

Mythical Re-construction of the Past: War Commemoration and Formation of Northern Irish Britishness

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I explore the relation between the novel version of the commemorative ceremony, *Orangefest*, and the formation of the Northern Ireland national identity. War memory and war commemoration have, in the late 20th century, been attributed with a new role and meaning in societies and have led to many contestations over memory and history. Commemoration of the Battle of Boyne, known as the *Twelfth Orange Parade*, has been re-enacted in Ulster for over three centuries. Since 1921, after the formation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the mythic past has represented one of the main components for the formation of national identity in Northern Ireland. In 1926, the war commemoration was made a national holiday and had up represented the dominant symbol of the state to the middle of the 20th century. During the period of the thirty years of ensuing civil violence, known as the Troubles, the war commemoration became the opposing symbol of the state and was undertaken by the rising ethno-nationalist movement: loyalism. The commemorative performance became alienated from majority of the Protestant community and from political and state groups. At the beginning of the 21st century, over the course of several peace agreements, leading to political and social changes, the role of war commemoration was considerably altered and modified. The parade was festivalized and renamed as *Orangefest*. The meanings of the myth of the Battle of Boyne were symbolically reconstructed by political and state groups. The memory of the war hero and of the military victory was implemented with memory of the Troubles, in order to reconstruct the notion of a common past within the Protestant community. This common past redefines the sense of a shared identity and represents the key source for members of the Protestant community in identifying themselves with the imagined community, i.e. the British nation. The process of identification thus excludes those, who do not see themselves as a part of this nation, i.e. the Catholic community.

KEYWORDS: war commemoration, mythic past, national identity

Introduction

The myth of the Battle of Boyne has enabled individuals to create their own tradition, which distinguishes them from others by their heroic past. Societies evolve around mythologies, testifying of their origin and sanctifying their norms. Misreadings of the past can become cherished myths. They become comprehended as a true story, which through re-telling and re-enactment renews the social order and the image of the world. In this sense, the myth creates sacred history and thus validates ideologies, which justify social order and social change.

The Battle of Boyne commemoration has been an active factor in the process of social identification. It celebrates one version of history and uses one method of remembering it, thus excluding Others. According to Zdzislaw Mach (1993), performance of the socially meaningful parts of the mythic material exceeds the content of myth and plays out the model for reality (1993: 78). Over time, myths often change their symbolic forms and content in relation to varying perceptions of the Others in the society as well as varying degrees of conflict and competition between them. War commemoration in Northern Ireland conveys the meaning of sameness and the continuity of the Protestant community. In order to justify and maintain this tradition, war commemoration has been redefined and reshaped on many occasions.

Since the formation of the nation-state, the political and social spheres in Northern Ireland have been characterized by times of change and stress. Re-enactment of the mythic past attained an especially prominent role in the society, as it creates an image of a convincing world. The Boyne commemoration became significant in sustaining national identities. The performance of war commemoration was thus hardly ever interrupted, even during the period of the Troubles. The Battle of Boyne commemoration has become significant for sustaining national identity as well as for providing potential for further antagonism between the Protestant/unionist and Catholic/nationalist community. In the commemorative practice, the imagination of a collective identity is constituted in memory, which contributes to nationalisms being shaped as communities of shared feeling of passion (Bond and Gilliam 1994: 133).

In the 19th century, the myth of the Battle of Boyne became reappropriated as the myth of British identity. The notion of the common past was used by unionist politicians to develop a sense of unity amongst Protestants, predominantly those coming from Ulster. This contributed to intensifying the communal polarization across Ireland, which developed in the early 17th century. The development of two opposing Ulster ethnicities had ever since structured the social, political and economic life of the north. The politically and economically dominant were Anglo-Scots (Protestant) and the dispossessed and politically excluded were Irish (Catholic). The Battle of Boyne was at the end of the 17th century, when the Catholic King James the Second and the Dutch ruler, William of Orange engaged in a battle, which ended in 1690 when William of Orange defeated James. The events of the battle contributed to the myth of the Glorious Revolution, which resulted in the imperial parliamentary sovereignty, religious toleration and a constitutional monarchy (Ignatieff 1993: 167). The battle provided not only the means for the symbolic capitalization of the victory of the Protestant king over the Catholic king; it was a memorial for the defense of Christendom for the entire Europe. The message of the moral and military victory was

continuously re-appropriated and adapted to the contemporary circumstances.

In the late 18th century, celebration of the Boyne anniversary, which was held on William's birthday, November 4th, spread from Dublin to the province of Ulster. The enactment of the parade had been taken up by the paramilitary defence force of Volunteer companies. They reshaped the parade into a military display, to suit their interest of portraying their military power. The state banned the Volunteers, whilst the parade remained in its military form, growing in size, until the late 20th century.

The cult of King William was strong and growing, much after his death. Orangeism, which had been developed under his rule, as a religious and political movement was further empowered. The movement leaned onto the ideological message of defending the Protestant religion against the enemies. Since then, it spread around the world rapidly, as a pro-Empire and pro-Protestant movement (Bryan 2003: 120).

In 1795, the Orange Order¹ was established as a society for mutual protection of the Protestant peasantry. Its origin is marked by the victory at the Battle of Diamond, where a twelve-year old sectarian feud ended with victory of the Protestants (Haddick-Flynn 1999: 11). The Orange Order had since been organized as a fraternity, whose primary aim has been to sustain and commemorate the ideological message of Orangeism, i.e. the myth of the Battle of Boyne. By advocating the defense and unity of the Protestant community, it has depicted itself as a religious organization, whilst it has been as well a cultural, economic and political association. A year after their establishment, the Orangemen held their first *Twelfth Orange Parade*.

Discovering the purposes of altering and using the past is connected to exploring specific time periods they belong to. As Gordon Wood (2008) notes, the 18th century had little in common with the modern striving for novelty and the dislike of imitation, which resulted from it. Instead, the preexisting models were creatively adapted and reappropriated to different circumstances (2008: 188). The fraternity undertook the previous form of the performance of memory of the Battle of Boyne and modified it to fit the new context. The ceremony was infused with specific meaning and provided a practice of strong social binding amongst the rural communities of settlers in Ireland.

British national identity was developing from the early 18th century onward, with the formation of the Union of the Scottish and English Crowns. Britain identified itself with the imperial state, not with the nations which comprised it. When the fraternity took over the memory of the battle and the notion of Orangeism, it also took over the ideology implied behind it; firstly, the defense of Protestant community in the Irish state, which was symbolically and materially depicted by Orangemen often carrying weapons, such as swords, spears and pikes, to their celebrations (MacRaild 2000: 52) and secondly, the support of English political tradition. Accordingly, the Orange Order contributed to establishing a notion of a common English culture and tradition, as symbols² of collective belonging to the British state.

¹ Also known as the Loyal Orange Institution.

² As symbol of collective belonging to the English state, a large obelisk was erected in 1736 by the River Boyne at Oldbridge as a reminder of the heroic past.

This ideological message, demonstrated through the enactment of the Twelfth parade has since then been sustained. Furthermore, political and institutional empowerment of Orangeism led to the actualizing the ideological message. The idea behind the defense of the Protestant community legitimised violent clashes and outbursts during the Twelfth parade enactment, further sustaining the division between the communities. The settler/native ideology induced in the early 17th century became the vehicle for further reproducing and intensifying the antagonistic relationship between the communities within the national space.

Since 1921, when the border between Ulster and the rest of Ireland was institutionalized, the unionist politicians constructed the national narrative around the perception of a Catholic threat from the Irish state as well as within Ulster. The narrative of siege was incorporated in society's collective memory. The performance of war commemoration became intertwined with national mythology and ethnic identity. It portrayed the image of stability and unchangeability and expressed nationalistic feelings, thus reviving bonds and loyalty between co-nationals. The public discourse built around it legitimized the re-recreation of a national space. The endurance of the myth of the Battle indicates that it reflects the hopes and reality of members of Protestant community. According to Wood (2008), such myths cannot be simply treated as devices of the powerful or imaginings of a few people. The idea of nation can only change through the reality of innovation, enterprise, and reform (2008: 261–262).

In recent times, the collective memory of the Troubles has proliferated due to the public interest in its various political and cultural dimensions. The memory of heroic victory or suffering endured in a previous battle may act as the template through which later conflicts are understood. Such templates tend to function at both a psychic and political level to intensify the response to later conflict. Templates of remote conflicts do not draw upon the direct memory of survivors. Yet these 'pre-memories' must be considered as no less powerful than survivor narratives in their capacity to galvanize public responses to conflict. Where subjectivities have been shaped by such templates, people feel the significance of these past events to be deeply personal (Ashplant et al. 2000: 28–36). Social groups that suffered injustice or trauma during the Troubles, started demanding public recognition and affirming their status as victims. These experiences became a part of the national narrative, and were infused in the Battle of Boyne commemoration. This kind of memorialisation reshapes the worlds of people, and redefines the narrative of their identity.

The novel kind of Boyne commemoration, *Orangefest*, is composed of templates of remote and later conflicts. The cultural memory of the Battle of Boyne has been transmitted to contemporary unionist politicians, whose participation in the commemoration constitutes their personal memories (Ashplant et al. 2000). The new national legacy in Northern Ireland is thus composed of past suffering and trauma.

This paper focuses on the commemorative performance of *Orangefest* 2008 in Belfast and its specific parts and meanings in the contemporary Northern Irish context. I accomplished the ethnographic fieldwork in Belfast during two periods of time. The first period was situated around the Twelfth of July, in 2008. During this time, I observed the

preparations for the commemorative performance, the transformation of the public space and the enactment of *Orangefest*. In the second period, in November 2008, I held several qualitative interviews. Most of my informants were members of the community activist groups, belonging to both communities and located in the middle-aged group (40–60 years old). I also talked to several members of the Orange Order, the Grand Master of the Orange Order and the organizer of *Orangefest*.

While I was observing the *Orangefest* enactment, the participants and their visual and material displays, a float came by with five actors representing soldiers from different periods of the national history: the Battle of Boyne, the First World War, the Troubles and recently soldiers from Northern Ireland, which served in Iraq and Afghanistan. On the float there was a sign ‘364 RUC officers were killed during the Troubles’ and ‘Basra to Boyne’. The re-invented war commemoration celebrates the collective memory of past and later conflicts, which appeals to family and communal sphere. The image of their beloved ones, who died during the Troubles, is cherished and remembered. The enactment of commemoration and re-telling of its ideological message affects the collective and individual levels of understanding. According to Michelle Rosaldo (1984) emotions are processes that are at best understood with reference to the cultural scenarios and associations they evoke. Within the collective stories in which we come to know culture the nature of the individuals’ world is depicted (1984: 140–142).

The relation between individual and the nation is thus re-constructed around the memory of past atrocities, based on the memory of the dead. This memory is one of the main elements that constitute the nationalist imagination. The imagined community is secured as those living feel their connection with the dead, who belong to the same national community (Anderson 2006). The main figures of these imaginings are the soldiers from the remote battle and the soldiers or policemen from the Troubles. The commemoration of Boyne and the nationalist rhetoric evoke the notion of sacrifice of dying for one’s country, for Great Britain and thus an attempt to re-assert Britishness.

According to Avner Ben-Amos (2003), only by examining the identity of those who are commemorated and the way they are commemorated, it is possible to depict who had the right to be included in the collective entity and who was excluded from it. The commemorated war hero and the events from the Battle and from the Troubles were chosen because they were identified with Britishness. In this manner, the authorities legitimized the incorporation of security forces in the commemorative performance during the Troubles and, as I will show later, this enabled the inclusion of the figures of soldier, serving in various British wars into the commemorative ceremony. Members of the Catholic/nationalist community were not a part of the British army and were furthermore on the opposite side of the ethnic conflict. Thereby, they were excluded from commemoration and thus also from the nation.

A decade after the last peace agreement, dead and living soldiers were commemorated, as well as the dead police officers from the Troubles. The passage from personal to public memory of the violent past was made in a ceremonial and emotional manner. Accordingly, the soldiers and police officers, the figures of the nation-state, represent the

identity of the Protestant/unionist community on an individual, communal and national level. The collective memories of the Troubles publicly manifested the trauma and tragedy of the Protestant community. The Irish Catholic community has been excluded by the Boyne commemoration from the national collective, whilst now their experiences of loss and suffering from the Troubles were excluded and silenced as well.

In this paper, I explore the content and the value of the float commemoration in relation to the contemporary Northern Irish national identity. I focus on the narratives of the informants regarding the role of the British military tradition in national identification. Specifically, I focus on *Orangefest* as a form of re-invented tradition, whose transformation, in my mind, reflects on the changing nature of the national narrative itself. I explore the Boyne commemoration firstly through a historical overview of its role and meaning since the nation-state formation; secondly by examining the meanings of the festivalization of the commemorative practice, and thirdly I represent the analysis of the fieldwork data from Belfast in order to demonstrate the relation made between the memory of the dead soldiers and police officers and the national imaginings.

Reshaping war commemoration: from a military parade to a festival

The ceremonial character of the Battle of Boyne commemoration was shaped in a military style in the late 18th century. It remained aestheticised in this manner until the beginning of the twenty-first century, growing in size and enhanced in military symbols. The military style commemorative performance transmitted its ideological message of the unity of the Protestant community and the need to sustain and defend it in the most prominent way. It became a part of society's collective memory, institutionalized after the nation-state formation, when the 12th of July was made a national holiday.

The aestheticization of war commemoration is in relation to Walter Benjamin's (1987) characterization of fascist rallies. Their aesthetic dimension was designed to aim at the masses and was at the same time executed by them. In this sense, the Boyne commemoration was used by the political elite to incorporate the participants and the spectators in the celebration of the military tradition, which was a source of identification with the British state. The military show is intended to be visually pleasing in their displays of potential violence (Aijmer 2000: 10). The Boyne commemoration symbolized martial activity, which included displays of the military uniforms and military-style parading of Orangemen. These uniforms communicated danger as well as style and beauty, whilst the parade was choreographed to appear threatening for those defined as outsiders, i.e. the Irish Catholic community. The ideological communication of the performance emphasized the role of the state and its readiness to defend the social order.

In the performance, the events of the Battle used to be replayed. As Dominic Bryan notes (2000), the Orangemen constituted themselves as a replica army, and their parade mimicked the departure to and return from, war. According to Benjamin, the monumentalizing of the masses cast a spell over spectators and actors at the same time as it

paralysed the power of critical thought or action; it furthermore eternalizes the imperial power (1987: 253–254). The aestheticization of Boyne commemoration was designed by the Orange Order to re-assert the message of egalitarian ideology connected to Britishness. The annual re-enactment confirmed the status of members of the Protestant community as citizens of the British nation as well as their communal and family ties.

The aestheticised dimension of the Boyne commemoration became especially prominent from the second half of the twentieth century onwards. During the 1950s, the commemorative ceremony became one of the most relevant sources of intensifying communal divisions and sectarianism. The rise of the Irish Republican Army in the Republic had been used by the Orange Order and unionist politicians to intensify the siege mentality among the Protestant community. In the late 1960s, tensions between the communities and the tensions between the unionist and British politics started revealing themselves intensively during the commemoration enactment (Bryan 2000: 94).

Re-enactment of the mythic past in Northern Irish society is based on the mythic repetition of purity (Feldman 1991: 36). The symbology of purity and impurity is sustained and incorporated within ethnic identities and replicated within public space. The commemorative performance indicated the divisions between Catholic and Protestant, spatially enforced through (in)visible interfaces, which have been materializing everyday social space and thus memorizing the colonial past for the Catholic population (Kelleher 2006: 57–59).

The Boyne commemorative performance transgresses the socially recognized boundaries and thus produces multiple experiences of the relationship between Protestant and Catholic, or between Irish and British, as the dominant and the dominated and thus re-enacts the past notion of colonization. Parading across boundaries exposes the concept of Otherness within which the Other is cast as deviant and malign. Accordingly, segregation creates a sense of being tied to their neighbours and community for residents and thus provides a sense of communal and cultural connectedness. This contributes to the Other community being depicted as impure (Kelleher 2006: 21). The notion of belonging, either to a community, to a social space or to a nation-state, is bounded by social differences and complex patterns of exclusion tied to symbolic and cultural codes. The commemorative performance construes the meanings of colonial past, which are embedded within the content of commemoration and bodily moving through space.

During the 1960s and 1970s, when the period of civil violence was ensuing rapidly, the role of Orangeism altered radically. The Orange Order shifted from being a political insider to an outsider and so had the role of the Boyne commemoration. The bond between the unionist elite and the Protestant working classes had been broken, leading to the growth of loyalist paramilitaries (Kaufmann 2007: 53). Since the early 1970s, the commemorative performance was infused with loyalist paramilitary symbols, which were officially banned in the 1980s. The ideas behind the use of militant symbols reinvoked the need to defend the unity and stability of the Protestant community, not only against its Catholic counterpart, but also against England and the rest of Europe, which led to the construction of an Ulster identity (Larsen 1982: 286–287).

Although no longer a state symbol, the commemorative performance continuously guarded by the police service, the RUC³, and the British army forces was during the Troubles. The security forces guaranteed that the performance would not be disrupted, which in turn meant that the Irish nationalists were treated differently. These institutions of authority have influenced and created very specific relationships with those that they *protect* and those whose safety was less likely to be ensured. Police institutions have been riddled with controversy due to the legacy of the Protestant majority of the force, as well due to the noted harassment and misconduct by the police force towards the communities they patrolled, particularly during the height of the Troubles⁴ (Roche 2008: 42–43).

The commemorative performance became the site for political struggle, which resulted in rioting and violent clashes. The arousal of conflict and anxiety is related to the heightened awareness of the common past being altered. Rioting during the performance was then the expression of working-class, loyalist Protestants and Orangemen of defending their Protestant identity by opposing the Catholic community as well as the symbol of authority it once supported and identified with it, i.e. British nationalism. As Michael Ignatieff (1993) points out elaborately, Ulster worships at 17th century Protestant shrines, which mainland Britain no longer recognizes as its own. Loyalism is essentially an ethnic nationalism, which emphasizes an Ulster identity within a British nation. This contributes to the dynamics of the relation between the memory of the imperial past and the actual state of Ulster being a minority in the British nation. In this sense, Ulster became separated from mainland Britain by a Britishness that once belonged to it. The Boyne commemoration represents a form of nationalism, intensely ritualized. Britishness is ritualized because it is up against its antithesis and nemesis: Irish Republicanism. In this way, loyalism is portraying its identity through rituals of belonging, which present an identity of their own. It uses the civic symbols of Britishness to mark out their identity, whilst disregarding the content of these symbols (1993: 181–184). The ideological message of the commemoration was transcended into the loyalist notion of defending a tradition, a culture – a way of life. At times when the historical verities were being undermined, implying on a fragile sense of the present and an unstable version of the future, the notion of Ulster identity was strengthened and emphasized vividly. Since the 1980s and especially in the 1990s, the commemorative performance evolved into a visible expression of the siege mentality.

In 1985 one of the first peace agreements was signed as an effort to end the Troubles. The Anglo-Irish agreement set a defining tone in the relationship between British nationalism and Northern Ireland. The rhetoric of the agreement was built around the discourse of colonialism, by constructing the naturalized and essentialist notions of the Protestant identity. This led to two important consequences that significantly affected the rise of ethno-nationalism. Firstly, the rhetoric reinvoked and contributed to the racialization of the Catholic/nationalist community.

³ The Royal Ulster Constabulary was a predominantly Protestant police service of Northern Ireland. After 1998, it was renamed as the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

⁴ The final withdrawal of the British Army troops from Northern Ireland occurred in July 2007 (Roche 2008).

In the agreement, Irish nationalism was identified as transgressing nature's way; it was impossible for them to claim the membership in the state or to claim the right to create one. The Catholic/nationalist community was placed outside of the natural law. They were not natural, since they were not sharing a common history, i.e. the history of the Protestant community. The discourse of the colonial past has been kept alive for the Catholic community, since its political position was marked as possessing a different temporality, one that had nothing in common with British nation. They were racialized. In contrast to this, the Protestants were depicted as rational, as the chosen ones in terms of the natural law (Kelleher 2006: 78–83). The Boyne commemoration represented the common history and was thus never suppressed or banned, although it became in opposition with the state. Recollection and repetition of the mythic past during and after the Troubles naturalized Ulster identity.

In contrast, the natural law was broken as far as the political unionism was concerned. The agreement stated that Northern Ireland would remain British as long as the majority of its citizens desired it. Furthermore, it involved the Dublin government in the political system of Northern Ireland. To unionists, this was betrayal, because it included a foreign, sovereign state in their governance (Coulter 1999). In this sense, the British government had denied natural justice. Protestant unionists believed that with the agreement the British state had betrayed Northern Ireland's loyalty to United Kingdom. The idea of the *natural law* was being removed from them in order to accommodate the Irish entity (Kelleher 2006: 64–65). This perception invoked the siege mentality once again. The agreement also affected the Orange Order, since the performance of the Twelfth parade was no longer to be secured by the police force (Bryan and Jarman 1997: 229).

Since the 1980s, the struggles over social distinctions, over narratives of origin, over space and place, have been the direct outcome of imperialism (Kelleher 2006: 84). The British state has worked powerfully in reproducing the dynamics of the binary. In this sense, colonial legacies have been the driving forces of the process of constructing difference and division. The notion of shared politics and future aspirations thus became problematic.

During and after the Troubles, the myth of the Battle of Boyne represented the key element in bolstering the need for the defense against the Other. The heroic past remerged to fulfil the need of belonging to a Protestant entity. When the loyalists took over the commemoration enactment, the myth was used to portray an image of a never-ending battle. After the ceasefires in 1994, and the consequent ending of the cross-fires between paramilitary politics, the commemorative performance became a high profile issue (Bryan 2003). The Orange Order and the Protestant loyalist community expressed their ethnic identity by emphasizing tradition and culture at every cost, which usually resulted in violent clashes and rioting. Furthermore, the symbolic threat of the Catholic community became visible as groups of protesters were formed on the incentive of political Republicanism. These have undermined the total control over space, which the Orange Order was reasserting through parading. Protesting as well as other forms of social interaction have continued to sustain spatial and social communal divisions, expressed most clearly through the daily

lives of individuals. Memory of past violence and reproduction of violence empower the boundaries (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006: 1).

In 1998, the Good Friday Agreement was signed, the most recent peace agreement, which strived to work out the social divisions and differences between communities in Northern Ireland. In the spirit of new times, the Boyne commemoration was reshaped and renamed *Orangefest* in 2007. In the modern context, politics developed new symbols, as means of identification, which are exclusive. They legitimate some claims, whilst delegitimize others. Symbols of nationhood, present in our daily lives, turn the everyday space into 'national space'. Ritual displays of national symbols play an important role in the organization of the commemorative spectacle. *National* is thus transformed into a form of life, a way of seeing and interpreting the world continuously (Özkirimili 2000: 193–5).

Orangefest has been reshaped into a different kind of a spectacle, by using carnival imagery and cultural characteristics and by infusing them with the elements of play. According to Mikhail Bakhtin (1968), the fest is an important primary form of human culture, which is sanctioned to the world of ideals. *Orangefest* is related to a specific historical event, which is connected to the moment of crisis, a breaking point in the social and political order from the late 1990s onwards.

By reshaping the parade and restructuring the past, the Orange Order indulged the unionist political needs in trying to construct a distinctive culture, history and identity, since it became clear that the *old tradition* no longer suited the present means and future aspirations.

One of the most prominent characteristics of *Orangefest* is that as a feast it is an indestructible ingredient of human civilization; it can alter, but it cannot vanish and it transgresses the limited objectives as it extends to the entire social sphere, affecting individual and collective (1968: 276). It presents a kind of separate reality that is independent of the world of hierarchy and authority, which previously resolved its support of the parade. The festival thus enables a new outlook by allowing common people to organize themselves in their own way. New symbols have been incorporated into *Orangefest* to reflect change and renewal, a new atmosphere connoting the post-conflict period of parity of esteem, i.e. the spirit of equality. This characteristic, described by Bakhtin, is the logic of the inside out. A second life is constructed, as a parody of the world inside out (1968: 11). In this world, *Orangefest* is a festival open to everyone and furthermore it is disconnected from the political sphere. Despite these alterations, in the following section I will demonstrate that the festivalization of the commemorative ceremony has brought about reshaping of its performance, whilst its emotional character reasserts the ideological message. The Boyne commemoration has, despite many of its alterations from the 18th century onwards, referred to the one community, which symbolically represents the nation.

Redefining national imaginary: remembering the Troubles

In the second half of the twentieth century, dealing with war crimes traversed the social role of memory. Wars are commemorated in the same amount, but in a different way than

they used to be. According to Gerard Delanty (2004), commemorative ceremonies have in the recent times become more contested and open to new interpretations as a result of the crisis of representation in culture. Due to the nation-states losing their political power, authoritative forms of cultural representation are giving way to more reflexive and critical expressions of cultural belonging. This has attributed to the rise of new forms and discourses around commemoration, which are related to the changing form of the state and the political community of the nation (2004: 196–197). The need to restructure the past is as great as the desire to set its future agenda, in times of changes within social and political order. This leads to re-inventing tradition in order to legitimize the social and political order. *Orangefest* as a form of re-invented tradition provides a response to the new situation within politics and society, which has weakened the social patterns for which the old traditions had been designed and therefore proved insufficiently flexible (Hobsbawm 1983: 1–5). The notion of displacement, which has intensified in the modern period, has enforced this need even more. Memory of the Troubles is reinterpreted within *Orangefest*, as a traumatic experience of unionists, emphasizing their survival being threatened (Nagle 2008: 29–32). Individuals and collectivities started identifying with a traumatic past, instead of the glorious and heroic one. An older informant, a Protestant loyalist expressed his view of a parade float in a similar manner:

I think it's a tribute to the young men who were sent to their deaths... really, I thought that was very sad... I don't see it as glorification, I see it as a tragedy, young men had to die.

Andrew Finlay (2004) notes that in Northern Ireland, the multiculturalist and pluralist principles, defined and promoted through various peace agreements from 1985 onwards, are confronted more recently with the thirty years of civil violence (2004: 149). These principles have outlined the political division between the nationalists and the unionists furthermore and thus set the ground for selective reconstruction of the past. The events of the Troubles were reinterpreted and incorporated into the mythical past. Members of the state security forces were redefined as national martyrs, as victims. According to John Nagle (2008), the 1998 peace agreement opened the doors for political groups to compete in the narrative of suffering in order to achieve the morally superior status as victims, sufferers. Victimhood engages in emotional and political functions, i.e., the irresolvable negotiations between the two ethnic collectivities represent a powerful trope that can be utilized to try to gain more economic and political concessions on the basis of deserved need and at the expense of the less deserving enemy oppressors (2008: 32). In the narrative of the organizer of *Orangefest*, an older member of the Orange Order, commemoration of the dead RUC officers constructs the notion of victimhood of the Protestant community:

For us, Northern Ireland was established as a state in 1921; for Roman Catholics, they have misruled, since the Battle of the Boyne, since 1921, in the partition and the forming of Northern Ireland, the IRA and those who would support it, have been trying to destroy this... And destroy us in our entirety

out of it. We have then had to have our own protection, with organizations and the police force, a quasi-military force... And the RUC for us were the protectors of not just Protestantism... But to protect the state from those who seek to overthrow it and to that end, we are obliged, morally obliged to keep the memory of those who defended us sacred.

Social suffering and experienced trauma became public and common in the post-conflict, post-war societies. The notion of shared traumatic experience redefines and reimburses collective identity. The violent past had to be reinterpreted as acceptable to the dominant group. The selectively constructed past is essential to the sense of the Northern Irish Protestant identity. In this sense, the struggle for owning the past has become vital for the personal history on an individual level as well as on the level of a national collective. Oppositional discourses in Northern Ireland are sustained through essentialist notions of Britishness and Irishness. Their boundary marker is reproduced through notions of colonialism, ethnicity and religion and class categories. The discourse of victimhood serves to conceal the power imbalance between the settler community and the native community. The struggle for representing the community as the ultimate victim is negotiated through the discourse of power, which masks the reality of the power relation between the occupier and the occupied (Kelleher 2006). The struggle is built on competing narratives, regarding the conflict and collective memories of both communities. However, the struggle is, within the narratives of the Protestant community, connected to the mythic past, which portrays the community as morally superior and thus as being the real victims. In this sense, collective memories and narratives of the past enforce the negation of the Other community.

Orangefest 2008 in Belfast paid tribute to the fallen soldiers and police officers from the past as well as to the soldiers who are currently in the service of the British army and who came back from their missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Primarily, I have focused on the first group, which represents the fallen soldiers from the Battle of Boyne and the First World War and the dead police officers from the Troubles. Furthermore, I examine the relation made between the dead and the living soldiers as a component of national identification in the modern world.

Commemorating the soldiers and the police officers, who are assumed to have fought and sacrificed their lives for their country and still do, functions as cohesive force between members of the nation. *Orangefest* evoked the rhetoric of the nation-state, which constructs meanings about death in war. According to Anderson's notion of the cult of the unknown soldiers, meanings of death are located in the cultural roots of nationalism. The deaths must be remembered as our own, as belonging to our collective (2006: 206). Cultural claims situated in the dominant narrative contribute to the construction of social and cultural victimhood among the Protestant community. The figures, which were incorporated into *Orangefest*, address the heroic past of the nation and thus the present state of affairs as well as secure the future aspirations of remembering their deeds. Victimhood and memory represent the key elements in the reproduction of the past through the performance of *Orangefest*. The ethnic and cultural divisions within the society are reproduced, as the transgressive acts of the Others from the Troubles are remembered. Peter Shirlow and

Brendan Murtagh (2008) explain the issue of loss and harm will remain a tool of political manipulation as long as the civil society refuses to make mature arguments concerning the past. The modern political regime has indulged in politicising victimhood, which ‘made the dead take sides’ (2008: 180–181).

Viewing or participating in the commemorative performance enables the living members of the Protestant community to feel a connection with the dead, who belong to the same national community. National imaginary was infused with new meanings of the violent past. *Orangefest* has, despite its variations, sustained the effects and the meanings of the Boyne commemoration. The performance affects the audience in the way that they identify with the sacrifice of the fallen soldiers and create a relation between the soldiers and the families that have suffered loss and the nation. According to Ben-Amos (2003), the commemorative performance makes the sacrifice seem ‘natural’ and thus secures the existence of the community.

The events of the Battle of Boyne and of the First World War were mythified and made a part of the Northern Irish narrative, as they asserted the British national consciousness. The events from the Troubles were for decades after the beginning of the conflict incorporated into the national narrative as well. The sign on the float reading ‘364 RUC officers were killed during the Troubles’, indicates the movement from individual remembering and traumatic experiences to state commemoration. This is connected to the dialectic relationship between personal and cultural memory. Cultural memory has to remain prevalent in individual memories in order to retain its political effectiveness, whilst individual memories are in part shaped by pre-existing national and cultural memories. Shared memories of the dead members of the state security forces entered the public arena, by being articulated into the dominant narrative. After the Troubles, the official memory has thus been re-articulated with the help of pre-existing war narratives, which provided the national imaginary with new images, plots and figures. Memories of the recent *war* needed to be accommodated through the reconstruction of the dominant national narrative (Ashplant et al. 2000: 18–21). The narrative of a former member of the Orange Order, a Protestant loyalist, reveals the meaning of the parade float commemoration to his sense of individual and national identification:

Those men who joined the RUC went out to fulfil their duty, not to think for a moment they were gonna be murdered... I wouldn't say it was a memorial, it was a reminder... I live in a great part of Britain and I'm probably more British than some people living in Britain, I should be allowed to show my Britishness, and if it's okay in Scotland and Wales to put on a flag or to run around with Union Jack, then it should be ok for me.

Since Northern Ireland is a part of the United Kingdom, its culture was defined through a unified British identity. British nationalism however, drew its source of identification from the Crown, not from the nations, which comprised it. In this sense, Britishness has many different connotations within the nations that proclaim it. Most importantly, the mythic past, to which the Northern Irish culture refers to, is not that which the United

Kingdom identifies with. Consequently, myths which have been used throughout history to sustain and enforce the Northern Irish national collective are not a part of the United Kingdom's past. Consequently, the events from the Battle of Boyne, the First World War and also the Troubles became a part of the repertoire of the Northern Irish Britishness, as an identity on its own.

Since the beginning of the peace process, much of Northern Irish society has remained polarised along ethno-national and religious lines (Wilson and Stapleton 2006b: 13). Communal divisions, dependent upon pre-existing constructs of self and Other, whether Protestant/Catholic, Irish/British or settler/native, became heavily enforced institutionally, politically and ideologically. As a result, the maintenance of 'Protestant space' is tied to the preservation of nationhood and the notions of Britishness. In the recent times, the demographic decline within the Protestant community has also created an enduring sense of decline and ideological and cultural defeat (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006: 15).

"Basra to Boyne": post-colonial discourse of war commemoration

Commemorating the living soldiers from Northern Ireland, who serve in the British army abroad, is another significant part of the national story. The sign on the parade float saying 'Basra to Boyne' indicates that the meanings of the mythical past are essential to the future concerns of the nation-state formation.

In the modern global world, the role of the nation-states and the notion of ethnic and national identity have altered significantly. According to Arjun Appadurai (1996), the modern nation-state grows less out of the notions of language, race, blood and soil, and more out of collective imagination (1996: 161). Conceptions of future play a far larger role than ideas of the past in the group consciousness. Remembering the events and actors from battles and wars, which imply having a common past with the British nation, is central to the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism. One of the older representatives of the Protestant loyalist community revealed (in his views on the parade float commemoration, the notion of the common military tradition as a cohesive force with the British nation:

In Northern Ireland since partition there has never been any conscription, so during the wars, and before 1921, 1916, everybody who went from Northern Ireland, was a volunteer, you could not be forced, like in England, Scotland, Wales, conscripted to the army forces... And we still have that and we still have a memory of that and we still have a great military tradition of being part of the British army.

Appadurai notes that as states lose their monopoly over the idea of nation, it is understandable that all sorts of groups will tend to use the logic of the nation to capture some or all of the state or its entitlements (1996: 57). Karyn Wilson and John Stapleton (2006a, 2006b) find that Northern Ireland lacks a national ideology or identity in the modern times. Many external processes, like the growth of the European Union, the rise of

migration, globalism, ethno-nationalism and so forth, as well as internal process, mainly affected by peace agreement policies, especially the 1998 Good Friday agreement, have altered the meaning of being British for the Northern Irish Protestants. These processes have diminished the political power of individual nation-states, while simultaneously a diversity of regional identities and national collectives has been fostered (2006a: 1–4). This results in the insecure characteristic of national boundaries. British identity in Northern Ireland cannot simply be equated with the state identity in general, because it is largely also constitutive of an ethno-national identity in the Northern Irish context (2006b: 12). Political unionism is predicated upon the maintenance of the British Union, whilst its legitimacy is rejected by a substantial minority of Northern Irish citizens, i.e. Irish nationalists, which further intensifies the unionist imperative to remain British. In this sense, the unionist politicians have been facing challenges by nationalist culture and symbolism within Northern Ireland, as well as by the rapidly changing relationship to mainstream Britishness. The need to articulate a distinctive cultural identity, based on history, heritage, territory and culture, has been all the greater, since it would provide Northern Irish Britishness with an ethno-nationalism, which could maintain cultural and political distance from Irish nationalism (2006b: 11–14). I consider *Orangefest* to be an articulation of the Northern Irish cultural identity. The struggle over what will be remembered and what will be forgotten takes place on a day-to-day basis of everyday life. Struggles over memory become especially intense in societies undergoing social change, when the need for a suitable historic past rises as well as the need to define individual and collective identity.

The need to sustain the nationhood in Northern Ireland, in my mind, leads to the support of the mythical past and to mythifying the recent violent past. This need reasserts a sense of ethnically closed or ‘pure’ formations in the place of the older, corporate nation-states or imperial formations (Hall 1999: 38). Resulting from this are the competing cultural claims, which are based on negating the Other community. This can lead to essentializing national identity and thus providing individuals and collective with a sense of security. Individual’s identity is thus perceived as grounded in a strong, unified collective cultural identity (Finlay 2004: 142). Considering this, commemorating the deeds of the dead police officers implies the notion of sharing a common past with Britain, whilst paying a tribute to the living soldiers constructs the cultural claim of belonging to the British nation.

The Boyne commemoration, whether the *Twelfth Orange Parade* or *Orangefest*, is based on reproducing the colonial discourse. This is evident from the transgression of boundaries through the performance of the parade, through the historical development of the parade, through the symbolic message of the parade and the exclusion of the Others.

Since the 1980s and 1990s, as Kelleher (2006) argues, postcolonial practices, as a dynamic of colonizing and decolonizing processes, are still a characteristic of Northern Ireland’s cultural practices. They have continuously naturalized cultural and national categories. State politics has instituted a politics of location, of class and nation that positioned Catholic/nationalists working-class people as subaltern. The meanings of the colonizing state’s production of itself and its Irish Other endure (2006: 205–213). In the narrative of the Grand Master of the Orange Order regarding the parade float commemoration, the

ways in which the Irish Other is (re)produced through commemorative performance and thus from the national narrative are revealed. The notion of *Orangefest* reveals that the post-colonial discourse continues to reassert the Othering process:

The idea of that particular float was... Those who served... And to that end that was commemorating their service to us, and the pictures and the posters... 364 RUC officers murdered in the line of duty, that was just our way, and rightly so, of expressing what those who were opposed to us, were prepared to do, to destroy the state... The soldiers in Iraq are still those who we would support, as you would have read or saw, those who were opposed to us, didn't even want to celebrate that, so this is our way of saying, "British we are and British we stay, if you want to be part of that Britishness, you're welcome, if you don't want to be part of it, then you must go your own course."

Conclusion

The Battle of Boyne commemoration was primarily reshaped and renamed at the end of the 18th century by the Orange Order. The enactment of the *Twelfth Orange Parade* was based on the reconstruction of the mythical past. The ideological message was re-appropriated consequently, to import a sense of unity amongst the Protestant communities in Ireland. Since then, the re-enactments of commemoration represented the main components for the community's symbolic identification. The commemorative performances reproduced antagonistic relationship between ethnic collectivities and thus maintained and legitimized social and anti-social imaginary, marking out unequal balances of power. The mythical past was actualized, indicating its heroes and its foes. The myth of the Battle has since been continuously adapted to changing political and social climate. The commemorative performance excluded the Irish/Catholic community firstly from the collective and from the nation as well.

The performance of the mythical past, of the events from the Battle and its hero, ensured the Protestant community with a sense of order and meaning across time. The Boyne commemoration became the dominant part of the cultural repertoire of the Protestant community. It was their source of collective identification as well as a source of bondage with the British nation.

Since the formation of the nation-state, the Boyne commemoration has been used to justify new norms and values. State and politics groups manipulated its meanings and content in order to unify the Protestant community. The notion of battle was used to define the need to defend the collective against the intrusion of foreign, strange elements from the Irish side of the border and from within Northern Irish society itself. The celebration of one version of history and the usage of one method of remembering it, excluded the Other community. The dominant national narrative was thus built on sustaining the British national consciousness, by referring to the common mythical past, as well as on negating the Others. Accordingly, the Boyne commemoration was always accompanied by tension. This case in point was most clearly demonstrated during the period of the Troubles, when the commemorative performance was frequently interrupted, often leading to violent clashes.

Popular memory had since been divided between two dominant collective memories, while the historical interpretation became politically contentious. Within this context, commemoration constitutes a never-ending cycle of division, which constructs a vital and popular pastime. Political negotiations of the meanings, which the Boyne commemoration produced, indicate the relationship between the dominant and the dominated memory, and the political conditions which make this possible. The different ways in which histories of battles are written and distributed portray the relationships between the state and the society. After the Troubles and especially after the 1998 peace agreement, the meanings of the Northern Irish national identity changed severely. The modern political regime started reimbursing its role in the struggles over memories of the recent violent past. Alongside the institutionalization and historicization of memories of the period of ethnic conflict, the ideological message of commemoration was reappropriated to the post-conflict state of affairs. The mythical past was re-appropriated to exclude the Other in relation to the recent past.

The Boyne commemoration was reshaped and renamed *Orangefest*. The Orange Order had been in opposition with the state and political practices for quite some time. By reshaping the parade and restructuring the past, the Orange Order indulged the unionist political needs in trying to construct a distinctive culture, history and identity, since it became clear that the *old tradition* no longer suited the present means and future aspirations. As a sign of rupture with the past, a festivalized form of the commemorative performance was developed. Creative expression of the ideological clash and the opposing memories of the past are demonstrated in the recent growth of the community-based memorials in both communities of Northern Ireland. These commemorative narratives have been structured by those events, which tell a story significant to an individual and a community for the present and the future. They are a response to change and, as such, provide an arena where cultural differences, social identities, and ideological values are produced and contested.

Orangefest 2008 was incorporated with the memory of the fallen and living soldiers in the British service as well as the fallen police officers from the Troubles. The meanings of death and violent past were infused into the celebration of the national holiday and thus into the national imaginary. The memory of the heroic victory or suffering endured in the previous battles was used as the template through which the Troubles are understood. This template was shaped by the figures of the men, who served the country and sacrificed their lives for it. The significance of these past events was thus deeply personal. Considering this, commemorating the deeds of the dead police officers and soldiers implies the notion of sharing a common past with Britain, whilst paying a tribute to the living soldiers constructs the cultural claim of belonging to the British nation.

Naturalization and essentialization of individuals and groups became especially prominent within the nationalist discourse. Individuals or groups engaged in *unnatural* acts have been easily demonized, dehumanized and targeted. The manipulation of these categories indicates the ways in which meanings of human actions are replaced by symbolic acts. In this manner, *our* goal makes sense and excludes *theirs*. Reconstructing the past is a necessary means in order to imply a sense of continuity and belonging to a British

national space. The discourse of victimhood, reproduced in commemorative performance, reimburses the narrative of siege. Since the Protestant community is victimized, the Catholic community is excluded from experiencing trauma and loss of the Troubles. The dead, coming from the Other side, have no space in the national repertoire. The silencing of their suffering can also be understood as a way of attributing them with responsibility for past atrocities. Victimization furthermore enables the Protestant community and its families to find a connection with their dead, which represent a source of identification with British national history.

Within the commemorative discourse, the notion of colonial past comes to the fore. Through performance, the dominant group and the excluded one are thus confronted and define each other. The questions of disharmony between south and north were at the centre of Irish and British history through the 19th and 20th centuries. This relation was constructed around religion and ethnicity. Irish Catholics became the endemic enemies. In the modern period, especially after the Troubles, the Other became attributed with new political meanings. Republicanism was outcast in relation to the selectively constructed past, where the Irish Republicans were the ones responsible for past atrocities. Accordingly, colonialism is still very much present in Northern Ireland. Its discourses are taken up in representations of the modern social world and are reflected through struggles over memory and through the objectification of the dominant memory.

Commemorative practice tells the story that produces social reality. Active participation between the *teller* and the *listener* appeals to the whole society, also to those who are not interested in it or who are excluded by it. For the purpose of the past and for creating boundaries between communities, it becomes very useful to (re)define the excluded ones. The exclusion is, in modern times, reproduced through the victimization of the Protestant community and through celebration of the memory of the dead soldiers and police officers belonging to their community.

In the context of global modern world, the popularization of culture and heritage enlarge the distance to the past. This intensifies struggles over collective memories and cultural identity furthermore. Therefore, I find it relevant to approach and examine the transformation of commemorative ceremonies, such as *Orangefest*. Its image is constructed around the notion of carnival, an all-inclusive cultural and festive event. This commemorative discourse blurs the social and cultural meanings embedded in the performance. The need to establish continuity with a suitable historical past becomes even greater within the contemporary context. The post-colonial rhetoric is traceable within the propaganda and arguments behind the novel image of the Boyne commemoration. The legacy of the Troubles, the ending of which is located in the recent past, has been re-appropriated to define the Other more specifically. Memory of the dead and the traumatic experience of the living are in the concerns for the uncertain future open to great manipulations and useful for creating and sustaining boundaries between communities.

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POVZETEK

Pričujoče delo proučuje odnos med novejšo verzijo spominske slovesnosti *Orangefest* in formacijo severnoirske nacionalne identitete. Vojnim spominom in komemoracijam sta bila v poznem 20. stoletju pripisana nova vloga in pomen v družbi, zaradi česar so se sprožili številni spori glede spomina in zgodovine. Spominsko slovesnost bitke pri Boyne, znano kot Dvanajsta parada oranževcev, v Ulstru organizirajo že več kot tri stoletja. Od leta 1921, po nastanku Združenega kraljestva Velike Britanije in Severne Irske, je mitološka preteklost predstavljala enega izmed glavnih elementov oblikovanje nacionalne identitete na Severnem Irskem. Leta 1926 je ta vojna spominska slovesnost postala državni praznik in je služila kot dominantni državni simbol do sredine 20. stoletja. V obdobju tridesetih let, ki jih je v Ulstru zaznamovalo civilno nasilje in jih imenujejo obdobje nemira (*Troubles*), je vojna spominska slovesnost postala simbol nasprotovanja države, ki jo je prevzelo vse močnejše etno-nacionalistično gibanje – lojalizem. Spominska slovesnost je bila odtujena večini protestantske skupnosti in tudi političnih in državnih skupin. V začetku 21. stoletja, v času več mirovnih sporazumov, ki so pripeljali do političnih in družbenih sprememb, se je vloga te spominske slovesnosti precej spremenila in preoblikovala. Parada je dobila festivalen značaj in se preimenovala v *Orangefest*. Pomen mit o bitki pri Boyneu so politične in državne skupine simbolno rekonstruirale. Spomin na vojnega heroja in vojaško zmago je bil dopoljen s spominom na obdobje nemira, da bi se znotraj protestantske skupnosti lahko rekonstruiral pojem skupne preteklosti. Ta skupna preteklost redefinira občutek skupne identitete in pripadnikom protestantske skupnosti predstavlja ključni vir identifikacije z zamišljeno skupnostjo – britansko nacijo. Proces identifikacije tako izloča vse, ki se ne vidijo kot del te nacije, torej, celotno katoliško skupnost. Postopek izbire tako izključuje tiste, ki ne vidijo sebe kot del tega naroda, to je katoliške skupnosti.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: vojni spomin, mitološka preteklost, nacionalna identiteta

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