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1 DRUMCREE: AN INTRODUCTION TO PARADE DISPUTES

On the evening of Monday 10 July 1995 I stood on a hill by the stone wall of a church graveyard, and watched two men walk down the hill to talk to some policemen. One was wearing an orange collarette, or sash, the other a crimson one. By Friday 8 September, one of those men, David Trimble MP, had become leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, the largest political party in Northern Ireland. After being elected to that post Mr Trimble was asked if his success in becoming leader was due to the events of July along the road from that church. He answered that it was not. However, in my view, whilst it is true to say that those events alone did not make David Trimble leader, had they not taken place he may well have had to wait a few more years.

What took place that July evening? The graveyard is situated around Drumcree church about a mile outside Portadown in County Armagh. Standing on the hill were thousands of Ulster Protestants, most of them members of an institution known as the Orange Order. Along with us were cameras from major television companies as well as journalists from around the world. Consequently, a global audience saw those two men walk down the hill to talk to the policemen. Many watching would have recognised the man walking with David Trimble as the Reverend Ian Paisley, a man whose reputation as orator, defender of Protestantism and scourge of 'Popery', is second to none. Paisley had just climbed down from a platform where, in characteristic style, he had told the gathered crowd that the future of Ulster might be decided that night. He is not a member of the Orange Order. Rather the crimson collarette he wears represents a separate yet similar organisation known as the Apprentice Boys of Derry.

Along with us all at Drumcree were the policemen of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). Dressed in riot gear, hundreds of them stood along the narrow country lane beside dozens of the armoured Land Rovers that have been such a distinctive part of policing in Northern Ireland. The previous afternoon, a number of policemen had accompanied lines of Orangemen on a parade up to the church for a religious service in commemoration of the Battle of the Boyne (a battle fought in Ireland over 300 years ago). However, senior policemen, aware of a counter-demonstration, had decided under legislation specific to Northern Ireland that the Orangemen could not parade

back to Portadown via the route the Orangemen had annually walked. The route they wanted to take was the Garvaghy Road a few hundred yards up from the church, which runs through a predominantly Catholic housing estate. The large majority of the residents of that estate did not want the Orangemen to march through their estate and some had been campaigning for the previous ten years to have them stopped.

The Portadown Orangemen stood facing the police determined that they would be allowed to parade down the Garvaghy Road. The police introduced reinforcements when, despite attempts to stop the word spreading, more Orangemen started to arrive from other parts of Northern Ireland to support their brethren. Meanwhile the residents of the Garvaghy Road waited apprehensively, keen to demonstrate their opposition to the parade and well aware of the possible results of a confrontation. There was a stand-off.

On that Monday evening Trimble and Paisley made speeches from a platform in an adjacent field. Paisley received the biggest applause.

We are here tonight because we have to establish the right of the Protestant People to march down the Garvaghy Road and our brethren of the Orange Institution to exercise their right to attend their place of worship and leave that place of worship and return to their homes. That is the issue we are dealing with tonight and it is a very serious issue because it lies at the very heart and foundation of our heritage. It lies at the very heart and foundation of our spiritual life and it lies at the very foundation of the future of our families and of this Province that we love. If we cannot go to our place of worship and we cannot walk back from our place of worship then all that the Reformation brought to us and all that the martyrs died for and all that our forefathers gave their lives for is lost to us forever. So there can be no turning back. (Ian Paisley, 10 July 1995)

Even as Paisley spoke, a hundred yards down the lane there were clashes between the crowd and the lines of police. A running battle developed across the fields as Orangemen and their supporters tried to reach the Garvaghy Road. A school and other buildings on the edge of the estate were attacked. Police fired baton rounds into the groups of men. Although ostensibly used as a crowd control measure the baton rounds are potentially lethal. Paisley attempted to calm the crowd with the news that he and Mr Trimble would negotiate with the police.

Behind the scenes, other negotiations had already begun. Members of the Mediation Network for Northern Ireland had been brought in to aid negotiations between the residents' group and the police since great distrust of the police exists in Catholic communities. At the same time the police talked to Orangemen and unionist politicians who refused to talk to the representative of the residents' group. Much was at stake. A peace process had developed the previous year and had apparently brought an end to the military conflict that had been ongoing in Northern Ireland since 1969. Both the Irish Republican Army (IRA), seeking a united Ireland, and loyalist paramilitary groups, aiming to keep Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom, had

announced cease-fires; but, as in the late 1960s, it was beginning to look as if parades and street demonstrations would lead to civil disturbances serious enough to bring about renewed armed conflict.

Finally, on the morning of Tuesday 11 July, a deal was negotiated. The Orangemen from the District of Portadown would walk down the Garvaghy Road without the band they had originally brought with them, who had gone home anyway, and the residents would stand by the side of the road and make their protest. Two lines of about 600 Orangemen walked in a dignified way past silent protesters; but when the parade reached Portadown, Trimble, Paisley and a crowd of supporters were waiting. The two politicians joined the parade and received the adulation of the crowd in triumph. To the dismay of mediators and police, and to the anger of residents of the Garvaghy Road and the wider Catholic community, the Orangemen claimed victory. Drumcree was seen by many loyalists as the Protestant people fighting back. Within months medals were struck commemorating the 'Seige [sic] of Drumcree', a video was produced depicting the events, and Trimble was, to the surprise of many, elected leader of the Ulster Unionist Party.

On 12 July 1995, all over Northern Ireland, members of the Orange Institution, their families, friends and supporters, prepared to celebrate the 305th anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne. This is the battle, in 1690, at which the Protestant King William III, the Dutch Prince of Orange, won a victory against King James II, an English Catholic, and is thus perceived by Protestants in Northern Ireland to have secured the civil rights and religious liberties of Protestants within predominantly Catholic Ireland.

The largest of the parades is held in Belfast. From early morning Orangemen, usually dressed in suits and wearing Orange collarettes around their necks, meet at Orange Halls to prepare for the day with fellow members of their Orange lodge. The lodge banners depicting places, people, and events of significance to the lodge, as well as its name and number, are unfurled and attached to poles ready to be carried through the streets. Members line up in military-style files behind their lodge banner and are led by a band hired for the occasion. The bands wear distinctive, brightly coloured, pseudo-military uniforms, some carry flags, and many have the name of their band and other loyalist insignia on the big bass drum which forms the centre-piece of the band. Most of the bands are flute bands, with some side drummers, and are almost exclusively male. There are some accordion bands and a few play bagpipes. Many of the larger bands have a group of teenagers, mainly girls, who follow them on the parade.

The officials of the Orange Institution accompanied by a colour party carrying flags lead the parade. The crowd cheers as the bands start playing, with the bass drummer, thumping his drum as hard as possible, almost jiggling down the road. Along most of the route spectators are three or four deep but in the Catholic areas passed by this parade the only spectators are policemen, soldiers and a few children. The parade route is well over 6 miles

long and there are a number of stops for participants to take on refreshment, a soft drink or perhaps a swig from a bottle of beer, and relieve themselves behind a house or in an alleyway.

By midday the first of the marchers reach 'the Field'. Some participants rush off to meals prepared in church halls and hotels, others buy from the food stalls, whilst still others concentrate on consuming the beer transported to the Field. At the bottom of the Field is a platform where a few spectators, journalists and social researchers gather to hear a religious service and some resolutions proposed by senior Orangemen and politicians. Many of the bandsmen are more interested in the teenage girls who have accompanied them.

At around four o'clock the parade re-forms with a little less discipline and decorum. Some Orangemen and bandsmen are just returning from their hotel meal and look to find their places in the parade. Some members of the parade are as sober and dignified as at the start. Others, particularly members of some of the bands, have entered into a little carnival spirit. Face masks, funny hats, wigs and false beards all appear. The performances are even more boisterous and the music is a little less disciplined. One song is played and sung above all others as they return to the centre of Belfast – 'The Sash'.

It is old but it is beautiful, and its colours they are fine;
It was worn at Derry, Aghrim, Enniskillen and the Boyne;
My father wore it when a youth in the bygone days of yore;
So on the 12th I always wear the Sash my father wore.

As lodges parade to the area of the city in which they are based they get a rousing reception. Bands finish by playing the national anthem, but some go on to play and drink back in their club until well into the evening. The streets of Belfast are almost deserted by mid-evening. Another Twelfth has come and gone.

On the afternoon of Sunday 7 July 1996, I was back at Drumcree watching another stand-off. The RUC Chief Constable, Sir Hugh Annesley, had announced that the Boyne Church Parade would not be allowed down the Garvaghy Road. There had been a few attempts to set up negotiations during the year but Orangemen had refused to meet the chairperson of the residents' group on the grounds that he had a terrorist conviction. When the parade left the church and reached the bottom of the hill they were confronted by more than just a line of police officers. The forces of the state had prepared more thoroughly than the previous year. Rows of barbed wire had been erected across a number of fields on either side of the road and in the distance a line of army trucks could be seen parked within the perimeter of a school playing field.

The mood amongst Orangemen and their supporters was relaxed. Some Orangemen were organising the parking of cars as the narrow country lanes

started to clog up with families, journalists and at least two anthropologists. Many people were in their Sunday best and mothers were negotiating pushchairs down towards the church. At the church a Tannoy system was being set up to relay information to the crowd. Down by the Land Rovers a number of unionist politicians milled around making statements to the press. A few conversations quickly revealed what many people had suspected, that the Orangemen had also been preparing. This year the tactic was not to bring as many Orangemen as possible to Portadown but for the Institution, and others, to make their presence felt all over the countryside. The previous week, Orangemen in other parts of Northern Ireland had put in applications for parades to be held on the 8th, 9th, and 10th, taking routes that were deliberately close to Catholic areas, to put pressure on the police. They had decided that if the police wanted a battle of strength, that was what they were going to get. By the time we left Drumcree on the Sunday evening the roads into Portadown were already blocked by men wearing masks, men more than likely belonging to the mid-Ulster unit of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) an outlawed paramilitary group. Back in Belfast youths were gathering on street corners preparing to build bonfires on roads. Could the forces of the state cope or would loyalists be able to face down the police in demanding their right to march?

Later on the evening of 7 July, a Catholic taxi driver was shot dead outside Lurgan, a town 10 miles from Portadown. The mid-Ulster UVF were widely believed to be the perpetrators although no one claimed responsibility. Mainstream unionist politicians made thinly veiled threats about the further consequences if the situation was not resolved. Despite this murder, the loyalist paramilitary cease-fire was still deemed to be in place.

The news the following morning reported a few incidents from the front line at Drumcree, but, more importantly, road blocks had been set up by Orangemen and their supporters in Protestant areas all over Northern Ireland. The police were either unwilling or unable to clear the roads quickly. On Monday evening Belfast emptied quickly and pubs closed their doors. Orangemen in the city prepared to go on parade. As the police tried desperately to place officers near to likely flash-points, of which there are many in Belfast alone, youngsters took control in particular areas. In Protestant areas of the city bonfires were lit across roads and bottles and stones were thrown at the police with relative impunity. Soon, not only bonfires, but cars, vans, buses and business premises were burning. Some car showrooms had had the foresight to remove all their cars. Protestant-run businesses in Protestant areas were being attacked by Protestant youths. I heard of one Orangeman out on parade in east Belfast who returned to find his car gone as well. In north Belfast there were serious clashes between youths in both communities. And most worrying of all, some Catholics were apparently intimidated out of their houses.

The violence became worse on the 9th and 10th, and 1,000 extra British troops were sent to Northern Ireland. By the end of Wednesday the RUC

announced that over the previous four days there had been 156 arrests, over 100 incidents of intimidation, 90 civilian and 50 RUC injuries, 758 attacks on police and 662 plastic baton rounds fired.¹ At Drumcree there had been intermittent violence, a bulldozer had been brought up by the local paramilitaries and the army had placed concrete blocks on the road. Secret negotiations were taking place between the Northern Ireland Office and members of the Garvaghy Road Residents' Group, and the heads of the main Churches also tried to broker a deal. By Wednesday evening rumours were rife that the Chief Constable would change his mind and allow the parade down the road. On the morning of 11 July it became clear that, with the threat of thousands of Orangemen arriving in Portadown for the Twelfth, the parade was to be given access to the Garvaghy Road.

Residents tried to conduct a protest but were forcibly removed from the road. The parade took place to the sound of a single drum and with hundreds of Orangemen, not all from Portadown, taking part. This time Trimble and Paisley steered clear of the overt triumphalism they had displayed the previous year, but Orangemen all over Northern Ireland were jubilant. Rioting now started in nationalist areas. Police fired thousands of plastic bullets and nationalist protesters threw thousands of petrol bombs. One nationalist protester in Derry was killed when an armoured car hit him.

As the events of Drumcree in 1996 proceeded one particular comment was repeated by journalists time and again: 'All this just to walk down one bit of road?' When outsiders watched the events at Drumcree in 1995 and 1996, or saw reports of the Twelfth parades, they were inevitably left somewhat bewildered by the apparent importance attached to these parades by people in Northern Ireland. The right to perform a particular ritual does not usually become a central political issue in a modern industrial European state. Yet in 1995 Drumcree was only one, albeit the most serious, of forty-one such disputes in eighteen different areas of Northern Ireland (Jarman and Bryan 1996: 85–93); and over four days during that July week in 1996 the forces of the British state in Northern Ireland were brought to breaking point over the right to parade. Thousands of policemen and soldiers were deployed, and millions of pounds spent, to try to stop around 600 Orangemen from walking down a particular length of road, that is, from performing a brief and simple ritual. This book will explain why Orange parades are such a prominent issue in the politics of Northern Ireland and how the rituals have been, and continue to be, utilised as a political resource. I will argue that by understanding the nature of ritual action we can better comprehend the dynamics of political divisions in the north of Ireland.

In tracing the role of ritual in the field of politics I will utilise historical and anthropological approaches. Abner Cohen argues that 'the challenge to social anthropology today is the analysis of this dynamic involvement of symbols, or of custom, in the changing relationships of power between individuals and groups' (1974: 29). This book takes up that challenge. Since

the 1790s the rituals and symbols of Orangeism have played a significant part in the political development of Ireland. Orangeism is popularly viewed as reflecting centuries of an unchanging political opposition: the opposition of Protestants to a predominantly Catholic Ireland. The annual parades therefore, perhaps more than any other aspect of politics in Ireland, appear to symbolise stasis. Orangemen claim an uninterrupted 'tradition' of parades reaching back into the eighteenth century. Many of their opponents and observers argue that Orangeism is unchanging and that Orangemen are 'trapped in their history'. Yet Ireland has quite evidently undergone enormous changes since the end of the seventeenth century when William of Orange – or King Billy as he is affectionately termed by Orangemen – fought King James at the Boyne. The north of Ireland has developed from a largely rural economy into a complex industrial society. Has the apparent continuity of Orange parades really been maintained throughout this period? I will argue that to accept the apparent continuity of ritual and symbol at face value is to misunderstand the roles of these rituals in politics. The ritual commemorations and symbols of Orangeism have played a far more complex and dynamic role in Irish politics than is generally understood. In explaining the way the functions of symbolic forms might change Abner Cohen provides the same warning.

To the casual observer this [continuity in symbolic forms] seems to be a manifestation of social conservatism and reaction, but a careful analysis shows that the old symbols are rearranged to serve new purposes under new political conditions. In ethnicity, old symbols and ideologies become strategies for the articulation of new interest groups that struggle for employment, housing, funds and other benefits. In Northern Ireland old religious symbols are used in a violent struggle over economic and political issues within the contemporary situation. (Abner Cohen 1974: 39)

This book examines the political control of Orange parades. It contrasts the appearance of continuity in an annual commemorative occasion, the Twelfth, with the clear evidence of political changes both within and outside the event. I will show how various class interests have attempted to control the rituals. I will argue that the political functions of the ritual vary historically depending upon those class interests, the interests and power of ethnic and denominational communities, and particularly the position of the British state in Ireland.

Part of the process of the political control of rituals is the attempt to control the meaning of symbols. Through both ethnographic and historical material I will show that the confrontation between social groups in Northern Ireland often takes the form of a competition over the meaning of particular symbols. There is a continuous attempt by those in power to impose an understanding of the parades that reinforces their political position. Yet the parades are large, complex events, drawing together diverse Protestant groups with diverse political and economic interests. These groups have significantly different relationships both with the Catholic community and with the

British state. Under such circumstances particular ritual meanings that might sustain those in power are not so easily imposed. I will argue that the ability to utilise ritual events by providing them with a dominant meaning rarely goes unopposed and that even within the parades there is resistance to these processes. Most obviously this resistance reflects opposed class interests within Protestantism. The parades may act as a symbolic reference for the Protestant community but they also form part of the confrontation between the powerful and the relatively powerless. More than one interpretation of the events exists and the dominant meanings come from a negotiation between interests.

This confrontation within ritual is the site of the formation of group identity, of 'the labour of representation', which Bourdieu regards as the very essence of the political process (Bourdieu 1991). It is part of an effort by an elite to represent a unified community in contrast to other possible representations, such as those of class, denomination or perhaps generation, and in doing so sustain its own political position. It is through this process that the ethnic identities in the north of Ireland developed, and that the nature of a Protestant identity as opposed to a Catholic identity is formulated. The formation of these identities is not simply a matter of examining the boundary between Protestant and Catholic but also involves the complex class relationships that exist within the communities and the relationship that those communities have with the state.

To examine the dynamic struggle over the meaning of parades, and the confrontations that are part of identity-formation, I will explore some historical moments, tracing the history of commemorations of William's campaign in Ireland from their origins in the eighteenth century to their appropriation and use by the Orange Institution in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I argue that there is a generalised discourse, emanating from the landed class attempting to control the Orange Institution, around what I call 'respectable' Orangeism. The generalisation of 'respectable' Orangeism has been mentioned by others (Smyth 1995: 52; Jarman 1997a: 67) and whilst I will use it as a term for particular types of discourse emanating from particular class interests it is also a term used by Orangemen themselves. By 'respectability' I mean the quality of perceived decency and the esteem gained from social correctness. And of course what is deemed 'respectable' is defined by the powerful. This notion of 'respectability' is similar to the idea of the civilising process as applied to parades in Ireland by Jarman (1995: 47–50, 1997a: 28). It implies a form of control on the 'rougher' elements of society likely to disturb the status quo. 'Respectable' Orangemen highlight the religious and 'traditional' meanings of Orangeism and make claims that the Institution is non-sectarian. This view of Orangeism has found its clearest and most recent expression in Ruth Dudley-Edwards' book *The Faithful Tribe* (1999) in which she argues that the Orange Order has been misunderstood and misrepresented.

From 1795 until the 1870s Orange parades were widely viewed, even by many Protestants, as 'rough' events that simply served to foster disturbances and demanded heavy policing. In the period after the 1870s Orangeism became patronised by many more Ulster landowners, the bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie in Belfast, parades came to be seen as more 'respectable' and there was a consistent attempt to marginalise the rougher elements. 'Respectable' Orangeism reached its zenith with the formation of the state of Northern Ireland in 1920 and the parades effectively became rituals of state. I am not arguing that what is deemed 'respectable' has remained constant over 200 years and I am certainly not suggesting by using the word 'respectable' that middle-class Orangeism is somehow non-sectarian or 'better' than that of the working classes. The argument is that discourses of respectability were bound to develop amongst those whose class interests were to maintain their position of power with regard to both working-class Protestants and the Catholic community, but that these political relationships also relied upon the stability of the state. When Orange parades caused major civil disturbances which required massive policing, then the utility of Orangeism to those class interests was reduced. It is my contention that, in attempting to buttress their power, middle-class and capital-owning Protestants have continually found Orangeism, and particularly the parades, a useful and yet awkward, unwieldy, even dangerous, resource in the maintenance of that power.

In the second half of this book I will undertake an ethnographic analysis of the parades I witnessed in the 1990s in an attempt to reveal the complex relationships of power, and resistance to power, within the ritual and between the Protestant community, the forces of the state and the Catholic community. I will look in more detail at the structure of the Orange Order and the two other large 'loyal orders' the Black Institution and the Apprentice Boys of Derry, the annual cycle of parades commonly referred to as the marching season, the preparations that are made for the Twelfth and the events that take place on 12 July. In doing so I will point out not only some of the tensions within unionism, but also the nature of authority within the Orange Institution and the way in which this authority structure affects the control of parades. Specifically, I examine the crucial role played in the parades by marching bands, and suggest that, as broadly independent from the Orange Institution, they have their own particular interests and input into the rituals. The political nuances, the contradictions, and the lines of cleavage that exist within the parades reveal the Twelfth to be a dynamic political ritual quite in contradiction to the discourse of 'tradition' which suggests that the rituals have remained unchanged for centuries. That the discourse of 'tradition' remains dominant is dependent upon the ability of an Orange and unionist elite to maintain power.

Rituals are by their very nature repetitive performances. They not only give the appearance of a lack of change but their imagined lack of change is

often held by participants to legitimate the events. As Connerton suggests, commemorative rituals:

do not simply imply continuity with the past by virtue of their high degree of formality and fixity; rather, they have as one of their defining features the explicit claim to be commemorating such continuity. (1989: 48)

Yet every ritual event is a complex, unique occasion created by specific individual actions in specific social circumstances and interpreted and reinterpreted by all the actors directly or indirectly involved. The rituals have complex meanings that are not fixed. They are therefore, to an extent, adaptable to new circumstances despite their repetitiveness.

This research work is a conjunction of participant observation, ethnographic interview and text-based investigation. Whilst being aware of the specific problems with each resource it is not a question of necessarily privileging one over another rather of using them to cross-reference each other. It is in the process of cross-referencing that really interesting questions arise. When a young lad interviewed on radio explains that the Twelfth is all about throwing stones at Catholics it should not be dismissed because a senior Orangeman has told me personally that the Twelfth is primarily providing witness to the Protestant faith. But conversely it would be wrong to suggest that actually the young lad was telling us the truth and the Orangeman was hiding what he really believed. What is interesting is asking why these different discourses exist and how they work in relation to one another.

The whole distinction between 'knowledgeable' and 'unreliable' informants can be revealed for what it is: not a reflection of privileged access to 'real existing meaning', but a local construction put on a contest of interpretations. Why should anthropologists listen only to winners of that contest? If there is no single underlying meaning to 'reveal' then the anthropologist's account does not have to be consistent: to represent consistency when in fact there may be confusion and diversity has been a tempting short-cut to something which doesn't exist! In thinking of symbolism as a code, anthropologists miss the fact that in offering interpretations of a ritual their informants are actually being creative (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994: 264).

Whereas many anthropologists who have approached ritual have been faced with a paucity of historical information or a relatively short time run, I was faced with sources on Williamite commemorations dating back to 1691 and have been able to spend five years watching a large number of events. What follows is an attempt to utilise diverse sources to allow a better understanding of some particular ritual practices.

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