

Power Through Parades:

An Analysis of Nationalism in the July 12th Orange Order Parades

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The Orange Order is a Unionist Northern Irish organization that uses terror to achieve two goals within the region of Northern Ireland: Protestant supremacy and remaining a country within the United Kingdom. This organization has existed for hundreds of years and reached peak activity during the Troubles (1968-1998).¹ One of the main ways that they created terror was through Orangemen parades that occurred annually on July 12th. These parades were a rallying point for members, a way to establish nationalism, and they often turned violent. The Orange Order is a nationalistic and religious organization and can be seen as part of the New Left Wave of terrorism, as the primary motivation was the creation and protection of their national identity.² The Orange Order is not classified as a terrorist organization, but it was an organization that created terror through its violent stance on nationalism. Their definition of nationalism was in contrast to the rival Republican nationalist organizations who wanted a United Ireland and Catholic supremacy. The Orange Order participated in many acts, but the main way in which they created terror was through the annual July 12th parades that occurred throughout The Troubles, as a display of power and nationalism. This essay will argue the Orange Order July 12th parades were held for three purposes; to form a Protestant Unionist culture, to increase their political power, and cause fear within Catholic communities.

Section 1 - Create a Protestant Unionist culture that could be seen as superior to Irish Catholic culture

The first purpose of these parades was to form a Protestant Unionist culture that could be seen as superior to Irish Catholic culture. Northern Ireland was, and remains, a divided country. There was ideological division between Unionists and Republicans, division between Protestants

¹ Lee A. Smithey, *Unionists, Loyalists, and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 14.

² Smithey, *Unionists, Loyalists, and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland*, 14.

and Catholics, as well as political, educational, and residential segregation that created Protestant and Catholic neighbourhoods.³ This degree of segregation and division became clearest during the Protestant marching season in the spring and summer, coming to a peak with the July 12th Parades of the Orange Order.⁴ Opponents to the Orange Order saw this organization as a militaristic sectarian organization and this parade as an act of nationalistic terror, while Unionists saw this parade as a demonstration of their culture.⁵ There were two main ways in which these parades demonstrate Protestant Unionist culture; through tying them to a powerful past and through portraying the Catholic Church as malevolent and weak, and juxtaposing this with their strength.

The first way that these parades demonstrated nationalism was through tying the Protestants to their powerful past. The July 12th parades celebrated the military success of the Protestant King William of Oranges at the Battle of Boyne over the Catholic King James II in 1690.⁶ Historically, parades in Northern Ireland were used to celebrate British Rule, and by the 1770s they were a way for the Protestant elite to exert political influence.⁷ In the 1870's, parading became a way for Unionists to voice their opposition to home rule laws which allowed the Northern Irish government more autonomy and resulted in the Unionists feeling less included as a part of the United Kingdom.⁸ The Unionists felt they were a part of British rule and the parades demonstrated the power that the British had over the Catholics. These parades

³ Jocelyn Evans and Jonathan Tonge, "Religious, Political, and Geographical Determinants of Attitudes to Protestant Parades in Northern Ireland," *Politics and Religion* 10, no. 4 (2017): 788, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048317000487>.

⁴ Evans and Tonge, "Religious, Political, and Geographical Determinants of Attitudes to Protestant Parades in Northern Ireland," 788.

⁵ Evans and Tonge, "Religious, Political, and Geographical Determinants of Attitudes to Protestant Parades in Northern Ireland," 789.

⁶ Smithey, *Unionists, Loyalists, and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland*, 54.

⁷ Lee A Smithey and Michael P Young, "Parading Protest: Orange Parades in Northern Ireland and Temperance Parades in Antebellum America," *Social Movement Studies* 9, no. 4 (2010): 403, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2010.522307>.

⁸ Smithey and Young, "Parading Protest," 403.

commemorated the conquering of Ireland, and by extension made the Unionists feel powerful. These parades not only demonstrated the Unionists as powerful, but also the Catholics as weak as they had been conquered and beaten. Thus, through connecting the July 12th parades to the past, the Orange Order associated themselves with strong regimes and established Protestant nationalism.

The second way that these parades demonstrated nationalism is through portraying the Catholic Church as malevolent and weak, and juxtaposing this with Protestant strength. The Protestants portrayed the Catholics in this way because of their own fear. There were stories of Protestants being treated poorly in the independent, and majority Catholic, Republic of Ireland.⁹ They feared that if the island of Ireland became one country they would become a minority, and would be subjected to the oppression and tyranny of the Catholic Church.¹⁰ The Orange Order claimed to be hostile to the Catholic Church, who they identified as malevolent and controlling, and claimed not to be hostile to individual Catholics.¹¹ However, this line was often blurred as they participated in things such as picketing churches and having involvement in paramilitary organizations that greatly affected individual Catholics.¹² The marches were a time to display Protestant strength, and compare this to the weakness of the Catholics. As they marched through they would shout things like “five-nil”.¹³ This was the marchers referring to the number of Catholics they had killed in that area throughout the year, so they could take pride in these

⁹ Helen Robinson, “Defenders of the Faith: Twelfth of July Rhetoric in the Later Brookeborough Era, 1954-1962,” *Irish Political Studies* 27, no. 3 (2012): 187, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07907184.2011.636803>.

¹⁰ Robinson, “Defenders of the Faith,” 187.

¹¹ John Lloyd, “Ireland’s Uncertain Peace,” *Foreign Affairs* (New York, N.Y.) 77, no. 5 (1998): 110, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20049054>.

¹² A. McCaldon, “The Orange Order in Northern Ireland : Has Political Isolation, Sectarianism, Secularism, or Declining Social Capital Proved the Biggest Challenge?” *University of Liverpool*, (2018): 125, <https://doi.org/10.17638/03027947>.

¹³ James F. Clarity, “Ulster Protestants March, Celebrating History, as Catholics Jeer,” *The New York Times*, 1995, Late Edition (East Coast) edition, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A150691835/AONE?u=ocul_thomas&sid=AONE&xid=ce2fb144.

killings, and scare the Catholics as they deliberately moved through their neighbourhoods.¹⁴

They also showed off their paramilitary connections as they participated in parades, carried paraphernalia, and had visible tattoos linking them to these groups.¹⁵ As they marched, they created fear, referred to fear that they had created throughout the year, and the continued hatred of the Catholics and Catholic Church. This created a sense of nationalism, so that they could view themselves as stronger and better than the Catholics.

Overall, these parades were influential in creating a sense of nationalism for the Unionists. They tied their current Order to a strong, British past that had been triumphant over the Catholics. This allowed them to gain symbolic military strength as they connected their current actions to the victorious past. They also created a sense of nationalism by viewing the Catholics and Catholic Church as weak in comparison to the strong and militaristic Orange Order and Protestant culture. These parades were a way for the Protestants to feel proud, strong, united, and to create a sense of Protestant Unionist nationalism.

Section 2 - Increase their political power

The second purpose of the Orange Order parades was to increase their political power. Members of the Orange Order often claim that their organization was apolitical or anti-political as it tended to not support any particular policies of political parties in Northern Ireland.¹⁶ However, both the Orange Order and its parades should be considered political. Parades in Northern Ireland, while considered by the Order to be an aspect of their culture, were inherently political as they discussed Unionism and Republicanism, the most important political issues for

¹⁴ Clarity, "Ulster Protestants March, Celebrating History, as Catholics Jeer."

¹⁵ Geoffrey Beattie, "Grassroots: The Night Before the Morning after - The July 12 Marches in Northern Ireland Are Usually Reported as a Spectator Sport," *The Guardian (London)*, July 17, 1990, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A171271184/AONE?u=ocul_thomas&sid=AONE&xid=933ce79c.

¹⁶ Jonathan S. Blake, *Contentious Rituals: Parading the Nation in Northern Ireland*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 121.

Northern Ireland at the time. These parades discussed their claim to nationalism implicitly through using the Union Jack, singing God Save the Queen, and explicitly through their speeches.¹⁷ These parades were particularly political after the marching ended for the day, in the post-march political speeches, and through the platforms they gave to the Order's preferred political party.

The first way that these parades contributed to their political power is through the speeches that were held after a parade. July 12th was not only a day for a single parade, it was an entire day of festivities. After the marches finished, they would move towards a church service, and after this speeches would begin.¹⁸ The speeches were made by leaders within the Order and by prominent Unionist politicians and figures in the community. A typical speech began with a profession of loyalty to the Queen, congratulating her on recent events in her family, professing loyalty to the British government, promising to remain in the union, promising to uphold the values of the Protestant revolution, in particular the protection of religious freedom, and then addressing local political issues.¹⁹ While the parade route and religious ceremony remained similar year-to-year and between areas, the speeches varied greatly, tailoring them to local issues, and current events and worries for the Unionist movement.²⁰ They were important for individual politicians as it gave them a platform to speak and a supportive audience.²¹ These post-march speeches were often published in newspapers, and were widely viewed on the day.²² There were so many political leaders speaking at these parades that they came to be regarded as unofficial state of the nation addresses.²³ This gave them a large platform to get votes for the next election,

¹⁷ Blake, *Contentious Rituals: Parading the Nation in Northern Ireland*, 123.

¹⁸ Robinson, "Defenders of the Faith," 379.

¹⁹ Robinson, "Defenders of the Faith," 380.

²⁰ Robinson, "Defenders of the Faith," 379.

²¹ Jennifer Edwards, and J. David Knottnerus, "The Orange Order: Parades, Other Rituals, and Their Outcomes," *Sociological Focus* 43, no. 1 (2010): 14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00380237.2010.10571366>.

²² Robinson, "Defenders of the Faith," 380.

²³ Robinson, "Defenders of the Faith," 377.

and through being associated with the Order and the parade, provided some automatic support. Through having inherently political speeches in a popular medium that was only available to Unionists and Protestants, the Orange Order demonstrated their political power.

The second way that they demonstrated their political influence through these parades was through their demonstration of how politically linked the Orange Order was. Across the world, parades were used to contest authority, generate legitimacy, challenge policies, forge new identities, confront rival groups, and claim citizenship.²⁴ In Northern Ireland, Orange Order parades were used to demonstrate Protestant and Unionist superiority. These parades demonstrated to many Catholics that the Protestants held the power in the country. Most Unionist politicians, and thus most politicians governing in Northern Ireland during this time, were members of the Orange Order.²⁵ The Order would both give these politicians a platform by allowing them to speak after the parades, but they would also advocate for Unionist parties. The Orange Order would advocate for supporting Unionist parties through telling their members to vote for specific parties and instilling fear if they voted for independents for fear of splitting the Unionist vote.²⁶ In addition to lobbying for votes within their membership the Orange Order also had direct political power. The organization of the Orange Order was also entitled to making up 13% of the delegates for the Unionist party, meaning they had a direct say in party policy and leadership.²⁷ The Orange Order was a very powerful political and cultural organization, and had the power through direct delegate votes and organizational influence, to change the outcome of elections. As such, they were able to use the platforms of these parades to further their political agenda.

²⁴ Blake, *Contentious Rituals: Parading the Nation in Northern Ireland*, 124.

²⁵ Blake, *Contentious Rituals: Parading the Nation in Northern Ireland*, 125.

²⁶ Blake, *Contentious Rituals: Parading the Nation in Northern Ireland*, 125.

²⁷ Robinson, "Defenders of the Faith," 188.

Overall, the Orange Order was a very influential and political organization. By the nature of the issues they advocate for they were political, through allowing certain politicians to gain a platform through their organization, and lobbying for certain politicians or parties, directly and indirectly. Their most popular parade, the July 12th parade, was both an opportunity for cultural and ethnic pride, as well as an opportunity for members to further their political agenda.

Section 3 - Cause fear within Catholic households

The third purpose of these parades was to instill fear in the Northern Irish Catholic community. There were two main ways in which these parades caused fear, they passed through Catholic areas, and the police and government were unable to re-route these parades demonstrating their lack of ability to protect the Catholic population. One good example of both of these fear causing events can be seen through one Parade of the Orange Order, the Drumcree parade along Garvaghy Road that occurred in 1996.²⁸ This parade was near the sight of the founding of the Orange Order, and thus it was seen as very important to their identity.²⁹ However, it was also near a large Catholic housing project that housed individuals who had been terrorized out of their Belfast homes.³⁰

One of the first ways that these parades created fear was through their route planning. In Northern Ireland there were large sections of segregated neighbourhoods into Protestant and Catholic areas. These neighbourhoods were self contained, had their own schools, businesses, churches and newspapers and were distinguished through flags and banners, graffiti, murals and the painting of curbs, in the different national colours on display in their areas.³¹ These

²⁸ McCaldon, "The Orange Order in Northern Ireland," 142.

²⁹ Lloyd, "Ireland's Uncertain Peace," 110.

³⁰ Lloyd, "Ireland's Uncertain Peace," 110.

³¹ J. Dingley, "Marching Down the Garvaghy Road: Republican Tactics and State Response to the Orangemen's Claim to March Their Traditional Route Home after the Drumcree Church Service," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 14, no. 3 (2002): 44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/714005620>.

neighbourhoods were not only places where people lived, but became mini-nations, with both communities attempting to get more territory for themselves.³² The parades of the Orange Order would often pass through the Catholic areas, causing violence and instilling fear in the Catholic residents as hostile groups moved through their areas.³³ In the case of the Garvaghy Road parade, there were two Protestant areas at each end of the parade route, but the majority of the parade passed by a Catholic housing estate.³⁴ This was fairly common for Unionist parades as many Unionist parades went through Catholic and Protestant areas, whereas Catholic parades tended to limit themselves to Catholic areas.³⁵ Unionists also used their parades to claim territory inhabited by Catholics as they felt they were being forced out of their areas as the Catholic population and territory expanded, and as such they needed to make their land claims.³⁶ In this particular parade, the housing estate that backed onto the parade route was once integrated, but the Catholic community had taken it over, and it became a Catholic mini-nation.³⁷ The Protestants used strategic route planning to instill fear in the Catholics as they passed through their areas, but also to make a claim to land. Through the parades passing through they signified that they still considered the land theirs, and that they were able to pass through it.

The second way that these parades caused fear was through the inability of the government to control them. The Parades Commission, a government appointed committee, had the ability to re-route controversial parade routes.³⁸ However, when this power was used on Protestant groups they often rioted and protested these amended routes.³⁹ The police were then

³² Dingley, "Marching Down the Garvaghy Road," 44.

³³ Smithey, *Unionists, Loyalists, and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland*, 119.

³⁴ Dingley, "Marching Down the Garvaghy Road," 52.

³⁵ Robinson, "Defenders of the Faith," 380.

³⁶ Dingley, "Marching Down the Garvaghy Road," 46.

³⁷ Dingley, "Marching Down the Garvaghy Road," 52.

³⁸ Evans and Tonge, "Religious, Political, and Geographical Determinants of Attitudes to Protestant Parades in Northern Ireland," 787.

³⁹ Evans and Tonge, "Religious, Political, and Geographical Determinants of Attitudes to Protestant Parades in Northern Ireland," 787.

unable to prevent the parades from passing through, and unable to prevent the violence that these parades brought. A week prior to the Drumcree July 12th parade there was a smaller Protestant church parade that followed the same route.⁴⁰ This was originally prevented from passing through, and a standoff ensued.⁴¹ Due to the significance that the Orangemen attached to this specific parade, they felt that if they were not able to complete it then it would signify weakness and allow their other parades to be re-routed or canceled entirely. As such, they camped out during an overnight standoff and protested this ruling.⁴² Over 30,000 Orangemen joined this standoff and as the police faced intense pressure they were forced to allow the parade to move through the areas.⁴³ As they passed through the area they linked arms, and this was interpreted as Protestant triumphalism and it intimidated Catholic residents.⁴⁴ This parade also demonstrated the power and numbers of the Orange Order and its supporters and made Catholic residents fearful as the police were unwilling and unable to protect them.

Overall, these parades were influential in creating fear within Catholic households. The parades were a way of entering their neighbourhoods, and their mini-nations, and instilling fear in the communities. They also were a way of claiming Catholic territory and neighbourhoods as belonging to the Protestants. These parades were also a reminder that the police force and the state was unwilling, or unable to protect the Catholics and their neighbourhoods. These two aspects created fear in Catholic households as they were not safe in their neighbourhoods and unable to be protected.

Conclusion

⁴⁰ McCaldon, "The Orange Order in Northern Ireland," 142.

⁴¹ McCaldon, "The Orange Order in Northern Ireland," 142.

⁴² Lloyd, "Ireland's Uncertain Peace," 110.

⁴³ McCaldon, "The Orange Order in Northern Ireland," 142.

⁴⁴ McCaldon, "The Orange Order in Northern Ireland," 142.

In conclusion, the July 12th parades of the Orange Order were powerful in creating fear, and a sense of nationalism. These parades tied the Protestants to a strong British past where they had been triumphant over the Catholics, as well as created a sense of the current Order as strong and militaristic in comparison to the Catholic Church. These parades also provided a political platform for individual politicians through the after-march speeches, as well as offering a political influence to the greater order. The formal way that these parades were powerful is that they claimed territory for the Protestants, and demonstrated to the Catholics that they were not protected by the state. These parades were very useful in creating both a sense of nationalism and pride for the Protestants, but also in creating fear in Catholic neighbourhoods. While many individual Protestants saw their parading tradition as a way of harmlessly demonstrating their culture, and having fun, the Catholics saw these parades as deliberate acts of oppression.⁴⁵ The period of The Troubles was a politically complicated time. The July 12th parades however, were a clear demonstration of the beliefs of Protestant Unionists in Northern Ireland, and the methods that they used to create a sense of superiority, instill fear and increase their power.

⁴⁵ Robinson, "Defenders of the Faith," 380.

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