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SECTARIANISM: WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

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SETTING THE SCENE – A CONTEMPORARY LOOK AT SECTARIANISM IN SCOTLAND IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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SECTARIANISM: What's The Problem?

Thirty years ago Steve Bruce noted that there was

> … considerable superficial evidence of sectarianism [in Scotland], if by that rather loose journalistic term we mean the aggressive display in the public sphere of religious and ethnic differences which, in modern societies, are supposed to be confined to the private world as matters of 'personal preference'. (1988: 151)

Bruce's argument was set against the context of a contemporary (indeed perhaps unprecedented) surge in academic interest in ethno-religious friction in Scotland. Some saw the outward signs of tension – football rivalry, graffiti, and Loyalist and Irish Republican parades – as reflective of deeper social divisions. Bruce argued that:

> If we adopt the metaphor of an iceberg, I contend that the relatively rare public displays of sectarian animosity are not the visible tip of a submerged mass of ice but are rather all that is left. My critics believe that there is still a sizeable piece of sectarian ice under the surface. (1988: 151).

Two key questions about sectarianism are: *just what is it?* (definition); and *is there much of it about?* (extent). There is a lack of consensus on both of these questions, the vagueness (and sometimes deliberate denial and avoidance) of *definition* making it difficult to measure *extent*.

Several things are clear, however, and provide useful starting points. Firstly, no-one describes *themselves* as 'a sectarian' – it is invariably the character and behaviour of others that is being described and decried. Secondly, sectarianism is seen as a *problem* – a recent survey on Scottish attitudes found that 88% of respondents described sectarianism as a problem in at least some parts of Scotland (Ormston et al 2015), though it is often – as we will see – *someone else's* problem. Thirdly, though there may be elements of doubt, uncertainty or denial about definition, there is widespread public consensus on what factors contribute to it. Key here is football: 88% of that survey's respondents felt that football contributed to sectarianism, 79% that Orange marches contributed, and 70% that Irish Republican marches contributed. However, when respondents were asked *which factor contributed most* a clear majority – 55% - pinpointed football with only small minorities picking out Orange (13%) or Republican (3%) parades.

The centrality of football (or, to be more precise, the rivalry between, and fan identities of, the two largest and most successful clubs) to the rhythm and temperature of sectarianism cannot be overstated. Contemporary academic/policy interest in 'sectarianism' began in the 1980s and in reaction to widespread fan disorder at the 1980 cup final. Tensions between the Old Firm clubs contributed to further debate – and policy interventions by the then new Scottish Executive – in the early 2000s. The current run of policy concerns sprang directly from an ill-tempered period in 2011 when tensions on the pitch spilled over into threats and intimidation, in particular directed towards referees and towards individuals associated with Celtic FC. Current concerns – and disputes – focus on the Scottish Government's legislative response, the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012. More broadly the Scottish Government set up the Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism (AGoTS) to take forward a broad policy and research agenda between 2012 and 2015.

In what follows I will avoid talking about football. Not, I should emphasise, because I think it unimportant or unworthy of discussion (it is *anything* but that), but because starting in that morass makes it almost impossible to grapple with the questions of *what?* and *how much?* So in the following I will explore issues of (in)equality and social separation ('life chances' and 'life choices'); briefly account for sectarianism as 'someone else's problem'[1]; and outline what we know – and don't know – about religious hate crime in Scotland. I'll then concisely outline the work of AGoTS and where we stand now in policy initiatives to address sectarianism in Scotland.

LIFE CHANCES: A Sectarian Iceberg?

By the late 1980s a key element of the academic debate was set – how much sectarian 'ice' remained unseen? As Bruce noted: 'What would be illuminating is evidence about the relative [labour market] fortunes of Protestants and Catholics in West Central Scotland but such data are not presently available' (1988: 155). The absence of such data made it difficult to investigate popular (and populist) claims about a substantial degree of religious disadvantage (and in many accounts specifically anti-Catholic discrimination). The emergence of robust and accessible data on religion and ethnicity in Scotland allowed such investigation, with the inclusion of questions on religion in key surveys and the Census in large part spurred by renewed claims of widespread sectarian discrimination. Despite such (continuing) claims, evidence of systematic religious disadvantage (let alone discrimination) in the resultant data has proved remarkably elusive.

The first survey which could accommodate robust statistical modelling was the 2001 Scottish Household Survey. Analysis suggested that, from those entering employment from the 1950s onwards, there was 'no evidence' of disadvantage, nor 'that, for example, Catholics are widely discriminated against in the labour market, or extensively have to abandon their religion to gain high-status employment'. The underlying reasons were a broad equality of opportunity based on educational qualifications and: 'essentially the equalizing of educational attainment among religious groups over time' (Paterson & Iannelli 2006: 368, 374).

Similar evidence on the absence of structured patterns of inequalities can be drawn from Scotland's recent Censuses. For example, the Scottish Government's review of evidence on sectarianism noted that 'the 2001 [Census] showed quite clearly that there was little or no difference in the occupations of Catholics and those of the Church of Scotland' (SG JAS, 2013: 25). This is borne out by more recent analysis of the 5% microdata sample of the 2011 Census:

[1] Further detail on these issues can be found in Rosie (2015).

Table 1: Occupational class and religion, 2011

	Church of Scotland	Catholic	No religion
Higher managerial, administrative and professional	8	7	10
Lower managerial, and higher supervisory	22	21	22
Intermediate occupations	16	14	13
Small employers and own account workers	9	7	8
Lower supervisory and technical occupations	9	9	9
Semi-routine occupations	18	18	17
Routine occupations	16	18	14
Never worked and long-term unemployed	4	6	6
	72,807	*32,076*	*67,038*

Source: authors own analysis of Census of Scotland Micro Data 2011.

It should be noted that bivariate analyses (such as in **Table 1**) must be treated with caution given the complex interplay of religion, class, gender, generation, migration and secularisation. To take just one example, it is clear that decades of secular decline in religious connections has impacted quite differently upon Scotland's Protestantism and Catholicism. In Scotland (as elsewhere) an increasing dislocation from formal religious activity, membership and belief hit earliest and hardest at liberal Protestant denominations. The outcome of this, over several generations, is that the character of those who identify themselves as Protestant has become progressively older. For example, 49% of all people sampled in the 2011 Census Microdata are aged 0-39 years, as are 49% of all Catholics. But this proportion rises to 63% amongst those of no religion, and falls to just 31% amongst those identifying as Church of Scotland. Likewise, 8% of the sample overall are aged 75+, but this is lower amongst Catholics (7%) and no religion (2%), and higher (14%) amongst Church of Scotland identifiers. The Church of Scotland population is considerably older (indeed more 'elderly') than that of Catholics, which in turn is somewhat older than the profile of those of no religion. What happens to occupational differences when we control for age?

We can produce 128 possible combinations of class/age (the eight different occupational classes described in table 1 across sixteen 5-year age brackets, spanning ages 15-19 down to 90+) and look for 'notable' differences in each sub-category. Here 'notable' is defined as a difference of 5% or more. In 105 of these categories any differences we find are *less* than five percentage points. The 23 categories where we do find 'notable' differences are disproportionately found in the oldest age groups. In the 64 categories for age brackets comprising people aged 15-54 we find just three with 'notable' differences: in the 32 possible categories for those aged 75+ we find 13. We might also note that individuals aged 75+ account for over half of the 'notable' differences but just 8% of the people in the sample. The Census thus points to a diminution – indeed a *disappearance* – of religious difference in the labour market. Nor is there any clear pattern of 'winners' and 'losers' in those differences we do find: often the point of difference is not between Presbyterian and Catholic but between those with a religion and those without one. That, in turn, points to a broadly meritocratic labour market operating from (at the least) the middle of the 20th Century, confirming the other research as described above. Any notion of widespread religious disadvantage – let along a system of sectarian discrimination to underpin it – runs entirely contrary to the evidence.

It should be noted, of course, that 'life chances' are hardly limited to the labour market – indeed the labour market may represent 'life outcomes' as much as life chances. However, a wide body of research into other key potential lines of inequality – education, housing, health, deprivation – suggests that what religious differences there are (if any) prove to be modest and, in most cases, declining. See, for useful summaries, the Scottish Government's evaluations of the evidence on sectarianism (SG JAG 2013; 2015).

LIFE CHOICES: You Dancin'?

If it is difficult to pinpoint consistent and structured differences across key religious groups in term of life chances, might we find evidence of social distance and differentiation in terms of 'life choices'? In other words, are the decisions Scots make across various aspects of their lives informed, shaped, or limited by their religion? The Scottish Social Attitudes of 2014 focussed upon issues of sectarianism and found that friendships across the supposed 'divide' were perfectly common: 81% of self-identified Catholics said they had one or more close Protestant friends; 76% of self-identified Protestants said the same of Catholic friends (Ormston et al, 2015: 280). An interesting (and overlooked) source of evidence is a Glasgow City Council study on sectarianism and intolerance in the city (NFO Social Research, 2003). Respondents were asked (see **Table 2**) how relevant their religion was to a range of personal decisions – for the most part religion was *not* seen as relevant as to who they befriended, who they dated, or where they chose to live. Where the study did find (relatively modest) differences a 'sectarian' reading was difficult to sustain. For example, we might be struck by the difference between the 6% of Church of Scotland identifiers and the 13% of Catholics who felt their religion was relevant to the jobs they could apply for. Yet – though not shown in the table – the fact that 14% of 'other Christians' also felt this makes an easy assumption of Protestant-Catholic difference difficult to sustain. Likewise, though 22% of Catholics reported that their religion was relevant to which social clubs they could join, this was also the case for 21% of 'other Christians' and 20% from 'other religions'.

Table 2: Religion and 'life choices' in Glasgow, 2002

Have you ever felt that your religion was relevant to …	**Church of Scotland**	**Catholic**	**No religion**
Who you could have as a friend	4	6	4
Who you could date or marry	10	8	7
What jobs you could apply for	6	13	6
Where you could live	5	8	6
Social clubs you could join	11	22	14
Base	*348*	*288*	*249*

Source: author's own analysis of NFO (2003) data.

We can approach such intimate questions not simply through what people *say* about themselves, but through what they *do*. The 2001 Census allowed an unparalleled opportunity to measure the extent of mixed religious marriage in Scotland. The extent of religiously mixed marriages and relationships demonstrated that boundaries between religious traditions are highly permeable at this most intimate level. As **Table 3** shows, the 2001 Census recorded almost 400,000 Scottish Catholics living with a spouse or partner. In almost half these cases (47%) that spouse/partner was *not* Catholic. More than a quarter of Catholics (27%) were married to, or cohabiting with, a Protestant. These data hardly indicate the existence of carefully bounded and patrolled religious communities – Catholics are very likely to find their life-partner outside the faith, and the fact that this is even more marked amongst those who are cohabiting suggests that exogamy amongst younger Catholics is remarkably high.

Table 3: Catholics and mixed marriages/relationships, 2001

CATHOLICS	MARRIED	COHABITING	
Religion of Partner:	%	%	TOTAL
None	13.4	28.9	17.1
Church of Scotland	22.0	29.2	23.7
Roman Catholic	59.4	33.9	53.3
Other Christian	3.4	4.7	3.7
Another Religion	0.2	0.9	0.3
Not Answered	1.4	2.5	1.7
	299,190	*93,488*	*392,678*

Source: Census of Scotland, 2001 – author's own analysis.

Previous studies have found that Scotland's Protestants and Catholics (and, indeed, the irreligious) are very like each other in terms of their political and social attitudes, and to a large extent we now know why. The Census data on intermarriage, alongside the evidence noted above on friendship networks, serve to signal that religious communities are not discrete and bounded entities inhabiting separate social worlds. In Scotland 'different' communities are connected by, and within, friendship networks, families and romantic relationships. Religious conflict with 'the Other' – indeed the very conception and relevance *of* 'Other' – becomes difficult to sustain when it is one's partner, father, sister, or child who 'kicks with the other foot'.

SOMEONE ELSE'S PROBLEM?

There are two quite distinctive senses in which sectarianism is 'someone else's problem'. First, as noted earlier, the common claim that sectarianism is *caused*, initiated, or carried out by someone else. Sectarianism becomes an accusation – something *they* do and *we* endure, and few individuals, let alone organisations or groups, will volunteer themselves as being 'sectarian'. The abundance of accusation (and a reluctance of many accusers to be concerned too much about actual evidence) fuels the second, and more sociologically nuanced, sense of this being 'someone else's problem'.

This second sense of distancing is that sectarianism *happens* to someone else, or somewhere else. There is a widespread belief that sectarianism is a problem in Scotland, perhaps a serious one demanding attention, alongside the seeming paradox that relatively few people report that they have themselves directly experienced it. This exemplifies a social anxiety over sectarianism, a phenomenon broadly analogous to the more familiar concept of fear of crime. Notably this seeming disjuncture between understandings of sectarianism as a *general issue* as compared to a *personal problem* is a common thread shared by much research into sectarianism in Scotland. Ormston et al (2015) noted that the perceived level of prejudice against both Catholics and Protestants was considerably higher than the proportion in the survey (14%) reporting that they had themselves *ever* experienced religious discrimination or exclusion. Likewise, whilst notable minorities felt that it was at least 'quite likely' that someone would be harassed or threatened in Scotland because they were Catholic (35%) or Protestant (39%), rather fewer (9%, 8%) felt that was likely in *their own* local area. We thus meet a seeming paradox which runs through much research on sectarianism in Scotland: for very many Scots 'religious discrimination and sectarianism are things that happen in Scotland, but not in their area, and not to them' (Ormston et al, 2015).

These two worlds of Scottish sectarianism – general perception and personal experience - were evocatively illuminated by the Glasgow Council study of 2002. Whilst Glaswegians were confident in reporting that sectarianism, in a variety of forms, was 'common' in their city, they were unlikely to report having encountered it themselves over the previous several years. For example, two-thirds of Glaswegians felt that sectarian violence was a common occurrence in their city (with 22% thinking it

very common). Yet less than 1% of the respondents reported that they themselves had suffered from religious violence in the previous five years). Likewise, a majority felt sectarian intimidation or harassment, sectarian threats, and sectarian vandalism were common in Glasgow, yet in each of case less than 1% reported that they themselves had suffered it over the previous five years. As the study noted, there was 'a stark contrast between perceptions of prevalence and reports of experience' (NFO Social Research, 2003: 59)

These results suggested a rather generalised unease or anxiety around sectarianism in Glasgow, rather than entrenched aspects of the city's life and geography which alarmed or worried respondents. This fits with Hamilton-Smith et al's account of how some of Glasgow spaces assumed a sectarian character only in very particular contexts: 'Only at specific moments might certain locations suddenly become laden with meaning and association' (Hamilton-Smith et al, 2015b). Thus someone may not think of avoiding a particular area, street, or bus route due to worries about ethno-religious friction *except* where a specific parade, football match, or other event is, or is thought to be, occurring. The evidence, therefore, points towards a nuanced, episodic and highly contextual (and perhaps highly personalised) sense of unease around sectarianism.

HATE CRIME: Whose Problem?

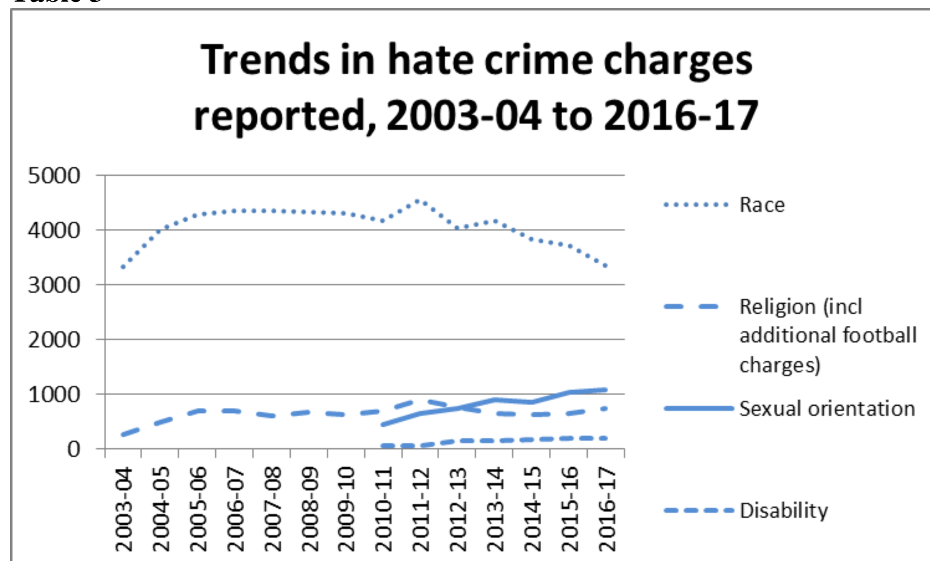
One of the relatively few lasting policy consequences of the Scottish Executive's interest in sectarianism in the early 2000s was Section 74 of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003. It should be noted here that religious prejudice is not actually criminalised *per se* – at issue is where a crime has been committed and where there appears to be a religious aggravation (there is no 'hate crime' as such, but there are crimes motivated by hate).

The statistics on religiously aggravated offending have proved controversial. After publication, in June 2017, of figures and analysis for 2016-17 the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland requested a meeting with Scottish Ministers. The Church was concerned, as it has been since the first tranche of statistics in the early operation of Section 74, at an apparent imbalance in offences: Catholicism, a minority within the broader population, proves the target of the offending in a majority of cases. A leading Church spokesman told *The Scotsman* that the Scottish Government exhibited an 'unwillingness to adopt a name and shame approach to religious hate crime' and that 'Were any other type of crime to be dominated so completely by a single type of behaviour [i.e. anti-Catholic prejudice], we might expect a targeted strategy to emerge, promoted by the authorities as a response to a particular problem'[2].

Yet the available statistics paint quite a different picture of the nature, extent and character of religious hate crime. Indeed – ironically – the perception of widespread sectarianism has led to routine publication of statistics relating to religious aggravations, but not to the other aggravations (race, sexual orientation, transgender identity, disability). We thus know substantially more about religious hate crime than any of the others – and what we know suggests a rather less sinister interpretation of the 'imbalance' of offending. First it should be noted that, despite the attention it garners, religious aggravations are by no means the most common form of hate crime in Scotland. Racial aggravations remain, by far, the most common kind of hate offences, and aggravations based on sexual orientation have been, over the last five years, the second most common (see **Table 3**).

[2] *The Scotsman*, 'Catholic Church calls for action on religious hate crime', 15 August 2017

Table 3



Source: Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service (2017), *Hate Crime in Scotland, 2016-17*[3]

Analysis of religious offending (the most recent official analysis is Foster & Myant, 2017) reveals consistent patterns. Most such offences occur in Glasgow and the surrounding west of Scotland; most offenders are relatively young and overwhelmingly male (95% in 2010-11; 91% in 2016-17). A very substantial proportion of offences involve alcohol and/or drugs; and where an actual person was the 'target' of such behaviour, it was most likely to be a police officer (victims in 42% of cases in 2016-17) or someone doing their job (16%). In only around a quarter of cases (26% in 2016-17) is a 'member of the public' the target of the offence – as frequently (29%) misbehaviour was directed towards the 'community' at large. There are significant spikes in offending during the evening, particularly at weekends.

Media attention has consistently headlined a supposedly disproportional victimisation of Scotland's Catholics with a narrative around 'victims', 'targeting', 'violence', and 'attacks'. However, relatively few such offences are physical assaults (6% in 2010-11; 7% in 2016-17), with the overwhelming majority (75% in 2016-17) relating to threatening or abusive behaviour. In other words, the bulk of Scotland's recorded religious offending crime is conducted on Friday and Saturday nights by young men, often drunk, in the urban west of Scotland. Offences are overwhelmingly anti-social, abusive and threatening with the most common victims being police and service workers. This is a dismal picture of urban incivility, a reminder that rather too many Scots – and particularly young men – drink too much, fail to behave themselves and when rebuked respond with foul-mouthed abuse. Depressing certainly, but disproportionately anti-Catholic?

Most religious offending *is* 'anti-Catholic' in nature – in 2010-11 58 per cent of offences involved behaviour 'derogatory towards Roman Catholicism' whilst 37 per cent involved behaviour 'derogatory towards Protestantism'. In 2016-17 Catholicism was 'the subject [of the] offensive conduct' in 57% of cases, Protestantism 24%, and Islam 17%. Yet the seeming disparity in the figures for Catholicism and Protestantism has a simple explanation. Given the broad religious demography of the west of Scotland it would require only that a roughly equal (and small) proportion of Catholics acted in anti-social and 'anti-Protestant' ways as Protestants acting in 'anti-Catholic' ways to produce a supposed 'disparity' in offences. To put this in simple terms: if in a town where there are twice as many Protestants than Catholics each community has a 0.01 per cent minority who behave in a religiously bigoted manner on an alcohol-fuelled Saturday night, then two thirds of sectarian offences would be 'anti-Catholic' in nature. That is not to say that in the real world Catholics and Protestants are indulging equally in sectarian hatred – we simply do not have the data to

[3] See http://www.copfs.gov.uk/publications/equality-and-diversity#Hate_Crime_in_Scotland

know – only that the underlying disparity in the numbers of Catholics and Protestants points towards a rather less frightening explanation than media coverage suggests.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland (AGoTS) was established in August 2012 to provide Scottish Ministers with impartial advice on how to develop and assess work to tackle sectarianism in Scotland. Membership of the Group was designed to span a varied background of understanding and tackling sectarianism, as well as incorporating members from Catholic, Reformed, and non-faith backgrounds. The Group operated independently from the Scottish Government and was given a free hand on determining relevant topics and contacts. Key to the Group's work was understanding the forms that sectarianism may (or may not) take in contemporary Scotland, and how best to address these. The Group met over 51 formal sessions, with dozens of additional meetings, conversations, and observational visits (e.g. to football matches, parades, project events, theatre performances). It advised Ministers on funding applications, and on how funded projects should be evaluated for their impact. The Group published an interim report December 2013 and its final report in May 2015.

Through the work of the Advisory Group and, not least, in its discussions with a very wide range of individuals and organisations – including charities, churches, community groups, educationalists, local government, MSPs, parading bodies, police, youth organisations - it became clear that there were three broad aspects of social and political life in which sectarianism might operate (see AGoTS, 2015):

- In the creation, underpinning, and reproduction of inequality and discrimination (*glass ceilings*);
- In the justification of threats, intimidation and violence (*glass bottles*);
- In the creation and reproduction of persistent suspicions or antagonisms which foster prejudice, hostility and resentment (*glass curtains*).

I would argue (speaking from an individual perspective and *not* on 'behalf' of AGoTS) that much of the empirical evidence suggests that glass ceilings and glass bottles are far more often an issue of perception rather than experience, a perception which, in turn, underpins the anxieties and suspicion of glass curtains. However, to talk of 'perception' is not at all to say, however, that sectarianism exists only in the imagination. It is more complicated than that: as Goodall et al. (2015b) note, 'For some, sectarianism is manifestly part of their everyday experience; for others it is almost invisible in their social world'. This notion of the *episodic* and spatially varied nature of sectarianism links to Ormston et al's (2015) finding that sectarianism can be 'A problem – but not where I live'. Crucially, it must be emphasised, a perceived problem remains a problem. Whatever the empirical evidence relating to the 'iceberg', it seems clear that many Scots are genuinely worried about sectarianism, its prevalence, and its impact. Perceptions, in other words, *matter*.

Clearly perceptions, anxieties and suspicions cannot be legislated away, and at no point did AGoTS suggest any additional laws. Indeed, the current controversy over the Offensive Behaviour Act demonstrates that well-intentioned legislative changes can deepen and extend suspicion and anxiety, at least in the relatively short term. This suggests the need for a policy focus which accentuates, firstly, discussion of when people do or do not feel worried or unsafe and, secondly, reassurance that unacceptable antisocial or criminal behaviour will be addressed and, if necessary, punished. This is not simply a matter of *criminalising* sectarianism – though a decade and more of religious hate-crime statistics suggest a continuing (and predominantly male and alcohol-fuelled) reservoir of low-level disruptive and threatening 'conduct derogatory towards' both Catholicism and Protestantism. Rather there needs to be a sea change in attitudes on what is, and what is not, acceptable in everyday Scottish life. Such a change appears to be occurring in Scotland (and elsewhere) with regard to racism,

misogyny and to homophobia although it is less clear what change is occurring with regard to sectarianism. Largely for this reason AGoTS focussed its attention, and made funding recommendations towards, community and education activities that would promote discussion of sectarianism and highlight best practice. Projects which brought together different faith partners were also funded (see, for example, the list of funded projects in Annex D of AGoTS, 2015).

There were three key risks, in my opinion, to the work of AGoTS and to the broader agenda of empowering and encouraging Scotland to tackle sectarianism. The first was that key agencies would prove hostile or uncooperative in that broader agenda. By and large, however, civic and institutional Scotland proved eager to address the issues, in general with generosity and openness. Police, education, local councils, churches and parading organisations met with us and exchanged, in the most part, frank and helpful views. We also met regularly with representatives of Scotland's political parties, having open discussion with Labour, LibDem, Green and Independent MSPs as well as with SNP Ministers. Having the parties on board, and informed, was crucial to avoid the second risk: the playing of politics around sectarianism. During the life of AGoTS there was a highly supportive cross-party acceptance of our role, without which our work would have been fatally limited.

The third risk was, of course, 'events'. In this AGoTS was, in one way, extremely fortunate that the financial crisis at Rangers FC removed that club from the top level of competition. There was, as Rangers worked their way up from the bottom division in the Scottish League, several years in which the two Glasgow clubs did not meet on the pitch. It may be that only in that (entirely accidental) circumstance could AGoTS have proceeded without the distraction of key events – related to Old Firm rivalry – that may have inflamed anxieties over sectarianism. The other side of that coin, however, was that – frankly – there was little appetite within Scottish football (here specifically meaning the governing bodies and the two Glasgow clubs) to embrace the AGoTS agenda. In our Interim Report (AGoTS, 2013) we noted that:

> **6.67** While we recognise that sectarianism goes beyond the sphere of football, it is also clear that the sport has close associations with the issue. We believe that football clubs and authorities could do more to directly address these associations.

In our Final Report (AGoTS, 2015: 8.11) we reaffirmed our Interim comments relating to football and added:

> It is clear that a strategic and measured response to Scotland's remnants of sectarian attitudes and behaviour cannot succeed without squarely addressing the sectarian problems within and around football.

Events, and the political arithmetic in Scotland, have moved on. In 2016 the Scottish election removed the SNP majority – and one of the first moves of the opposition parties was to push for repeal of the Offensive Behaviour Act. Whilst it is entirely valid and reasonable to criticise the Act and seek its removal, in practice the focus upon the Act has served to obscure the broader agenda on tackling sectarianism. The risk that sectarianism, and the tackling sectarianism agenda, will become a political football is now very real indeed.

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