth century (Byrne 1997: 28 and Coogan 1996: 6). During the nineteenth century, in a context of economic decline heightened by the potato famine of the 1840s, Catholic and Protestant movements grew polarized around issues of land reform and the proposed introduction by the British government of a “home rule” system for Ireland, which the Protestant elites of the northern parts of the island opposed in the name of union with Britain (Byrne 1997: 29-31). Then, in the Easter Week of 1916, the Irish Republican Brotherhood reorganized and staged an uprising in Dublin to end British rule over the island of Ireland and institute an independent Irish Republic (Coogan 1996: 19).

Pressured by the Irish Republican Brotherhood, now renamed the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the British attempted to appease Protestant Unionist interests in Belfast and Catholic nationalist demands in Dublin with the Government of Ireland Act in 1920 (Coogan 1996: 20). This Act divided the territory between the six Protestant Unionist counties of the North and the twenty-six counties in the heavily Catholic South and West (Byrne 1997: 34). While ostensibly the South became the ‘Irish Free State,’ the fact that it remained a dominion of the United Kingdom was unacceptable to young IRA members who had pledged to fight for an independent Irish republic (Coogan 1996: 21).

A brutal civil war followed until 1923 in which former allies in the struggle for Irish independence turned against one another to fight the implementation of the Act (Coogan 1996: 21). Nevertheless, the Act and the boundary it represented remained intact, leaving a substantial Catholic minority in the newly-formed Northern Ireland under the rule of a 'Protestant parliament for a Protestant people' (Coogan 1996: 22-23).

Protestant ascendancy and discrimination.

Fearful of a hostile Catholic minority and frustrated by a noncommittal British government, the Protestant Ulster Unionist Party believed that consolidating unionist power and identity was the only means to secure the survival of the Northern Irish state (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 6-7). In 1922, proportional representation was abolished first at the local level and then in elections to national parliament, further restricting the political representation of the Catholic nationalist community (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 8-9). Confronted with discrimination in public and private sector employment, disproportionate allocation of public housing to Protestants, restriction of voting rights to the head of household and oppression by an exclusively Protestant police force, Catholics felt increasingly marginalized from public life (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 9-13).

In 1967, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) formed to protest the mistreatment of Catholics in Northern Ireland (Byrne 1997: 40). Styling itself after the American civil rights movement and student movements across Europe, NICRA, the product of a burgeoning Catholic middle-class unwilling to accept their status as second-class citizens, espoused non-violent resistance (Byrne 1997: 40-41). On October 5th 1968, following a ban by the Minister for Home Affairs, the NICRA staged a march in Londonderry (McKittrick and

McVea 2002: 41). The documented and televised brutality of the Royal Ulster Constabulary against the marchers brought international attention to the situation in Northern Ireland and put pressure on the government to institute reform (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 41-42).

Escalation of violence and the beginning of ‘The Troubles.’

Thwarting the possibilities of reform stood the loyalists of the Ulster Volunteer force and other Protestant unionist organizations whose intransigence led by the late 1960s to a climate of violence and intimidation (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 47-49). Catholics in Northern Ireland felt increasingly abandoned by an Irish Republican Army under Southern, leftist leadership which seemed unable to protect them (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 59-60). A split within the IRA brought into being the Provisional IRA, committed to defending the nationalist community in Northern Ireland and achieving a united Irish Republic through armed struggle. These developments signaled a steady increase in the level of violence in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s.

1972 marked the height of violence during ‘the Troubles,’ which would last until the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement in 1998. On the infamous ‘Bloody Sunday,’ fourteen unarmed demonstrators were shot (many in the back) when the British Parachute Regiment opened fire on civil rights marchers in Derry (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 76). In response, the IRA stepped up its bombing campaign, while loyalist paramilitary organizations retaliated by shooting Catholic civilians (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 86).

Youth participation during ‘The Troubles’.

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, young people were often involved in civil rights demonstrations, constituting a significant proportion of those injured or fatally wounded (Cairns

1987: 26). In fact, in a 1980 Mercer study estimated that about one-third of all young people in Northern Ireland had participated in a demonstration (Cairns 1987: 27). Further, Northern Irish youth as young as ten years old were frequently associated with violent rioting against security forces and were reputed to have been involved in burning homes and intimidating residents of the opposing community (Cairns 1987: 27).

The shift from violent confrontation associated with civil rights demonstrations to armed struggle and bombing campaigns did not signal the end of the youth's direct participation in the conflict (Cairns 1987: 28). Rather, in addition to being utilized in an auxiliary capacity, providing diversions which allowed gunmen to escape the detection of security forces, they were also used occasionally as human shields (Cairns 1987: 28). Youth were even recruited by local paramilitaries and also may have been taught to make and deploy petrol bombs (Cairns 1987: 28). The youth's direct involvement in paramilitary violence appears to have peaked in 1978, when nearly one hundred young people from ages ten to seventeen were charged with firearms and explosives-related offenses, with arrests dropping to around twenty-five annually throughout the remainder of the Troubles (Cairns 1987: 29).

During the 1980s, one youth in particular constituted arguably the most enduring popular symbol of the Troubles. Since 1976, a dispute had been developing in Northern Ireland's prisons, also known as the 'H-blocks,' surrounding the issue of 'special category status' being granted to republican and loyalist paramilitary prisoners (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 137). Prior to 1976, republican and loyalist paramilitary internees were allowed free association and were permitted to wear their own clothes and to accept visits and packages, obeying their commanders' instructions rather than those of the prison wardens or guards (McKittrick and McVea 2002:

138). With the revocation of these privileges and the effective criminalization of loyalist and republican paramilitary internees, prisoners began increasingly to protest their change of status, first by refusing to wear their prison uniforms, then by refusing to bathe, and finally, by refusing to eat (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 138-141).

In 1981, IRA and Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) prisoners went on a second 'hungerstrike,' with a young, charismatic Bobby Sands being the first to refuse to eat prison food (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 142). Met with the British state's rigidity and aversion to compromise, ten prisoners died of slow starvation, the first being the twenty-seven-year-old Bobby Sands (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 142-144). Sands' youthful persona and media-friendly image made him a ready martyr for the republican cause. His story resonated with young people worldwide, who pledged their support for the nationalist armed struggle. In Northern Ireland, this led to a dramatic increase in public sympathy for the IRA and a swell in its ranks with supporters acknowledging that "it is not those who inflict the most who ultimately win, but those who endure the most" (cited in McKittrick and McVea 2002: 146).

The peace process.

Britain and Ireland negotiated the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, an initiative to strengthen constitutional nationalism (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 163). This historic Act contended that a change in Northern Ireland's status could only result from a majority vote by its people (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 163). However, the agreement did not produce the substantial change desired by nationalists and merely consolidated unionists' interests (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 169). Violence continued even as Northern Ireland began to move towards a political settlement by the early 1990s.

The historic ‘Good Friday Agreement’ of April 10th, 1998 provided for cross-border relationships between both Northern Ireland and Ireland and Northern Ireland and Britain, parliamentary rule in Northern Ireland, and a commitment to leave the decision to remain a part of the United Kingdom or join a united Ireland to the consent of the people of Northern Ireland (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 220). On May 22nd, in both the North and South, separate referendums were held, which resulted in overwhelming majority support for the Good Friday Agreement from the Republic and a seventy-one percent approval rating from the North (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 222). While sectarian violence continued, the peace process essentially stayed on track, and the IRA was officially decommissioned in 2005.

Youth in post-conflict Northern Ireland.

Young people had played an important role throughout the Troubles, particularly in their participation in civil rights demonstrations, riots, and formal or informal membership in paramilitary organizations (Cairns 1987: 26-29). Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, young people have faced numerous challenges in the struggle to build a peaceful society in the wake of the region’s prolonged period of sectarian violence. These challenges included continued spatial and communal segregation (especially in Belfast), violence against ethnic minorities, and failure to provide socioeconomic opportunities, especially in working class communities (Coulter and Murray 2008: 16-17). Poverty rates in working-class loyalist neighborhoods keep rising, and “the substantial and multiple disadvantage which they face has inevitably served to alienate many working-class unionists from a peace process which they consider to have conferred benefit from others but not upon them” (Coulter and Murray 2008:

18). This has led many to conjecture that the next generation of violent political extremism will emerge from these working-class areas (Coulter and Murray 2008: 18).

Literature Review

Scholarly literature on youth and violence has overwhelmingly concerned itself with debating the root causes, or etiology, of violent behavior among young people. One of the first concerns in studying youth violence is that professionals in different fields apply varying terminology to describe the same deviant or violent youth behavior (Leone 1990: 16). For example, a young individual who commits acts of violence may be alternately described by general educators as ‘disruptive,’ special educators as having a ‘serious emotional disorder,’ correction officers as ‘delinquent’ and clinicians as ‘having oppositional deviant disorder’ (Leone 1990: 16). These labels often convey negative connotations and the lack of consistency in their implementation can impede communication across disciplines (Leone 1990: 16).

Defining Youth Violence

So, what exactly do we mean by the term ‘youth violence?’ The National Academy of Sciences Panel on the Understanding and Control of Violent Behavior offers simply, “Youth violence is defined as interpersonal violence committed against children and adolescents below the legal age of adulthood,” or ‘behavior by persons against persons that intentionally threatens, attempts, or actually inflicts physical harm” (cited in Howard and Jenson 1999: 7). The National Academy of Sciences Panel definition is restrictive, in the sense that it equates ‘youth’ with a legal minority status, restricts ‘violence’ to physical, personal harm, and limits ‘youth violence’ to violence committed *against* youth, rather than committed *by* youth.

Füsün Çetin offers an alternative, more precise definition, stating, youth violence is “any intentional physical, sexual or psychological assault on another person (or persons) by one or more young people aged 12 to 24 years” (Çetin 2008: 11). By specifying an age range of

between 12 to 24 years, Çetin's explanation describes 'youth' not as merely a legal category, but one which can be applied socially long after attained the age of legal majority. Further, Çetin's definition includes both sexual and psychological forms of violence, as opposed to simply physical interpersonal conflict.

While Çetin's definition of youth violence identifies both the actors and types of youth violence, it does not expound on why youth violence must be 'intentional,' how such intent should be determined, or what potential motivations for youth to act violently might be. The idea of intent is especially pertinent to our study as we will be examining current significations for youth violence in post-conflict contexts where violence has historically been politically motivated. Fidan Owen defines political violence as, "violence enacted against persons or property to achieve certain political ends" (Owen 2008: 24). Thus, Owen's definition incorporates violence against property and also rejects the idea of universalist norms demarcating violent and nonviolent behavior by arguing for a culturally-appropriate definition of violence which recognizes that identifying aggressive behaviors depends upon what is considered culturally illegitimate (Owen 2008: 28). For our purposes, we will incorporate the merits of both Çetin's and Owen's arguments to define youth violence as "intentional physical, or psychological acts considered aggressive, according to prevalent cultural assumptions, against other persons or property, committed by young people aged 12 to 24 years."

Etiology of Youth Violence

In his book Understanding Troubled and Troubling Youth, Peter Leone divides the theoretical arguments of different scholars into three categories, or micro, meso and macro perspectives. A micro, or problem/person-centered perspective focuses directly on youth

exhibiting ‘problem behaviors’ and employs strategies to correct or suppress these behaviors (Leone 1990: 18). This perspective is individualistic in nature and argues that ‘problem youths’ have simply not learned normative, adaptive, and prosocial behaviors (Leone 1990: 18).

The meso, or social ecological perspective examines the wider social context in which these ‘problem behaviors’ occur, contesting that youth deviance is a result of an imbalance in the relationship or social interactions between youth and their environments (Leone 1990: 19). Societal behavior, as well as youth behavior, may be maladaptive (Leone 1990: 19). Thus, change is the responsibility of both the youth and members of his or her social environment (Leone 1990: 19).

A macro, structural-level or cultural-level analysis considers the “institutions, culture and other societal forces that give meaning to daily events and influence behavior” (Leone 1990: 19). According to a macro-perspective of youth violence, “troubling behavior can be seen as a function of the roles that adolescents play in society and the unanticipated purposes that deviant behaviors serve” (Leone 1990: 19). Thus, behaviors which would be maladaptive in certain contexts, such as youth violence, may be adaptive to counteract systemic social problems (Leone 1990: 19). For example, our results indicate that to counteract unequal access to higher education in South Africa, some youth join gangs in order to attain social status and achieve financial security. In this context, youth violence can be perceived as an adaptive response, given the systemic social problem of unequal educational access.

Micro-perspective.

Let us first evaluate the merits and limitations of a micro-perspective on youth violence, which explains violent behavior among young people through the presence of individual qualities or factors.

Violent youths match specific population indicators.

Many who adopt a micro-perspective on youth violence will begin by examining population indicators such as gender, age, and race or ethnicity to explain why some youths exhibit aggressive behaviors. Research on population indicators has concluded that young violent offenders are internationally an overwhelmingly male phenomenon, concentrated among ethnic ‘minorities’ aged fifteen to twenty-five (Howard and Jenson 1999: 22-25). In South Africa, gang violence has historically been associated with black urban youth, and has often been regarded as the manifestation of an otherwise repressed masculinity, often exerted through sexual violence (Pinnock 1996: 29; Glaser 2000: 4) Wolfgang and Ferracuti’s “subculture of violence” thesis goes so far as to say that the disproportionate level of violent offenders within ethnic minority populations is the result of their inherently violent culture (see Guerra and Smith 2006: 21).

While a micro-level approach of studying population indicators may yield information pointing at the prevalence of violence in potentially vulnerable populations, this perspective minimizes structural or systemic factors and the influence of socio-ecological niches on adaptive cultural beliefs and practices (Guerra and Smith 2006: 21). Studies, such as the research conducted by Krivo and Peterson in the 1990’s, show that when structural conditions are controlled, violence rates are comparable across communities (Guerra and Smith 2006: 24). However, “most prevalent conceptual frameworks do not emphasize the social stratification

system or the social positions that comprise...the structure of the system and the processes and consequences that these relative positions engender for a child's development" (cited in Guerra and Smith 2006: 26).

While micro-level factors often appear to present a tidy explanation of youth violence, they generally fail to consider the interrelated nature of individual characteristics and the social environment. For example, Kanarek's 1994 study shows that an individual sugar-rich diet is correlated with hyperactive behavior, poor school performance, possible emotional maladjustment and juvenile delinquency (Howard and Jenson 1999: 26-27; Bynum and Thompson 1995: 113). By blaming sugar consumption, however, this approach ignores social and institutional factors such as the impact of the school system on school performance (Bynum and Thompson 1995: 145).

Violent youths fit a psychological type.

Psychological or psychogenic theory is perhaps the most pervasive perspective within the micro-perspective on youth violence. It is generally rooted in Freudian psychoanalysis and explains youth violence as the output of the repressed, unconscious traumas of childhood (Bynum and Thompson 1995: 125). According to a psychogenic perspective, delinquent acts are symptoms of a psychopathology, an "internal neurological disorder, or deeply hidden personality disturbance," rather than learned behavior or the outcome of marginalization (Bynum and Thompson 1995: 129). As a result, studies like Theodore Ferdinand's in 1966, have endeavored to establish a psychological typology of criminals, while others point to qualities such as early aggressiveness, negative emotionality in childhood, and left-hemisphere language deficits as

predictive of later youth violence (Howard and Jenson 1999: 27-28, Bynum and Thompson 1995: 136).

However, no such criminal personality type been identified (Bynum and Thompson 1995: 137). In fact, it is highly improbable that a unique delinquent psychological type exists, as delinquent acts are usually committed by ordinary people, for which an abnormal psychological pathology cannot be ascertained (Klein 1987). Research conducted by Burgess and Ferguson on young people's reasons for joining paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland shows that they resulted from rational decision-making, rather than "psychological disorders that make them capable of committing murderous atrocities" (Burgess and Ferguson 2008: 83-86).

Furthermore, adult behaviors relate not only to childhood experiences but evolve according to processes of human development in which one adopts a variety of social roles and adapts to a variety of social situations (Bynum and Thompson 1995: 146). This is why Cairns, in his important work on young people and violence in Northern Ireland, argues that developmental psychology cannot be divorced from the social context of political violence (Cairns 1987: 673).

Meso or social ecological perspective.

A meso, or social ecological perspective on youth violence provides a framework to understand this phenomenon within its social context, and design interventions that focus on the transaction between individuals and their environments, rather than merely individual characteristics (Trickett and Zlotlow 1990: 105). "Rather than being portrayed as a relatively indifferent force with which individuals must contend, the ecological environment consists of specific processes, norms and structures that exert active influence on the individual" (Trickett and Zlotlow 1990: 106). In examining ecological processes, Kelly describes deviance as the

result of the interplay between the adaptive demands of the sociocultural setting and the adaptive capacities of individuals (Trickett and Zlotlow 1990: 106). Thus, behavior which is adaptive in one setting may be maladaptive in others (Trickett and Zlotlow 1990: 106).

Youths become violent as a result of marginalization.

Social ecological explanations for youth violence abound. Some theories focus on the role of socioeconomic marginalization in producing violent youths. The “Social Strain Theory” or “Anomie Theory” posits that, given unstable social conditions, there is a “state of dissatisfaction arising from a sense of discrepancy between the aspirations of the individual and the means that person has available to realize these ambitions” (Merton 1938: 672-682). Each individual has a differential opportunity to pursue success through both legitimate and illegitimate means (Cloward and Ohlin 1960). With lack of available means to realize one’s ambitions, an individual, if given the opportunity, may resort to deviant behavior (Merton 1938: 672-682). The inconsistency between the expectations of South African youth and the pace of sociopolitical change in South Africa has, for example, often been linked to youth violence (Hirshowitz, et. al. 1994: 81).

Inherent to Social Strain Theory is the assumption that lower-class and middle-class individuals share the same socioeconomic aspirations and internalize the same meaning of success (Bynum and Thompson 1995: 161). However, studies such as Hans’ 1969 research indicate that members of the impoverished social class adjust their expectations according to their economic situation (Hans 1969: 679-790). Furthermore, Social Strain Theory assumes a correlation between poverty and youth violence, a correlation which has never been conclusively established and varies tremendously depending upon the type of violent behavior studied

(Howard and Jenson 1999: 25). Social Strain Theory still does not explain why youth violence is concentrated among males, even within impoverished communities or why young people appear to abandon delinquent behavior as they grow older, despite the persistence of adverse environmental factors (Bynum and Thompson 1995: 161). Clearly, being poor does not necessarily equal acting violently.

Youths are socialized to violence within violent environments.

Other scholars in this perspective contest that youth violence is simply another learned behavior in impoverished communities. Cultural Transmission theorists insist that delinquency is a product of youth internalizing the norms and values of a lower-class subculture (Bynum and Thompson 1995: 166). Miller's 1958 study of lower class culture, for example, contends that delinquency is a result of commitment to lower-class values, such as exhibiting one's masculinity, demonstrating street smartness, and striving for autonomy from authorities (Miller 1958: 5-19).

Social Learning Theories, likewise contend that juvenile delinquency is a learned behavior apprehended through interactions with criminal elements of society (Bynum and Thompson 1995: 173). Sutherland and Cressey's 1943 argument on 'differential association,' as well as Akers' 1985 'differential reinforcement' theory suggest that delinquent or violent behavior among youths is a reflection of their association with a criminal tradition which rewards and reinforces maladaptive behaviors (Sutherland and Cressey 1943 and Akers 1985). In South Africa, in particular, there has been concern that young people will adopt maladaptive behavior as they "have been socialized to find violence completely acceptable and human life cheap" (Chikane 1990: 344). Fraser likewise argued that among youth in Northern Ireland, "The

violence that children learn in the streets spills over...towards all authority figures. Once you are patterned to violence, it is hard to get unpatterned” (cited in Cairns 1983: 120). Basically, “a person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favorable to violation of law over definitions unfavorable to violation of law” (Bynum and Thompson 1995: 173).

The argument that youth violence is merely the product of socialization in a criminal value system contains numerous fallacies. First, so-called ‘high delinquency areas’ may be ‘collectors’ rather than ‘generators’ of violent behavior, due to societal rejection or previous identification with delinquent behavior (Bynum and Thompson 1995: 172). Second, official statistics are often a reflection of law enforcement bias in impoverished areas and even in ‘high delinquency areas’ there remain many young people who do not engage in delinquent behavior (Bynum and Thompson 1995: 171, 177). Finally, as David Matza’s 1964 study shows, far from giving support or condoning the violent behavior of their peers, many deviants view youth violence as morally wrong (Matza 1964). Thus, social ecological theories which regard youth violence as a product of learned behavior through cultural association or interpersonal relationships ignore the power young people have to shape their own process of socialization or assign meanings to their environment.

Youth are violent because society labels them as such.

However, some social ecological approaches do consider the role of meaning and identity construction in generating youth violence. For example, Labeling Theories argue that youths assume a deviant role in response to societal reactions to their behavior. Tannenbaum’s 1938 ‘Tagging’ theory contends that the treatment of the offender is what translates an occasional criminal into a hardened criminal (Tannenbaum 1938: 8-22). As Becker, contends in his *The*

Outsiders, “No act is intrinsically deviant, but must be defined as such” (Becker 1963). Labeling a person as generally, rather than specifically deviant, causes them to adopt a ‘master status’ of delinquency (Bynum and Thompson 1995: 199).

While Labeling Theory implicates society as responsible for perpetuating youth violence, it provides no insight into what causes youth deviance in the first place, or what compels one individual over another to commit deviant acts (Bynum and Thompson 1995: 201). Also, in practice, treating delinquent youths harshly has not been associated with greater criminality (Bynum and Thompson 1995: 202). Rather, Thornberry’s 1979 study shows that many potential second offenders are deterred by decisive reactions to their first offense (Thornberry 1979). Finally, Labeling Theory assumes that societal reactions are completely external to the actor and that individuals cannot create a delinquent label (Bynum and Thompson 1995: 202). Overall, Labeling Theories regard youth violence as being generated from external manipulation by adult members of society, and neglects to incorporate the capacity for individual choice and youth agency.

Macro-perspective.

Youth become violent to resist economic exploitation by elite adults.

Similarly, within macro-perspectives on youth violence focusing on structural or systemic conditions, Radical Theory considers society’s role in labeling, and thereby, determining delinquent behaviors. Influenced by Marxist theory, radical theory contends that conflict between the interests and values of different social classes produces a delinquent label which is in turn, upheld by differential law enforcement applied to these social classes (Bynum and Thompson

1995: 204). Quinney's 1975 'social reality of crime' contends that acts which threaten privileged classes are more easily stigmatized by law and labeled delinquent (Quinney 1975).

In this perspective, therefore, activities or conduct most threatening to adults, who hold both economic and social power would be most likely defined as delinquent and punished. To this would contribute a young person's status as socially and economically inferior to his peers and his parents, which would further restrict youth's opportunities for economic advancement (Greenburg 1979: 189-224). Thus, youth are frustrated by their relegation to unfulfilled age-status roles and would resort to crime to survive and resist the oppression of powerful adults (Quinney 1975).

Radical Theory goes further than Labeling Theory in considering some of the systemic and structural causes behind initial youth violence. However, it overemphasizes the importance of socioeconomic factors in predicting youth violence. If youth violence were a manifestation of a frustrated juvenile lower class, we would expect it targeting predominately more privileged youths, or empowered adults. Yet, much youth violence takes place within the same socioeconomic class, rather than being directed at the upper classes (Bynum and Thompson 1995: 211).

Moreover, Radical Theory again overemphasizes 'empowered' adults as responsible in initiating and maintaining youth violence, confining the agency of the youth to merely responding to oppression, rather than proactively using violence to attain other goals. Youth violence should be seen not simply as a resistance of last resort, but also as a "social currency" to navigate social contexts of adversity (Guerra and Smith 2006: 28).

Towards A New Etiological Paradigm

Risk and resilience perspective.

Resilient youths counteract the risks of a violent social ecological environment.

In this manner, a ‘Risk and Resilience Orientation‘ to youth violence emphasizes the actor’s capacity to successfully cope despite a social context of adversity (Richman and Fraser 2001: 1). It considers the “interplay between a combination of factors predictive of negative developmental outcomes (risk factors)” and “combinations of counteracting factors that reduce or ameliorate risk (protective factors)” (Richman and Fraser 2001: 1). Resilience is not simply an individual trait, but a product of the transaction between an individual and his or her available resources. Fraser et. al. posit that “a child who maximally exploits resources - or simply benefits from them without considered strategy - and in so doing produces a successful outcome in the face of significant threat can be called *resilient*” (cited in Richman and Fraser 2001: 5).

However, some argue that by emphasizing the power of young people to overcome adversity, we neglect “the very real psychological distress that occurs in the context of violence” (cited in Cairns 1994: 679). Further, many studies from a risk and resilience perspective result in ‘laundry lists’ of predictive factors, without considering the interrelated nature of these factors or differences between particular socioecological settings (Howard and Jenson 1999: 21). My earlier discussion of social ecological perspectives on youth violence indicates that individual behavior is not an abstract function of individual capacities for resilience, but varies from setting to setting (Trickett and Zlotlow 1990: 118-119).

Most importantly, scholars of the “risk and resilience” persuasion do not consider youth violence a resilient behavior. Rather, it is one’s capacity to resist or abstain from violence which

is deemed successful, or resilient. This normative approach does not, therefore, allow one to see how, even when acting violently, young people are involved in changing their community and its social relationships (Hoffman 2004: 241). Youth possess, in particular, an abundance of social capital and vibrant informal networks which are not always approved by society at large but can nonetheless be mobilized to navigate the social environment (Hoffman 2004: 241). Youth violence can, therefore, be seen as both a resilient and adaptive behavior, even when it is not morally approved.

Conceptual Framework of This Study

Youth agency perspective.

In contrast to the dominant paradigm on childhood which proposes that children are merely passive recipients of adult agency, an emerging perspective on the sociology of childhood has prioritized the importance of understanding and appreciating children's agency in its own right (James and Prout 2005: 57). "Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes" (James and Prout 2005: 57). Although it is acknowledged that these social structures and processes may place constraints on a child's capacity to act, this does not render the agency of child impotent or invisible (James and Prout 2005: 76).

In her study of the political socialization of Palestinian schoolchildren, Habashi notes that children and adults equally respond to processes of global structural hegemony and the local reproduction of that hegemony: "Children at large are not a separate entity, and it is not the local construct that defines them, rather they are the product of the constant contest between local and

global” (Habashi 2009: 44). Habashi thus argues against a clear-cut, universally applicable distinction between childhood and adulthood, because “this linear perspective does not express the interdependence of local resources and the structure of global discourse” (Habashi 2009: 44). This is not to imply, by any means, that children are fully independent (Habashi 2009: 44). However they are, at least to some extent, capable of harnessing resources made available by global and local discourses and as such, autonomous actors in possession of agency.

Defining youth agency in context.

As many theoretical traditions emphasize and debate the agency of young people, what do we mean by ‘agency?’ In his *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Anthony Giddens argues that, “to be a human being is to be a purposive agent, who both has reasons for his or her activities and is able, if asked, to elaborate discursively upon these reasons (including lying about them)” (Giddens 1984: 3). This purposive action is a process of rationalization rather than a set of discrete intentions, reasons or motives, as sociologists have often argued (Giddens 1984, 3, 8). Agency refers not to the actors’ intentions but to their capability of action (Giddens 1984: 9). Inherent to Giddens’ definition is the notion of power, as determining and distributing capacities to act according to different rationalities and goals (Giddens 1984: 9).

The association of agency with power is of particular significance for children and young adults, traditionally portrayed as ‘silent others,’ ‘enfants terribles,’ a ‘lost generation,’ or alternatively, innocent and vulnerable, and thereby in need of adult protection (Honwana 2005: 3). “Children and youth appear as pre-social and passive recipients of experience. They are portrayed as dependent, immature, and incapable of assuming responsibility, properly confined

to the protection of home and school” (Honwana 2005: 3). Those children and youth who do transgress these established boundaries, or otherwise fail to conform, are labeled ‘deviants’ (James and Prout 2005: 62).

Both in South Africa and Northern Ireland, youth were stereotyped by the media, governmental forces, revolutionary movements and scholars as a ‘lost generation’ of marginalized persons living outside formal social structures and devoid of the values deemed essential for ‘civilized’ society (Seekings 1996: 103, 121). In this perspective, Seekings argues, “today’s youth are armed, their violence is anarchic and random, their targets innocent passers-by” (Seekings 1996: 107). All of the various political, economic, educational, social and psychological dangers of violence in a context of conflict were thus attributed to a single age cohort, which in South Africa’s case was often racially identified with black males (Seekings 1996: 108).

This stereotype is undoubtedly grounded in the “generally unexamined assumption that there is a direct and close relationship between adverse structural conditions, moral degradation, and anti-social behavior” (Seekings 1996: 118). Certainly young people in Northern Ireland and South Africa faced and continue to face adverse conditions such as unemployment and communal violence (Seekings 1996: 123). Nevertheless, these youth are not just powerless victims of circumstances of which their actions are mere reflexes. They should not, therefore, be excluded from a category of rational actors in possession of agency.

Recognizing youth as rational actors.

In their study of youth in post-colonial Africa, Honwana and De Boek argue for a recognition of children and youth as “both makers and breakers of society while they are

simultaneously being made and broken by that society” (Honwana and De Boek 2005: 2). While I would caution against objectifying youth as either a constructive or destructive force, this statement reinforces the importance of focusing on transactions between young people and society and emphasizes the youth’s capacity to affect change in ways both legitimized and approved by their social context. “Young people in Africa have the capacity to fracture public space, and re-invent or even bypass it” (Honwana and De Boek 2005: 1).

Furthermore, despite the violence surrounding their everyday lives, young people are important sources of economic production, wealth and security in an African family dynamic: “Children and youth are major players in the new informal economies and processes of globalization,” the development of popular culture, and in “redefining and restructuring existing models of kinship and moral matrices of reciprocity and solidarity” (Honwana and De Boek 2005: 1-2).

Similarly, Madeleine Leonard acknowledges the agency and social capital of children and young adults in Northern Ireland post-conflict processes. Traditionally, social capital has been regarded as a resource earned through a one-way process of socialization between parent and child, in which children either reject or accept the norms and values imparted by their parents, but do not influence them (Leonard 2005: 607). Social capital is regarded as an asset for a child’s future, rather than his or her present, as children are described, to quote Qvortrup ,as ‘human becomings’ as opposed to human beings (cited in Leonard 2005: 607).

Leonard’s research on children’s employment in Northern Ireland, instead, shows that young adults do generate and access sources of social capital independently of their parents and their parents’ associates, for example by developing links of reciprocity and trust and creating

social capital by discovering employment opportunities through their peer networks (Leonard 2005: 617). This social capital can be transferable to other forms of capital as children develop life skills they would not have acquired through formal education and generate finances to support continuing education (Leonard 2005: 617).

Moreover, Leonard argues that children and youth in Northern Ireland are also active in building subcultural capital as they spatially navigate and claim ownership of streets and places where they can escape adult hegemony (Leonard 2008: 236). Subcultural capital “enables children and young people to create social spaces not contaminated by existing adult values and cultural norms...develop connections that bestow status on participants [and] reinterpret the social world” (Leonard 2008: 237). The way in which this subcultural capital is produced can be, I would argue, imbued with various degrees of youth violence, as a form of agency.

In conclusion, I therefore propose that to fully understand the significance of youth violence in post-conflict contexts, one’s focus should not be limited to its undoubtedly painful and traumatic aspects, but should look at how, as my findings in Northern Ireland and South Africa will show, young people use and signify violence as part of their broader strategies of defining themselves as purposive agents in their community and society.

Methodology

Research Design

To study how Northern Irish and South African youth understand and employ violence as a form of agency, I have employed a qualitative study design consisting of semi-structured interviews of no more than forty-five minutes in length.

Traditionally, critics have questioned whether the results of qualitative case studies can be applied to a broader population. First, some question the significance of these findings, arguing that results from qualitative analysis cannot be generalized without further quantitative analysis of carefully selected segments of the population (Burawoy 1991, 272). The second line of criticism contends that the level of qualitative analysis (face-to-face interaction) is ahistorical, ignoring the macro-level, structural conditions of society, and thus, cannot be applied outside of its particular setting (Burawoy 1991, 272).

Here, we must make the distinction between statistical significance and societal significance. When social scientists seek commonalities between similarly selected case studies in order to make generalizations about all individuals that possess similar attributes, they are searching for statistical significance (Burawoy 1991, 282). This study, however, aspires to societal significance. In other words, by analyzing the results of specific interviews, I will determine what must be true of their social and historical context for these case studies to “have assumed the character we have observed” (Burawoy 1991, 282). Rather than seeking to generalize these findings across similar populations, I will use my results to generalize about the condition of society at large (Burawoy 1991, 282). Therefore, I will contend that the results of

these quantitative case studies are not merely the expressed opinions of sixty-nine individuals, but that these findings are societally significant, or representative of a broader social reality.

Data Collection and Analysis

Study participants were first asked questions to garner information relating to their biographical data, socioeconomic status, family composition, education, religious affiliation, and ethnic background. Then, I asked respondents to explain their understanding of the term “youth,” attending to whether they defined it as an age group, a social status, or a set of attitudes or behaviors. Next, I asked respondents to identify the main problems in their communities and to suggest possible causes and solutions to these problems. Participants were then asked to determine in what situations, if any, violence could be considered justified, as a way to solve personal, familial, or community problems. Finally, participants were specifically asked to assess the importance of peaceful approaches at the individual and societal level, as an alternative to address community and societal problems.

Interviews were recorded by means of a digital recorder and then transcribed, to ensure accuracy and minimize study bias. Results were coded manually and processed using a frame analysis approach with which recurring themes in respondents interviews were grouped according to: I) an understanding of youth in terms of: A) age, B) physical maturity, C) emotional maturity and legal responsibility, and D) a non-existent or irrelevant label; II) associations of violence as either: K) unjustifiable or unacceptable, L) morally wrong, but socially understandable, or M) a legitimate response to social conditions; and III) identification of community problems as related to: E) gender, F) socioeconomic inequality, G) institutional

neglect, H) individual failure, I) substance abuse, J) gangsterism and organized crime, N) racism and sectarianism, and O) domestic violence and interpersonal violence.

Participants

This research study is cross-sectional in nature, focusing upon a specific segment of the Northern Irish and the South African population, namely youth from deprived communities with a past of racial or religious discrimination, histories of violent confrontation, and persistent violence in a current, post-conflict context. As such, respondents were recruited by means of an oral recruitment script through local non-profit organizations serving at-risk, or disadvantaged youth.

In Worcester and Oudtshoorn, South Africa, participants were clients of Kibbutz Elshamma and the Lappert Street Project, organizations that serve street children, orphans and otherwise at-risk youth. In Northern Ireland, respondents were clients of Coiste in Belfast, and Tar Abhaile and St. Columb's Park House in Derry. Coiste and Tar Abahaile are organizations of Republican former prisoners that serve youth from predominately nationalist communities. St. Columb's Park House is a reconciliation project targeted to young people throughout Northern Ireland.

As the research population included minors and individuals from otherwise vulnerable populations, special precautions were taken to minimize risk and protect respondents' right to privacy. I was granted initial approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for research in South Africa in August of 2009, and received approval for Continuing Review from the IRB authorizing research in Northern Ireland in August of 2010. In order to ensure that respondents' privacy was protected, I did not access participant records to determine their suitability for the

study. Further, personally identifiable information was neither solicited nor recorded at any time during the study.

Respondents were also appointed an advocate, independent of the research study, who was familiar with the respondents and their needs and monitored the recruitment and assent processes in order to minimize undue influence. Respondents were not asked to recount personal experiences with violence as doing so might have involved unnecessary psychological strain associated with evoking past traumas. Finally, participants could terminate their involvement at any time during the interview without penalty or damaging their relationship with the affiliated non-profit organization. In short, every consideration was taken to ensure that respondents' safety, privacy and well-being would be maintained throughout the course of the study.

Sample Characteristics

In total, sixty-nine young people were interviewed across the twenty-three group and individual interviews comprising this research study. Of these sixty-nine total respondents, forty-one were South African and twenty-eight were from Northern Ireland.

Geographical Background

In South Africa, twenty-eight of the respondents were from Worcester, ten were from Oudtshoorn, one was from Kwa-Zulu Natal, one was from Johannesburg, and two were from other areas of the Western Cape. *Figure 1* shows the number of South African respondents who claim residence in each of these cities in order to detail the geographic area represented by the results of this study.

In Northern Ireland, six respondents were from Derry, nine were from Belfast, six were from Omagh and the surrounding area, and seven were from Newtownstewart. See *Figure 2* for a representation of the number of respondents in Northern Ireland who claim residence in each of these cities in order to illustrate the geographic area represented by the results of this study.

As such, 34 percent of all respondents came from rural geographic backgrounds (Oudtshoorn, Newtownstewart, and Omagh), while 64 percent came from urban areas (Derry, Belfast, Worcester, and Johannesburg).

Gender

This study aimed to achieve gender balance. In South Africa, thirty-one respondents were males, while ten were females. In Northern Ireland, thirteen respondents were males and fifteen were females. Overall, 64 percent of all respondents were males, and 36 percent were females.

Age

Respondents ranged in ages from 12 to 30 years old. In South Africa, four respondents were aged 12 to 14, twenty-eight aged 15 to 18, five aged 19 to 21, and four aged 26 to 30. In Northern Ireland, nine respondents were aged 12 to 14, fifteen were aged 15 to 18, two were aged 19 to 21, one was 23 years old, and one was 26 years old. By far, most represented age bracket was 15 to 18 years old, with 62 percent of all respondents. *Figure 3* demonstrates that our sample in both Northern Ireland and South Africa is diverse in terms of age.

Ethnic and Religious Affiliation

In South Africa, the vast majority of respondents, forty, classified themselves ethnically or racially as ‘Coloured,’ which reflects the overall demography of the two sites. In Northern Ireland, all respondents identified themselves as Roman Catholic. The homogeneity in this category can be explained by the nature of the community organizations which assisted with this study and the types of communities they serve.

Socioeconomic Background

While many respondents declined to provide information concerning their socioeconomic backgrounds, perhaps as a result of the inherent stigma of associating oneself or one’s family with poverty, it is clear that the vast majority of respondents came from relatively deprived realities. Of twenty-one South African study participants supplying this information, eight have either two unemployed parents or their sole guardian is unemployed. *Figure 4* shows that a significant percentage of South African respondents’ families are affected by unemployment.

In Northern Ireland, thirteen respondents’ families receive financial support from the government, compared with two who do not. *Figure 5* illustrates that many of the respondents in

the sample from Northern Ireland receive some form of federally funded income assistance.

Further, of fifteen respondents in Northern Ireland describing their families' occupational status, seven have unemployed parents, while for eight at least one guardian was employed. See *Figure 6* which demonstrates that a significant percentage of respondents in Northern Ireland either have two unemployed parents or their sole guardian is unemployed.

Family Composition

Many respondents' socioeconomic situations are compounded by a lack of a stable family structure. This is particularly the case in South Africa, where only twelve of the respondents live in two-parent families. Eleven reside in single-parent homes, six live solely with extended family members, and thirteen are classified as street children. In Northern Ireland, however, sixteen of those interviewed live in a two-parent home, while five live in a single-parent home. None of the Northern Irish respondents lived solely with extended family members, or could be classified as street children, homeless, or orphans. Overall, of the 91 percent of total respondents who answered questions concerning their family structure, 56 percent live outside of a two-parent family. See *Figure 7* which shows that South African respondents are disproportionately affected by a lack of stability in their family structure, the vast majority residing outside of two-parent homes.

Discussion of Comparative Findings from Fieldwork

Youth Defining Youth in Terms of Agency

Scholarly discussions of youth violence seldom address the ambiguities associated with the term ‘youth’ itself, especially with regard to the opinions of young people and their own capacity for self-identification. Instead, ‘youth’ are often defined and written about by adults. As a result, ‘youth’ is at risk of becoming merely a stereotype as young people have been granted little space to challenge negative perceptions of themselves and their peers. My interviews in South Africa and Northern Ireland bridged this gap between young people and youth studies by starting with young people’s own capacity to define themselves.

Respondents were asked, “What does the word ‘youth’ mean to you?” and “When do children become adults?” in addition to follow-up questions which included, “How does a youth/child/adult act?” For clarity, I have separated responses into the following four categories based on the respondent’s identification of “youth” as: 1) an age-grade category; 2) a process of physical maturation; 3) a period of emotional maturity or legal responsibility; and 4) an imagined but empirically contested label.

Youth as an age-grade category.

Many respondents from both Northern Ireland and South Africa described youth in terms of an age-grade category. Overwhelmingly, those who described youth in this way focused on the transition from childhood to adulthood. In South Africa, eighteen was the most frequent age given for when the passage to adult status takes place, but twenty-one was also mentioned. Two respondents cited access to legal rights, such as being allowed to drink or being able to get married, to reinforce their views of youth as an age-grade status. Another South African

respondent described eighteen as an age of freedom and empowerment: “Eighteen is when children become big people. When you are eighteen, you are like finished with school and you can do what you dream about. You can make your dreams come true after eighteen.”

In Northern Ireland, respondents likewise described youth in terms of a transition between childhood and adulthood. However, in contrast to South Africa, the majority considered sixteen to be the age at which this transition occurs, although eighteen was cited by a couple of respondents. Again, a focus on age-related factors was often associated with the identification of youth as a period in which one is granted greater legal rights, such as the right to drink or the right to employment. One respondent from Northern Ireland described youth as an age range, rather than a specific age figure, “If you look at...the membership in terms of political youth wings, it draws from like 15 to 29. So, twenty-nine, some would argue, isn’t too youthful...but in terms of Ireland and the context we live in, or whatever, that’s what you’re looking at.” Interestingly, this response identifying youth in terms of age of membership for a political youth wing was the only answer among all respondents which defined youth as a predominantly political concept.

Youth as a process of physical maturation.

Eighteen is the legal age of majority in both Northern Ireland and South Africa. Nevertheless, despite these legal similarities, respondents in Northern Ireland indicated that the transition to adulthood takes place at an earlier age when compared with respondents in South Africa. The fact that ideas of young age varied between Northern Ireland and South Africa indicates that youth, far from being a universal concept, must be considered within its cultural context. The designation of youth as a cultural, rather than a physical construct becomes clearer

when one considers responses describing youth in terms of physical maturation. The only respondents who described youth in physical terms were three male South Africans, who described youth as a process of “growing bigger” and going through puberty. Based on these responses, physical maturation is not especially relevant in defining youth.

Youth as a period of emotional and legal responsibility.

Asserting emotional and legal independence.

Conversely, the vast majority of young people in both South Africa and Northern Ireland consider *emotional* maturation and legal responsibility central to categorizing an individual as a young person. In Northern Ireland, only a couple of respondents rated ‘youth’ more mature than children, or identified several ‘partying’ behaviors associated with young people which rendered them less mature than adults. Further, none of the respondents in Northern Ireland reflected on youth as a developmental period stirred by emotional experience. Rather, in Northern Ireland, legal responsibility was the key in defining youth status.

In South Africa, however, many described youth in terms of emotional maturity, and identified youth with recklessness and the assertion of independence. For example, one interviewee described youth in this way: “They just wanna hang around teenagers and be on the street corners, but adults, they act more mature. [Youth] are smoking, sleeping around, doing drugs and that stuff, drinking, going to bars.” Many likewise pointed at the influence of peers in determining young people’s level of maturity and responsibility:

Youth to me is when you go out with your friends and party and all that. They are more free [sic] and irresponsible because as a teenager, you like to fit in with your

friends...Boys like to be seen by girls. They like to impress other people. Youth are more concerned with how they look.

While South African respondents' connotations of youth were not entirely positive, they nevertheless interpret youth as the proactive exploration of normative boundaries and therefore, an exercise in agency, as opposed to respondents in Northern Ireland, who generally considered youth as the conferring of legal rights by adults.

Adopting roles appropriate to the social context.

However, many South African respondents also defined youth by citing the dependent nature of children within the parent-child relationship. "In our culture, a child should respect their elders and that...but if you become an adult...you have the responsibility of taking care of your children, so at the end of the day, that says that if you are an adult, you take care of your children, but if you are still a child, you are being taken care of." In describing their relationships with adults, many further emphasized the various roles young people have in relation to the social context and their level of experience:

It depends on what situation you are in, 'cause your responsibilities differ...My mom is [an adult], she has to deal with the responsibilities of looking after children, paying taxes, all that stuff. I don't have all the responsibilities, but I have other responsibilities. I have to see that I succeed in my studies, I have to see that I look after my sister, and when I am home, I look after the household, because my dad isn't there, so that's my responsibility.

In this example, we see that young people in South African often exercise their agency by either assuming roles traditionally reserved for adults, or by exercising leadership appropriate to their

social context. In this way, South African respondents' understanding of youth is predicated upon social relationships with both adults and peers, as opposed to legal status.

Seizing opportunities for personal growth.

While respondents in Northern Ireland regarded youth in overwhelmingly neutral terms, a half-dozen South African respondents described youth in a definitively positive light as a promising period in which to seize new opportunities:

A youth for me is kids who are still going to school, getting that spiritual growth, getting that support from parents and just basically doing what teenagers do, what the youth do, like getting involved with sports...cause there are programs to motivate the youth...I want, especially now, in this year, youth to be a positive thing.

While recklessness and irresponsibility were certainly relevant to the self-understanding of South African youth, young age is by no means only associated to negative connotations. Nor are explicit political affiliations to be seen as the only means in which young people relate their age to a capacity to act in the world.

For South African young people, youth is clearly an age in which one asserts independence, assumes responsibilities appropriate to the social context, and seizes opportunities for personal growth. In contrast, however, respondents in Northern Ireland perceived youth in less nuanced terms. The overwhelming majority of Northern Irish respondents described youth in terms of legal minority status. A few cited economic opportunities, such as being legally permitted to work, as opposed to South African youth who viewed employment as the domain of adults.

Relatively few respondents in Northern Ireland defined youth as a relationship among peers or between parent and child. One, however, classified youth according to the treatment of young people by adults in their social setting:

I would say that the more adult you treat them, the more adult they will be in response.

Give them responsibility, young people, treat them like they have something to contribute, a valuable contribution to make, not just to be seen, but also to be heard.

Overall, however, my respondents in Northern Ireland had a narrower understanding of youth than in South Africa. They focused primarily on legal conditions within their cultural context, emphasizing legal rights rather than experiences or emotions. Given the relative importance of social relationships among South African respondents despite a breakdown in family composition, South African youths' more nuanced understanding of youth agency may be attributed to the greater level of personal autonomy experienced within a single-parent home, or by living independently.

Youth as an imagined but empirically contested label.

The vast majority of respondents, particularly in Northern Ireland, accepted 'youth' as a relevant category to characterize a specific type of social and cultural agency. Few Northern Irish respondents considered youth as inconsequential to their own self-identification and were either confused by the word itself, or saw it as meaning a youthful outlook towards life which one could adopt at any age. For example, one respondent stated, "I think youth is kind of your approach and your attitude to life. It's hard to explain, but I think it crosses over, youth and adult."

On the contrary, a half-dozen respondents questioned the validity of the term youth in the South African context as they focused on the cross-generational presence of problematic behaviors. One respondent stated simply: “Adults fight and steal, children fight and steal. They act the same.” Other responses concurred: “Youth today has kind of disappeared because people are living like the grown-ups,” or:

You become exposed very early to the adult world here...When you're underage, you can't do certain things, but the thing is, our life is so unpredictable here. People are like fourteen, fifteen years old and they do stuff that an adult would.

Among these respondents, there was a general consensus that adults were at fault because they had failed to provide positive examples for young people, even if these respondents maintained that young people were ultimately responsible for their choices.

Conceptualizing youth in terms of agency.

While South African young people appear more articulate than those in Northern Ireland in identifying ‘youth,’ these responses indicate that a significant portion are nevertheless incapable of contrasting youth agency with adult agency. Again, South African respondents’ focus on the importance of social relationships in defining youth, while providing opportunities for young people to exercise agency by assuming adult roles, nevertheless constrains some forms of youth agency to accruing recognition within an adult world. As such, the purposive actions of youth and adults appear equivalent, regardless of whether these actions involve caregiving or lawbreaking.

It is clear that, despite the stereotypical dichotomy defining youth as either an anomic force of lawlessness, or a positive force of sociopolitical change, young people’s own

understanding of their agency is in fact, complex, and not merely dependent on their explicit values and orientations. In their relations to adults, young people display a process of self-identification through interdependence, rather than top-down socialization, and peer relationships are as critical to identity formation as parental influence.

Moreover, my respondents' understanding of youth and its associated level of emotional responsibility and maturity varies depending on the roles young people adopt in order to navigate particular social contexts and challenges. Youth can alternatively be described as a period of irresponsibility exercised in a subordinate role to parents, or responsibility assumed by acting in the adult role of caregiver to a younger sibling.

Employing Youth Agency in Evaluating the Legitimacy of Violence

Similarly, young people's perceptions on the legitimacy or validity of violence were often responsive to their definition of youth agency and depended on responses to the social context. I asked respondents "What is violence?" and "Can violence help solve problems?" and I delved deeper by asking whether there are circumstances in which violence is acceptable or necessary. I grouped their responses according to whether they viewed violence as: 1) unjustifiable or unacceptable; 2) morally wrong, but socially understandable, or 3) a legitimate response to social conditions.

Violence is unjustifiable or unacceptable.

Within a moral and legal context.

Many South African respondents viewed violence as unjustifiable or unacceptable, even among gang members who presumably practiced it themselves. For many of these respondents, violence, crime and theft were interrelated offenses with legal or moral consequences. For

example, one argued: “Stealing for me is a crime in the case of the law...Stealing is violent, ‘cause when you want something, you want your money, you get caught, and you go to prison” while another respondent answered, “Stealing is a big sin for me because in the Ten Commandments it says it’s not OK...We musn’t kill each other. It’s a sin as well.” Considering a social context of religious faith, and a legal context in which crime is proscribed, many respondents considered violence morally illegitimate.

Within a domestic context.

Many South African respondents also asserted the moral illegitimacy of violence within the social context of the home. A few described the emotional trauma associated with domestic and communal violence. One respondent described feeling scared because of the violence in his neighborhood: “My community is not a peaceful place. Sometimes, I am afraid. Sometimes, I would just like to run away if there is violence.” Another respondent described his father’s alcohol-induced abuse and concluded:

Adults must discipline their children, but you can do it in a proper way...I don’t think violence should be an option in the parent’s minds, because they don’t know what they are mentally and physically doing to their children...There was quite a lot of kids in our school...that committed suicide, they killed themselves because of that type of violence.

While many scholars cite witnessing domestic and communal violence as a risk factor for the commission of future violent acts among young people, these responses indicate that young people do not simply passively absorb the violence of their environment. Rather, young people in South Africa were engaged in a process of interpreting domestic and communal violence as

morally unjustifiable, which influenced not only their outlook, but also their responses toward violence in their commitment to either avoiding or abstaining from conflict.

Within a context of social censure.

However, a few South African respondents who believed that violence is morally unjustifiable or unacceptable considered not only their personal interpretations of communal violence, but also the moral judgements of society at large. One respondent stated:

The gangsters are bringing everybody down because people coming from outside...aren't going to know that they are protecting us...Maybe they are shooting and then you are gonna think, this community is like this and like that. They have a judgment already in mind.

Contrary to theories which suggest that youth violence is the product of values inherited within a unique subcultural environment, this example shows that while some South African youth may justify violence within the context of their personal environment, their perspectives are not limited to the values of a particular subculture. This example further shows that youth are not only aware of a broader social discourse outside of their communities, they also assess and apply the values of those outside their immediate environments through outsiders' reactions to violence.

Similarly, some respondents from Northern Ireland who viewed violence as unacceptable often saw it as casting their community in a negative light. For example, one respondent stated, "We are looked down upon, this area, because of car crime. That was all years ago, but some of it still goes on...It seems like the local newspapers and stuff, they don't publicize the good stuff that teenagers do." In contrast to South Africa, however, the responses from Northern Ireland indicate

that while young people were likewise keenly aware of the negative reactions of outsiders to violence within their communities, they nonetheless refused to internalize the value judgments of outsiders. Respondents from Northern Ireland refuted these perceptions by asserting that negative evaluations of their community were a result of outsiders' ignorance and their own relative access to knowledge as insiders. In this way, young people's status as knowledgeable insiders was reinforced and redefined through their moral evaluations of violence in their community in contrast with those outside.

Violence is morally wrong, but socially understandable.

Within a context of socioeconomic oppression.

While young people in Northern Ireland often actively refuted negative judgments of violence in their communities based on their relative position as knowledgeable insiders to the contrary, a few South African respondents indicated that violence, while still morally wrong, was acceptable given prevalent social conditions. Often, this was in the case of violent crime or theft, which was perceived as a response to adverse socioeconomic conditions. For example, one respondent stated:

For me, its like, [the violence] is the government's fault...because people is [sic] unemployed and they need to eat, and that's where it starts. They steal now to satisfy themselves. For me, it's like, if the government can do something about unemployment, it will be better for all of us.

Another used an illustration:

This thing we're talking into [a digital recorder], the people won't even know what it is, but I'll sell that thing for one hundred Rand. The only thing I can buy for a

hundred rand is chicken - the chicken will cost me about thirty odd Rand, then I will have sixty left, two breads, then I'll have forty Rand, I'll buy myself beer. Because oppression puts people in a state you feel helpless, so you will drink, you'll smoke *dagga* [marijuana], you'll use crystal meth, all those types of things. Nothing says you want to, but circumstances force you to do that. The shitty thing about crystal meth is, your first or second hit is for free, and the third hit, you have to go get money to get it and that is where shitty things get violent.

In contrast to respondents in Northern Ireland, who did not identify socioeconomic conditions which justified the application of violence, these South African responses indicate that prevalent social conditions of poverty and unemployment are critical to South African youth's interpretation of the legitimacy of violent behavior.

Within a context of self-defense or discipline.

Finally some South African respondents justified violence as a legitimate mode of interpersonal relations, not on the basis of socioeconomic conditions, but either as a form of self-defense or as necessary to discipline in child-rearing. For example, one respondent stated, "With [self-defense], other people don't get hurt. You are violent with the person who was violent with you in the first place," while another explained, "Violence can sometimes be a good thing, because maybe...my child...is doing something wrong. I am going to use violence, not to hurt him purposefully, but to [teach] him not to do things wrong." These responses indicate that, among South African youth, not only are the socioeconomic conditions in which violence is expressed important, the social relationships between parties and the restriction of violence to those 'in the wrong' are crucial in determining the legitimacy of the action.

Likewise, the majority of respondents in the Northern Ireland context who responded that violence could be morally wrong, but socially understandable did so within a context of self-defense. For example, one respondent contended, “It depends on the situation. Like, if they’re really gettin’ stuck into you, and you can’t do nothin’ about it, you’ll have to go out the back.” Again, the legitimacy young actors assign to violent behavior is dependent upon the motivations behind the act, rather than the mere presence of violence in the community and family.

Implications for youth agency.

Overall, responses from Northern Ireland and South Africa indicate that young people justify violence based upon their own interpretations of the legitimacy of both its social context and actors’ rationale, as opposed to by simply witnessing violence in the home or immediate environment. In South Africa, young people considered such factors as legal and religious proscriptions, emotional trauma, socioeconomic conditions, social relationships, and outsider perspectives in assessing the legitimacy of violence in their community. This was in contrast to Northern Ireland, where young people actively refuted negative perceptions of outsiders, who were considered relatively less knowledgeable than themselves.

The marked difference between Northern Irish and South African responses with regard to perceptions of ‘the other’ is quite interesting given the persistent spacial segregation of both societies. This would suggest that ideas of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are not only more salient among youth in Northern Ireland, but also have a greater impact on the manner in which young people assert their agency in Northern Irish society. Youth in Northern Ireland appear to express agency in confronting ‘the other’ by asserting their status as knowledgeable insiders to the problem of

communal violence, while youth in South Africa express their agency by applying perspectives of the 'other' in their avoidance or abstinence from violent communal conflict.

Violence is a legitimate response to underlying social conditions.

Within a context of historic sociopolitical conflict.

Many of the Northern Irish respondents of this study are from interface areas of Belfast and Derry where political violence has historically been disproportionately represented (Cairns and Darby 1998: 756-757). For example, as part of the Falls Road ward, the Divis Street Flats experienced a higher incidence of political violence in their neighborhood than across all of East Belfast (Fay et. al. 1999). Moreover, given the historical context of the Divis Street riots in September, 1964, civil rights demonstrations and rioting in the Bogside neighborhoods in October of 1968, August of 1969 and July of 1972, as well as Bloody Sunday in January of 1972, many of my respondents are residents of areas which witnessed some of the most provocative incidents of political violence during the whole of the Troubles (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 244-253).

Nonetheless, Strabane and Omagh, where the remainder of our respondents claim residence, did not escape the Troubles unscathed. Despite the fact that Strabane, is in a relatively rural locale, it is ranked highest in terms of spatial deprivation and is eighth in a geographical ranking of resident deaths and number of fatal incidents occurring during the Troubles (Fay et. al 1999). Omagh, on the other hand, witnessed what is often regarded as one of the most devastating incidents of the Troubles in July of 1998 as republican dissidents under the moniker of 'The Real IRA' exploded a bomb outside a shopping center, killing twenty-nine civilians (McKittrick and McVea 2002: 223).

Given this local historical context of concentrated experiences with political violence in the communities where my interviews were conducted, many respondents in Northern Ireland argued that violence can be understood in light of past political conditions. In Northern Ireland this mainly refers to the continued presence of paramilitary organizations in working-class communities. One respondent contended: “People get carried away, which they shouldn’t do. They see it as political. It’s what was done twenty to thirty years ago and they see it in that time and in that light.” Another, describing so-called ‘punishment shootings’ by local paramilitary members to reprimand anti-social behavior and substance abuse among youth or confront suspected informers, argued:

We’re sort of like, that’s the way it is, that’s the way our society is...it doesn’t really shock people. They’ll say, ‘Oh God, that’s terrible,’ but at the same time won’t be sitting in a state of shock hearing that somebody’s shot or somebody’s beaten by the paramilitaries...here...in the working class, there’s violence.

Responses such as these indicate that familiarity with political violence can constrain Northern Irish respondents’ expression of purposive agency, in that their response is one of apathy, rather than reinterpretation or re-articulation of existing societal norms.

Ascertaining the degree to which political violence contributes to the historical memories of residents in Worcester and Oudtshoorn is no easy task. Despite the fact that South Africa under the apartheid regime was a highly spatially segregated society, there have been practically no studies conducted regarding the geographic distribution of political violence during the apartheid era. Understandably, there is considerable difficulty accessing such statistics, as the South African Police Service under the apartheid government, for obvious reasons, did not seek

to chronicle the murdering of blacks and coloureds by state forces, especially when these incidents occurred in non-white townships. Moreover, Coloured politics have generally been ignored in studies of black resistance, some researchers rejecting the notion that Coloureds constitute a separate political entity and focusing instead on black resistance movements (Lewis 1987: 1).

However, even when these statistics are compiled, they inevitably reflect an urban bias, concentrating on the highly-populated cities of Cape Town, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Durban, for example (Booth and Biyela 1988; Mangananyi 1990: 33). As such, it is difficult to determine whether Worcester or Oudtshoorn constituted particular flashpoints of conflict during apartheid. Considering this lack of access to empirically reliable data concerning rural and peri-urban South Africans' experiences of political violence during apartheid, it is no wonder that my respondents spoke of South Africa's apartheid legacy in a more general sense, and appeared less familiar with the historical particulars of the apartheid era than their Northern Irish counterparts.

Nevertheless, given their more general knowledge of discrimination and relative deprivation of non-whites during apartheid, a number of South African respondents described violence not only as understandable on the basis of past conflicts and traumas, but also as a legitimate response to prevalent social conditions. Often, they justified violence as a response to grievances inherited from apartheid. For example, one respondent stated:

It's the history of the country that leads people to violence. You get black people that's violent...You get coloured people that's violent. You don't get white people that often that's violent because they've got money. I think it's only the apartheid years that made people violent...Coloureds and that, they'll be violent in principle...like if you do

something wrong towards your own culture...they will show you, you listen here, if you want to be violent, go and be violent against the whites.

In contrast to Northern Ireland, past political significations of violence appear to be a greater predictor of agency among South African youth, as some are engaged in a discursive process of justifying current violence by repurposing the political significations of violence under apartheid, rather than simply reacting apathetically on the basis of familiarity.

A few South African respondents also justified violence as a means of collective self-defense, or defending the community from outside attack, which was also a constant preoccupation under apartheid but is now reframed as preventing the intrusion of violent criminal gangs. One respondent stated:

I talk to the gangsters and...as they say, their policy is to protect the people around them from incoming gangs. If they see gangs from another community coming to harm us, they will protect us...It is more people outside that are at risk.

For another respondent, gangsterism was a means of financial security in a context of high unemployment and poverty: "The only way to make money and provide for your own family is when you become a gangster." Thus, among South African youth, violence is perceived as an exercise of agency in the sense that it is a course of action taken to ensure one's personal and financial security.

This is in contrast to respondents in Northern Ireland where, while many more respondents tracked the causes of current violence back to political conflicts of the past, relatively few considered violence to be a legitimate response to adverse social conditions. Responses from Northern Ireland indicate that they have elaborated on the political conflict of

the past differently. Political violence is generally perceived as a closed chapter in Northern Ireland's history books, rather than something which can be re-articulated in a post-conflict context. Still, some, evoking the IRA's armed campaign, spoke of violence as legitimate within the context of defending the community in a similar manner as some South African respondents who regarded gang members as protecting community residents from outside attack. For example, one respondent contended:

I think that violence was, well, the struggle with the IRA was, a necessity, is what it was, to defend communities. Like George and Pat, here in Derry, they died defending our communities from the [British Army] tryin' to come in. So, it was sort of a necessity tryin' to defend against the loyalist paramilitaries and the British Army.

While these respondents perceived the IRA struggle as legitimate within a context of community defense, it was within a discrete context of past political violence, with no implications for conduct today. Again, justifications of the political violence of the past limited expressions of youth agency in the present, in that Northern Irish youth failed to apply or reinterpret past significations of political violence in their attitudes towards political violence today, considering them for all intents and purposes mutually exclusive.

Within a context of maintaining balanced interpersonal relationships.

Nevertheless, a couple of respondents who perceived violence as a legitimate response did so within the context of interpersonal conflict, rather than political conflict. Here, they perceived peace as an unattainable goal. Some even argued that conflict is essential to maintaining balanced interpersonal relationships. For example, one respondent claimed, "I think [violence] can [solve problems]. If you fight, then, usually they're friends after. Because they

keep fighting and they're just gonna get fed up with it then." Responses like this indicate that among a minority of youth in Northern Ireland, interpersonal conflict may be seen as a way to diffuse social tensions, rather than perpetuate them, and can be adaptive within certain social contexts.

Implications for youth agency.

Overall, the majority of respondents in both Northern Ireland and South Africa believed that violence is morally unacceptable. However, the majority of respondents in South Africa also recognized social conditions in which violence could be considered a way to exercise agency to adapt to a social context based on past political uses of violence and to imagine relationships within the community today. This was in contrast to respondents in Northern Ireland, who treated political violence today with apathy, and generally disregarded persistent violence in their significations of past political violence, neglecting an opportunity to assert their agency. I then moved to inquire how respondents experienced violence in their everyday lives in order to grasp more firmly how they signify it as a source of agency and as part of the discursive strategy positioning them in their communities.

Asserting Agency by Experiencing and Addressing Violence in Everyday Life

I asked respondents: "What are the main problems in your community?" and "Is Northern Ireland/South Africa a peaceful or violent place, or somewhere in-between?" Follow-up questions included: "What are the causes for these problems?"; "What should be done about the problems in your community?"; and "What can young people do today to help Northern Ireland/South Africa be a more peaceful country?" Responses were grouped into the following categories, based upon the nature of the problems interviewees identified: 1) gendered problems;

2) socioeconomic problems; 3) institutional neglect; 4) individual failure; 5) substance abuse; 6) gangsterism and organized violence; 7) racism and sectarianism; and 8) domestic and interpersonal violence.

Gendered violence.

Teenage pregnancy.

Gendered issues were not discussed by respondents in Northern Ireland. However, a few South African respondents considered problems in their community to be gender-related. Concerning gendered problems, the most common responses mentioned teenage pregnancy. For example, one respondent stated:

From my class, from Grade 10, 11, and 12, there used to be five or six girls pregnant...because they get pregnant, they apply for grants from the government, but they don't support their children with the money that they get from the government. They take that money, go to the parties on weekends, go to the clubs.

A couple of other respondents adopted a more forgiving tone, arguing for example, “[Other students] judge the person [who is pregnant] and I don't think it's nice to judge.” The stereotyping of grant-receiving pregnant young women by South African males certainly contributes to the phenomenon of gendered violence in South African society. Further, by imposing damning meanings on young women who have seized socioeconomic opportunities as a result of their pregnancy, South African males reassert their gendered authority and limit opportunities for young women to express agency in establishing financial independence.

Rape.

In South African communities, rape constitutes another exercise of male authority at the expense of women's agency. While rape was regarded as a serious problem, it was rarely discussed among South African respondents, and was always mentioned within the context of other problems such as personal safety and crime. For example, one respondent, discussing sexual assault, stated, "My mom has told my younger sister to go early to bed..don't walk with the bigger guys...just sleep, don't go." All of these discussions highlighted an implied fragility and helplessness inherent to being female. For example, when asked what violence meant to him, one respondent recounted the following story:

[Violence is] when another person rapes a girl. One kid came there in the Kibbutz and there were only girls here, they sleep there...the other people were gone and there were only two girls in the house and they break in and they stole things. They can do anything to her, if she doesn't get awake, but she got awake and the person get away...[That's violent] 'cause men know that...they are stronger than the girl and if they try to hurt the girl, the girl can do nothing. Violence is when someone hurts someone who can't defend themselves.

Implications for youth agency.

The fact that South African respondents condemned sexual violence against women on the grounds that female's are inherently unable to fight off potential attackers indicates that the onus of responsibility for rape lies among women, due to their defenseless condition. Again, gendered problems appear to have robbed South African young women of their agency and

power, as they are intrinsically deprived from taking purposive action to address and confront sexual violence.

However one respondent related rape not simply to an inherently weak female condition, but also to a corrupt police force which often perpetrated the rape itself. Corruption within the police force was seen as a major factor in perpetuating violence, and even teenage pregnancy. In addition to failing to respond swiftly to communal conflict, one respondent contended,

Some of the police are involved with the gangs, some of them even work undercover for the gangs. They go out and just watch what others are doing and then...they will say, like, you can go to that club there and make some violence and we will come and just arrest [the others]...There are some police that just come and get the teenagers pregnant and just leave them like that.

Here we see the blame for rape shifted to law enforcement personnel, but the underlying assumptions remain unchanged. As is true of other gendered problems we have discussed, young South African women are signified as defenseless and in need of protection, in this case, from male law enforcement officials. Seen as incapable of acting to confront sexual violence in their communities, South African young women are denied an opportunity to exert their agency and reliant upon a shift in male's hegemonic position over their process of identification.

Violence to navigate socioeconomic conditions.

Unemployment.

While gendered problems were not frequently mentioned by respondents in either South Africa and Northern Ireland, many South African respondents described the problems facing their communities in terms of prevalent socioeconomic conditions. For example, unemployment

and poverty were often cited as the underlying causes behind overt violence. One respondent described the relationship between unemployment and violence in this way:

I think there's one problem that causes a lot of problems after that. It's like a chain effect. The most common problem is unemployment. People aren't employed and they are dependent on social grants, and because of that they suffer, and they suffer in poverty. So, all of the social problems are caused by unemployment in the sense that I don't have a [job], I can't provide properly for my family. I can't buy the basic things they need, and that causes tension, stress in an environment, in the home. The father maybe can't handle the pressure of not being able to provide fully for his family, so maybe he abuses alcohol...and that can relate to the fact that he can become violent and then he can abuse his family, so...the source of the problems comes from unemployment. It's like a seed which grows into other problems.

In this example, substance abuse and, in turn, domestic violence are the result of a repression of more legitimately perceived forms of adult agency, namely gainful employment.

Poverty.

Yet South African respondents not only related unemployment, substance abuse and violence within the context of adult agency; many also considered these factors as instrumental in defining youth potential. For example, one respondent contended:

In my community...children from eleven and twelve start using alcohol because of unemployment. I think, in my town, if there's no bread in your house, you don't want to go to school...now you want to use crystal meth...it's all you can do, the action you take. It starts at home, with poverty in the home.

This response describes substance abuse as a purposive action taken by youth when educational opportunities are restricted by unemployment and poverty.

Many South African respondents likewise emphasized the impact of poverty on their ability to achieve an education. One respondent stated, for example, “I think money is a really big problem in this area for people to study further because we don’t get much scholarships here.” The youth’s inability to attain a higher education was seen as a causal factor in gang recruitment, as young South Africans joined gangs as a purposive course of action taken to ensure financial security and secure social recognition, in the absence of legitimate educational alternatives.

A few South African respondents, however restricted their discussion to the emotional stigma associated with coming from a poor community, or with being poor in South Africa. One street child described the experience of begging in this way:

You don’t have friends or food. Sometimes people think that you are not good enough.

Not just because you don’t have money, also...when you ask someone for something, they will say they don’t have because they don’t want to give.

However, others argued that poverty was so common in South Africa that it is no longer stigmatized, but merely a fact of life. The emotional trauma of poverty did not appear to have had a significant impact on their peers’ decisions to engage in violent behavior.

In contrast, in Northern Ireland, the vast majority of respondents denied that poverty was a problem for their community, stating that they came from middle-class areas. Even among the few who did state that they came from a working-class community, there was great hesitancy to

describe it in terms of being impoverished. For example, one respondent described the sense of community solidarity which exists in his community as a source of wealth:

In terms of need, there's nobody needs anything in our community, and everybody sticks together. That's the thing, you know, [when] you use the term 'poor' and 'rich.' Our community's probably richer in a lot of things that other people would want, in terms of that community spirit, in terms of helping each other...Relatively...when I go away anywhere, I always just am impressed with how lucky I am, and how much we actually have.

The hesitancy in characterizing one's community as impoverished may, like Northern Irish respondent's rejection of outsider perspectives towards car crime, be rooted in the strength of persistent community identities based upon an 'us' and 'them' mentality. Acknowledging poverty in one's community may be perceived as a concession to the superiority of 'the other,' strengthening the agency of the 'other' community in competing for social recognition.

Nevertheless, several respondents in Northern Ireland did discuss poverty in terms of a lack of facilities, unemployment, and the historic underdevelopment of the West of Northern Ireland:

In terms of myself growing up, I come from a working-class background...Social deprivation and stuff was on my doorstep...the river Bahn in the North of Ireland splits up East and West. East you have Belfast, and there was a lot of centralization and work placement. West of the Bahn was neglected, so you had high levels of social deprivation, you get high levels of claimants on welfare, benefits, and stuff like that there, so that's the

kind of background that I grew up in like the rest of the lads. So that's an area, in short, poor, for want of a better word.

With this response, nonetheless, any potential slight to the respondent's community is averted by his focus on the Unionist state's underdevelopment of his nationalist area. Thus, in claiming systematic socioeconomic repression at the hands of the 'other' community, this respondent is asserting his own community's moral superiority, justifying its collective grievances, and strengthening its agency in claiming compensation.

Violence to counteract institutional neglect.

Inadequate housing allocation and poverty.

Just as underdevelopment by the state was viewed as a contributing factor to 'social deprivation' among respondents in Northern Ireland, many South Africans viewed institutional neglect as a major problem in their community, particularly as it relates to poverty, unemployment and housing allocation. A street child discussing the government's housing subsidy program stated, "The government should help poor people. 'Cause part of the government['s job is to] throw the people out of their homes; they drive people to live in the streets. They could help pay their rent for their house." Government corruption was also often cited as an indicator that the state was not doing enough to meet the needs of its citizens. For example, one respondent argued:

Government should help poor people because if government have money to fund like big parties and stuff, to fund catering for themselves and so on...you can feed the communities with the amount of money you are wasting...They have the authority to fund

all of the things that they want to fund...but due to the corruption and stuff they usually abuse their powers to dominate and enrich themselves.

Inequitable provision of employment opportunities.

Some South African respondents also criticized the state's Black Economic Empowerment Program, an initiative which aims to redress apartheid-era grievances by providing economic opportunities to traditionally disadvantaged groups, through employment equity schemes, among other measures. Several Coloured respondents regarded the black empowerment scheme as a form of race-based clientelism which contributes to the ongoing unemployment crisis:

The Parliament is full of black people and there is another President who is also a black man. That is why they are treating people differently. There are so many black people in the road [crews] and so many Coloured people [looking] for work. Wherever you go, it is black empowerment. Before they employ any person, they have to get a black person first, and then a Coloured person.

The above responses indicate that among South African youth, there is a significant distrust of institutional means to address prevalent social problems or redress the grievances of apartheid. This distrust is exacerbated among Coloured South African youth by the fact that they feel alienated from a predominately black ANC regime. The alienation of young people to institutional change, in turn, negatively affects the youth's capacity to exercise their agency through acceptable political channels.

Law enforcement corruption.

In contrast, in Northern Ireland institutional neglect is often articulated – unsurprisingly, given the historic grievances the Catholic community had with law enforcement agencies – in terms of corruption and abuse within the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). A couple of respondents argued that the police force was simply ill-equipped to tackle anti-social behavior and rioting between young people from opposite communities or between youth and the police:

Young people, you have no sense of respect or anything for the police or Sinn Fein. You don't really fear nobody...Police will stand back most of the time and do nothin.' The crowd's a hundred, over like a hundred people, like, and that's a residential area. The problem is police isn't nowhere near able to tackle the problems up in Rosemount...with the likes of the PSNI, you know, they're a disaster at the moment. Obviously, there's a legacy issue there for us, but I mean, it's about trying to ensure that they are playing a part, that they're not recruiting them as informants, and then trying to use them against the community as opposed to what they should be doing, which is arresting them.

Nevertheless, the failure of the PSNI to challenge anti-social behavior and rioting was not only due to their perceived disorganization in resolving conflict, but was also related by several respondents to a lack of respect on the part of youth: "I'll be honest with ye, young people out here, if they're in the streets at night, drinking or whatever and they hear the PSNI coming down, that's excitin.' It does nothing, it does not serve a positive purpose."

With these responses, we can understand anti-social behavior and violent rioting are expressions of the antagonist relationship of Northern Irish youth toward police, who they feel do not adequately represent their, or their community's interests. Thus, unlike in South Africa,

where institutional failure did not implicate any purposive course of action on the part of youth, but rather impeded their agency, in Northern Ireland, we can see that institutional failure has resulted in an expression of agency as youth express their contempt for an inadequate police force.

Politicization of issues along sectarian lines.

Finally, a couple of respondents in Northern Ireland contended that the national government was failing to address sectarianism, because it set a poor example by feuding itself along largely sectarian lines. For example, one respondent stated:

I think that our government in Stormont [the devolved Parliament in Northern Ireland] isn't doing enough to tackle the issue of sectarianism...The nature of the way our government is, it's unionists feuding with nationalists, and nationalists feuding with unionists. How can the country move on if the government's just picking fights with each other over party lines?

These respondents, nonetheless, were engaged in political activities within a nationalist political youth wing. Thus, despite their assertion that government was failing to adequately address sectarianism, they remained committed to a post-conflict political process. In a marked contrast from South African respondents, who overwhelmingly felt alienated and isolated from the ANC regime, some youth in Northern Ireland were committed to change via political means, and were actively exercising their political agency by organizing other youth around collective issues.

Violence as a result of individual failure.***Poverty.***

A significant minority of South African respondents blamed individual, rather than institutional failure as a major factor responsible for community problems facilitating violence. In South Africa, many responses which described individual failure as a community problem emphasized the linkage between poverty, individual sense of disempowerment, and violence. For example, one South African respondent stated:

Poor people, they are...useless, they don't want to do anything, they are poor by choice...For me, they must help themselves first. The government doesn't do enough to help the poor, but from my point of view, poor people just think about themselves they don't want to get up themselves and make a living, they want to live off of the government.

As we have previously stated, among South African respondents, witnessing domestic and communal violence actually served as a deterrent to young people forming attitudes which legitimize violent behavior. However, it appears, with regards to South African respondent's views on individual responsibility, that socioeconomic disempowerment is seen as a causal factor in reproducing violence. Nevertheless, it is an exercise of individual choice, or agency, in the sense that young people are 'choosing' to live off of the government and engage in illegitimate means of earning a living, either through gangsterism or drug related violence.

Gangsterism.

As they cast the responsibility and the impacts of violence mostly at the individual level, some South African respondents emphasized personal perseverance and a positive attitude in avoiding the pitfalls of youth violence and gangsterism:

My father was an ex-gangster, I was born around that in the street, but I don't feel as though you need to be a gangster. I want to make something good out of my life, but because of the path [my] father walked, he wants me to be a gangster too.

Another respondent interjected, "You must really have a strong personality to get out of the situation and tell yourself that I am going to work hard to get out of the situation." While time and again, South African respondents emphasized *social and communal* relationships over individual attributes through their own process of self-identification as youth, they nevertheless paradoxically regard violence as stemming from an *individual* failure to assert one's character and independence.

Implications for youth agency.

Overall, the vast majority of South African respondents who linked community problems to individual failure complained of a general lack of individual fortitude and character. One respondent contended:

It doesn't matter what people say. In this life, people don't want you to succeed, people don't want you to be happy, so you have to go out and get it...That's why I am still going forward, I want to achieve my dreams...You cannot blame your circumstances 'cause you need to rise above your circumstances.

Again, violence is seen as a result of individual, rather than social or collective failure, despite the fact that South African respondents overwhelmingly argue that the social environment prevents the realization of their full potential and restricts their agency. Instead of endeavoring to address the systemic discrepancies within their own environments, many South African youth have elected to correct perceived personal failures instead, and continue to struggle in the same unreceptive social ecological setting. Clearly, this is in stark contrast to the apartheid era, where youth expressed social and political agency by directly confronted structural inequities. Nevertheless, South African young people's attempts to redress perceived deficiencies in their personal character can be seen as a purposive action taken to navigate their social environment, even if it is a deflected expression of agency.

In contrast, only a couple of respondents in Northern Ireland related violence to individual choices in response to community problems. Several concluded that, to quote one: "Many people won't [talk about things]. They're too stubborn...They have a reputation as a fighter, so they don't want to sit while people's talking." However, responses in Northern Ireland seemed to have a less abstract view of personal responsibility than in South Africa, and a more focused approach to individual responses reproducing violence. Interviewees discussed, therefore suicide, sexually transmitted infections, anti-social behavior, and substance abuse in terms of community problems resulting from individual failure. For example, one respondent described substance abuse in this way:

You'll have people living in a big house, and you'll have people like us, living in a working-class estate and dreaming of that. But it nearly becomes just too much of a

dream, so they'll never actually try for it...Then without that confidence, a lot of young people drop out of school and turn to drugs. It just becomes a spiral.

Here, in contrast to South Africa, we see individual failure attributed directly to socioeconomic inequality, rather than merely to a deficiency in personal fortitude. Thus, Northern Irish responses promise policy-oriented opportunities for youth to challenge systemic social problems, instead of simply prescribing changes in attitude.

Violence as a result of substance abuse.

Substance abuse and alcoholism are major issues in South Africa, however, and were among the most frequent factors cited as community problems by nearly every respondent. Rather than seeing them as individual behavioral malfunctions, however, South African respondents tended to regard them more as responses to broader social ills, such as unequal access to higher education, gangsterism and organized crime, as well as domestic and interpersonal violence.

Domestic violence and education.

Many considered alcoholism a contributing factor in domestic violence. Several respondents also contended that the high incidence of drug use and alcoholism among young people and their families was a nearly insurmountable obstacle to achieving a higher education. One respondent described the impact of substance abuse on education in this way:

It's meth and then it's weed, and then your basic alcohol, because you see more and more younger children being addicted to drugs, children from 9 years, 10 years [old], and that's a big problem in my community, which means they can't get educated, can't go to

work for [themselves] and a lot of people they drop out of school like in high school.

They finish in Grade 9 or Grade 10 and drop out of school.

Another confirmed that substance abuse is not necessarily a problem in itself but was rather part of a broader process of socialization providing an attractive alternative to education:

The kids at school, their role models is like the drug dealers, because they've seen guys like 18, 19, driving good cars, fancy cars, living in fancy houses and now they also say, 'Why do I have to be in school when I can do that?' ...But when they are finished, most of the kids in school don't get bursaries to go to colleges or universities

These responses demonstrate that substance abuse is not only restrictive in terms of inhibiting South African youth's educational attainment, but that it can also be an adaptive course of action when educational opportunities are, or are perceived to be, out of reach. Thus, some South African youth are socioeconomic agents in their substance abuse, as they deal drugs to navigate a context of unequal access to higher education.

Organized crime and territoriality.

Many South African respondents also related substance abuse to crime, and in particular, to organized crime and gangsterism. Several respondents described the conflict in their community as stemming from the strategies of territorial control of competing drug dealing actors:

For example, we have two druglords and this one is selling more than this one, they are gonna get a little jealous. Then you will come and you will shoot that guy. If he's got a gun, then you will shoot each other. All of the gangs are affiliated with the druglords. That's their main source of income.

Spatial territory is claimed and reclaimed through the exercise of violence among youths as they compete for social dominance. Thus, through gang wars, South African young people are exerting a degree of control as purposive agents over their spatial environments.

Anomic violence.

Some described substance abuse among gangsters as exacerbating or heightening social tensions. One respondent recounted an incident in which drugs had contributed to communal violence and spurred gang recruitment:

A year or two back in our community, a gang fight [arose because] there wasn't any booze, no alcohol, and there weren't drugs available in the town. So what one of the gangs did in the town, to be high...they were violent, they stabbed people, everywhere they went in the street...They stabbed...about eleven people and one person died, a young person died that day, and that got a big stir for the gangs.

Even in this seemingly anomic act of violence, South African young people were contesting their lack of access to resources (drugs) and asserting the relative social status of their respective gang in order to generate recruitment. Thus, this instance of youth violence can again be recognized as an expression of agency in navigating the social environment.

As opposed to South Africa, in Northern Ireland, drug abuse was not considered quite as common, but was nevertheless often cited as a contributing factor, along with underage drinking, in provoking anti-social behavior among youth. For example, one respondent explained anti-social behavior in terms of boredom compounded by alcohol abuse:

There is a term here in Ireland that kinda has been bandied about recently, 'recreational rioting'...It's just on Friday nights, if you look at urban centers like Belfast or Derry, you

always see young people standing around with alcohol...and whenever alcohol gets in, people become brave...So you have situations developing like that there that's just a culmination of boredom and nothing to do.

Among Northern Irish respondents, alcohol was also perceived as contributing to sectarian violence, especially when accompanied by provocative social events, such as football matches or parades. Alcoholism was seen as widespread, but drug use seemed instead to be an increasing problem, rather than one which had already reached epidemic proportions. While in South Africa, substance abuse and the violence attributed to it was often tied purposively to the accumulation of social and economic advantage, in Northern Ireland, it appears to be merely the result of boredom and depressive social environments, rather than purposive action taken based upon an underlying socioeconomic rationale.

Suicide.

Also, in contrast to South Africa, gangsterism and organized crime were hardly discussed in the context of Northern Ireland. A couple of respondents mentioned the pressures young people face when they are indebted to drug dealers, and how that might be contributing to higher suicide rates across Northern Ireland. For example, one respondent explained:

[Suicide] seems to have...escalated. Now in one area of North Belfast, there was a study done, on...why this was happening. Trauma was one of the issues identified, in terms of drugs being brought into the area, young people not being able to pay back drug dealers...and as a result, coming under increasing pressure...that culmination there has seen the increase in the suicide rate.

Violence in the form of gangsterism and organized crime.

In contrast, in South Africa, gangsterism was the most frequently cited problem young people faced in their communities. For example, when asked what the word ‘violence’ meant to him, one South African respondent replied:

[Violence] means to me...when you are a gangster...making people dead, shooting each other with a gun...Esselen Park [and] Roodewal, our community, they are not getting along well with each other and they are calling names. So when you from Roodewal, when you are going to [Esselen Park], they can hurt you, and when they are coming here, they can hurt you.

Respondents displayed in-depth knowledge of gang behavior, detailing the initiation process (a first kill), indications of rank (increasing numbers of stars), and distinguishing features (tattoos and mannerisms) which all point to gang membership.

Many respondents also described an incident which had occurred the week before being interviewed to demonstrate that gangsterism was a pervasive phenomenon. “There was an incident last Friday, when they shoot somebody; the gangsters and the kid jumped over the [school] fence. He was a kid who was in the school, but not anymore [after joining a gang].” As gangsterism invaded local social institutions, a feeling of powerlessness and abandonment crept in:

People inside the school were really scared you know...but...people from good neighborhoods, like a white area in Worcester, if something like this happens, they will totally go ballistic, but if something like this happens here in the Roodewal, people will be like, ‘Oh, another shooting. Who did they shoot this time?’

Youth violence in Northern Ireland is often attributed to disorganized groupings of disaffected and marginalized youth. However, our South African respondents demonstrate that violence in their country is overwhelmingly associated with membership in a gang or collective organization. Given the salience of overarching communal affiliations in identity formation in the Northern Irish context, South African youths' tendency to forge their own collective identities through gang membership may result from the breakdown in salient racial identities post-apartheid.

Violence personifying sectarian or racist attitudes.

Rioting.

While gangsterism was considered one of the main contributors to violence among South African respondents, sectarianism was often discussed as a source of violence in Northern Ireland. For example, several respondents described the tensions surrounding the marching season, or parades occurring during the summer months to commemorate culturally distinct practices, historical instances of loyalty and successful defense of one community against the other, in terms of the Protestant-Catholic divide:

Rioting's a big problem. The Protestants are rough...It's like a march for Protestants, if it's like a march for Catholics...Even if the cops are driving through the Bog, they'll just lift a glass bottle or a brick, anything they can get their hands on, just throw it at them...It's because of the Protestants and Catholics. The Troubles. They think the cops are all Protestants, whenever like some of them's actually Catholics too.

However, about as many respondents disagreed that sectarianism still posed a problem in Northern Ireland. Likewise concerning the peace walls, one respondent described the Falls and

the Shankhill Roads, two neighborhoods that have historically been the center of violence along sectarian lines during the Troubles, in a positive light: “They say, like, Protestants and Catholics hate each other. They would say it’d really be more the Falls and the Shankhill, but it’s not, because their gates be open all day, everyday... We never have riots, like, with each other.”

Several respondents also contended that sectarianism is simply a relic of an older generation:

“Older people hold a grudge. See, younger people, we can resolve it, but see with the older ones, it’s not gonna happen because of what they went through.”

Although sectarianism was often cited by Northern Irish respondents among problems facing their community and society, it was always related to violence in a remote sense both spatially and emotionally. Physically, among rural youth, it was seen as occurring in interface urban areas of Belfast and Derry. Among urban youth, however, sectarianism was in other communities, rather than their own. Emotionally, it was described in terms of incidents they had heard about, rather than personally experienced. Thus, respondents in Northern Ireland expressed a distinct lack of ownership for the problem of sectarian violence, either through their professed limited personal experience of sectarian violence or by their association of sectarian violence with other, often older, members of society. While sectarianism may still be a significant contributing factor in provoking violence in Northern Ireland, it is clear that, among young people at least, it is not especially relevant in their own personal expression of agency when navigating the social conditions of their everyday lives.

Xenophobic attacks.

Among my South African respondents, racism, which in that country shaped past social conflicts, was not seen as a major contributing factor in post-apartheid violence, with the

exception of the recent racist and xenophobic attacks against immigrants in the Cape Town area and elsewhere. “Last year, we had xenophobia, and the people...just were like, killing each other...I think the problem in South Africa is that people keep on judging on the color of their skin and I think that is wrong.” However, xenophobia was only mentioned by a few respondents, most of whom were not sympathetic to immigrants, but rather viewed them as bringing drugs to South Africa and placing a burden on their already strained economic opportunities.

The majority of respondents did not connect violence to racism even if they still felt judged on the basis of their skin color or ethnic background:

Sometimes when you go into a shop where there’s white people...they just stare at you like you like you are a stranger living on the street...They look at you like, ‘What is he doing here?’ If we go to Durban Street, there is only white people living there, and [coloureds] are living other places, and then it’s the blacks. People are separated still.

Rather, most considered social relationships within neighborhoods as more predictive of potentially violent conflicts. As one respondent explained:

I wouldn’t say the fighting is racially-based. I would say it’s more community-based.

Like, if I am from Roodewal, this community, and I go into another community and I’m not a gangster, they will class me as a gangster, like I am one of them and they will try to beat me up.

Other physical markers, like tattoos, and mannerisms, such as one’s way of walking, were seen as more important in identifying members of different neighborhoods, as opposed to simply racial characteristics.

Nevertheless, it was striking for me, given the country's history, that South African respondents hardly related domestic, communal and interpersonal violence to racism, even when they had experienced it themselves. Although South African respondents express a marked distrust for current ANC leadership, it appears that the ANC's original plea for racial equality and tolerance post-apartheid has been internalized among youth today. In a post-apartheid context, racism is no longer considered a legitimate platform from which to express sociopolitical grievances. As a result, youth have filled the vacuum of anti-racist dialogue with discussions of personal responsibility and the general failures of the immediate social environment.

Domestic and communal violence.

Finally, the domestic realm is variously perceived as an arena where community violence is refracted, amplified, and reproduced. In South Africa, domestic violence is a pervasive problem and many respondents critically connected it to violence in their communities. One described his experience of domestic abuse:

Most of the parents and adults here in South Africa, it's like when they're drunk, they're just aggressive and they want to be violent and stuff...I have seen a couple of parents who would like hit their kids physically...but I think I was just strong...because I knew my parents would start drinking and I would go to my grandmother's, or just, not go home because I would know, in the process I am going to get hurt.

But perceptions of how domestic malfunctions contribute to community violence went beyond directly witnessing physical domestic violence and emphasized broader patterns of family collapse. Many related community-based violence and gangsterism to a general breakdown in the family structure, including the absence of male role models.

In many households...[there's] a mother figure and not a father figure, and that's a problem for both boys and girls because...their father's not around...so they go around doing that stuff, nobody tells them what's the right thing and what's the wrong thing to do. They just don't get it.

Aside from divorce or separation, many fathers abandoned their families in pursuit of greater economic opportunities in urban centers such as Cape Town and Johannesburg. While this particular respondent indicated that gangsterism stems from a lack of a moral center provided by a strong father figure, South African youths may also join gangs as an expression of the relative autonomy they experience without the constraining influence of adults in their home environments. In this way, youth violence can be seen as an assertion of independence from parental authority, and thereby a purposive form of agency.

In Northern Ireland, however, none of the respondents included domestic violence as a problem for their community. They rather focused on interpersonal violence like stabbings and bar fights, of which most respondents did not, on the other hand, have direct experiences. In the domestic sphere, respondents categorized, however, intergenerational conflict as not necessarily violent: "one problem would be, really, being looked down upon by the older ones, like, the adults...Old people are very aggressive to us. They're cheeky. Nasty, just nasty, nasty people." The lack of discussion of domestic violence within the Northern Irish context is a striking difference with its emphasis among young respondents in South Africa. Like suicide, domestic violence may culturally be a taboo topic to discuss, or perhaps, domestic violence has been more adequately addressed through the strong community assistance organizations and community solidarity prevalent to nationalist communities in Northern Ireland. Whatever the case, it is clear

that, in the opinions and experiences of our respondents, domestic violence is a much more relevant social problem in South Africa.

My discussion of the relations between community and domestic violence brings home an important, overall difference between my two case studies. While violence seemed among young people in Northern Ireland relatively removed from the immediate sphere of effects and human connections, in South Africa, on the other hand, young people's experiences of violence were more deeply personal and reflected not only in their detailed and thoughtful descriptions of incidents of violence, but in their more mature and articulate ways of conceptualizing it. These differences greatly impacted the solutions to community violence and social problems respondents in South Africa and Northern Ireland proposed.

Opportunities for agency in youth-advocated solutions to violence.

Institutional interventions advocated by Northern Irish respondents.

Proposed solutions to community problems in Northern Ireland were nonetheless varied in scope and application. Respondents emphasized institutional interventions like stricter law enforcement, prevention coursework supported by government subsidies, family-based initiatives, community outreach, youth clubs, lowering the drinking age, and providing alternative recreational facilities. One respondent emphasized the importance of positive role models in the community, as opposed to punitive action:

Personally, I think people would be much more likely to listen to a community leader not coming from an authoritative point of view, you know, coming to talk to ye, as a grown person, as an adult, like, giving you the respect you deserve, 'cause you're not getting that from the PSNI.

Regarding sectarianism, respondents in Northern Ireland supported a variety of initiatives. For some, “taking down the peace wall” was paramount. Others saw collective, cooperative action as the key. One respondent stated simply: “Work together, so we can work in peace.” Many emphasized cross-cultural community youth work as an effective means of combating sectarianism:

I think there's much [that] has been done recently in Belfast...it's bringing together members of the nationalist working-class areas, and unionists, bringing them all together on Tuesday nights and have a big football tournament, and afterwards then, have pizza...It's the pizza that brings them there, but it brings them off the streets. Otherwise then, young people would be standing about, having nothing else to do.

Another respondent stressed the similarities between working-class nationalist and loyalist youth in Northern Ireland and saw pilot programs which brought them together for team-building retreats as a promising step towards ending sectarian violence:

You kind of build up a rapport with people from working-class loyalist areas or unionist areas...you're chatting to working-class loyalist young people and engage in their perspective and, in a way, it breaks down barriers around sectarianism and ‘the other side’ for want of a better word...So you have twenty-five people going back to their respective areas, with kind of a different view of things and you know, maybe, hopefully, their experience will kind of rub off on others and kinda break down sectarian tensions.

Similarly others supported greater interpersonal understanding and tolerance as the way forward for Northern Ireland:

Forget about...what they hear from other people. Maybe their parents tell them about, like, the Protestants, like 'Don't be going along with them.' Protestant's parents might tell them the same, like, 'Don't be friends with Catholics,' but there's no call for it. Just be friends, 'cause they're the same. Everybody's the same. There's nobody different, or badder, or gooder, or anything like that.

For several, however, change in Northern Ireland is required not simply at the personal level, but also at the structural level, in governance and educational policy.

For peace to be sustained there has to be cross-community work, and it's great to have a weekend camp with twenty-five people from each side, but it needs to happen on a much bigger scale than that there. And I don't think government is doing anywhere near enough to help move the process forward.

Broad social policy changes advocated by South African respondents.

In South Africa, instead, numerous respondents expressed their view that community problems such as gangsterism and organized violence were too deep-rooted to be contended with through behavioral improvements or targeted interventions. For example, one respondent stated that violence was "like a curse...in this neighborhood. Nothing can happen in Roodewal....It's like if there was a curse, like nothing will come from here." Several nonetheless contended that abstaining from violence was an individual responsibility that comes from an inner change of heart, rather than any type of collective action. "No one can make a decision for others, they need to decide on their own. So, no one can really do anything 'cause it's an individual choice."

Also as opposed to Northern Ireland where the majority of respondents alternately emphasized interpersonal cross-community work and institutional interventions, the majority of

respondents in South Africa saw improved life conditions as resulting from broader socially-based policy changes. For example, some considered increased educational opportunities as the key to change violent behaviors and attitudes by increasing opportunities for young people:

There's only one thing that can solve all these problems and that's education. If you can educate yourself, get a good job, if you have a family, then you can educate your children, teach them a certain set of values, how to act, the difference between right and wrong, what to do and what not to do, how to act and react. If we can do that, we can solve violence, because violence, it's actually a choice. For instance, if me and him get into an argument, I can choose to fight or I can choose to walk away. It's a choice, a personal choice, but you can only make that choice if you're educated.

Several recognized that education did not necessarily need to be a formal one, but could come from witnessing positive examples and proper discipline in the home. "I don't think you must be educated to not use violence. It's about the household; the parents can educate you in the household, if you can't educate yourself. It starts with your household."

Some South African respondents further emphasized the social and policy side of educational access, recommending government funding for early intervention and preventative programs to address gangsterism and substance abuse. Some cited grassroots initiatives as examples of progress being made to address problems in the community. "In our community, they started like a cricket club and now, I can walk in X park because our gang plays against that gang, or our community plays against that community for money." Another respondent proposed building and funding shared recreational facilities. "I would suggest if they place a building in our community like that, for dance - there is many of the boys in my community that can

breakdance or hip-hop or stuff like that, or rap. That would be nice.” Again, while youth in Northern Ireland focused primarily on legalistic institutional interventions such as more qualified police and lowering the legal drinking age, South African youth focused on broader social policy-based efforts which necessitate government funding to implement, but which are maintained at the community level.

Call to greater personal tolerance, love and faith.

Finally, many South African respondents had in common with Northern Irish interviewees an emphasis on changing value systems, stressing tolerance, love and religious faith as essential to addressing the problems of their communities. One respondent stated:

I think it first starts with yourself. You should work on yourself as a person and grow character within yourself and grow as a person emotionally to be more tolerant of other people, in South Africa especially, because we come from different backgrounds, we come from different townships, we come from different households, and also we have different races, so mostly we speak different languages. So, it first starts with you as a person, growing as a person, being more tolerant of other people, and telling yourself that yes, we are different, but we don't have to kill everyone. We should find common ground, we can live together in peace.

Implications for agency.

Overall, these responses indicate that young people in contexts, such as post-conflict Northern Ireland and South Africa, affected by massive political traumas, poverty, inequality and continued violence, cannot be merely categorized as victims or perpetrators of violent behavior, but are actively engaged in addressing violence on the basis of their perceptions of problems in

their communities and the solutions they envision. Despite scholarly discussions of youth violence as dysfunctional and anomic, my interviews indicate that post-conflict youth are quite aware of the underlying structural and social conditions which shape their world. Young people in Northern Ireland and South Africa understand and signify violence within the practical and discursive modalities with which they navigate adverse social conditions in their schools, homes and neighborhoods. It is by signifying violence as part of broader social problems that these youth have underscored their ability to take purposive action to deal with and overcome it.

Policy Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the data gathered over the course of these interviews, I would recommend that continued efforts to build peace in post-conflict Northern Ireland and South Africa be based upon young people's own perspectives of violence and its relationship to social problems. This is crucial to engaging the youth in a process that overcomes the violence affecting their communities, while also empowering them.

On issues like sectarianism, anti-social behavior and gangsterism, in both Northern Ireland and South Africa, policy interventions to encourage shared recreational spaces in interface areas of deprived communities should be based on surveys of local youth to gauge which activities are most meaningful to express their autonomous potential. Early preventative educational programs should be hosted by institutions that provide support and counseling in the case of substance abuse and violent behavior. Young community leaders must be integrated in these programs and facilities so that they can act as mediators in a process where the community as a whole is invested in these endeavors, while maintaining a specific focus on young people's perspectives and providing youth with positive role models and mentors, an added protective factor. Finally, regarding law enforcement efforts, corruption must be challenged and the composition of forces should reflect the community they serve.

Such interventions are necessarily linked to systemic policy interventions. In South Africa, for example, stronger provisions must be made to establish need-based scholarships for youth from impoverished communities. Empowerment schemes to provide employment opportunities to historically marginalized groups, should include *all* those affected by socioeconomic inequality, with particular attention to young people, and not merely traditional

supporters of the incumbent political regime. Legislation should also be altered to enable young people to receive loans to finance their education by loosening the power of parents or guardians as cosignatories. Schools and daycares must be equipped to not only recognize the signs of domestic abuse, but to report abusive parents to culturally competent child welfare agencies. School-sponsored programs which host tutoring and study sessions in a quiet learning environment should be expanded so that the education of young people is not impeded by studying in a chaotic family setting.

Finally, further research on youth violence in Northern Ireland and South Africa should move towards youth-initiated perspectives which discuss youth agency as opposed to simply sensationalizing youth anomie and marginalization. Literature on youth violence should foreground the role of young people in analyzing their own social and cultural environment. Fieldwork among young people in post-conflict societies should be aimed at empowering respondents not only as objects of research but as protagonists in knowledge production.

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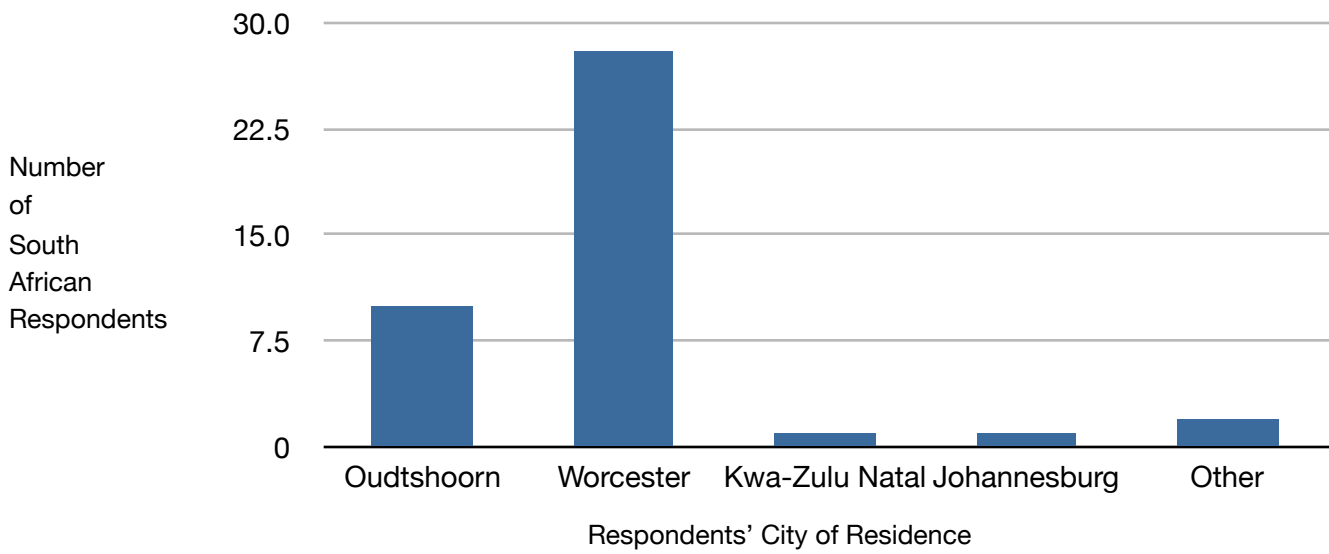


Figure 1. South African respondents' self-reported city of residence. This figure illustrates the geographic area represented in the South African sample.

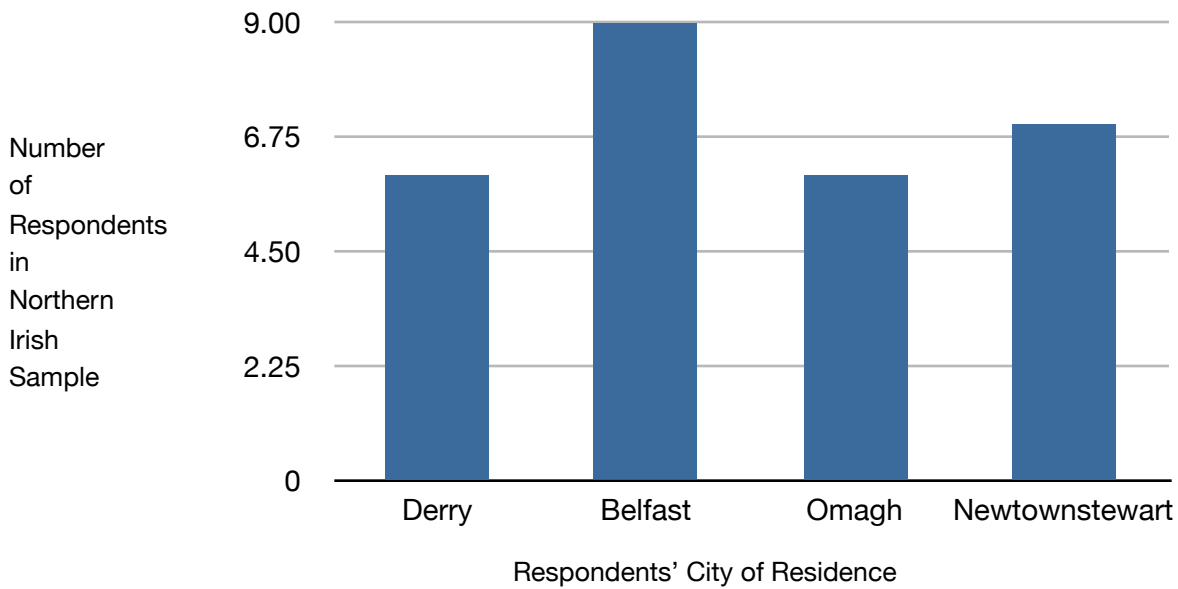


Figure 2. Northern Irish respondents' self-reported city of residence. This figure illustrates the geographic area represented in the Northern Irish sample.

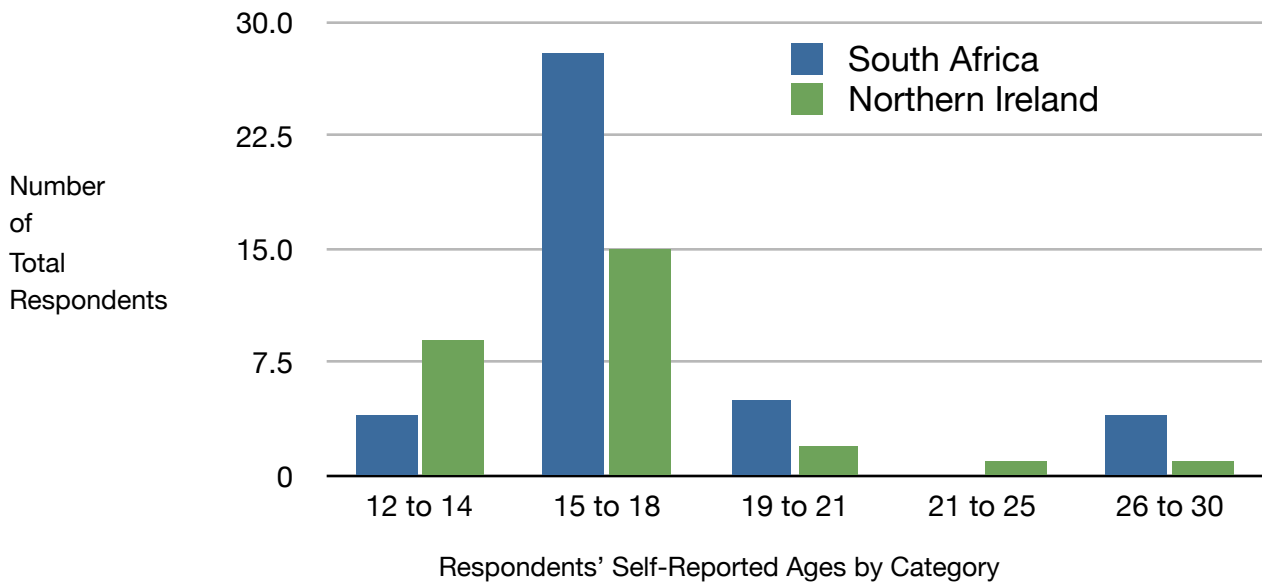


Figure 3. South African and Northern Irish respondents self-reported ages by category. This figure illustrates the diversity of both the South African and Northern Irish samples in terms of age.

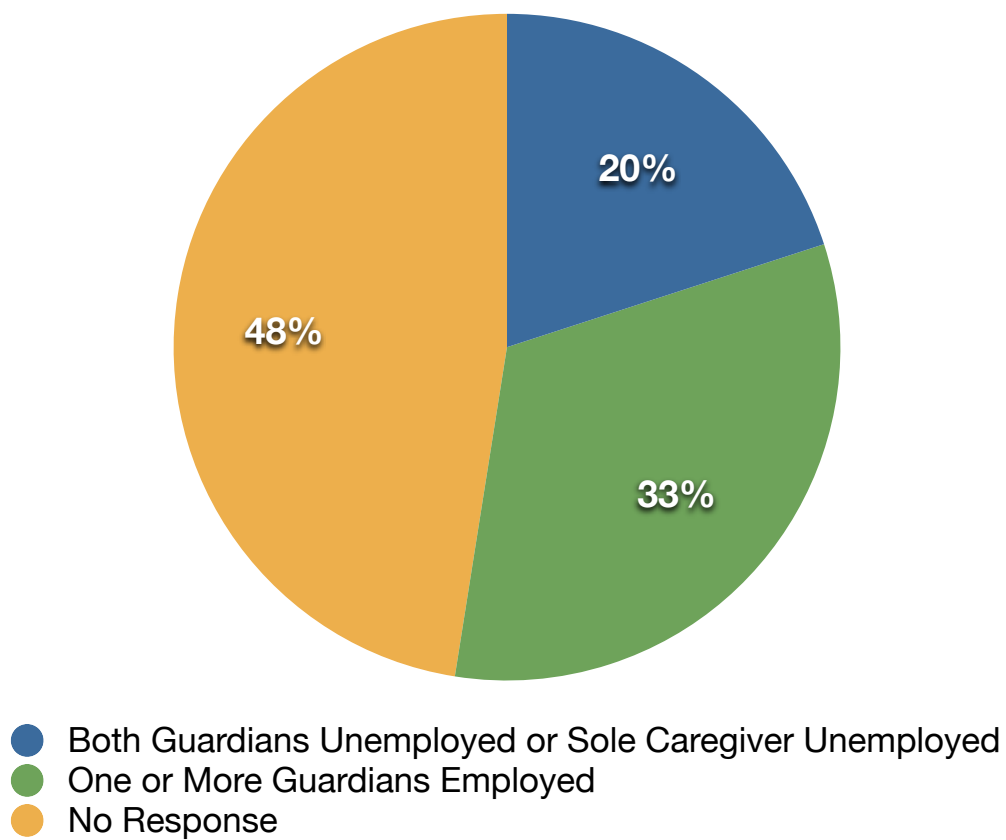


Figure 4. Percentage of self-reported guardian unemployment in South African sample. *Figure 4* demonstrates the high level of South African respondents who have either both parents unemployed or whose sole caregiver is unemployed.

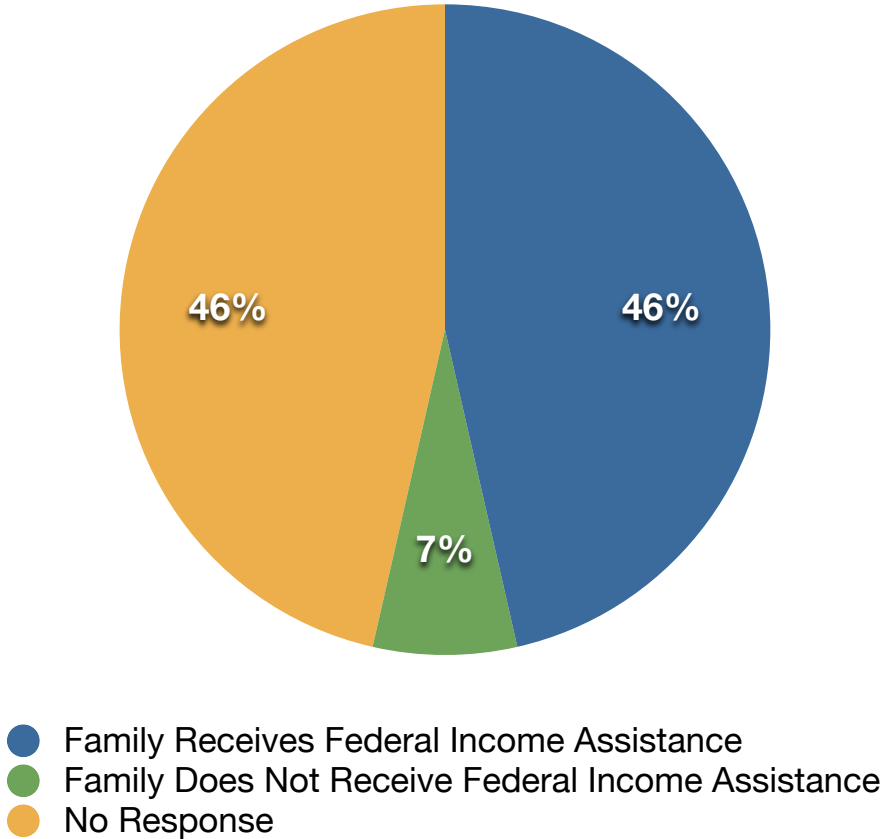


Figure 5. Self-reported percentage of families receiving federal income assistance in Northern Irish sample. This figure illustrates that the vast majority of respondents’ families in Northern Ireland receive some form of income assistance from the government.

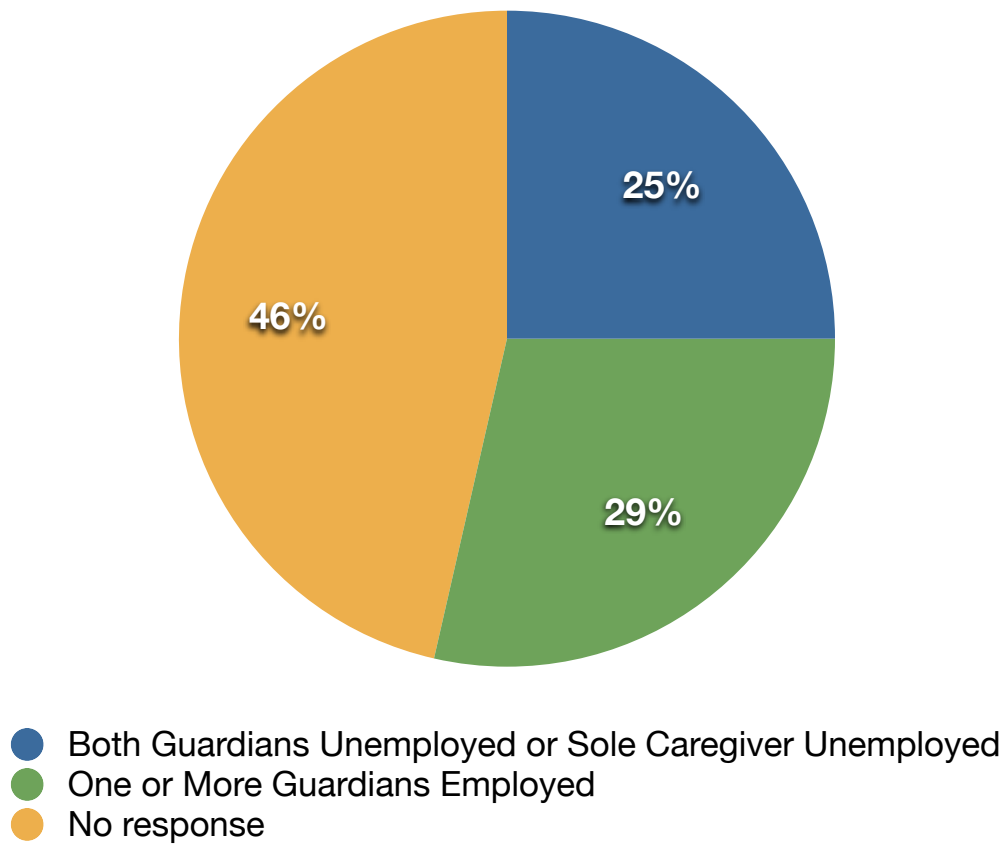


Figure 6. Percentage of self-reported guardian unemployment in Northern Irish sample. *Figure 6* demonstrates the high level of Northern Irish respondents who have either both parents unemployed are whose sole caregiver is unemployed.

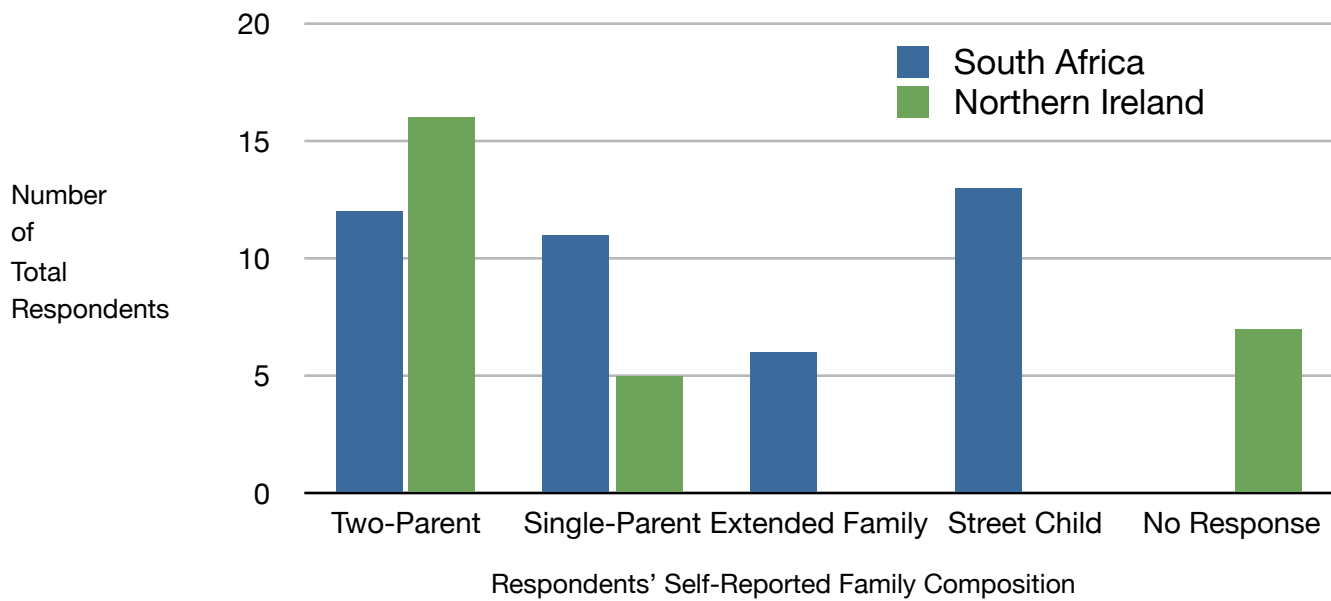


Figure 7. South African and Northern Irish respondents self-reported family composition by category. This figure demonstrates that the majority of South African respondents, in particular, reside outside of two-parent families.