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Re-Assessing Rural Conflict: Rituals, Symbols and Commemorations in the Moyle District, Northern Ireland

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Abstract

This article is a case study analysis of local manifestations of sectarianism and conflict in the Moyle District, a rural district in County Antrim, Northern Ireland. I argue that, with the exception of rural areas located along the border with the Republic of Ireland, rural areas are often depicted, in scholarly analyzes, as relatively unaffected by the political conflict. I offer some demographically-based data that support this assumption and, I draw on textual and visual analyzes of material and symbolic artefacts, including rituals, symbols and commemorations in the Moyle District, that demonstrate the presence of local sectarianism and conflict in Moyle. I argue that assertions about the absence of sectarianism and local conflict are problematic because they exclude rural areas from key policy documents related to community relations and, because they permit the construction of surface appearances of peaceful co-existence and policy adherence, while at the same time, permitting the continuation of local sectarianism and conflict. I suggest that recently enacted administrative changes may exacerbate these local tensions further and, that the presence of local tensions and divisions must be acknowledged before they can be addressed.

Keywords: rurality; conflict; rituals; symbols; commemorations

1.0 Introduction: Constructing Differences and their Significance

Rurality has long constituted a point of interest, and contention, amongst scholars studying Ireland (Wilson and Donnan, 2006). An ethnographic fieldwork in the post-World War II period, the Republic of Ireland was presented as a particularly salient context for documenting rural change, including migrating populations, weakened familial and community networks, fading cultures and lapsed traditions (Arensberg, 1937; Arensberg and Kimball, 1948, 1968; Wilson and Donnan, 2006). Wilson and Donnan (2006) argue this focus dominated textual studies of Ireland; Carville (2011) argues that it dominated photographs of Ireland. This view was contested, eventually, by wider interest in Ireland's diversity, its urban contexts and its connections with Europe (Helleiner, 2000; Fanning, 2002; Garner, 2003; Bonner, 2011; Carville 2011).

But, unlike the Republic of Ireland, urban centres constituted a primary focus for researchers studying Northern Ireland (Aretxaga, 1997; McIntyre, 2004; Heatley, 2004; Wilson and Donnan, 2006, p. 27). Exacerbated by housing stress resulting from discriminatory practices, population concentration and close community proximity, changing demographic balance and political instability, urban centres were key to analyze of internecine conflict (Bell, Jarman and Harvey, 2010, p. 5).

The relatively small body of scholarly research that examined rural contexts in Northern Ireland often presented them as peaceful spaces and, in some instances, models of shared values and inter-community cooperation (Harris 1972; Leyton, 1975; Buckley, 1982; Bufwack, 1982; Adams, 1995). Succinctly captured in titles such as *A Gentle People* and, *Village without Violence*, these analyzes argue that rural areas enacted histories of economic and social organizing and cooperation that cut across community lines and protect their inhabitants from conflict and violence (Buckley, 1982; Bufwack, 1982). In this analysis, I demonstrate how local narratives are constructed in a single, select, rural district in Northern Ireland to evoke claims about its social and geographical distance from conflict and violence. Through an examination of material and symbolic artifacts, I critique the veracity of these claims. This critique expands a small body of research that challenges sanguine portraits of rurality, by refuting the uniformity of their claims and critiquing the partiality of their analyses (Mac Farlane, 1986a, 1986b; Vincent, 1989; McKay, 2000; Donnan, 2005; Donnan and Simpson, 2007).¹

Reductionism, sometimes accorded to urban/rural differences, is also applied to communities, their members and their politics in Northern Ireland. Partly for the purposes of establishing a continuous trajectory of enmity, differences between Protestant and Catholic communities are highlighted. Although religious identity and affiliation are used commonly as forms of linguistic abbreviation, their differences are also based in history, culture, language, identity and politics. They are often accorded prominence, to the exclusion of their similarities and, the recognition of other religious and cultural groups (Nic Craith, 2002). Although differences between these two groups are not transparent or static, the designations of unionist and nationalist respectively, are used to refer to those whom—regardless of their religious identity and affiliation—generally support the union with Great Britain and, to those whom—regardless of their religious identity and affiliation—generally support an independent nation of Ireland that includes Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.² These terms have institutional and vernacular resonances. They are, for instance, embedded in the establishment of Northern Ireland's consociational government and, in everyday conversation.

It is largely assumed that separate designations, loyalist and republican, refer to those who share working-class affiliations and employ violence, in the case of the former, to support the union and, in the case of the latter, to achieve a united island of Ireland (Bryan, 2000). However, members of both groups have engaged in a wide array of strategies to achieve their national aspirations, including formal political participation (Bryan, 2000, p. 15). Regarded as minority groups, loyalists and republicans bear the greatest burden of responsibility for conflict-related injuries and deaths. Their cooperation and dissidence continue to shape what kind of future is possible for Northern Ireland (Smyth, 2006, 12).

1.1 Contextual and Methodological Limitations

Broad patterns of (mostly anthropological) representations of divisions in Northern Ireland have resulted in two significant areas of scholarly oversight, one contextual, the other methodological. First, they have produced a concentration of studies of urban-based conflict (Feldman 1991; Aretxaga 1997; McIntyre 2004; Reid, 2008).

¹ A rural exception to recorded incidents of sectarianism and violence is Craigavon Borough Council, County Armagh (Smyth, 2006, pp. 14, 16).

² I combine terms here to indicate that differences are not theologically-based.

Second, they have constrained the ways conflict is assessed, with strong affinities for recognizing urban-centred expressions of identity and/or enmity, including political wall murals and community interfaces (Rolston 1992; 1998; 2003; 2013).

This disproportionate focus on urban contexts is understandable and, justified statistically and demographically. Almost half of all conflict-related deaths in Northern Ireland occurred in a single city, Belfast, and disproportionately in the neighbourhoods of North and West Belfast (Sutton, 2010). The majority of the population of Northern Ireland resides in urban areas; by the end of the 1920s, over half of the population of Northern Ireland resided in urban areas (Devlin Trew, 2013, p. 5). By comparison, rural areas in Northern Ireland exhibit lower rates of conflict-related death and, in attitudinal surveys, they are assumed to have lower rates of violence, fewer sectarian incidents, to be more integrated and to exhibit better community relations (Murtagh, 1999).

Methodologically, the disproportionate focus on urban locales skews policy. It leads to an under examination of the dailiness of urban life, says relatively little about urban variation and, overlooks the extent to which a majority of individuals report being unaffected by conflict (McLoughlin and Miller 2006).³ It also limits rural inclusion. Three, key policy documents for improving community relations, *A Shared Future, The Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration*, and *The Racial Equality Strategy* contain few references to rural contexts (Office of the First Minister Deputy First Minister [OFMDFM], 2005, 2010, 2014).⁴ “Current government policy on rural communities, including *The Programme for Government*, the *Rural Development Programme*, the *Rural Development Strategy*, and *Planning, Reform and Transport Strategy* are oriented more towards sustaining the economic basis of rural communities rather than addressing the realities of segregation and sectarian division that pervade many areas” (Bell, et al., 2010, p. 49). These policies permit the construction of surface appearances of peaceful co-existence and policy adherence in rural contexts, while, at the same time, permit the continuation of sectarianism and conflict, as I demonstrate here.

This research analyzes sectarianism and conflict and uses textual and visual evidence to demonstrate gaps and contradictions between local narratives and their material expressions (Murtagh, 1999). I demonstrate how the presence of material artifacts, in the form of rituals, symbols and commemorations, extends the conflict, geographically and temporally. The extent to which they are overlooked limits their visibility and thereby, minimizes the obligations of individuals, communities and local government to participate in conflict transformation efforts.

2.0 The Moyle District as a Case Study

As a case study, the Moyle District is unexceptional. I draw on it primarily because of my access and, my first-hand familiarity with the area (Side, 2005, 2006). It is not associated with particularly memorable events in the trajectory of the conflict. It is not a border district; its closest border is with Scotland, across the Sea of Moyle. Many of Moyle’s economic challenges are shared by other rural locales, including

³ In a *Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey* (2005), a majority (82%) of 1,200 respondents reported they were not victims of the conflict.

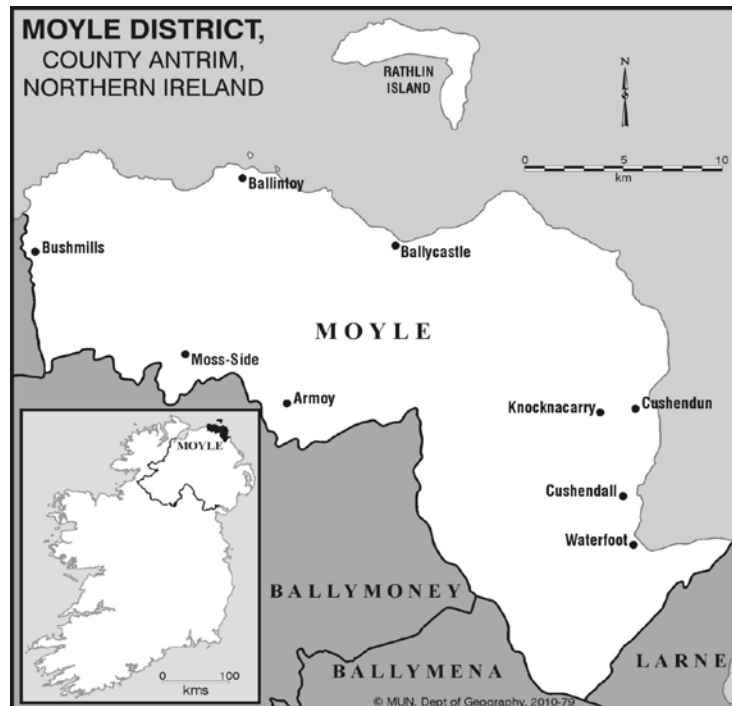
⁴ Sections 34.1 and 34.2 of the *Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration* reference rural areas; however, its emphasis on “building capacity” implies that their residents lack skills and/or training, for which there is no evidence (2010, pp. 21, 22).

limited local employment opportunities, lower than average household incomes and consequent social deprivation (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency [NISRA], 2010, p. 38; Moyle District Council, 2013). However, this case study challenges assertions about the geographical distribution of the conflict and expands the terrain of power struggles. It challenges the ways rural contexts have often been ‘written out’ of conflict narratives and questions how evidence for conflict is assessed, interpreted and used in local narrative construction. By mapping contested identities and their everyday representations onto rural, geopolitical landscapes, it offers a partial explanation about why the widely accepted, present-day, post-conflict dispensation has not led to the cessation of sectarianism, conflict and violence. I demonstrate how the presence of rural sectarianism and conflict are managed, avoided and shifted, intentionally, onto other spaces and groups of individuals in Moyle, to become an unquestioned cultural landscape in which its absence is largely presumed.

2.1 Moyle: Space of Conflict and Sanctuary?

The Moyle District extends along the northern coast, including offshore Rathlin Island, Northern Ireland’s only inhabited island. (See Figure 1). Its population is spread out over approximately 190 square miles (NISRA, 2009). Comprised of a central market town and scattered villages and hamlets, the area’s economic bases are limited. Moyle has the “highest rate of unemployment, as a percentage of the workforce” and, the lowest average earnings in all districts (Moyle District Council, 2001, pp. 16, 28). Its economy relies heavily on a seasonally- based tourism economy and on agriculture, the latter which is generally of poor quality. The majority of agricultural land in Moyle (94%) is deemed “less favourable” with 66% of this classified as “severely disadvantaged” (Moyle District Council, 2001)

Figure 1: Moyle District, County Antrim, Northern Ireland.



Source: C. Conway, Cartographer, Memorial University. 2010.

Within the District's 'mixed population,' people live together, as scholars frequently observe, at least as separately as they do elsewhere. Ballycastle, Armoyle, Mosside, Ballintoy and Rathlin Island are classified as 'mixed' areas (Donnan and Mac Farlane, 1986; NISRA, 2001). Ballycastle's majority population is Catholic/nationalist (77.7 %); and, a minority population is Protestant/unionist (20.5 %) (NISRA, 2001).⁵ Rathlin Island and Ballintoy also have 'mixed' populations, with Catholic/nationalist majorities. Armoyle and Mosside both have a majority Protestant/unionist population (69.5 %) and minority Catholic/nationalist population (28.3 %). Other villages and hamlets are almost exclusively populated by members from a single community. Bushmills is mostly Protestant/unionist (97%) (NISRA, 2001). Cushendall and Cushendun (96.9%, combined), Waterfoot (98 %) and Knocknacarry are mostly Catholic/nationalist (NISRA, 2001).

Local communities are separated from each other in ways that exemplify the pattern that Webber (1964, p. 59) terms, "intense localism." Contact is limited by established social habits and by poor, public rural transportation links. Segregated housing and established patterns of social avoidance lead to situations, even in 'mixed' areas, whereby residents interact mainly within their own communities. They frequent community affiliated businesses and participate in community-specific educational and recreational facilities (Bell, et al., 2010; Radford et al., 2009, p. 66). Over a prolonged period of time, these adjustments to space and services can lead to a form of "bounded contentment," whereby life choices are constrained by the imposition of perceived, or real, physical, social and spatial barriers (Roche, 2008). These barriers, which are often taken for granted, may only become noticeable when exacerbated by cyclic trigger events, such as bonfires and parades.

Local narratives and scholarly analyzes depict Moyle as relatively unaffected by sectarian conflict and violence, sometimes by omission. Murray's (1982, p. 309) map outlining deaths from political violence between 1969 until 1977, records none for Moyle. In their study, *Northern Ireland's Troubles: The Human Cost*, Fay et al. (1999) state that Moyle has experienced few conflict-related incidents. The Moyle District's 2012 *Policing and Community Safety Partnership Annual Report* aims to build "safer, shared and confident communities," by reducing crime, fear of crime and anti-social behavior;" it makes no mention of inter-community tension (Moyle District Council, 2012 c, p. 5).

The area's tourist literature supports views of Moyle as a peaceful, rural idyll. Tourist materials make extensive use of visual images of the area's geography, notably the distinctive, basalt rock formations of the Giant's Causeway. Visually, they depict scenes of rural tranquility, including the area's glens, the causeway coast line and the area's extensive "woods, waterfalls, riverside paths, viewpoints and forest parks" (Moyle District Council 2014, p. 7). A local visitors' guide boasts, "This is a peaceful landscape – one to the delight of the walker, the cyclist, the fisherman and the lover of nature" (Moyle District Council n.d.a, p. 2). In contrast with urban centres, including Belfast and Londonderry, Moyle does not participate in the "commodification of conflict heritage," for tourism (McDowell 2008, p. 405).⁶ For example, interpretative storyboards displayed throughout Moyle's towns

⁵ Raw data do not total 100%.

⁶ Names of the city, district council and county are subjects of long-standing dispute between Protestant/unionists, who prefer Londonderry and, Catholic/nationalists, who prefer Derry. A 2007 High Court judicial decision ruled in favour of the official name, Londonderry (Northern Ireland Queen's Bench [NIQB], 2007).

and villages make no references to conflict or, its local effects. Textually and visually, promotional materials confirm the District's status as a suitable location for 'escape'—whether the purpose of this escape is a day trip to the seaside or, as discussed later, as a permanent refuge for those intimidated or threatened by violence elsewhere.

There are few conflict-related deaths in Moyle.⁷ Five conflict-related deaths are recorded for Moyle: two in Ballycastle, (1979 and 1991), two in Cushendall (1977 and 1989) and one in Waterfoot (1973) (Fay et al., 1999; Sutton, 1994, 2001). Loyalist and republican paramilitary organizations claimed responsibility, demonstrating their local presence and operation. Some violent incidents, such as a car bomb and a hotel bombing, resulted in deaths (*Belfast Telegraph*, 1979, 1979 b). Other incidents had similar intentions, but were averted. This includes a car bomb placed outside a Catholic Church and car and pipe bombs detected at the Auld Lammas Fair, an annual event that attracts upwards of 20,000 people to the area (Hunter, 2001; Gillespie, 2006, p. 147).

District-level publications characterize Moyle as having “a relatively low incidence of fatal incidents...and resident victims of the conflict” (Causeway Coast and Glens, 2011, p. 7). The area is consistently portrayed as safe, partly based on its rural location and, its distinction as a space of sanctuary. The *Good Relations Strategy and Audit* (2011-2014) acknowledges that, “during the conflict many families were moved to the area, from Belfast,” displaced from Catholic/nationalist neighbourhoods in Belfast (2011, p. 7). Although this population is estimated to make up approximately 20% of Ballycastle's Catholic/nationalist population, no official local statistics are maintained (Personal communication with Moyle District official, 09 July, 2007). Contrary to local narratives, a close examination of rituals, symbols and commemorations in Moyle, indicate that conflict is present here and that it exists as a taken-for-granted aspect of the local landscape.

3.0 Rituals: Parades in Moyle

Parades, as one of the most visible community rituals, are analyzed extensively (Bryan, 2000; Jarman, 2007; Tonge et al., 2011). (See Figure 2). Jarman (2007) contends, they “have been a vibrant feature of political life in Northern Ireland for over two hundred years” (1997, p. 79). Both communities organize parades, but the majority are held by “fraternal organizations of the loyal orders” (Bryan, 2000, p. 97). These include: the Loyal Orange Order, the Royal Black Preceptory, the Apprentice Boys of Derry, the Royal Arch Purple, the Independent Orange Institution, the Junior Orange Institution and, the Association of Loyal Orange Women (Bryan, 2000, p. 97). Two Catholic/nationalist fraternal organizations also organize parades: the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Irish National Foresters Friendly Society (Jarman, 1997, p. 141). Catholic/nationalist parades also commemorate the 1916 Easter Rising and individuals associated with it, the anniversary date of internment (August 9) and, hunger strikes by some republicans in 1981 (Bryan, 2000, p. 84; Jarman, 1997, p. 144). Charitable and civic parades involving members from both communities are uncommon (Northern Ireland Parades Commission, 2011).

All parades are enacted to “link the present with the past and explain the present in terms of the past” (Jarman, 2007, p. 9). Their intentions and effects are disputed.

⁷ Since the late 1960s, over 3,500 people have been killed, at least 8,300 injured and up to 11,000 people displaced by the conflict (Sutton, 2001; Breen-Smyth, 2012).

Parades held by Protestant/unionists claim to commemorate battle victories and national military service and to demonstrate the affiliation of Loyal Order Lodges (LOL) members to the union and their faith. Over 3,000 parades a year are hosted by LOLs and they extend across much of the calendar year (Bryan, 2000; Tonge et al., 2011, p. 72). Following on from bonfires held the previous night, parades on July Twelfth commemorate the victory of Protestant King William III (of Orange) over Catholic King James at the 1690 Battle of the Boyne. Some Catholic/nationalists remain opposed to parades on the Twelfth as brazen displays of political power, particularly on routes proximate, physically and aurally, to Catholic/nationalist neighbourhoods and towns, some of which result from population shifts.

Orange Lodges have a particularly strong presence in rural areas (Jarman, 1997, p. 128; Tonge et al., 2011, p. 60). In Moyle, Lodge names evoke community history and position their (all-male) members as defenders of history (Bryan, 2000). Lodge names in Moyle include: Faith Defenders, No Surrender, Rising Sons of William, Sons of William, Chosen Few, True Blues and Purple Heroes (Bryan, 2000, p. 128; J. McGregor, Deputy District Manager, Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, personal communication, 25 October 2012). Moyle has eleven designated bonfire sites and, designated LOL parade routes include the mostly Protestant/unionist villages of Bushmills and Mosside and, more controversially, the mostly Catholic/nationalist town of Ballycastle and village of Cushendall (Jarman, 1997; Moffett, 2010). Ancient Order of Hibernians parades are held in Ballycastle, Cushendall and Armory (Jarman, 1997, pp. 141, 149).

Figure 2: Mosside Independent Loyal Orange Order Banner, 12 July, 2006.



Photo Credit: Brad Gibb.

Parades in Moyle are orchestrated to minimize conflict and maintain dominant narratives about the district. Despite local efforts, parades do not always proceed peacefully. The Independent District Orange Institution's parade held in Ballycastle every five years, is a flashpoint for inter-community tension (Moffett, 2010). In 2001, Catholic/nationalist protestors have alleged sectarianism, with reference to the actions and musical choices of bands which are normally hired by Lodges to accompany parades (Moyle District Council, 2007).⁸ After an investigation by the Northern Ireland Parades Commission, the local Moyarget Silver Plains flute band was banned by the Parades Commission for violating its code of conduct under Section 8 (1), *The Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act, 1998*. It was reinstated in advance of the 2006 parade (NIPC, 2007).

The Moyle District Council downplays the conflictual context of parades and masks their problematic aspects. This is understandable given the District's economic reliance on tourism. Macaulay (2013, p. 1) suggests that strategies to minimize conflict and violence, which includes "the denial and existence of conflict and division," can avoid... "painful and potentially... contentious and difficult issues." However, avoidance contradicts the District's statutory responsibility, under *The Good Friday Agreement, The Programme for Government* and, *Section 75 Equality Duties*, to improve local community relations.⁹

Decisions to re-frame local parades as apolitical events involve orchestrating silences. For example, after a particularly divisive parade in 2001, the Council hired a public relations firm to consult with relevant "stakeholders," identified as "ratepayers" and "retail owners" about its effect on local businesses (Moyle District Council, 2007, p. 2). In advance of the 2006 parade, a public education campaign was launched and a leaflet titled, '*What is the Twelfth All About?*' was distributed to all households (Moyle District Council n.d. (b)). It affirmed the historical tradition of parades, without mention of their contested, political context:

The Orange traditions date back to the period of the Williamite wars (1688-1691), during which William, Prince of Orange, ascended to the throne of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland... The Orange Institution was formed in 1795, over a century after the "Battle of the Boyne," and it evolved into a benevolent fraternity which upholds the memory of William of Orange... The concept of parades by the community that gave birth to the Orange Institution was well established long before 1796... Parades are therefore very much a part of the Orange tradition and heritage as two hundred years ago the founding fathers decided that parades were an appropriate medium to witness for their faith and to celebrate their cultural heritage (Moyle District Council, n.d.b).

In 2006, the Council managed the parade, with considerable assistance. It organized a day-long excursion to remove youth from Catholic/nationalist housing estates and adopted a securitized approach involving 150 Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) officers and independent monitors, at a cost of £37,915 (Moyle District Council, 2007, p. 5; Moffett, 2010). Because Lodge members in Moyle, and

⁸ In his analysis of an Ulster Protestant flute band, MacDonald (2010) argues that the context and manner in which music is played can lead to accusations of sectarianism.

⁹ The title for the Agreement commonly referred to as *The Good Friday Agreement* or, *The Belfast Agreement*, is the *Agreement Reached in the Multi-Party Negotiations* (1998).

elsewhere, have typically refused to meet directly with Catholic/nationalist objectors, two local councillors met with the Parades Commission to discuss contentious music and loyalist displays and symbols (Moyle District Council, 2007, p. 5; *Ballymoney and Moyle Times*, 2006 c).¹⁰ Despite these efforts, an Orange Lodge near Armoy was defaced by ‘paint bombs’ and burned in an arson attack (BBC, 2006). (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Orange Lodge, Armoy, 2006.



Photo credit: Brad Gibb.

The District Council’s 2007 *Parades Review* minimized reports of tension. The *Parades Review* characterizes the 2001 parade as having “instigated tension and disorder” (Moyle District Council, 2007, p. 5). It contends that, “Ballycastle itself is not a highly political town and parading is not used in an overtly political fashion” (Moyle District Council, 2007, p. 3). It makes no mention of the ban imposed on a local flute band, the arson attack on the local Orange Lodge or, as expected, of behaviours that Bryan (2000, p. 164) describes as “normal” at parades including intoxication, verbal and/or physical provocation, public disturbances and resident protests. These silences minimize negative perceptions of the District and, they also limit the extent to which sectarianism can be identified and addressed.

Except for the opinions voiced by two local councillors, both elected from Catholic/nationalist political parties, assertions about parades as apolitical were unchallenged (*Ballymoney and Moyle Times*, 2006; *Ballymoney and Moyle Times*, 2006 b). Parades in Moyle appear, then, as if they are uncontested, routine rituals because the District Council orchestrates them this way, choosing to gloss over controversy in favour of local narratives about Moyle.

¹⁰ In the context of parades, the national flags of Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland can be regarded as contentious (Bryan et al. 2010).

4.0 Symbols: Flags in Moyle

Political symbols, many of which are incorporated into rituals, abound and can include flags, emblems, football jerseys, songs and even flowers, as recognizable symbols of identity, belonging and nation (McCall, 2006; Bryan 2000; Bryan, et al. 2009, 2011).

Flags flown in civic and popular contexts can have political meanings. For example, the Union Flag is displayed prominently by Protestant/unionists at July Twelfth events and can be accompanied by the flag of St Andrew (or, the Scottish Saltire), the flags of St. George and St. Patrick, the Ulster Banner flag, Orange Order flags and, those associated with loyalist organizations. Catholic/nationalists display the Irish Tricolour, the flag of the Republic of Ireland, as well as Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) flags, historical and commemorative flags and, flags associated with republican organizations.

These are matters of political and legislative importance. Jarman (2007, p. 88) notes that:

Flags are one element of the material culture through which the two competing collective identities are asserted, defined and renewed, through which territorial concerns are enforced and social and spatial boundaries are marked out. Flags are also an important element of the ongoing tensions and conflict and have increasingly been a means by which the opposing political aspirations have been sustained throughout the duration of the peace process.

The *Flags and Emblems (Display) Northern Ireland Act (1954)* required the flying of the Union Flag and restricted other flags in civic contexts. Replaced by *The Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order (1987)* and by stipulations in *The Good Friday Agreement (1998)*, legislative restrictions on flags have relaxed; however, public reactions towards them have not. Currently, *The Joint Protocol in Relation to Flags Flown in Public Areas (2005)* governs flags flown on arterial roads and, *The Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000* governs flags flown in civic contexts, requiring that the Union Flag be flown over specific government buildings on designated dates.¹¹ Flags outside of the *Regulations* are prohibited (United Kingdom, 2000, p. 3; United Kingdom, 2002). This issue instigates considerable conflict and in December 2012, changes in adherence to the *Regulations* by Belfast District Council resulted in riots, attacks on a Catholic church and on the homes of some councillors, rioting in nearby towns and, over 180 arrests (O'Hara, 2012; McKeown, 2012).

District Councils are exempted from the *Regulations*; however differing interpretations result in mixed practices (Bryan & Gillespie, 2005, p. 53). Seven District Councils fly the Union Flag every day; seven others fly it on designated days (Bryan & Gillespie, 2005). Two District Councils fly the Union Flag alongside other flags, either the Ulster (Government of Northern Ireland) Flag or, the local District Council coats of arms (Bryan & Gillespie, 2005). The remaining District Councils, including Moyle, the majority of which have a 'mixed' or mostly Catholic/nationalist population, adhere to a 'no flags' policy. No District Council flies the Irish tricolour flag and, Jarman (2007, p. 89) notes that parity of esteem does not translate into "equality of flag flying."

¹¹ Dates include the anniversary and coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, birthdays of members of the Royal family, Commonwealth Day, St. Patrick's Day, Europe Day and, Remembrance Day.

Moyle's 'no flags' policy does not convey the absence of conflict. Flags are evident across Moyle and, their display is largely tolerated. Contrary to governing legislation, flags are flown along public arterial roadways. Prior to parades, they are also displayed on private homes, businesses and at the entrance to some neighbourhoods. (See Figure 4). Although only a small portion of the total number of flags flown, The *Flags Monitoring Report (2007)* records 62 visible political symbols in Moyle in 2006 and, 80 in 2007 (Bryan et al., 2007). As is normally the case for rural areas, few are associated with paramilitarism (Donnell, n. d.).

Figure 4: Unionist Flags on private homes in Bushmills, 13 July, 2007.



Photo Credit: Brad Gibb.

Flags are still cause for local concern. Survey respondents in the area's *Good Relations Strategy and Audit* identified flags and emblems as the "number one issue" that "caused or sustained divisions in Moyle" (Causeway Coast and Glens, 2011, p. 9). Political symbols and flags on arterial roads are noted as the top concern by a majority (75%) of respondents, some of whom (57%) "believed that the Council area was not a shared space due to territorial markers" (Causeway Coast and Glens, 2011, p. 7). Flags are perceived as dividing communities in Moyle and inhibiting the use and enjoyment of some public spaces.

Residents' concerns sometimes instigate actions. For example, efforts to erect a flagpole, flag and monument in the Stroanshek Park area in Ballycastle, to honour republican Daniel Darragh, a member of Fenian Brotherhood Movement, were foiled.¹² They were removed by Police Service of Northern Ireland, acting on residents' complaints (O'Cleireachain et al., 2012; *Ballymoney and Moyle Times*, 2009b). At other times, concern is merely officious. In June, 2012, a majority of Moyle District councillors supported a Motion to declare a zero tolerance policy on paramilitary flags, which comprise only a small number of all flags; but instigated no follow-up, remedial action or, redress (Moyle District Council, 2012 b). Rural areas face particular challenges because they can provide less anonymity for opposition and action and, because they are likely to have lower levels of infrastructure and support for redress (Radford et al., 2009; Macauley, 2013). The District Council's management of parades, however, indicates that it is not averse to taking steps to minimize perceptions of conflict to reshape the District's public image.

Rather than step away from the issue altogether, the Council instead embroiled Moyle, albeit temporarily, in a related conflict. By establishing a formal twinning arrangement with the Municipality of Gaza, Moyle embedded the District in a global conflict with deep reverberations. The issue of formal acknowledgment of efforts towards Palestinian statehood and, its distinction from the legitimacy of the modern state of Israel, have long been divisive in Northern Ireland. Since the late 1970s, some republicans have supported the Palestinian cause through flags and the formation of paramilitary alliances, including training and arms transport (Hill & White, 2008, pp. 33-34). Displays of Palestinian flags by republicans reference international liberation struggles and endeavour to "add legitimacy to nationalist struggles" (Vannais, 2007, p. 139). In response to the display of Palestinian flags and, to republicans, some loyalists fly the flag of the state of Israel (Guelke, 2008; Hill & White, 2008). These flags, associated with a geographically distant region and conflict, provide visible markers of political difference in Northern Ireland (Hill & White, 2008).

The flags also signify political differences in Moyle. The Motion to establish the twinning arrangement was made by the District Council Chairperson, who was (then) elected from a Catholic/nationalist political party.¹³ It was blocked by Protestant/unionist councillors who sought a legal opinion. A year later, when the issue arose again, the final vote (ayes 7, noes 6) was divided along community lines. All members elected from Catholic/nationalist parties voted to support it; none of the members elected from Protestant/unionist parties voted to support it (Moyle District Council, 2012; Henry, 2011, p. 8; Mulgrew, 2011). The twinning agreement was formally signed in April, 2012. Shortly afterwards, the District Council Chairperson was physically barred by local residents from opening the Dundarave playing fields in Protestant/unionist Bushmills and, the District Council Chairperson and a councillor from a Protestant/unionist party, engaged in verbal exchanges and physical contact outside of Council Chamber (Mulgrew, 2011; Kilpatrick, 2012).¹⁴

The fact that the flags of the Municipality of Gaza and the Moyle District Council were only ever displayed together in Gaza City and, on a blog maintained by the (former) District Council Chairperson, demonstrates their divisive potential. In

¹² The Fenian Brotherhood Movement was founded in 1858.

¹³ Later, he sat, and was re-elected as an Independent.

¹⁴ Local protestors contend that they objected to the Chairperson's characterization of July Twelfth as "an unsavory event" and, not to his Motion (Mulgrew, 2011).

September 2012, the (former) District Council Chairperson, made a presentation in Belfast, about the “successful twinning” of the Moyle District with the Municipality of Gaza; however, just two months later, the agreement was ended. At a November 2012 meeting of the local District Council, a Motion to express solidarity with the people of Gaza proved, predictably, controversial. Although the original Motion was withdrawn, a subsequent Amendment and majority vote (ayes 8, noes 7), resulted in the end of this formal agreement (*Ballymoney and Moyle Times*, 2012). All those who voted to end the twinning arrangement represented Protestant/unionist parties. One councillor contended that the issue had alienated the unionist population in Moyle, from the District Council (*Ballymoney and Moyle Times*, 2012). The controversial twinning arrangement had lasted a mere seven months. In 2013, at a District-wide event to celebrate twinning arrangements, it went unacknowledged, although many in attendance were aware of the controversy.

As this example indicates, the absence of some symbols in Moyle may open up possibilities for the presence of others. The presence of flags, displayed on houses, businesses and arterial roads, creates perceptions about local divisions, which, at various points, have heightened relations of distrust, confrontation and conflict. Flags, including those that stand as metonyms for nation, are tolerated across Moyle but, their presence contradicts local narratives about the area’s peacefulness by magnifying local divisions.

5.0 Commemoration: Memorials in Moyle

Some of the most visible memorials in Moyle are those commemorating injuries and deaths in the World Wars. These are readily evoked because they are regarded as less controversial; however, even these commemorations produce and reinforce narratives about two, separate community identities.

Both Catholic/nationalists and Protestant/unionists fought for Great Britain in World War I, although often for different reasons. Some Catholic/nationalists believed that their allegiance to Great Britain would facilitate Home Rule, whereas some Protestant/unionists viewed their service as evidence of their loyalty (Grayson, 2009). Their experiences, and its commemoration, support Jarman’s (1997, p. 153) argument that an “entwined tradition of commemorative ritual...serves to emphasize two opposing senses of communal or ethnic identity and destiny.”

State-sanctioned war memorials are maintained by the Northern Ireland War Memorial organization and are limited to casualties suffered by British soldiers in World Wars I and II. The inclusion of security force members in Northern Ireland’s conflict remains a controversial matter; they are not fully integrated, despite requests to do so (Leonard, 1997, p. 17). For example, “a Catholic family in County Down spent sixteen years campaigning for the name of their son, a UDR private killed by the IRA in 1980, to be added to the war memorial in Downpatrick” (Leonard, 1997, p. 17). In 1996, the local council sanctioned the unveiling of a plaque recording his name and regiment on a wall beside the monument.

Comparison of World War memorials in the Protestant/unionist village of Bushmills and, in the Catholic/nationalist town of Ballycastle, clearly demonstrates Jarman’s (1997, 153) “two opposing senses of communal...identity.” In Bushmills, a life-size bronze sculpture of a helmeted World War I soldier, with gun and fixed bayonet at the ready, dominates the village centre. Towering on a granite base above the main traffic circle, the village’s roads and those to outlying areas, route around it. The

sculpture is by British artist, Charles Leonard Hartwell, renowned internationally for his war related sculpture.¹⁵ Erected in 1921, it is reputed to be the oldest memorial to World War I in Northern Ireland (*Ballymoney and Moyle Times*, 2009 a). The Union Flag flies from a flag pole at the base of the memorial and an engraved brass plaque reads, "To the men of the Town and District who gave their lives *for their country* in the Great War, 1914-1918" [italics mine]. The plaque lists over eighty names, to which another five names are added.¹⁶ The £3,000 statue was paid, by public subscription, by Bushmills' residents. Additional World War memorials are also located in Orange Halls, schools and youth organizations and, in the Presbyterian Church in Bushmills (K. Switzer, *Ulster War Memorials*, personal communication, 11 May 2013). (See Figure 5).

Figure 5: Bushmills War Memorial, July 2013.



Photo Credit Brad Gibb.

¹⁵Charles Leonard Hartwell was a British artist, born in Blackheath, Kent (1873-1951). He exhibited at the Royal Academy and his work is acquired by the Tate (London), the National Museum of Wales and displayed in Brighton, United Kingdom and Capetown, South Africa (*Ulster War Memorials*, 2006; Banerjee, 2013).

¹⁶ Names were added based on research by Robert Thompson. Names have also been added to war memorials in Lisburn and Dromore (Switzer, 2013).

The memorial is a tribute to local men and, is a public display of political unionism and its central narrative of blood sacrifice. Sacrifice is a persistent theme in unionist memorials and, MacDonald (2010, p. 150) contends that “Northern Ireland loyalist culture is pervaded with an absolute conviction that Northern Ireland’s Unionists have done more, suffered more, sacrificed more for their British identity than any other people.”

The mention of men who gave “their lives for their country” solidifies Northern Ireland’s constitutional relationship with Great Britain, as reinforced by the prominence of the British sculptor and the Union Flag. Local subscription implies a sense of community investment and ownership in the memorial and its commemorative status. A textual description of the monument, by Ulster War Memorials, describes the bronze soldier in this way: “There is an expression of grim Ulster determination on the features and in the tenacity of the muscles braced for resistance to the enemy (Ulster War Memorials, 2006).”

This characterization of the enemy could refer to opponents in World War I or, to present-day republicans.

In contrast, the World War memorial in the ‘mixed’ town of Ballycastle occupies a less central location and has no visible association with Great Britain. (See Figure 6). Ballycastle’s war memorial, a seven-foot marble obelisk, is located outside of the town centre. This location was partly determined by the fact that a memorial pre-dating World War I occupies the town centre.¹⁷ A more modest and less decorative memorial, it was designed by B. H. O’Connor, a local serviceman and Vice-Chair of the (then named) Ballycastle Urban Council. The monument’s textual dedication reads, “To the glory of God and in memory of the brave men who gave their lives for justice and freedom.” Dates for the two World Wars are carved on the front of the memorial, which lists the names of fifty-five men. No names have been added and, no further information is available about the cost of the memorial, how it was funded or, when it was erected.

Unlike the memorial in Bushmills, the memorial’s artist is not well-known or, well-exhibited. No mention is made of nation, the memorial itself has no visible or textual markers that reference Great Britain and, no flags are displayed in its proximity. Recognized in local services on Remembrance Sunday, it appears to be acknowledged, officially, by Protestant/unionist councillors. For example, a commemorative service held on Remembrance Sunday, 2011 was attended by five District councillors, all of whom were representatives of Protestant/unionist parties; no councillors from Catholic/nationalist parties attended. Furthermore, “there are no memorials [to World War I] in any Roman Catholic church” in Ballycastle or, in Roman Catholic churches elsewhere in Northern Ireland (Switzer, 2013).

These memorials distinguish communities by their histories of wartime participation. One community is associated closely with Great Britain; the other is more distant. These associations stand as evidence of Protestant/unionist allegiance with Great Britain but, also as markers of their difference from Catholic/nationalist communities.

¹⁷ Erected by public subscription in 1899, this memorial recognizes the services of medical doctor, Dr. George Matthew O’Connor, M. B. (1817-1897) to town residents.

Figure 6: Ballycastle War Memorial, April 2010.



Photo Credit: Author.

Bronze, granite and marble commemorative markers need not be memorials to ‘the Troubles’ to display local divisions but, a memorial plaque erected in a laneway in Cushendall, highlights these divisions. (See Figure 7).

The plaque names three civilians, “murdered by British Crown Forces [A]t this location on 23rd June 1922” and, refers to two others, both wounded. Textual allegations of murder are likely to fuel local disagreements, paralleling those that ensued in 1922 and 1923, about whether or not these named individuals were combatants engaged in attacking security forces (Hansard, 1922, 1923). The memorialization of this event is unlikely to be supported by the town’s small Protestant/unionist minority, included amongst “the people of the Glens,” and who may distance themselves from use of the Irish language, which reads, ‘O Mary of the Gaels, pray for them.’ It is particularly telling that the plaque is displayed in a location where it can be read, but is inaccessible enough that it is unlikely to be defaced. Conflict-related memorials in Moyle commemorate two separate histories whose path towards the future is not yet determined as shared.

Figure 7: Cushendall Memorial Plaque, July, 2013.



Photo Credit: Brad Gibb.

6.0 Constructing Peaceful Spaces: Shifting Responsibilities

Depicting LOL parades as apolitical events contradicts the experiences of some District residents and may subsume their rights to community identity and its expression. Avoidance of flags and memorials, implies local acceptance of community divisions, as do separate traditions of memorialization. Although *The Good Relations Strategy and Audit* (Causeway Coast and Glens, 2011, p. 7) uses the past tense to reference local conflict, it is still present. The District Council's responsibilities for community relations are managed, avoided and shifted onto others. This shift onto others is explicit in *The Good Relations Strategy and Audit* (Causeway Coast and Glens, 2011, pp. 7, 26) which notes the presence of displaced families from Belfast and, identifies its future plans, as "building relationships with ex-security services, ex-combatants and victims, including those who were rehoused in the area during the conflict."¹⁸

It is incorrect to insinuate that latent sectarianism and conflict are exogenous to Moyle or, can be associated with individuals from Belfast. Because it is unlikely that many Catholic/nationalists from Belfast served in the security services, local policy distinguishes them as ex-combatants and victims. Identifying ex-combatants and victims, (which can be quite different), taints them with conflict. Incorporating them into the District's future goals implies their lack of local involvement, which is unfounded. These insinuations create further divisions, including within Catholic/nationalist communities. Furthermore, they are specious because the District maintains no official statistics for this population, some of whom have lived in Moyle for two generations.

¹⁸ This specific population is also distinguished locally through the use of derogatory terms.

7.0 Conclusion

Moyle's physical expansiveness and its rural location, away from the conflictual areas of Belfast and Londonderry are contradicted by its social confinements (Carville 2011, p. 159). Local narratives about Moyle's status apart from the conflict, are inaccurate. Evidence for conflict in Moyle does not have predictive powers for other rural locations. However, Moyle likely resembles many other districts, where sectarianism and conflict persist and shape residents' daily lives.

Decisions to overlook local sectarianism and conflict have negative consequences. By failing to identify and articulate local challenges accurately, they maintain the District's marginal position with respect to policies to improve community relations. This position also exonerates individuals, communities and local government officials from participation in ongoing conflict transformation efforts. Bushmills and Mosside have chosen to participate in the Art Council of Northern Ireland's Re-imagining Communities project, intended to reduce manifest signs of sectarianism and increase positive expressions of community identity; but, in the absence of District-wide participation and support, these are isolated initiatives, with considerable distance still to be achieved (Moffett, 2010, p. 5). Acceptance of local narrative perpetuates falsehoods about rural-urban differences, limits understandings about the complexity of rurality in Northern Ireland and results in under developed methodologies for conflict assessment.

These narratives are also likely to be challenged in future. Until administrative amalgamation, an ongoing process than began in 2011 and extends until 2015, political representation in Moyle was to an elected council with fifteen members. Political parties are closely linked to communities and, representatives are elected mainly from within community constituencies. Although representation was almost equally balanced amongst three groups, Protestant/unionist, Catholic/nationalist communities, and Independents, representatives acted in the interests of their own communities, a widely accepted local practice. Administrative amalgamation, which alters population size and demographics, could heighten conflictual expressions of identity (Northern Ireland Executive, 2013). Moyle, with a total population of 17,050, joins three, more populous Boroughs: Ballymoney, (population 31, 224), Limivady, (34, 428), and, Coleraine, (population 57,100), to form the newly constituted Causeway Coast and Glens District (Northern Ireland Executive, 2013). This overall population increase may enhance resource acquisition, but it does not necessarily assure their equitable distribution. The majority, (59.56 %), Catholic/nationalist composition of the District shifts, as Protestant/unionists, instead, form the new District's majority, (57.79 %) (Causeway Coast and Glens, 2011).¹⁹ Political representation also shifts. In May 2014 elections to the newly formed Causeway Coast and Glens District, candidates from Protestant/unionist parties secured over half, (24), of the total 40 seats; Catholic/nationalist party candidates secured just over one-third (14) of all seats and, two seats were secured by Independents and cross-community parties. It is reasonable to assume that elected officials will continue to act primarily in the interests of their own communities, and

¹⁹ Protestant/unionists are a minority population (37.01 %) in the Moyle District (2012 d). As they become the majority population in the newly formed District, Catholic/nationalists become a minority population (40.21 %) (Causeway Coast and Glens 2011-2014). The relatively small percent of residents in Moyle who affiliate with neither community (9.4 %) or, with other religions (0.1 %) shrink statistically, to 7.35 % and 0.64 % (Moyle District Council, 2006, 12; Causeway Coast and Glens 2011).

under these circumstances, Catholic/nationalists residents of Moyle may perceive themselves as disadvantaged politically.

The Moyle District, which is to be fully amalgamated administratively, could face substantial challenges, in terms of recognition of its rural character, their economic implications and, local effects for latent sectarianism. Its ability to identify and address these future challenges will determine whether or not the alleged 'absence' of conflict continues to be present.

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