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## **Parading memory and re-member-ing conflict:**

### **Collective memory in transition in Northern Ireland**

#### *Abstract:*

In Northern Ireland, parades have long been important carriers of politico-cultural identities and collective memories, as well as arenas of struggle and conflict. Taking as its starting point that these contests over meaning are always framed by their contexts of articulation both in temporal and spatial terms, this article examines the role of parades in the current 'post-conflict' phase of the peace process as it plays out in a particular location, namely North Belfast. Using theories of cultural and collective memory and examples from republican and loyalist parades in North Belfast, it is argued that there is fear of memory and identity collapse in particular communities on the margins of the peace process, leading to a conscious doubling of efforts to (re)articulate the hidden recesses of memory in the current transition. In this, the patterns of 'competitive commemoration' in parades should be understood both horizontally: as majority memory traditions move to minority memory positions; and vertically: in relation to the increasing dissonance between vernacular practices of conflict and the official post-conflict discourses in Northern Ireland. Central to these arguments is the recognition that parading traditions are at once presentist, competitive instruments and also emotional and embodied practices to ensure the continuity of identity. It follows, that both dimensions must be recognised together, if cognitive and visceral templates of conflict are to be explained and shifted. This article applies a wide-angle memory studies lens to capture the two together and explore the changing parade-scape.

#### **Introduction**

Every year, thousands of parades and processions set out to commemorate carefully chosen events or iconic figures in Northern Ireland. Here, parading has historically been used to articulate specific constitutional positions and national aspirations (Jarman, 1997), and it has continued to be an important carrier of politico-religious identities and collective memories beyond the political peace agreement in 1998. This particular ritual of maintaining collective memory has been consistently generating cultural and political conflict in a triangulated relationship between the Protestant community, the Catholic community and the state in Northern Ireland. As Northern Ireland is gradually emerging from conflict in a

negotiated political process, parades as a politico-cultural practice continue to cause eruptions in the settlement of differences.

Correspondingly, the 'marching season', as an arena for politico-cultural struggles and resistance, has been used to index relations between communities, between society and the state and, more recently, the robustness of the peace process.

As the contest over meaning is always framed by the context of articulation both in temporal and spatial terms, this article examines the role of parades in the current 'post-conflict' phase of the peace process as it plays out in a particular location. Using theories of cultural and collective memory and examples from republican and loyalist parades in North Belfast, it is argued that there is fear of memory and identity collapse in particular communities on the margins of the peace process leading to a conscious doubling of efforts to (re)articulate the hidden recesses of memory in the current transition. In this, the patterns of 'competitive commemoration' in parades should be understood both horizontally: as majority memory traditions move to minority memory positions; and vertically: in relation to the increasing dissonance between vernacular practices of conflict and the official post-conflict discourses in Northern Ireland. Central to both arguments is the recognition that parading traditions are at once presentist and competitive instruments, whilst also emotional practices to ensure the continuity of identity. It follows, that both dimensions must be recognised together, if cognitive and visceral templates of conflict are to be shifted. This article applies a wide angle memory studies lens to capture the two together and explore the changing parade-scape.

The emotive use of collective memory to charge processes of identity formation can be a pivotal part of protracted and sectarian conflict (Horowitz, [1985] 2000; Bar-Tal, 1997; Cairns & Roe, 2003; Mann, 2005; Roudometof, 2002; cf. Asmal et al., 1996). In this context,

commemoration and memorialisation often work to enhance and reinforce exclusive group solidarities (Abou Assi, 2010; McDowel & Braniff, 2014). The study of peace processes thus demands specific understandings of the role of history and memory as conflict dynamics, as well as strategies for studying these as both critical events and as critical continuities. In Northern Ireland, parades provide a unique case for this approach as they draw on and reframe collective memories through partly ritualised practices that at once challenge and are regulated by the state, reflecting dynamics of identity politics between political institutions and cultural traditions in societal transitions.

While parading by no means is a cultural phenomenon exclusive to Northern Ireland, it is an exceptionally prolific and problematic practice there. According to official numbers there are currently around 4000 parades annually in a country of approximately 1,8 million people – a number that has doubled since the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994. The parades are not evenly distributed across the year, but concentrated in a ‘marching season’ that runs roughly from April to August and provides a rhythmic focal point and outlet for community tensions and political unrest. Though the lion’s share of these parades pass with no incident, a number of them are contested, and a fraction lead to critical public disorder, riots and violence.

The article engages North Belfast specifically as a case where commemorative rituals are used as an instrument in a number of ways: in the inter-communal competition for domination of space; in the intra-communal struggle for domination of community; in the negotiation of the ongoing peace process in an area that has been savaged by conflict and reaped few of the benefits of peace. I use contested parades in this context as illustrative cases of culture as a site of struggle, but crucially consider them within the wider identity-making commemorative culture of parading and marching in dialogue with the peace process.

As an interdisciplinary field, memory studies hosts a broad spectrum of terminology on collective memory. Analytical distinctions centre around the collective that is referred to; the distance from which we remember; the modes of recall; and the drivers of memory (Olick, 1998; Misztal, 2003; Roudometof, 2007; Assmann, 2008). Parading as a socio-politico-cultural phenomenon bridges and complicates many of these structural, temporal and relational distinctions, and provides an ample illustration of Assmann's suggestion that the structure of terminology is in fact more like a dynamic, 'creating tension and transition between the various poles' (2010, p. 113).

Contested parades in Northern Ireland are an interesting and complex passageway for studying collective memory and its political, spatial and temporal dimensions. Parades provide procedures, scripts and choreography that frequently reactivate memory and enhance collective participation. As such, parades are sites of many kinds of different collective memories that are woven together, the mediated memory of a more mythical past, the embodied memory of marching, the intergenerational shared social memory of commemorating and participating in these events and the trans-generational cultural memory constructed and embedded by symbols, materials and procedures. It is not difficult to see the binding function of parades in giving expression to collective identities. In Northern Ireland, however, collective identities are also institutionalised in the consociational design of political structures that posit communities rather than individuals as the fundamental political units in society (Taylor, 2009). This compounds a political dimension to the expression of collective memory, which is significant in understanding the contemporary Northern Irish parading tradition.

Analysed together as a form of politico-cultural theory on the street, collective memory and parades speak to issues of path dependence in conflict, mnemonic choreographies of

violence, and not least the inscription and re-description of ‘master narratives’ (Zerubavel, 1995) in particular places– linking past and present in remembering and forgetting. The sociologist Olick, recently asserted that it remains unclear what kind of inquiries the term ‘collective memory’ inspire (2011, p. 16). I don't propose to labour under a concise definition of collective memory here, beyond agreeing with Boym that ‘it [collective memory] allows one to describe the phenomenology of human experience’ (2001, p. 54). In this article, looking at parades in Northern Ireland that traverse spatial and temporal, social, cultural and political terrains can provide a locus for studying horizontal and vertical collective memory discourses, as well as their circulation in conflict and during conflict transformations.

After an introduction to the parading culture in Northern Ireland, the first part of the article considers the different layers of memory at play in parades. The second part examines the dynamics of spatial memory and particular parading routes of violence, while the third and final part discusses the role of parading memory in transitions as some memory discourses move from the centre stage to the periphery.

## **Parading**

As a historical phenomenon, sectarian parading in Ireland has existed since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The main organisations on the Protestant side are the secret societies, also known as ‘The Loyal Orders’, most notably the Orange Order, the Royal Black institution and the Apprentice Boys of Derry, who initially commemorated events of the religious wars of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but since have added various events of Protestant perseverance to the commemorative calendar. On the Catholic side the most prominent organisations have been the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Irish National Foresters and the Gaelic League, who celebrate St. Patrick's day, Lady Day and support Irish nationalism and Gaelic revival (Farrell,

2000; Jarman & Bryan, 1998). The two parading traditions are by no means symmetrical although they do feed off each other. They have exhibited different (and changing) relations to the state and different access to the public sphere, just as they have also had access to decisively different resources in terms of political and economic power. Crucially, the Protestant parading tradition is very strong and predominant in its community, whereas the Catholic parading tradition never held sway in the same way (de Rosa, 1998). Indeed currently 63% of parades are organized by what is defined as 'broad unionist' in comparison with 4% defined as 'broad nationalist', while the remaining 33% are accounted as 'other' i.e. church, charity, sport etc. (Parades Commission, 2013).

Parades have continually changed character, again, in dialogue with political and structural change. Borrowing from Bastian, it may be argued that they function as records. That is, they operate within a context, they have a structure, and they contain and impart content (2013).

Up until the partition of the island of Ireland in 1921, parades charged sectarian divisions and particularly powered the debates around union and Home Rule (Loughlin, 2000). After partition, seminal events like the 'two 1916s' (the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme, respectively) became exclusive sectarian memories that were separately commemorated and employed to foster hegemonic official narratives in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, July 12<sup>th</sup> became a state holiday to commemorate the 1690 Battle of the Boyne. As part of the outbreak of the 'Troubles' in the late 60s 'politics in the streets' were re-configured in the campaign for civil rights (Purdie, 1990), and as conflict developed, commemorative practices followed suit. Marching became a more conspicuous motor of resistance to the state, particularly for the Republican community, as pivotal events such as the introduction of internment (1971), Bloody Sunday (1972) and

the hunger strikes (1981) were contested in the contemporary public space and afterwards remembered on an annual basis (Jarman & Bryan, 1998). In the burgeoning peace process, the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994 saw confrontations around parades intensify, as novel forms of organised protests manifested in 'resident groups' grew (Jarman, 2003). When the annual marching season became an increasingly violent, ritual negotiation of access to public space between paraders, protesters and police a 'Parades Commission' was set up in 1998 to adjudicate on contentious parades. All parades must be notified to the commission, which can mandate changes in route, time, and behaviour of parades considered "contentious" in the interest of public order. Regulation of commemorative parades has a long pedigree in Ireland and crucially reflects relations between populace and state, whilst also demonstrating the growing sophistication of bureaucratic practices in dealing with public order. From the Party Processions Act in 1850 to the Public Processions Act in 1998, legal and policy instruments to govern the parading landscape have been developed and disputed. The creation of a Parades Commission represented an attempt to 'address longstanding structural inequalities in the public sphere and illustrates the potential capacity of an institution to address entrenched identity-based conflict and deepen the roots of democratic governance.' (Hamilton & Bryan, 2006). However, the Parades Commission has also become a body of contention. It has never been formally accepted by the Orange Order, and many sections of the wider unionist community continue to lobby for its replacement (Jarman, Rallings, Bell, 2009, p. 11)). It must also be noted that the constitution of the commission as predominantly male, has given rise to criticisms, particularly prior to 2006 (Hillyard, McWilliams, Ward, 2006).

The politico-cultural practice of commemorative parading has thus been both a source and a manifestation of contention in Northern Ireland. Throughout the political transitions of the last 20 years, the marching season has been a challenge to the peace process as a constant

reminder that, despite political agreements, people and parties departed from different historical positions and are in transition to different future destinations. In contemporary terms, 'competitive commemoration' (McBride, 2001) continues to be a constant fixture, where 'memory entrepreneurs' (Pollak, 2000; Abou Assi, 2010 cf: Haugbolle, 2010; Braniff et al., 2012; Holyfield & Beacham, 2011) peddle selective, partisan accounts (both activating and actively forgetting the past) to construct a meaningful connection between past, present and future, to ensure that they will be 'tomorrow's ancestors' (McCrone, 1998). In this respect it is also worth noting that traditional organisations to a certain extent have been eclipsed by different configurations of 'memory entrepreneurs' highlighting the dynamic between political power, compromises and cultural practices. In post peace agreement Northern Ireland, traditional Protestant parades have provided critical platforms for airing objections to the course of the peace process and republican parades have continued to keep vigil over the unaddressed atrocities of state policy.

Illustrating this, there is a noticeable rise in ad hoc parades operating outside traditional systems and institutions and marching on dates outside the ordinary 'marching calendar', this is particularly the case on the loyalist side where the phenomena has increased by 22% in just a year<sup>1</sup>. Another development in the Republican 'paradescape' has been the withdrawal of mainstream republican organizations from a number of the conventional commemorative spaces and in some cases the abandonment of 'martyriological narratives' (Giesen, 2004) in order to embrace a more confident mode of celebrating community. This is evident in the transformation of 'internment week' into the West Belfast Festival in the 1980s and more recently in the suggestion that the annual internment rally could be replaced by a day of

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<sup>1</sup> This rise is usually explained with reference to the 'flag protests', protesting the discontinued flying of the Union Jack from Belfast City Hall 365 days a year (Nolan 2014).

political activity and education (Morrison, 2007). This speaks of course directly to a change of political fortunes, where Sinn Fein has become a central part of the government of Northern Ireland and therefore cannot perpetuate a structural criticism of the institutions of the state. However, it also abandons a particular, resonant narrative and ritual to other agents, who do not support the current peace agreement. A number of republican marches and parades are now organised by what is termed 'dissident republicans'. Amongst these is an annual 'anti-internment' rally, which not only addresses the failed internment policy of the 1970s, but also includes contemporary security policy and conditions for republican prisoners in maximum security prisons like Maghaberry, effectively positing a critical continuity rather than a critical change in the wake of the 1998 and 2006 peace agreements.

A similarity in loyalist and dissident republican parading might be indicated here: they both seem to be marching for and against a past version of the state in a new political situation. Dissident republicans refuse to recognise the new political dispensation as new, and loyalists sense that the state in its current form has withdrawn from them.

Furthermore, since the peace agreement of 1998 commemorative parades for victims of violence, but also for paramilitary volunteers who gave their lives 'in the line of duty' have swelled in number and, as such, unfolded yet another crease in the memorial fabric of conflict stretched out between past, present and future objectives.

### **Parading Collective Memory**

The point of departure for the study of collective memory is that memories are not just the property of the individual but also of the group. Most scholars begin investigations into collective memory studies with (at least) a nod to the legacy of Maurice Halbwachs and his pathbreaking work '*Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*' or, the Social Frameworks of Memory

from 1925 (e.g. Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy, 2011; Erll & Nünning, 2010). Combining and developing strands of thought from Bergson and Durkheim, Halbwachs moved beyond subjective time and individualistic consciousness to establish the ways in which social frameworks for memory operate and how a collective memory exists. The core idea is that memories, much like emotions, may be held by individuals, but are socially experienced and embodied in groups and cultures:

...it is in society that people normally require their memories. It is also in society they recall, recognize and localize their memories. [...] It is in this sense there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection. (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 38).

Or as Aleida Assman would later suggest 'the individual participates in the group's vision of its past by means of cognitive learning and emotional acts of identification and commemoration' (2008, p. 51). Cognitive psychologists have long stressed that both the content and the process of remembering is social; that conversational and ritual behavioural processes are important aspects of remembering, as is membership of social or ethnic groups where memory is (per)formed against the backdrop of social norms, institutions and networks of communication (Bartlett, 1932 quoted in Cairns & Roe, 2003). Studying collective memory is therefore far from trying to understand merely an aggregate of individual minds. It is more crucially about understanding the situations in which memory is recalled and the shifting social frameworks by which memory is stabilised or reshaped (Olick, 1999).

Parading is an activity that is at once embodied, disembodied and re-embodied, with consequences for the ways in which collective memory is both exercised and generated.

Obviously, nobody living today was present at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 or the rebellion of the United Irishmen in 1798. Nobody alive (or very few) signed the Ulster Covenant in 1912 or took part in the Battle of the Somme or the Easter Rising in 1916. But many trace their family and community history through these events, and most people can remember the parade commemorating these events last year and the year before that, and are often parading because their father and grandfathers and great grandfathers did so. In the case of the Protestant parades, people are sometimes literally, and always metaphorically, walking behind their fathers or wearing 'the sash my father wore' (Ruth Dudley Edwards, 1999; Dawson, 2007, p. 41). Indeed, most parades are family events where children are brought as a matter of course. In the Protestant community the 12<sup>th</sup> of July is an important holiday surpassed only by Christmas (Dudley-Edwards, 1999). Again, the parading organisations are also community hubs where for instance the local Orange lodges have important convivial functions, organising social life and providing nodal ports and points for collective memories. It is crucially also a strongly patriarchal tradition where men hold the political, social and moral authority and assign women what is deemed to be appropriate roles<sup>2</sup>.

Parades thus traverse and unite the collective memories of the individual and the family, as well as the community and the nation. By ritually collapsing memories of family, community and nation, parades powerfully unite individuals in particular collectivities, which leverage the past not only to mark cohesion, but to map out desired trajectories in to the future.

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<sup>2</sup> The gendered dimension of parading has been explored by Katy Radford in 'Drum Rolls and Gender Roles (2001) and Susan Salhany in 'Exposing Foucault's two rituals' (2007).

To move from the social memory of families and communities to the cultural and political memory of communities and nations, however, is to cross a threshold in time. There is, according to Vansina (1985), a 'floating gap' between communicative and cultural memory, between face-to-face interaction and the more semantic manifestations of memory. Cultural and political memories also rely on carriers other than individuals. Remote and mythic events cannot be remembered, they have to be memorised (Assmann, 2008, p. 51). They are thus disembodied, mediated memories conveyed by institutions like churches, schools, and museums. They are exteriorized and objectified in symbols such as flags and icons, they reside in material representations in the shape of memorials, statues and buildings, and they are repeated in procedures of commemorations and celebrations. Obviously, the material for constructing and embedding trans-generational memory is abundant in parades and the encompassing parading culture. It employs all the auxiliary symbolic carriers, the visual and verbal signs that aid memory: the formal dress, the silk banners, the snappy slogans, the multidirectional iconography (portraying both national and local heroes), music and lyrics (Jarman, 1997). In spatial terms, most parades have traditional routes linking memory and place, and will have geographical checkpoints in the shape of palpable relics like war memorials, monuments or gravesides and in the case of the Orange Order there are also the material buildings of Orange Halls from which parades may set out.

Commemorations have been described as the 'ritual of a ritual-less society' (Judt, 2008), but in Northern Ireland parades exercise collective memories so frequently and vividly that it forms part of everyday experience, thus complicating distinctions between *Milieux*- and *Lieux de Memoire* (Nora, 1989). Furthermore, the exclusive politico-cultural narratives that are exercised in parades have plenty of props to sustain them outside of marching seasons. The still prevalent tradition of mural paintings as territorial markers for both in and out groups,

rehearse much of the same visual symbolic imagery that is found in parades. In between the actual commemorative events some organisations even offer free drill training and musical tuition. Both loyalist and republican historical narratives are fiercely guarded to ensure perpetuation. The Orange Order, for example, reconstituted a Historical Committee after 1922, ostensibly to provide ethno-historical guidance for the maintenance of an Ulster-Protestant collective memory. Part of this work entailed archiving documents, erecting memorials, re-enacting events and lecturing (Kaufmann, 2007). Halbwachs argued that collective memory can fill the void between periods of 'effervescence' (when, according to Durkheim[1915], a community comes together, communicating the same thoughts and participating in the same action) and ordinary life (1992, p. 25) and it is clear that there are few empty spots in the lives of particular communities in Northern Ireland.

Parades, clearly, are then also sites of political memory as they both reflect and condition contemporary power relations and relations between state and society. Indeed as stated earlier, they are a regular test of peace and the popular and political will to pursue peace. In so doing, they also amply underscore the chasms that can emerge between official discourses on the peace process and more antagonistic commemorations of the past in what might be termed vernacular collective memories. In this sense, parades are important both as indicators of where communities feel themselves to be in relation to the state and as points of access to negotiations on the issue.

In addition, collective memory in Northern Ireland parading is strongly relational and competitive. Parades not only present the opportunity to remember as members of groups, they also constitute those groups and their members in the act – in that way re-member-ing (Olick, 1999, p. 342). The agents handling this politico-cultural carriage are often sectarian

institutions, catering for exclusive communities. What is remembered is often a charged narrative of acts of violence (battles, defeats), *men* of violence (revolutionaries, paramilitary leaders) or victims of violence (both of state, pro-state and anti-state forces). And the act of remembering regularly generates more violence – conceptualised by some, as commemorative violence (Braniff, Byrne & McDowell, 2012) – as contested parades are met with counterdemonstrations, protests and confrontations. In this sense, collective memories, as embodied in parades, are shaped not just by the groups parading, but also by their relations to other social groups.

Importantly, the parading issue is not just about confrontations between communities, but also between communities and the agents of the state. Since the law is recognised as an overarching discourse, which provides frameworks for the discursive creation of collective memories (Halbwachs, 1992[1980]; Reading, 2011; Meyer, 2010), it stands to reason to briefly consider the main body that gives expression to the law in terms of governing local practices: the Parades Commission. Here the Parades Commission represents an official discourse, which tries to regulate vernacular discourses and traditions. These acts of regulation at once shape the contemporary parading tradition and provoke resentment and protest.

There are a number of conditions that can be imposed on a contentious parade, ranging from regulating songs to be sung and symbols to be displayed, to restrictions on routes. These might include instructions on behaviour when passing places of worship or other locations of symbolic significance. Notably, any determination will include a section on 'Background'. In this section the pedigree of the parade is assessed: whether it has occasioned violence before; whether parade-related protests have been announced; and if that is the case; whether there

has been dialogue between the organisers and the protesters. Furthermore, the background section of a determination considers the immediate state of community relations in the psycho-social context of the parade.

At least three things can be deduced from this brief summary: firstly, the elaborate bureaucratic procedures clearly shape cultural traditions as mapping and remapping takes place in an attempt to fixate or supplant memory and geography. Demographic and territorial changes over time are overridden by 'traditional routes', which are again overridden by Parades Commission rulings either restricting, rerouting, or observing another geography in the shape of churches or war memorials. Secondly, recent memory already plays into determinations, as the historical trajectory of any given parade is taken into consideration. Thirdly, determinations are themselves contested, and give rise to what we might call 'determination memory', where the perceived injustice of specific, or sequential regulations lead to simmering anger and more commemorative violence. (Byrne, McDowell, Branif, 2012) (Cf Bryan & Jarman, 1999).

There are further complications: While parades offer an interesting junction of different layers of collective memory, what could be called 'retrograde strategies of emplotment' (cf. White, 1984; Barthes, 1972) further challenges how we might think about collective memory in this context. Although there might be long term structures to what a social group remembers and forgets, there are also clearly instrumental and presentist forces at work in most commemorative practices. The politics of history entail a conscious sifting and mining of the historical record as linkages are made between events, in order for communities to move steadily up and down history (Anderson, 1991, p. 26; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983).

Parading traditions, like other rituals, are dynamic. Despite claims of unbroken tradition,

they emerge, change, expand and deteriorate as social and historical processes (Grimes, 2011, p. 15). New parades are being added all the time and others fall away, particularly in times of transition (Bryan, 2006). New parades, however, are quick to assume the predicate of traditional since it literally gives right of way in the competitive commemorative landscape of Northern Ireland. Often new parades, feeder parades and counterdemonstrations are fuelled by present day tensions but fitted into a historical narrative and an overall tradition.

A recent example of competitive commemoration and accompanying commemorative violence, regards the emergence of the Henry Joy McCracken memorial parade in North Belfast. It is organized by Republican Network for Unity (RNU), which is a dissident alliance formed in opposition to the political compromises made in the peace process by the largest nationalist party Sinn Féin. Henry Joy McCracken was a Protestant Irish nationalist and a founding member of the Society of United Irishmen. He was hanged in 1798 as one of the leaders of the failed rebellion against British Rule in Ireland. Since 2011 Republican Network for Unity has organised a memorial march in his name, terminating at McCracken's graveside memorial in Clifton Street Cemetery, Belfast. The organisers maintain that the commemoration is a re-assertion of non-sectarian values, uniting Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter (albeit, in a common push for overthrowing British rule). According to the organisers, the purpose of the parade is to 'rededicate ourselves to the cause for which he [Henry Joy McCracken] gave his life' (RNU, 2013) However, since its inception, the march has stirred up tensions, partly because it is organised from an anti-peace-agreement platform, partly because it proposes to go along a contentious route, parts of which run along a particularly fractious interface and partly because chapters of the Royal Black Institutions march at the same time in the same area. As such, the Henry Joy McCracken parade could be

(and is) construed to be an attempt to encroach on territory, the political agenda and historical narrative, all at the same time. Importantly, this commemoration works in provoking the neighbouring loyalist community as well as the contemporary republican political elite that is wedded to the peace process. After an uneventful (in terms of violence) first outing of the Henry Joy McCracken parade in 2011, it came to violent riots and direct clashes between protesters, police and supporters when the parade was repeated in 2012. In 2013 the organisation of the Henry Joy McCracken parade almost appeared to be staged as a confrontation, as it was proposed to take place on the same day as a loyalist parade, rather than on what would have been Henry Joy McCracken's birthday (as it had been in previous years). The competition for access to public space resulted in a re-routing of the Henry Joy McCracken parade in 2013 by the Parades commission, partly because it coincided with the more established parade by the Royal Black Perceptory in the same vicinity, and partly (and relatedly), because of the threat of violent clashes between communities on the tender interface in North Belfast where both parades were due to take place. This prompted Garry McNally (acting national chair for RNU) to accuse the DUP, The Orange Order, the UVF, as well as Sinn Fein of respectively, 'thuggery', 'intimidation' and 'back room lobbying' which had induced the Parades Commission to 'effectively strangle' the march, by expecting the participants 'like second class citizens', to walk up 'back alleys' and 'narrow lanes' of the New Lodge (RNU, 2013) Speaking directly to the marchers at the point of the re-route, he encouraged them to disperse and instead go home and 're-double efforts' to build a United Republican Movement...' (RNU, 2013). As such, the narrative of the parade is intertwining threads of historical (and purist) republicanism, with the established civil rights template of the Catholic community as 'second class' citizens, and continued adherence to a republican struggle, in order to confront and protest what is perceived to be a continuation of structural

discrimination inside Northern Ireland.

In terms of memory, the Henry Joy McCracken commemoration is a more mediated form of historical consciousness, putting a Republican icon back onto the streets, so to speak. As such, they are trying to re-constitute pure Republican ideals and re-member the republican movement in opposition to the compromises made in the peace process. Remembering through a contested parade sharpens a political stance, marking both disagreement with Sinn Fein and the wider Northern Ireland state. However, it is also a more immediately violent event that gives rise to new embodied memories of violence in ensuing clashes with police and counterdemonstrations. Here, distant myths (or semantic memories) work as pretext for generating more urgent remembering/memories (specific episodic memories), thus, embedding the cumulative nature of conflict. Importantly, this commemoration is not just a stage en route in the Republican consciousness/catechism, but also tied to a particular place – Henry Joy McCracken’s grave in North Belfast.

### **Routes of Violence**

Place is an important host of memories, and while parades form part of an overarching culture they also fundamentally shape and are shaped by specific contexts. This section now turns to the particularly fluid communal landscape of North Belfast, in which competition for dominance over public space has created distinctive geographies of inhabited and embodied violent memory. The fluidity of the landscape in North Belfast echoes the fluidity of memory and the fear of losing ground(ing) in an ongoing transition. This fear is perpetuated by long-term socio-economic disadvantages and a contemporary lack of foothold in the political process of ‘moving on’ from violent conflict.

As has been made clear, parades in Northern Ireland are mostly exclusive events, which rehearse a master commemorative narrative composed of a sectarian selection of events, reminding a group of its distinct social identity and historical development in a ritual performance (Zerubavel, 1995; Connerton, 1989). Tensions arise when such exclusive narratives are taken to the streets and asserted across territories where they do not resonate and are met by organised resistance. In an urban space, like for example North Belfast, which is a patchwork of sectarian enclaves and fraught interfaces, particular parading routes are constant conduits of conflict.

Political and human geography is concerned with the ways in which social identities are shaped in relation to political-territorial constructions of place.

In Northern Ireland residential segregation and sectarian marking of territory are prominent features of urban space and work as powerful *aides de memoir* of conflict. As Shirlow and Murtagh (2006) suggest, the borders between loyalist/unionist and republican/nationalist spaces are more than boundaries between communities, they are also important instruments defining discursively marked space. Interface walls do not just serve to impede violence between communities but can be construed as crucial structures that reduce contact and create distance between communities. Specifically, they underline the capacity of such boundaries 'to turn small-scale physical distances into expansive symbolic signs of cultural and political differentiation' (ibid: 57). Parading shores up these boundaries by challenging them in the name of *traditional* routes. Again, North Belfast provides a poignant case with its 'complex series of ever-changing interfaces and spatial juxtapositions' (Shirlow & Murtagh, 2006: 61). Indeed it has been called 'the seismic area of the city' (Barton quoted in Burton, 1978). This fluid communal landscape has both historical and contemporary dimensions that run and erupt along both inter- and intracommunal fault lines.

As violent conflict escalated in the late 1960s and 1970s, Catholic and Protestant populations were forced to migrate across Belfast, settling in what might be termed communal exclusion zones. In North Belfast communities live segregated yet cheek to jowl, which exacerbates territorialism and competition for access to and dominance over contemporary public space. This is further fed by what is feared to be a unidirectional shift in territorial identity (Jarman, 2004, p. 229) as the Catholic population grows while the Protestant population declines. In North Belfast Protestants feel crowded out and Catholics boxed in.

The area has been the stage of almost endemic parade-related rioting at least since the mid 1990s where the controversy surrounding Drumcree<sup>3</sup> played out in a localised version. Orange parades marching along the Catholic part of Ardoyne have been both peacefully protested and violently confronted by politically stratified residents groups reflecting divisions both between and within communities on how to engage with the peace process.

On what is now the Woodvale/Crumlin Road-interface to Ardoyne, violent exchanges between loyalists and dissident republicans are constantly raising anxieties and tensions. In addition, the neighbourhood is currently the site of a permanent protest camp, set up in July 2013 to contest route restrictions imposed on a particular Orange lodge by the Parades Commission, in effect extending the 'marching season' year round in this area, complete with symbolic 100 m marches every night to the police line. Complicating the image of inter-communal violence are configurations of intra-communal paramilitary and political feuding in

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<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in 2001 North Belfast was the scene of the virulent sectarian Holy Cross dispute where a route used by Catholic primary school children was contested and blocked, as it passed through the Protestant enclave Glenbryn/upper Ardoyne (Jarman 2004). Residents claimed that Republicans were using the cover of taking their kids to school to enter the area and attack Protestants (Ashe 2006).

bids to secure domination and control within their 'own' communities. Here, inciting inter-communal resentment is often used to consolidate internal power in a particular place and makes compromises difficult to attain.

Behind these manoeuvrings lie quite specific memories of violence. In North Belfast alone, 577 lives were lost between 1969-2001 (Sutton index of deaths). In 1978 the sociologist Frank Burton wrote:

'... statistics in Anro [his fictitious name for Ardoyne] are not mere figures on the television screen or headlines in the papers, but corpses in the road, empty chairs, unworn clothes hanging in the wardrobes and all the living reality of violent death.' (Burton, 1978: 18).

The many layered memories of conflict, constant vigilance, experience of loss, and deprivation has had a crucial impact on the formation of local and communal identities and the relations between them. As Graham Dawson puts it: 'Local stories about what happened or what "happens" here, play an important part in shaping a living sense of local identity' (2007, p. 11).

In contemporary terms, Ardoyne continues to be the most disadvantaged area of Belfast (PMR, 2014) and child poverty in North Belfast is 36 % (BBC, 2013). As such, the part of the peace process that deals with 'moving on' has drastically disparate trajectories in different places. In places where the 'peace dividend' never paid out, the peace process itself and the state-supporting parties behind it have different statuses. The inclusive discourses that sustained the peace agreement in political compromise do not reflect the socio-political reality on the ground in North Belfast. Resources remain scarce and competition for them rife. Social prejudices run between religious communities, but also importantly between working

class communities on the interface and middle class communities peacefully settled by the peace dividend in wider society. In the context of deprivation (shared across communities) symbolic memory discourses of 'common glories in the past', work to restore dignity in the present and hope for the future.

Looking at parades against this backdrop, reminds us that protracted conflicts are fundamentally informed by specific contexts. Based on situational analyses, one theory of violence suggests that the threshold of violence is difficult to cross, and that people in each individual situation have to establish pathways around this difficulty. (Collins, 2009, p. 11) In protracted conflicts, however, particular pathways are well cleared and violence is often an easy, even anticipated, next step. In the context of contentious parades, violence is already path dependent, it almost has a choreography, and certainly a mnemonic practice in the triangulated relationship between parades, resident's protests and police regulation. Violence is even condoned and legitimised by recourse to commemorative practice (Jarman, 1997, p. 3) and community resistance. In North Belfast, local and central dynamics are interacting in a particular place, rather than this place simply being a microcosm of the wider conflict. In conflict theory there is usually an assumption that the final stage of conflict escalation is violence (i.e. Fischer & Keashly, 1991), but in analysing parades it might be more fruitful to also think of violence as a particular route.

In significant ways then, North Belfast is a geography of violent memory in contested space. The embodied memory generated in and alongside parades that take place in this geography is important here. Precisely because parades are emotive, bodily and ritual events, those participating must be habituated to the performance (Connerton, 1989, p. 338). Part of the performance of a contentious parade is protesting and rioting. However, the bodily memory generated in parades is more than a 'habit memory' or a motorized memory obtained

through the repetition of mechanical actions (Bergson, 1988 [2002]). It is crucially about a re-enactment of the past, through the body, where the body is also a centre of experience.

Bodies are of course fundamentally gendered with consequences for the kinds of and ways in which memory is performed and embodied. The bulk of the official Loyal Order Parades in the area are exclusively male, though some women's lodges on occasion join separately. In contrast, the Henry Joy McCracken parade has a strong contingent of young female as well as male teenagers who march together. However, spectators and protesters in both cases come in all ages and sexes. Having said this, it is paramount to note that the people and bodies who are most active in direct confrontations with the police, and who are disciplined and punished for rioting are almost exclusively young males – and increasingly protestant (Nolan 2014). The gendered aspect of parading, protesting and policing and questions of how male hegemony is perpetuated through parading traditions has been explored more fully by Racioppi & O'Sullivan (2000), while the question of changing violent masculinities have been addressed by Ashe and Harland (2014).

Being there, at the parade – and the protest, means that the body can retrieve the past in ways that go beyond cognitive maps of remembering. (Trigg, 2012). Presence means participants can tap into the emotional energy of the interaction ritual (Collins) and power the capacity for conflict. As Trigg proposes 'Not only do places hold memories in a material sense – as the archive of our experiences- but those same places crystallise the experiences that occurred there' (2012, p. 9). If memory, as human geographers would suggest, is also a metaphor for physical location (McDowell, 2009), then contested routes and interfaces recall violence.

Richard Sennett asks how we can avoid memory becoming a detour rather than a confrontation (in Fara & Patterson, 1998). In North Belfast, memory is simultaneously a

detour (i.e. not confronting socio-economic or gender issues) and a confrontation between communities and/or agents of the state. In this context of protracted conflict we are still looking for routes around violence. But, as has been argued by Shirlow and Murtagh: 'violence and the memory and perpetual experience of it...reduces capacity for alternative discourses' (2006, p. 79).

Contested parades are almost always related to changing demographic landscapes, changing political fortunes and territorial struggle as witnessed in North Belfast. It is often argued that parades and commemorations are used instrumentally to penetrate territory, stoke tensions, kindle community fear and anger and stir up trouble as well as support. While there is little doubt that commemorative practices are used for power-political purposes, at the same time it is possible to explore a reading that considers contested parades in terms of a more benign dynamic between memory and place.

Parades crossing territories, where the particular tradition does not resonate or no longer does so, are frequently perceived as a form of triumphalism and (re)assertion of supremacy. However, there is perhaps a less sinister perspective that can be brought out by considering parades and collective memory in a more spatial turn. Theorists of nationalism have long talked about the 'territorialisation of memory' (Smith, 1986) and the importance of attachments between collective memories and place as 'ethnoscapes' (first coined by Appadurai [1990], but employed here in line with Smith's definition as: 'landscapes endowed with poetic ethnic meaning through the historicisation of nature and the territorialisation of ethnic memories' [1999, p. 16]). These landscapes are associated with crucial events and historical personages. The sociologist Georg Simmel argued in the beginning of the twentieth century, that the spatial dimension of place 'unfolds greater associative power' than even temporal constructions of collective identity (the much coveted shared myth of origin),

because place is 'insolubly associated with memory, especially where the mutual relationships are unique and emotionally charged'. In North Belfast, both inter-communal and intra-communal constructions of identity attest to Simmel's statement that 'place remains the pivot around which memory entwines individuals in correlations...', but also that it is not the space itself but the '...structuring and summation of its parts...' that are of societal significance. (Simmel cited in Schetter, 2005, p. 51). Importantly, we might argue that it is not necessary to settle or dominate ethno-scapes; '(t)he collective fiction that affiliation with an ethnic group is related to a certain space is sufficient' (Schetter, 2005, p. 52). Dylan Trigg suggests that 'being attached to a place means allowing memories to be held by that place. In turn being held by a place, means being able to return to that place through its role as a reserve for memories' (2012, p. 9).

This idea allows us to think of parading along traditional routes, despite demographic changes, not only as a manifestation of power but as a way of maintaining memory stored in specific localities, even when everyday dominance or control over a certain space has been lost. Studying the actions of a community that has lost its territorial power, Shaul Cohen suggests that even though Protestants are not a majority in Derry/Londonderry and do not control the symbolically significant space of the walled city,<sup>4</sup> the fact that the Apprentice Boys are able to enter that particular space in their twice-yearly parades, allow them to narrate their experience of historical victory (despite the contemporary distribution of power being a near complete reversal of fortune) and 'serves in place of an aggressive agenda for regaining control of territorial icons' (2007). He argues further that the parades allow the Apprentice Boys 'to adapt to its loss of local hegemony, and provide a way to maintain their place-based

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<sup>4</sup> In 1688 during the Williamite war in Ireland, Derry was besieged by a Jacobite army . A group of apprentice boys closed the gate and 'the closing of the gates' and the 'relief of Derry' by Royal Navy ships are commemorated annually.

identity in the face of tangible dislocation.’ (2007, p. 954). Undoubtedly, place is an important host of memories, and traditional routes should also be considered as accessing ‘lost space’ where memories are held, not just as conduits for invading space. The anthropologist Henrik Vigh argues that the tradition of marching from an isolated enclave to connect to the larger community is:

...experienced as instantiations of unity and coherence that ritually join the minor Protestant areas to the larger Protestant population: they alleviate the *mereological uncertainty* felt by being part of a spatially fragmented community. (Vigh, forthcoming)

By connecting with ‘the larger Protestant population’, I argue, minority Protestant residents also connect with a wider historical narrative expressed and maintained through practices of collective memory.

This section has argued at once two fundamentally different takes on the connections between memory and place: one in which violence is literally path dependent because violent memories are held and upheld in particular places, and one where walking traditional routes or new commemorative trails may have restorative purposes, in anchoring identities. This is a paradox that remains at the heart of attempts to deal with contested parades and more widely cultural traditions.

Clearly, parading has multiple meanings and functions depending on the immediate context. A parade along a fractious interface is markedly different from a parade that takes place in a community sharing the collective memories on parade. Likewise, the almost exclusively nationalist city side of Derry/Londonderry can be magnanimous towards the unionist community in a way the contested space of North Belfast cannot easily allow either way. Equally important parades also take place against the back drop of a wider historico-

political development where Northern Ireland has gone from being an 'Orange State' (Farrell, 1990) to a more plural -if not shared – space. In this, memory discourses are also increasingly pluri-vocal and the dissonances between official and vernacular languages amplified. It is not least this transition that contested parades are negotiating and to which we now turn.

### **Memory in transitions**

Shared memories are crucial in forming and claiming collective identities and when their continuation is perceived to be under threat substantial social anxiety can develop. As changing frames brings about forgetting (J.Assman, 2010) transitions can destabilize narratives and make them vulnerable to both contestation and exploitation (Hobsbawm, 1983; Brown, 2001). This is particularly pertinent when considering what happens when a majority memory discourse becomes a minority memory discourse during the course of a conflict and its transformation.

While Pierre Nora's distinctions between *Lieux* and *milieux de memoire* speak directly to the transition from traditional societies to modern societies, (i.e. the disappearance of peasant cultures), they also work in understanding more contemporary configurations of memory through looking at parades, in current transitions in Northern Ireland.

Historically, we know that parades pick up around transitions (as was the case around the Home Rule debates of the 1880s and the paramilitary ceasefires of the 1990s). Such commemorative vigilance speaks very directly to the re-negotiation of memory that is enabled during transitions and which is currently taking place in Northern Ireland. Maintaining memory in the push and pull between past, present and future concerns has become a community bulwark against being 'swept away by history' (Nora, 1989). Precisely because the future depends on the past and the past appears open to reinterpretation,

manifestations and imaginations of the past also become about casting a net to grasp the future.

Obviously, the peace process in Northern Ireland is an on-going transition, not just from violence to relative peace, but from disputed democracy to relative political legitimacy and, part of this transition is negotiating the past and the future. The fact that in Northern Ireland there are few shared narratives of the past and that parties are in transition to different futures means that it is difficult to establish the realm of relevant remembrance. Parades (as modes of remembrance) are in constant politico-cultural dialogue with the peace process and are an important (but, by no means the only) expression of how conflicting ways of remembering the past not only reflect different community identities, but also involve differing understandings of the current dynamics of conflict, and, importantly, speak to radically different visions for the future. It is crucially a peace process that is anchored in compromise, which complicates the templates that sustained community identities in conflict. The exclusive stories of 'who we are', 'where we came from', 'where we are going' and the commemorative practices that go with these do not fit the compromise mode. The peace process has in a sense made the future constitutional, and immediate cultural demands more separate. At the same time, the Northern Ireland case is another illustration that negotiated settlements present particular challenges for creating shared accounts of the past. Compromised memory is a tricky currency: once you consciously open memory systems up they are often devalued.

The disaffection with the political peace process and a fragmentation of political leadership (particular in the unionist community, but also among more hardline Republicans) highlight the difficulties in building and maintaining trust during transitions. According to Giddens (1991) ontological security (i.e. a sense of continuity and order in events) rests on

basic trust. However, community anxiety is difficult to assuage because it does not (in Freudian terms) take a concrete object, but operates more like (in Raymond Williams' terms) 'structures of feeling' if understood as the lived experience of the quality of life at a particular time and place. This again alerts us to the importance of particular places as the 'structures of feeling' extend unevenly across communities and cultures.

According to John Bodnar official history (held by institutions and records) attempts to quell anxiety about change and promote exemplary behaviour. Cultural leaders representing official positions, have an interest in social unity; the continuity of existing institutions; and, loyalty to the status quo, whereas vernacular cultural leaders represent specialised, and even dissonant interests, grounded in parts of the whole that can destabilize this endeavour (Bodnar, [2011] 1992, p. 265).

With reference to a collective memory framework, I would argue that specifically the phenomena of 'protestant anxiety' ties in closely with moving from feeling (potentially) part of an official memory culture to being a group represented in a much more exclusively 'vernacular' position in a more plural memory culture.

Indeed, questions of culture and (mis)trust remain crucial in a divided society where politics often pivot around 'whose culture shall be the official one and whose shall be subordinated? [...] Whose history shall be remembered and whose forgotten?' (Jordan and Weedon quoted in McCall, 2006, p. 302). These struggles are particularly intense in times of transition where traditions, power relations and frames of relevant remembrance are correspondingly reconfigured.

The real danger is perhaps not in moving from an official to a vernacular position, or even the loss of hegemony, but in the event that official and vernacular memories lose all contact points.

Patrick Devine-Wright points out that:

'(S)ocial rituals such as commemorations may be fruitfully interpreted as forms of social competition, in that the enactment of 'traditions' may be an attempt by members of a high status group, for example, to preserve the socio-political status quo, prevent social change and maintain the status of the in-group in society'

However, under the new political dispensation we might reconsider the social ritual of parading. In a sense the apparent lapse in power feeds fears about a collapse of memory. From his extensive field work in a loyalist community Henrik Vigh observes that parades:

[...] are excessively loud and ostentatious exactly because they are meant to be seen and heard as assertions of presence. Framed in a context of conflict; of feeling endangered and increasingly marginalised, the marches are exclamations of being. (Vigh, forthcoming)

These differing perspectives flag up the competition between two schools of understanding collective memory: the presentist models that see collective memory as a tool shaped by contemporary interests and a more traditionalist model that perceive of collective memory as the continuity of identities. I argue that both models are at play in a fluid negotiation, when it comes to parading identity in Northern Ireland.

Thus, the memory that is exercised in contemporary parades may combine conflicting emotions. In a way the collective that comes together is at once both victor and vanquished, remembering past glories in a present state of anxiety.

Since the ceasefires in 1994, the number of Protestant parades has doubled. This has led a number of commentators to argue that going by volume, the rumours of protestant demise are overstated (Osborne, 2014; Kane, 2014). However, the inflation of parades might not necessarily be a sign that a tradition is thriving but instead underscore Olick's point that, when the continuity of memory is under threat, there is often a redoubled search for its hidden recesses. (2011, p. 14) Or, as Dominic Bryan argues: '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'. (2006)

The lack of trust and fear of memory and identity collapse is shared across communities on the margins of the peace process. It is driven by structural and discursive exclusion, hinges on perceptions of lack of political representation and community mistrust is produced alongside collective memories in this environment. Perhaps, patterns of 'competitive commemoration' as evidenced in North Belfast, are better understood in relation to the increasing dissonance between vernacular, antagonistic languages of conflict and the official, cosmopolitan post-conflict discourses in Northern Ireland.

## **Conclusion**

This article has attempted to grapple with the conceptual mistiness of collective memory by establishing different entry points to the analysis of the particular politico-cultural practice of parading in Northern Ireland.

Reflecting on parades through the multidisciplinary prism of memory studies illuminates the complex processes in which parading has been constituted and of which the parading tradition has been (and is) constitutive. For parades are about memories: they both memorialize past events and incite new memories through particular social and embodied

practices. They are about memory and place, as they are tied to particular routes and local dynamics. They are about memory and violence: they generally commemorate events, men and victims of violence, but they also enact new paths and scripts of violence. They are about memory and politics, as they reflect and challenge shifting relations to the state. And they are about memory and transitions, because they negotiate tradition in dialogue with wider trajectories of political and demographic change. In all these ways, they are vernaculars that can unsettle received or official narratives attempting to smooth over differences and anxieties in transitory times. Along these veins, parades are literally traditions in transitions and remind us that culture is fundamentally a site of struggle.

The collective memory that is rehearsed and reinvigorated in parades is shaped in a fluid negotiation between presentist interests and the expression of tradition. As such, parading is not exclusively a refusal to accept social change but also a practice to ensure the continuity of identity, in a way where people are able to recognize the past and remember in order to belong.

On New Year's Eve 2013, months of talks on, 'Flags', 'Parades' and 'the Past' ended without agreement on how to move towards a reconciliation of positions in Northern Ireland. In December 2014 the Stormont House Agreement on the same outstanding issues was negotiated, but has yet to be implemented. Bridging official and vernacular memory discourses and local and national pasts remain one of the great challenges in 'post-conflict' Northern Ireland. While collective memories are often considered bounded by established ethnic or national communities, any analysis of contested parades in Northern Ireland should also take into consideration the shared anxieties of communities that are 'lost in transition'.

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