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'Traditional' Parades, Conflict and Change: Orange Parades and other Rituals in Northern Ireland, 1960-2000

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Much has been made in the disciplines of history and anthropology of the invention of tradition.¹ Since Hobsbawm and Ranger's landmark work there has been a whole range of publications looking at continuity and change particularly in the areas of ritual and national identity. It is now accepted wisdom that we can never take 'tradition' at face value, that even apparent longevity of an event should not allow us to assume that events have been unchanging or that they are consistently performing the same social functions, or are maintaining consistent meaning to the participants and spectators. At the same time the importance of ritual in modern politics can also not be underestimated. As such, explorations of ritual provide us with a useful tool with which to examine social processes of continuity and change in the politics of identity.

I have elsewhere argued the importance of understanding the nature of ritual in order to provide an adequate explanation for both the senses of continuity that exist within events but also the role those events play through a period of social, economic and political change.² There is reasonable evidence that it is precisely at a period of time when a society is undertaking change that ritual events can provide a mechanism whereby apparent continuity is being maintained. Yet closer exploration of the ritual reveals that adaptations are taking place. Indeed, I would provisionally argue that the greater the claims to tradition the greater the likelihood of finding fundamental changes in the tradition.

In this paper I would like to look at the role of public ritual during a period of conflict in Northern Ireland. An examination of ritual through the period from 1960 to 2000 provides us with a revealing view of the nature of the conflict and the role played by public rituals in conflict. Whilst a number of authors have recognised the importance of public events, as part of the process of mobilisation and the control of public space, prior to and during periods of conflict in Northern Ireland,³ this essay suggests

- 1 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge 1983).
- 2 Elizabeth Tonkin and Dominic Bryan, 'Political Ritual: Temporality and Tradition', in Åsa Boholm (ed.), *Political Ritual* (Gothenburg 1996), 14-36; Dominic Bryan, *Orange Parades: The Politics of Ritual, Tradition, and Control* (London 2000).
- 3 Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State* (London 1976); Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago 1991), 17-45; Neil Jarman, *Material Conflicts: Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland* (Oxford 1997); Niall ÓDochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles* (Cork 1997); Sean Farrell, *Ritual and Riots: Sectarian Violence and Political Culture in Ulster, 1784-1886* (Kentucky 2000); Peter Jupp and Eoin Magennis, *Crowds in Ireland*

that they were quite central to what took place. Indeed, it was the inability of the Northern Ireland Government to deal with the public rituals that directly led to the communal violence preceding the low level paramilitary war of the 1970s. Intriguingly, as the peace process developed in the mid-1990s, public rituals, specifically those within the Protestant community organised by the Orange Order, returned to centre stage as disputes over the right to parade dominated policing.

This article brings together evidence from a number of my previous publications to make a more cohesive argument on the role of rituals and the discourse of 'tradition' in the Northern Ireland conflict. The first half of the paper will review the environment for public ritual in Northern Ireland up to the 1960s as a way of explaining why the Civil Rights movement so dramatically destabilised Northern Ireland. It suggests that a shift in the nature of the conflict in the early 1970s led to the rituals of the Protestant and Unionist loyal orders – the Orange Order, the Black Institution and the Apprentice Boys of Derry – playing a central role in the conflict before paramilitary violence became the focus of policing. The second half of the paper will look at changes that have taken place to Orange parades and how the rhetoric of 'tradition' is maintained in spite of these changes. These developments took place at a time when both the size and the power of the loyal orders were in decline.

Orange Parades in Northern Ireland

The quasi-state of Northern Ireland came into existence with the passing of the Ireland Act 1920. It divided the island into two, giving six counties in the north, Antrim, Down, Londonderry, Armagh, Tyrone and Fermanagh, a Parliament. The southern polity became the Free State and eventually the Republic of Ireland. The majority of the population of Northern Ireland was Protestant and supporters of the union with the United Kingdom, whilst Catholics, making nearly 40% of the population, viewed themselves as Irish and maintained a political desire to see Ireland re-united and independent from the United Kingdom.

Northern Ireland was never a secure political entity. Emergency legislation has been in place for the whole of its existence to deal with the apparent threat from violent Irish Republicanism. The majority of the Protestant community have consistently voted for the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), a political party that used the rhetoric of viewing Catholics as enemies of the state. The fear of the enemy within led to a range of sectarian practices effectively excluding Catholics from jobs and housing and leaving political power in control of Unionist politicians. In addition, the police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), was predominantly Protestant as was the civil service and the judiciary.

A key institution for Ulster Unionism was, and is, the Orange Order. A brotherhood or 'friendly society', based in many respects on the Freemasons, the Orange Order was founded in Armagh in 1795 taking its name from the victory of Protestant King William III over Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690.⁴ Institutionally it organised brethren into local 'lodges', but the defining activity of Orangemen was the holding of public parades on the Twelfth of July to commemorate the Battle of the Boyne. Over time a range of other days became part of the 'marching season'. As such, their rituals were part of the formation of sectarian space in both rural and urban areas of the north of Ireland.⁵ The Orange Order developed from a rural base prior to the 1850s to one that grew in working class districts of Belfast through the second half of the nineteenth century providing the organisational basis for the development of Ulster Unionism.⁶ It created an effective cross class alliance amongst Protestants in opposition to the threat from Home Rule Bills. Orangeism spread through the range of Protestant denominations and instilled a sense of 'Britishness' based on loyalty to the Protestant throne. In addition, the institution offered forms of patronage, both in terms of employment and the advancement of a political career. It is estimated that between 1908 and 1913 the numbers of Orangemen in Belfast more than doubled from 8,834 to 18,800.⁷

Public parades up until the 1870s had often not been great in size, and were deemed by many in authority as lacking respectability. In the later nineteenth century, with the help of public transport and the patronage of both landowners and the industrial bourgeoisie, Liberal and Conservative Unionists, Orange parades became large respectable events. They were politically important as perspective MPs joined with, and spoke to, their voters. In addition, for many ordinary people in Belfast the Twelfth of July parades were the big annual day out providing a carnival style atmosphere, even if the event bore more of the hallmarks of a military parade. Men that were not marching with their lodge were often in musical bands that accompanied the lodges. The involvement of soldiers returning from wars across the British Empire only added to the bearing of the parade.

From 1921, for the newly formed Northern Ireland, Orange parades were events of state. They provided a populist link between members of government and ordinary working people even through times of great economic hardship. Between 1921 and 1972 all but three members of the Northern Ireland Cabinet were Orangemen. With the UUP dominating

4 Anthony D. Buckley and T. Kenneth Anderson, *Brotherhoods in Ireland* (Cultra 1988).

5 Farrell, *Ritual and Riots*.

6 Jarman, *Material Conflicts*, 31-61; Bryan, *Orange Parades*, 44-77.

7 Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon and Henry Patterson, *Northern Ireland 1921-1994. Political Forces and Social Classes* (London 1995) 24.

Parliament the majority of MPs were Orangemen.⁸ On the Twelfth of July these men walked in the parade; after the arrival at a field the Prime Minister and other government ministers made political speeches alongside clergymen taking religious services.

The Orange Order and their parades had political, economic, social, religious and cultural functions and in 1926 the Twelfth was made a public holiday. In addition, the parades provided a ritual through which public space was demarcated. Loyal order parades dominated the roads of Northern Ireland with, particularly in the 1930s, new 'traditional' routes being added to increase the numbers of parades. On Easter Monday the Apprentice Boys of Derry developed further parades and on the 'Last Saturday' of August the Royal Black Institution invented marches of its own.⁹ This was in part a reaction to political developments in the south with Eamon De Valera coming to power and restrictions on Orange parades on the other side of the border.¹⁰ Of equal significance was the policing of Irish Nationalist and Republican events during the same period. The Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act 1922 gave the police broad powers under which events could be seen as a threat to the state. As such, parades held by the Catholic Ancient Order of Hibernians were often restricted to Catholic rural areas of Ulster and Republican events and the carrying of the Irish Tricolour were, in effect, banned. This situation eased to a certain extent in the 1950s and 60s but the 1951 Public Order Act and the 1954 Flags and Emblems Act were both used to restrict ritual and symbolic representations by Nationalists and Republicans.¹¹

Civil Rights and Orange Parades

From the mid-1960s Unionist and Orange hegemony appeared under threat. A range of social changes as well as declining fortunes for some local industries had sparked talk of reform from Unionist government ministers. But more dramatically, from 1967 onwards, the Civil Rights Movement increased activity from the Republican Movement, and doubts over the determination of the British government led to growing insecurity amongst many Protestants and, in consequence, heightened activity from loyalist paramilitaries. There is a complex inter-relationship between the activities of the Civil Rights Movement and the tensions within Unionist and Orange politics that started to split the UUP and consequently divided

8 John Harbinson, *The Ulster Unionist Party, 1882-1973: Its Development and Organisation* (Belfast 1973), 90-3.

9 Brian Walker, *Past and Present: History, Identity and Politics in Ireland* (Belfast 2000), 14-7.

10 Neil Jarman and Dominic Bryan, *From Riots to Rights: Nationalist Parades in the North of Ireland* (Coleraine 1998), 42-8.

11 Eid., 'Green Parades in an Orange State: Nationalist and Republican Commemorations and Demonstrations from Partition to the Troubles, 1920-70', in T.G. Fraser (ed.), *The Irish Parading Tradition: Following the Drum* (Basingstoke 2000), 95-110; Keith Jeffrey, 'Parades, Police, and Government in Northern Ireland, 1922-1969', in *ibid.* 78-94.

the Orange Order.¹² What is of interest here are not the political demands made by the Civil Rights Movement around fair housing, employment and fair votes, but the nature of the campaign, in particular the use of demonstrations. Only if we understand the context in which the demonstrations took place from 1967 onwards can we fully appreciate the destabilising nature of them. Constitutional Irish Nationalism had not significantly organised itself in a populist formation for much of the history of Northern Ireland and representations and rituals of loyalty and Orangeism dominated the public arena in the form of flags, war memorials, and, of course, parades. When Civil Rights demonstrations were organised along the routes taken by traditional parades in places such as Derry there could not have been a more direct physical challenge to the state. This was a conflict that was, at first, fought through rituals.

The most obvious effect this had was to heighten the sense of territoriality that existed throughout Northern Ireland, but particularly in urban areas. Over the years that followed there were pogroms and large numbers of people were intimidated into moving. Local communities felt themselves to be under attack. Most Catholics saw the RUC as party to the violence, whilst increasingly Protestants and the British government saw the police as being ineffective. As such, in 1969 the British government sent in troops to undertake policing duties. They also began reforms of the RUC that included, in 1970, the disbanding of the B Specials, the part-time armed section of the police force, much hated in the Catholic community but seen by many Protestants as their defenders. Even more significantly, increasing numbers in both Catholic and Protestant working class areas saw no choice but to defend themselves. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) began to grow in strength and conducted a campaign including attacks on the British Army, RUC, economic targets as well as operations that appeared little more than sectarian. The Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) had carried out sectarian murders as early as 1966 but also increased their numbers. More significantly, in Protestant neighbourhoods local defence associations started patrolling their patch as well as holding marches. By 1972 they formed themselves into the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), were marching in Protestant areas, and were soon committing sectarian murders under the name of the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF). By 1974 they had an estimated 50,000 members.¹³

From 1969 organisers of the Civil Rights Movement increasingly worried about the effect of holding their marches and some felt the levels of violence meant that it was not safe to do so. Other demonstrations were held within Catholic districts and those neighbourhoods began to be defined by the IRA as 'No Go' areas for the RUC and British Army. 'Brits

12 Bew, Patterson and Gibbon, *Northern Ireland 1921-1994*, 111-44; Bryan, *Orange Parades*, 78-96.

13 Colin Crawford, *Inside the UDA: Volunteers and Violence* (London 2003), 20-32.

Out' was daubed on many walls and essentially became a reality in parts of West Belfast and the Bogside in Derry. This process took its final terrible turn in January 1972 when members of the British Army Paratroop Regiment shot dead thirteen people at the end of a Civil Rights demonstration in the Bogside of Derry.

The consequence of all this for the Orange Order and for Orange parades was quite dramatic. These were rituals that through the 1950s had reflected the hegemonic control for Unionism. Consequently they were less assertive in nature than in previous eras. Unionist politicians demanded respectability from those taking part and criticised the more raucous and sectarian activities of Blood and Thunder marching bands, particularly the bands from Scotland. Criticism of the UUP and the government was not unheard of from Orange platforms on the Twelfth of July but it was often guarded.¹⁴ However, in 1965, after Prime Minister Terence O'Neill had met with Irish Taoiseach Seán Lemass criticism started to grow of apparent appeasement of the Republic of Ireland. By 1967 and 1968 criticism of government ministers was so virulent from within the Orange Order that a number failed to turn up to make speeches on the Twelfth of July.¹⁵ The Twelfth parades, for so long apparent rituals of state, were becoming the site of a struggle over the future of Unionism.

For the Orange Order, much worse was to come. As territorial boundaries became more clearly demarcated some traditional routes taken by Orangemen began to look more like invasions of territory. This became immediately obvious for the Apprentice Boys of Derry who held their parades in a city with a predominantly Catholic population. Disturbances at the parades on 12 August 1969 are sometimes seen as the start of 'the Troubles', since British troops started policing the streets just days later. Similarly, in Belfast the White Rock parade, on the last Saturday of June, held by West Belfast Orangemen became highly problematic since it spread to the Springfield Road, near to the Catholic Falls area of Belfast. The parade has been a source of conflict ever since.

Consequently, an interesting shift in the nature of street disturbances can be noted through this period. Prior to August 1970 they seem to concentrate around Civil Rights events. After this time, parades by the Orange Order, Apprentice Boys and Black Institution become the focus. The nature of the violence around territories led the Civil Rights Movement to retreat but left the Loyal Order parades in a difficult position. After all, they had dominated public space for fifty years. The position was even more problematic since within the Orange Order were members of the RUC and government who counselled caution. A Northern Ireland Home Office Report from 1970 provides a fascinating example concluding that

14 Bryan, *Orange Parades*, 60-77.

15 Ibid. 80-2.

there were an 'unreasonable number of processions'¹⁶ and that Orange Parades should be stopped on the Grosvenor, Springfield and Crumlin Roads and part of the Antrim Road. Furthermore, it recommended that local lodge parades preceding main parades should be curtailed.¹⁷ Orangeman, Minister of State for Home Affairs, and senior UUP politician, John Taylor, chaired the working group producing this report. The reality for some UUP politicians attempting to deal with the crisis was that parades needed to be restricted. In fact, the security situation led the Orange Order to abandon the tradition of marching with the lodge banner from the house of each lodge Master to the hall since this put too great a strain on the police. Instead, larger district parades prior to the Twelfth, sometimes known as the mini-Twelfth, were held.¹⁸ Hardliners, however, were looking for the Orange Order to organise the fight against Irish Republicanism. For them, retreat from their traditional routes was not a welcome option.

The Orange Orders' function as organiser of a populist ritual and also as provider of a substantial number of 'respectable' people in government left it with extreme difficulties, which arguably it never adequately resolved. Anecdotally Orangemen have pointed out to me that many of their more middle class brethren, particularly in Belfast, started leaving the Order at the time. This may also be connected to the rapid decline in local industries with the consequently reduced role for the Order in economic patronage. When, in 1972, the British government prorogued the Northern Ireland Parliament introducing direct rule from Westminster, political patronage was also diminishing. In short, the context in which the Orange Order and its parades were taking place was changing dramatically, and the Institution and its rituals were struggling to adapt.

Ritual Change

Rituals that exist over long periods of time, and through periods of fundamental social change, must be adapting or they would go out of existence. 'Traditional' rituals are only in certain respects the bearers of continuity. Just because a ritual appears to be unchanged does not mean that it is serving the same function throughout its history. David Cannadine has shown how the coronation of the British monarch has shifted in function over periods of time coming to reflect the realities of mass politics in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ The changes, however, are masked by a discourse

16 Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, CAB4/1569/19: Future Policy on Processions etc. First Report of the Joint Working Party on Procession etc. Joint Working Party on Procession. Northern Ireland Home Affairs Office, p. 7.

17 Ibid., p. 16-7.

18 Bryan *Orange Parades*, 119-20.

19 David Cannadine, 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c.1820-1977', in Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, 101-64.

that claims 'tradition' and continuity. Similarly, Maurice Bloch in his analysis of circumcision rituals in Madagascar shows how the same ritual is used to give legitimacy to different political regimes over a two hundred year period.²⁰ Apparent continuity in a ritual over periods of time is no evidence of a lack of change.

The claim to 'tradition' made by the Orange Order over their parades must be seen in this context. Since the 1960s Orange parades have clearly changed in terms of their symbolic content and relationship to the state. Some of the parades have become more assertive and overtly political in nature. The parades themselves and the speeches made at the field have developed into sites for internal political conflict between different forms of unionism. The symbolic content of the parade has changed with the introduction of new flags and uniforms both by Orangemen and, more significantly, by the accompanying bandsmen. Parade route changes have been made, both willingly and enforced. New parades have been added to the parading calendar, a few have been lost, whilst others have changed in terms of what they commemorate. The numbers of Orangemen taking part has declined significantly, particularly in urban areas, whilst some types of marching bands have prospered. Blood and Thunder marching bands have increased in number while fewer accordion and silver bands, often viewed as more respectable, participate in parades.

In my view the key to understanding these changes is to examine the networks of political power and influence within which the Orange Order has worked. As an example of change, the views of John Hermon, Chief Constable of the RUC from 1979-89 on the Loyal Orders is instructive.

By mid-May 1985, the Force [the RUC] was fully prepared to address the smouldering problem of loyalist parades. Over a century, these had been given special position in Northern Ireland and appeared to have acquired a sort of temporal sanctity. Participants believed they could march wherever and whenever they chose. Their marches epitomise the right to civil and religious liberty, as long as the religion in question is Protestantism ... I was not alone in believing that the superior attitude of the loyalists, in respect to their marches, had to be changed.²¹

It is inconceivable that a Chief Constable in the 1950s or 1960s would have held such views and even more unlikely that he would express them. It was clear, after 1972, that it would be difficult to reinstate a local Parliament and even more unlikely that it would have powers over local policing. As such, the influence the Order had held since the setting up of Northern Ireland was gone. The handful of Unionist MPs in Westminster carried limited power. In the 1950s issues over the right to parade had allowed the Orange Order to wield its political weight and influence over the Home Affairs Ministers at the time.²² The Secretary of State for

Northern Ireland and a range of people dealing with security issues at the height of the troubles were not so sympathetic, as became obvious with the Drumcree disputes in 1985 and 1986,²³ then again 1995-2003.²⁴

As the Orange Order has struggled to maintain political influence to sustain traditional routes, so the hegemonic control of senior Unionists within the Order also waned. Loyalists in working class districts of Belfast did not view the Orange Order as the organisation likely to defend their communities. Rather the paramilitaries, the UVF and UDA grew in strength. The UDA conducted parades in areas in which they were strong. That is not to say they abandoned the Twelfth but rather started to reflect their own politics within the Twelfth through the development of Blood and Thunder flute bands that in their names, emblems and flags reflected the defence of the area they came from. Indeed, in terms of the ritual commemorations of the Twelfth, by far the most distinctive developments within this period were the Blood and Thunder bands.²⁵ Whilst these sorts of bands had always been around Orange events and can be traced back to the rough 'drumming parties' of the nineteenth century, the 1970s and 1980s saw the creation of a large number of new bands based in working class areas of Belfast and in estates in rural towns. Some of the bands could have up to 70 members and were run on a pseudo-military style. However they are also the place for illicit drinking for young boys and girls both in venues where the bands practiced and on the parades. It is often the bands that dress up in fancy dress on Twelfth parades, breaking the military poise of the event and creating a sense of carnival. In addition, the uniforms of the bands have developed remarkably since the early 1970s. To begin with many bands dressed in grey trousers, a coloured v-neck sweater and a matching cap or beret. However, by the 1980s a variety of much more elaborate uniforms were being worn and by the time I undertook fieldwork from 1991 onwards the majority of bands had more expensive and sometimes highly designed and colourful uniforms. Many also developed coats of arms or crests for their band as well as drawing upon some contemporary cartoon characters for the heads of the large base drum that features in the centre of the band.

Not only were these types of bands increasingly the only ones hired by the Orange lodges but the bands themselves also organised their own band parades and competitions held on Friday and Saturday nights right across Northern Ireland. Some in the Orange Order mourned these changes as the respectable nature of the parades was seen to decline²⁶ but

20 Maurice Bloch, *From Blessing to Violence* (Cambridge 1986).

21 John Hermon, *Holding the Line: an Autobiography* (Dublin 1997), 171-2.

22 Jeffrey, 'Parades, Police, and Government'; Bryan, *Orange Parades*, 74-7.

23 Dominic Bryan, T.G. Fraser and Seamus Dunn, *Political Rituals: Loyal Parades in Portadown* (Coleraine 1995).

24 Chris Ryder and Vincent Kearney, *Drumcree: The Orange Order's Last Stand* (London 2001).

25 Desmond Bell, *Acts of Union* (London 1990).

26 *The Orange Standard*, June 1977, July 1979, September 1981, May 1982, September 1985, December 1985, September 1986, November 1986, May 1987, September 1987, July 1988.

relatively little was done to control the behaviour and displays of these bands. The parading 'tradition' was directly reflecting fundamental changes in power and the communal politics within the Protestant community in the 1970s and 1980s.

A key dispute in the control of the content of the parades was the carrying of flags by bands and lodges during the parades. Those marching bands with links to the paramilitaries sometimes carry the 'standards' of those organisations. It is reasonably common to see UVF flags in Orange parades, in part because those carrying the flags claim it has historical significance. Since men of the UVF of 1912, many being Orangemen, joined the 36th Ulster Division that fought at the Battle of the Somme in 1916, the carrying of UVF flags and 36th Ulster Division flags with 'battle honours' on them is seen to have historical legitimacy. The link between the bands and the contemporary UVF tends to be ignored by those defending the carrying of the standards. The UDA has no historical links with the Orange Order and UDA flags are less often tolerated by organisers. Nevertheless, UDA and UVF flags were not uncommon in the early 1990s when I was watching a range of Orange parades. The UVF and UDA are prescribed organisations under emergency legislations, many Unionist politicians have criticised them, and the flying of such flags is illegal. This, of course, was one of the issues that increasingly started to worry the RUC in the late 1970s and into the 1980s. Of more interest in terms of ritual change is the fact that there is little or no record of these flags being flown at the Twelfth prior to the 1970s. Whatever the support amongst those that are involved in Twelfth parades, the use of these flags is a reflection of changes in the social and political context in which the parades were taking place. Even if one argues that there was not wide spread support for them within the Orange Order, and there is certainly support in some areas, then there is clearly a change in power relations allowing those organisations to represent themselves through the Twelfth parades.

It is much harder to estimate quite what the flying of other flags indicates, but through the 1970s it was noted that the Ulster flag (red cross of St George on a white background, with the crown above a red hand in a white star) was becoming more popular, sometimes replacing the Union flag. Certainly the Ulster workers strike of 1974 heightened disillusion amongst Unionists with the role of the British State. There have also been periods when the Independent Ulster flag (red cross on a blue background, with red hand in a yellow star) has been flown from street lamp-posts although I have only seen them in an Orange parade on a couple of occasions. But what is clear is that the ritual parades provide a space within which a variety of, sometimes contradictory, political expressions can appear. Other contemporary political representations have also appeared in the parades. From the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in November 1985 Unionists ran a concerted campaign against the political arrangements that gave the Republic of Ireland some say in the affairs of

Northern Ireland. Small protest banners saying 'No to Dublin Interference' were routinely hung from Orange banners.

Orange parades were adapting to changing social and political circumstances. Based on figures from the Orange Order, by looking at photographs of parades, and drawing on what Orangemen have told me, the number of Orangemen appears to have declined consistently since the 1960s. Current estimates would put numbers at not much above 40,000 whereas the Order would have claimed numbers of 100,000 through much of the century. This decline might be due to the inability of the Orange Order to play an effective political role, or reflect a more mobile population breaking up communities from which lodges were drawn. Alternatively, there might also be a general decline in these sorts of organisations, or, most likely, a combination of all these factors. The Twelfth of July is still a central ritual event for Unionism and draws support from a far greater range of people than just Orangemen and their families, but the Order is struggling to maintain its influence in a whole range of areas.

Policing the Rituals and Public Space

The most obvious way the rituals surrounding the Twelfth have changed is in their relationship to the state. As suggested above, it is reasonable to view these as state events from the 1920s to the 1960s. However, once the hegemonic control of the UUP had begun to dissipate the place of the Orange Order was also under threat. As discussed above, policing Orange and other Loyal Order parades became particularly problematic after about 1970. 'Loyal' Orangemen demanding their 'traditional' routes found themselves facing the, or should I say 'their', *Royal* Ulster Constabulary, not to mention the British Army. Clashes with security forces over routes and violent behaviour of those on the parade were not unusual. And whilst the period from 1974 through to the early 1980s proved something of a respite, issues developed again in 1984 in Castlewellan, Downpatrick and Ballynahinch in County Down. More seriously still, in 1985, parades through the Tunnel area of Portadown, County Armagh, came under question. At first the RUC appeared willing to attempt to police it in spite of opposition but that became harder and the Orange Order did not help itself by the uncompromising way it demanded its 'traditional' routes.²⁷

Interestingly, the Drumcree parade dispute that flared up again in 1995 is often traced back to the early 1990s but it is important to remember that disputes in 1985 and 1986 led to six major riots in Portadown, the death of the first Protestant, Keith White, from an RUC baton round and, in 1987, a change in public order legislations. At the time the disputes became part of Unionist protests over the Anglo-Irish Agreement although the evidence suggests that changes to parading policy were taking place before any possible influence from Dublin. Significantly, the new public order legisla-

27 Bryan, Fraser and Dunn, *Political Rituals*.

tion, though not dramatically different from that used in England and Wales dropped the clause that police should have regard to the desirability of not interfering with "a public procession customarily held along a particular route."²⁸ In other words, exemptions for 'traditional' parades, given under previous legislation, were taken away. The enactment of the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 was greeted with hostility by Orangemen who in a number of areas refused to hand in the required notification to the police before a parade.

In July 1992, following the UDA murder of five people in a betting shop on lower end of the Catholic Ormeau Road, some members of an Orange parade walking through the area waved five fingers at protestors whilst a woman in the parade danced down the centre of the road. The next day the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Sir Patrick Mayhew, stated the behaviour of the Orangemen would have 'disgraced a tribe of Cannibals'.²⁹ The Lower Ormeau Concerned Community group received increasing publicity as the number of parades through the area was highlighted. For the loyal orders this was the start of a campaign by residents in Nationalist neighbourhoods that was going to see a range of 'traditional' parades restricted.

The more restrictive policing of Orange parades was preceded by a more relaxed attitude to Nationalist and particularly Republican parades. Whilst individual changes look insignificant, if we examine the use of public space the totality of change comes into view. For example, in 1992, for the first time, Sinn Féin were allowed to hold a parade through the centre of Belfast. In the years that followed demonstrations over internment that had previously taken place within Nationalist areas such as west Belfast now started in those areas but finished at City Hall. The centre of Belfast was shared space in a way that it had never been before.

In 1994 the IRA announced a ceasefire and shortly afterwards loyalist paramilitaries, the UVF and UDA, did the same. Although the IRA ceasefire broke down between 1995 and 1997 the context within which politics was taking place was changing. The changes brought about have been discussed in a number of respects. What is clear is that the nature of the conflict was transforming from one between the military forces of the state and paramilitaries to issues over policing, human rights, justice and equality. Indeed, in some respects Sinn Féin were returning to some of the ground, politically and literally, on which the Civil Rights Movement stood in the late 1960s. The ceasefires also changed the political dynamic within Nationalist areas and the cessation of violence removed a barrier to constitutional nationalists, natural supporters of the Social and Democratic Labour Party (SDLP), from working more closely with Sinn Féin. Unionist

28 Tom Hadden and Anne Donnelly, *The Legal Control of Marches* (Northern Ireland Community Relations Council 1997).

29 *Irish News*, 11 July 1992.

depictions of the pan-Nationalist front, the SDLP, Sinn Féin and the Irish Government, had some truth. We might also speculate that with the removal of threats of violence public demonstrations and protests became easier. The conflict was moving from the dark allies back out on to the streets. Whilst the political leaders of Irish Nationalism took part in the peace process, local community groups, Residents Groups, became active on the issue of parades going through their area.

Another important change is worth mentioning. Policing was a significant issue in the peace process and whilst the Patten Commission on policing in Northern Ireland was not set up until 1998 there is no doubt that reform of the RUC was taking place. This reform became clear on 9 July 1995 when the annual Orange parade from Portadown to the Church of Ireland church at Drumcree was blocked by the RUC from returning along the Garvaghy Road because of some protestors. The RUC had taken a harder line on some parades in the 1980s including the outward route of the Drumcree parade, and had particularly shown concern over the increasing number of paramilitary displays within Orange parades. However, it is inconceivable that the RUC would have made such a decision to stop a Portadown parade thirty years earlier.

The stand-offs at Drumcree church in 1995 and 1996 both resulted in the Orange Order eventually taking their traditional route but had huge financial costs in policing, led directly to the loss of one life, and had great political costs for the Orange Order. Both years it was the threat of force from the loyalist crowds gathering at Drumcree church and, in 1996, from the chaos caused by Orange Order protest parades and road blocks all over Northern Ireland, which drove the necessity of eventually allowing the parade to take place. But it was clearly unsustainable for the British Government and the RUC to have their decisions forced in such a way. Whilst many Nationalists argue that the parade was put down in 1996 after five days of a stand-off because police officers were going to mutiny, I have consistently found, from police officers I have spoken to, that the RUC's professional pride was undermined when their Chief Constable, Hugh Annesley, felt it necessary to reverse his decision and allow the parade. From the point of view of many RUC officers, they had been defeated.

In August 1996 the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Patrick Mayhew, announced a review of legislation over marches and in January 1997 the Independent Review of Parades and Marches, chaired by Sir Peter North (the North Report) recommended that decisions over parades should be taken from the police and given to an independent commission.³⁰ In July 1997 the police decided to allow the Drumcree parade to take place along the Garvaghy Road, but in April 1998 the Party Processions (Northern Ireland) Act came into force and the Parades Commission

30 *Independent Review of Parades and Marches* (London 1997).

made 'determinations' on a range of parades. The Drumcree parade was stopped from going down the Garvaghy Road and at the time of writing Orangemen have still not been able to take this route. Orange Order protests in 1998 ended in tragedy when a house in Ballymoney was petrol bombed and three young boys died. It has always been disputed by members of the Order that this act had anything to do with their protests but the perceptions were that it did. Senior Orangemen decided that the protests had to be scaled down. In the years that followed the numbers protesting at Drumcree have reduced whilst there has been much public support from various loyalist paramilitary figures. This has further marginalised the position of the Orange Order.

Through the 1990s the Orange Order suffered restrictions on routes in Belfast, Londonderry, Portadown, Lurgan, Newtownbutler, Bellaghy, Dunloy, Newry, Ballycastle, Pomeroy, Kilkeel and others places. There is still an enormous number of parades. During the year 2001/02, there were 3301 parades in Northern Ireland of which the largest number, 2489 (75 percent), were categorized as 'loyalist', whilst 584 (18 percent) were categorized as 'others', and only 228 (7 percent) as 'nationalist'.³¹ But there was clearly a significant alteration in the position of traditional Orange rituals and public space. The rituals were reflecting a change in the access of the Order to power.

That reduction in power may also be to do with the decline in the number of Orangemen. At the height of the conflict over the parade at Drumcree a hard-line ginger-group, the Spirit of Drumcree, became active critics of the way those governing the Orange Order, the Grand Lodge of Ireland, were handling the situation. Amongst the information they divulged was the suggestion that membership of the Orange Order was around 45,000. This was significantly lower than even those who had recognised the decline had speculated. I have reason to believe this figure is accurate. In addition, the activities of the Orange Order brought it into direct conflict with mainstream elements of all the major Protestant Churches. The number of vocal critics within the Church of Ireland increased and Presbyterians and Methodists started to question the use of their churches by the Orange Order. Despite their sympathies over the parades issues, for many Protestants, who place great store by abiding by the laws of the state, the protests of the Orange Order were unacceptable. So through a period of time when all the evidence suggests the Protestant community has felt under threat the organisation that, certainly since the 1870s, most symbolised the community appears to have gone into decline.

31 Parades Commission for Northern Ireland, *Fourth Annual Report 2001/02* (London 2002), 32.

Conclusions

Throughout this period of change the Orange Order have kept strictly to a discourse that they must maintain their traditional parades. I have described in other places how this is sustained³² but it seems reasonable to argue that this is as a result of the pressure the hegemonic power of Orange parades came under after 1960. Pierre Bourdieu argued that discourses of heterodoxy opposing the dominant ideas will be responded to by arguments of orthodoxy.³³ 'Traditionality' is the discourse of orthodoxy. It is a claim to a legitimacy drawn from the past and relies on a sense of continuity. Ritual events provide spaces whereby change can take place within an apparent container of continuity. They are therefore key arenas for the maintenance of political identity.

Since the 1960s Northern Ireland has gone through tremendous changes with relations of power between Protestant and Catholic communities being transformed. Public space and rituals of representation have both reflected but also driven processes of change. The Civil Rights marches threatened a status quo and parades organised by the Orange Order have attempted to maintain their pre-eminence through the same public space. But as well as this the rituals of the Orange Order are also the site of contest within Unionism. The parades reflected changes within Unionist and loyalist politics, the decline in the hegemony of the UUP, challenged by the more strident loyalism of the DUP) and paramilitaries.

Public rituals have remained central to the communal identity politics of Northern Ireland. But they do not provide evidence that the conflict is stagnant and that the people of Northern Ireland remain caught in their history. Rather they indicate that people utilise the past to deal with contemporary changes. The rituals are actually revealed as the sites of political contest and negotiation and whilst providing the legitimacy of 'tradition' they are tools of contemporary politics.

32 Dominic Bryan "'Ireland's very own Jurassic Park': the Mass Media, Orange Parades and the Discourse on Tradition", in Anthony Buckley (ed.), *Symbols in Northern Ireland* (Belfast 1998), 23-42.

33 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge 1977).