

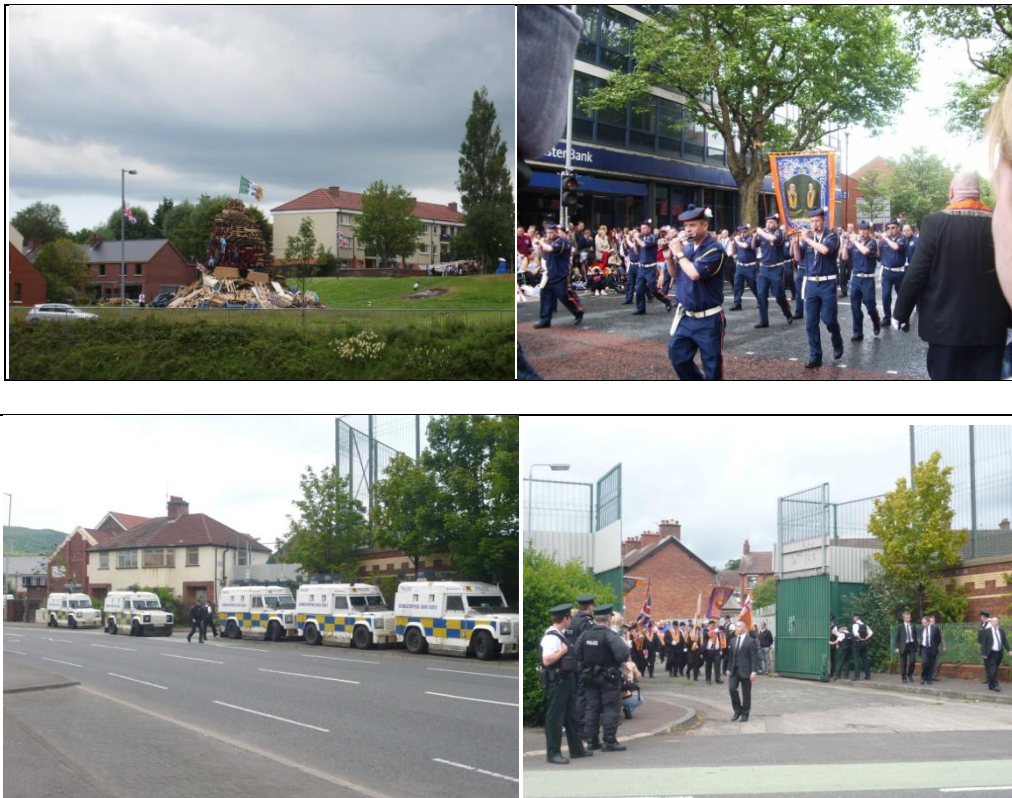
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Belfast Commentary

July 2011



Parading, Protesting and Rioting: The Rhythms of Urban Space

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For anyone writing in and about Belfast at this time of year, and perhaps every year since the mid-1990s, it is impossible to avoid the subject of what, in Northern Ireland, is known as ‘the marching season’ⁱ. I am tempted to write ‘euphemistically known as’ to refer to this practice associated with ‘the troubles’. Yet, I question where exactly the euphemism is in this expression? To be sure, the word ‘season’ correctly describes the cyclical periodic rhythm in the occurrence of what is (mostly) Loyal Order marches and parades, and thus is internally consistent with the notion of ‘marching’ which is rhythmical and orderly. Yet, to the extent that this descriptor is a mild, indirect and vague substitute of a much more complex and harsh reality, the expression ‘marching season’ is, undoubtedly, a euphemism. In Northern Ireland the very act of marching is a physical statement about history, power and rights that goes far beyond a simple practice of walking in and around the city in an orderly fashion. Marching is only one element of all that happens on the streets and there is nothing orderly in the street-level clashes and violence that have become features of the season. Neither the parades nor the eruptions of rioting that gravitate around the marching season are in themselves exclusive to Belfast or are even solely urban phenomena. They are a reminder, however, that in urban space conflicts tend to be manifested in a more aggressive and explosive manner. Not least, (following Lefebvre’s writings on rhythmanalysisⁱⁱ), they testify that rhythm, polyrhythmia and arrhythmia go hand in hand in, and are part of, urban space.

This year the season has witnessed outbreaks of sectarian rioting and violence against the PSNI not seen for at least a decade. While some may reflect an expected reaction to tensions around parading, there are other underlying, complex concerns that are not so easily pigeonholed. On Monday, June 20th it was reported that a group of young men wearing masks and surgical gloves came out of the loyalist Mount and Castlereagh Street areas of inner east Belfast and made their way to the Catholic enclave of Short Strand where homes were attacked. This attack drew a response from that community and the situation quickly escalated. Two ferocious nights of rioting followed involving an estimated 500 loyalist and nationalist rioters (mainly youth) and, of course, the deployment of large numbers of police officers in an attempt to quell the situation. Worryingly, guns, albeit on a limited scale, were also evident accompanying the barrage of bricks, bottles, fireworks and smoke bombs that resulted in two people being treated for gunshot wounds to the leg and homes and other property being damaged (UTV, 21/06/2011ⁱⁱⁱ). The damage to the mental, social and physical health of the area and its residents and to community relations is, of course, incalculable. What is more calculable is the damage to the taxpayers’ purse. In July 2010, for instance, after an intense four nights of rioting in the nationalist area of Ardoyne in north Belfast the cost of policing was estimated at £1.1 million (BBC News, 02/09/2010^{iv}). However, the damage is often less immediately tangible. One aspect of the long term damage is captured in this ‘stray insight’ from the local Slugger O’Toole blog commenting on the violence in the east of the city described above: ‘[I]t is likely that young Protestant working-class males foolishly ensnared by the schemers will find themselves with criminal records like their Catholic counterparts in other parts of the city have in recent years. Thus, those most likely to find meaningful employment a challenge throughout their lives will have an additional obstacle to overcome in the form of a criminal record^v’.

Since the incident occurred police have unequivocally stated that it was members of the east Belfast division of the Ulster Volunteer Force, (UVF - a loyalist paramilitary organisation, said to have ceased its military operations), who were initially behind the violence. This prompted a lot of questions and commentaries in the media over, not simply the state of this organisation, the extent of their influence over the community in east Belfast, and particularly over young adults who were overwhelmingly the front men of this disturbance, but also over the nature of rioting like this, often associated with the marching season, which Belfast and other parts of Northern Ireland have continuously witnessed since the paramilitary ceasefires in the mid 1990s. Strong evidence from our Conflict in Cities research and comments in the media, suggest that street-level disorder of this type has ceased to be as intense and as wide-spread when compared to the beginning of this period and that its reverberation throughout Northern Ireland no longer has the same destabilising power. Whether or not, and 'how' the manifestations of conflict such as rioting and street-level disorder have changed over time is an important question that requires attention and I return to it later. Certainly, this year such trouble at the very beginning of the marching season did not bode well. This is why it is perhaps worthwhile to first present a quick overview of media coverage of these events, followed by further field notes and researcher's commentary, on some of the parades in Belfast and of some of the protests and bigger disturbances pertaining to the marching season since mid June 2011.

- **Summer 2011 Media Highlights: Belfast and Beyond**

Friday, June 17th, 2011: 'Trouble Erupts at Tour of the North'

UTV News (<http://www.u.tv/news/Trouble-erupts-at-Tour-of-the-North/a6842af8-399a-4879-aff8-5bd5d264947c>)

'Trouble has broken out at the Tour of the North parade in the Ardoyne area of north Belfast, with bricks, bottles and stones being thrown at police by protesters.

The marchers set off from the Orange Hall at Clifton Street at around 7.30pm on Friday, amid significant police presence. When they arrived at Woodvale Parade, marchers handed over a letter of protest to police over the Parades Commission's^{vi} decision not to let two feeder parades pass the Ardoyne shop fronts. Registering the complaint, North Belfast DUP MLA Nelson McCausland said: "There are residents of Ballysillan and over [sic] Ardoyne who have been refused the right to return home this evening at the conclusion of the parade." "That's a denial of a basic human right - the right of peaceful assembly". "This is a main road; it should be accessible to people throughout the community."

Trouble erupted soon after at the top of Twaddell Avenue, with protesters throwing missiles at police and officers in riot gear moving in. There were also reports that police used water cannons as the disturbance continued late on Friday night. A police spokeswoman said: "A number of missiles have been thrown and police are monitoring the area." Motorists were still being advised to avoid Twaddell Avenue, Woodvale Road, and Crumlin Road after the

parade ended. The Tour of the North is the first contentious parade of the marching season. The interface area of Ardoyne has been the scene of violent clashes in previous years’.

Saturday, June 25th, 2011: ‘Whiterock Parade Passes Off Peacefully’

UTV News (<http://www.u.tv/news/Whiterock-parade-passes-off-peacefully/61fcc7f4-9940-4fe7-a446-e564d3c60259>)

As all media reported, the annual Whiterock Orange Order parade taking place in west Belfast on the last Saturday of every June did pass off peacefully, despite fears of violence: ‘There was a substantial security presence during the parade as a large crowd had gathered to watch the Orangemen walk down Workman Avenue and onto the predominantly nationalist Springfield Road. Earlier this month [June 2011] the Parades Commission ruled [that] only members of the host lodge would be able to walk down the Springfield Road, where on Saturday [June 25th] nationalist residents gathered to register their objection to the parade. The commission rejected a request by the North and West Belfast Parades and Cultural Forum for a silver band to accompany the lodge on this year's march. The remainder of the parade continued through the Old Mackie's Factory site as in previous years’.



Orangemen walk through the Workman Avenue gates of the Springfield Road interface wall (specially opened by police for the occasion) during the Whiterock annual parade on June 25th 2011.

Saturday, July 9th, 2011: 'Protest in Ballyclare after PSNI Remove Flags'

BBC News, (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-14093919>)

'Roads have been blocked by loyalists in Ballyclare, County Antrim. It is understood it is because of a dispute with police about the erection of illegal flags in the town. The PSNI said they were liaising with community representatives to find a peaceful resolution. It is believed up to 70 members of the loyalist community staged a protest after officers removed some of the flags. DUP MLA Paul Girvan said about 10 flags were taken down by police on Friday night. "There was a number of loyalist paramilitary flags removed, but as well as that there was union flags and an Ulster flag (removed)," Mr Girvan added. "As a result there was a bit of a backlash from the community and those who put the flags up." He said a crowd of protesters gathered on Saturday afternoon and put up around 100 union flags on the Ballynure Road. They then staged a sit-down protest, which is believed to have blocked roads for a time'.

Monday, July 11th, 2011: 'Ballyclare, Carrickfergus Violence Inexcusable: Police'

BBC News (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-14102295>)

'Trouble flared following the removal of union and paramilitary flags near a Catholic church. Six officers sustained whiplash when a hijacked bus was used to ram a police vehicle. Other cars were hijacked, set alight and used to attack police lines. Police deployed water cannon and baton rounds were used after a number of petrol bombs and missiles were thrown by loyalists'.

'Assistant Chief Constable Alistair Finlay said police would apologise when in the wrong but violence did not have to be "inevitable". "There were some parts of the process we could have undertaken differently and we will look at that," he said'.

'DUP MP Sammy Wilson said the violence was an "over reaction" and that the trouble was "orchestrated" in an attempt to "spread police resources". He did, however, say the removal of the flags could have been handled "more sensitively." ... ACC Finlay agreed with DUP MP Sammy Wilson's assessment that the violence had been co-ordinated. "There was some degree of organisation," he said. "The disorder that broke out in Carrickfergus seemed to us a result of some degree of contact between the people engaged in Ballyclare in seeking to distract police to another site."

Tuesday, July 12th, 2011: 'Belfast Riots. Appeals for Calm After Night of Violence'

BBC News (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-14130190>)

'Police and community representatives are appealing for calm after trouble in west and north Belfast on Monday night in which 22 officers were injured. An investigation is under way into the possibility that shots were fired in west Belfast during the trouble. An ambulance and a fire engine were also attacked.

Community worker Robert McClenaghan, from the Falls Residents Association, said the violence was organised by nationalist youths. More than 40 petrol bombs were thrown at police, who said crowds of about 150-200 people were involved in the violence at Broadway and about 200 in both the Oldpark and New Lodge areas of north Belfast. Crowds of nationalists threw petrol bombs and masonry at police who fired 51 plastic bullets in the Broadway and Oldpark areas. Mr McClenaghan said the violence was "nothing but thuggery". "There was no provocation. There was nothing from the Protestant, loyalist, unionist community. Broadway interface was quiet," he said. "What you had was 100 or 150 of these young people all tooled up and masks around their faces. "They were armed with petrol bombs, they were armed with sticks and stones. They had wheelie bins with extra ammunition that they were pulling behind them." ...

'Sinn Fein MLA Jennifer McCann was at Broadway for several hours during the trouble. She believes that those taking part in the rioting were not from the area. "Mostly what I saw was people who came from other parts of Belfast, who would be known as anti-social elements, who had taken a lot of drink and were attacking the police," she said. "I am appealing to young people who may be caught up in this behaviour to stay away from Broadway, Ardoyne or anywhere else there may be a chance of trouble."



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12th July 2010. Lower Ormeau Road, South Belfast: Disturbance after the passing of an Orange parade.

Tuesday, July 12th, 2011: 'Shops Open their Doors and City Hall Hosts Food Market for Twelfth'

The Belfast Telegraph (<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/twelfth/shops-open-their-doors-and-city-hall-hosts-a-food-market-for-twelfth-16022193.html>)

'There are many other activities on offer over the Twelfth. A food market, featuring some of Northern Ireland's best food producers, will be situated in the grounds of Belfast City Hall. This year the shops will open half an hour earlier, at noon, after the parade has passed through the city centre, before closing at 4.30pm. It is the third year in a row that shops, restaurants, cafes and bars will open their doors on the previously contentious bank holiday. St George's Market will also be trading and many tourist attractions such as Belfast Zoo will open as normal.

Belfast City centre manager Andrew Irvine said the Twelfth celebrations brought more people into Belfast than any other event. "In terms of visitor numbers, the Twelfth of July is simply the largest annual event we have in the city centre," he said. "For the third consecutive year the city centre shops are open — and providing some fantastic special offers. "Additionally this year, shoppers can enjoy the Northern Ireland food produce market in the grounds of the City Hall."

There will also be on-street performances by Belfast Community Circus at various places, including Royal Avenue and Cornmarket'.

Tuesday, July 12th, 2011: 'Thousands Take Part in Twelfth Parades'

UTV News (<http://www.u.tv/News/Thousands-take-part-in-Twelfth-parades/420c35a1-f24d-47a3-b1c5-26a449489f56>)

'Thousands of Orangemen have been taking part in Twelfth of July parades across Northern Ireland, with the leader of the order attending the demonstration in Limavady, Co Londonderry. The largest of the 18 marches passed through Belfast city centre on Tuesday morning. Around 250,000 people watched or participated in the event, with the parade stopping at City Hall for a wreath laying ceremony on its way to the demonstration field at Barnetts Demesne.

Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Ireland Edward Stevenson, who was a guest speaker this year's Twelfth in Limavady, called on Protestants and Orangemen to engage with the Historical Enquiries Team to uncover the truth about atrocities carried out during the Troubles. ... Speaking in Ballycastle, Grand Secretary Drew Nelson hit out at the Parades Commission which he said "has lost its way". "This cultural humiliation must stop," he said. "Time and again a lack of understanding about our Institution and its Principles has condemned others and indeed our opponents to languish in ignorance; an ignorance that can, intentionally or otherwise, promote division in our society." He said the focus on parading issues "blinded" non-members to the order's contribution to civic society in Northern Ireland. ...

The other main parades were held in Ballymena, Cullybackey, Aghalee, Ballymartin, Rathfriland, Killylea, Ballycastle, Broughshane, Sixmilecross, Stewartstown, Ballyronan, Lisnaskea, and Clougher, with the demonstrations in Randalstown and Comber enjoying flagship status this year'.

Notes from the Field. Research Commentary on Marching and Protesting

Rhythm: Tuesday, July 12th, 2011. Ardoyne Roundabout, North Belfast

A Conflict in Cities colleague and I arrive at 7:45 a.m. all set to observe and record as much as we can of the passing of three Orange Order Lodges^{vii} through the Ardoyne roundabout^{viii} on their way to the congregation point for the main 12th of July parade at Carlisle Circus. This spot constitutes a part of the traditional marching route of the Twelfth parade, along with six other Loyal Order annual parades. Most of these, although contested by local nationalist communities, pass off peacefully, even as nationalist resident groups organise protests. However, trouble often occurs upon marchers' return through this space in the evening time. According to local people evening parades are traditionally the most problematic as the time of day provides an opportunity, if not an 'invitation for young people to come and get involved in rioting' (Conflict in Cities interview, 20/04/2011). Indeed, in some years the Parades Commission has not allowed the marching lodges to return to the starting point of their route in the evening through Ardoyne (as was the case with this year's Tour of the North parade, see page 3 above). Last year Ardoyne was propelled into the media headlines when four nights of rioting followed the return of the Twelfth parading procession through the same roundabout.

The parade starts from further up the Crumlin Road at 8:15 am. It will pass through the roundabout where we are positioned, then swerve through Woodvale Road into a unionist area, bypassing a part of the Crumlin Road but soon re-emerging back onto it. The party will then proceed onto Carlisle Circus where the imposing building of the North Belfast Orange Order Headquarters stands and where a number of other 'feeder' parades will have been congregating to form the main procession which will march through Belfast city centre. From there they will proceed to the fields of the Barnett Demesne park in South Belfast and will then go all the way back in the evening. We are aware that the Parades Commission has imposed a number of restrictions on the parade in this particular section of the road which includes the Ardoyne roundabout. I later find these on the Commission's website. The Commission's determination states among others that: 'on both the outward morning and return evening parades' no music and no drum beats are to be played for this part of the notified route. There is also to be 'no singing, chanting, whistling, humming or shouting'. 'All flags must be furled and no bannerette may be visibly displayed by any notified band on the portion of the notified route'^{ix}. The number of supporters allowed to join the procession is limited.

A local nationalist residents association have given notification for protest. This protest has also now become traditional. Unionist community and political representatives for the area have said on numerous occasions that what they see in nationalist protests against Loyal Order parades and in the actions and determinations of the Parades Commission is a total lack of respect and understanding of their cultural tradition and a denial of their right to march down a public road celebrating this tradition 'in a peaceful and dignified way' (interview, 24/03/2011). Nationalist communities and politicians in the area say that they are not about 'no Orange feet on the road' (interviews, 30/05/2011 and 03/06/2011) and that they will be happy to negotiate the possibility of withdrawing day protests in exchange for no

return parades in the evening because the latter act as a magnet for youth from far and wide intended on rioting. In the past, rioting has repeatedly brought devastation to the local area.

In the 13 years since the passing of the Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act (1998)^x both the conduct of the marchers and supporters on parade through the area and that of local residents opposing the parade has been highly regulated. Since the early 2000s attempts have been made by local community organisations to negotiate the passing of Loyal Order parades through this point of the road prior to the marching season. The Parades Commission takes into account whether or not an agreement has been achieved at a local level (in most instances this has not been achieved) before they issue a determination, such as the example quoted above. This year the protesters have been asked to limit their presence to a particular part of the road (between [the] 'Mountainview junctions and from [the] dentist surgery to [the] traffic island'^{xi}). Furthermore, the number of protesters has been limited to 150 and it has been determined that there can be no 'conduct, words, or behaviour which could reasonably be perceived as intentionally sectarian, provocative, threatening, abusive, insulting or lewd'. There is also to 'be no singing, chanting, whistling, humming or shouting'. Finally, the protesters are asked to 'remain static until the parade has passed' and to then 'disperse no later than the time at which the parade passes the junction of Woodvale Road and Woodvale Parade in the morning, and the junction of Crumlin Road and Hesketh Road in the evening'^{xii}.

It is a gloomy start of the day. Crowds are beginning to gather but the place still looks very much deserted. Among those already here, I can recognise one or two Sinn Fein representatives and I later see a number of local community activists. There is also the usual crowd of journalists, cameramen, and a few foreigners – either journalists or, like us, researchers. Mostly however, there are people who must constitute the official protesters party, many holding placards and signs saying 'Residents Rights are Being Trampled On', 'Shame on You' and 'Respect our Rights' among others. Police, including some local neighbourhood policemen, are there to make sure public order is maintained. There are not many of them (and none is in riot gear) but there are enough to form a cordon on either side of the road thus separating the protesters from marchers. Police Land Rovers in their tens are parked both further up the Crumlin Road (where in the distance we can see the procession forming and getting ready to march down towards the roundabout) and a little bit away from the roundabout on the Woodvale Road.

Digital cameras, photo and video, are being held by every other person and we are not an exception. A police Land Rover prominently features a CCTV camera on its roof and a number of policemen are taking photos of the gathering crowd. We are surprised to see that not all of the Ardoyne shops are closed and a cafe is already doing business. Are they being brave or do they know something we don't? Is this a sign of changing times? Personally, not content with the 'fact' that rioting in this spot seems to be an evening occurrence and not entirely trusting the advice I was given, I decide not to park the car at the roundabout and leave it instead in the grounds of the nearby Holy Cross church in the Crumlin Road.

Among the gathering crowd of protesters one begins to notice more and more community stewards in high visibility jackets. They are there to manage the crowd and as community insiders, while making sure that the crowd adheres to the agreed regulations. Eventually, when the parading procession makes its way by the point where we are standing I can see a

number of stewards among the marchers too. The front of the procession is carrying a huge placard saying 'Republicanism = Cultural Apartheid'.

As they approach I am struck by the relative absence of sound and noise that one usually hears in a city. I know it's an early morning and of course no music, whistles, chanting or singing have been allowed and all traffic has been stopped in this stretch of the road. The gloominess and little daylight for this time of year seem to accentuate the impression of silence. Despite my awareness of muffled conversations going on around me and the occasional splashing sound from the heavy cold drops of the early morning rain, the distant purring of a police helicopter hanging above our heads is the only definite and discernible sound. In the absence of much other sound, the placards which both crowds now raise at each other leave the impression they are actually shouting loudly in each other's faces while not making a sound. Soon though, when the marchers are close enough, I can hear the rhythm of a single drum beating. What is this single drum doing? Is it simply giving rhythm to the procession (after all, once they start marching they do have a limited time to get to Carlisle Circus)? Is it just showing defiance in the face of issued restrictions and what is seen as a lack of respect for unionist cultural identity by the Parades Commission and by nationalists? Is it commanding attention and respect on its own terms from those who wouldn't give any? Is it demonstrating power? Dignity? What is the deeper symbolic significance of the act? Listening to it in the absence of any of the other usual mundane urban sounds I feel its emotive influence. It occurs to me that the struggle is just as much over rhythm as it is over space. Whose rhythm will prevail on this day on this stretch of the road – that of the urban mundane of a nationalist residential area, people going about their business, cars whizzing by, shops open or that of the Orange celebration, because of which all other rhythm has ceased in this spot, punctuating the mundane, demanding attention? The parade passes off peacefully. This place will look and sound very differently in the evening.



12th July 2011. Ardoyne, North Belfast. Orange feeder parade about to pass through Ardoyne roundabout. Local residents hold a protest.

Polyrhythm: Tuesday, July 12th, 2011. Belfast City Centre

Listening to a recording of the BBC's live coverage of the Twelfth celebration as the main parade passes through Belfast city centre I am reminded that this year is the 321st anniversary of the battle of the Boyne. The main procession has started from Carlisle Circus, just before 10 am. From there it has swiftly moved off in a south easterly direction along Clifton Street and Donegall Street, swerving south into Royal Avenue, straight up the heart of the city centre along its main shopping street. By the time I arrive belatedly in Shaftesbury Square at the bottom of Botanic Avenue, the head of the procession has long made it past the City Hall, up Bedford Street and Dublin Road and is now marching away up on the Lisburn Road. Eventually, at the top of this road it will turn left into Balmoral Avenue leading to the Malone Road and from there to Barnett Demesne where their journey is over. The BBC commentators helpfully explain that the distance the parade covers from their starting position up to this point is 9 miles. With the return journey the main part of the route totals 18 miles. (This of course does not include the additional distances that feeder parades have had to cover from various other parts of Belfast up to the meeting point in Carlisle Circus and back from it home in the evening). I am amazed at the stamina of anybody who can cover this distance in a day, let alone while carrying a heavy musical instrument, a flag or a banner! It takes about a good two hours, I am told, for the parade to pass a given point and, as one of the commentators points out, the 'cruel irony' is that the last two miles are uphill.

The first thing that hits me upon approach is the extremely sharp visual and audio barrier that I appear to be going through. While all around Queen's University and along Botanic

Avenue from where I approach there is total desertion; Shaftsbury Square impresses you in more ways than one: the motley colours (though of course red, white and blue above all) of the crowd and of the rich merchandise on display on a huge long stall (or are these a series of stalls appearing welded into each other?); the extravagance of some of the decorations (both on people and in the environment); the diversity of ages in the crowd; the sheer number of bodies; and mostly the music, drumming, cheering, clapping and shouting amounting altogether to a huge sound wave which deafens you. And, if a band happens to be passing by you at this point you realise you don't so much hear them as you feel them vibrating through your body. What could be more in contrast to the silent, solemn, gloomy atmosphere of the passing of that isolated Orange party through Ardoyne earlier on?

I stop for a while as I am trying to capture this sensory abundance. I use my photo and my video cameras and I try to record the audio background but, alas, I think all of these reduce to some extent the multi-layered nature of the actual atmosphere. The BBC journalists did comment on the impressive range of ages represented in both the spectating crowds and in the marching procession – from veteran Orangemen to very young children. I can see indeed that this is very much a family occasion. Not only are there children in the crowd that observes the spectacle, drumming their souvenir drums, waving flags, expecting dads, granddads and uncles passing by with their lodge or band. There are also a lot of children in the actual procession – holding the ribbons of banners, carrying flags or, as I saw on a couple of occasions, themselves juggling with batons. I am impressed at the level of skill and dexterity that a child, appearing no more than four or five years of age (!), demonstrates with a baton. Occasionally marchers stop for a few seconds and walk over to someone in the crowd to greet them. The crowds cheer and clap all along.

Unlike earlier in Ardoyne, here the atmosphere is relaxed and loose, much like the hands and arms of band drummers released on a vigorous enthused dance upon the drums. The smell of burgers fills the air. The sun is now shining unapologetically. Streams of teenagers flow alongside the procession on both sides of the road, dressed in party gear or wrapped up in union jacks. Alcohol can be seen in a few people's hands. Occasionally, I am told by other observing colleagues later, people even cross the procession to greet someone on the other side of the road. This would have not been allowed before, they say, and I think I know what they mean. I remember well that on my first year of being in Belfast on July 12th, eleven years ago now, my unsuspecting husband on his way back from a jog encountered the parading procession in Stranmillis Road. Upon his attempt to quickly cross the procession's way (he could see nothing wrong with that, no disrespect intended) to get home the shorter way, to his bewilderment he was poked with flag handles by both marchers and crowd members. Times must indeed be changing.

Further down towards the City Hall, at the junction of Ormeau Avenue, Bedford Street and Dublin Rd, where the BBC live coverage cameras are positioned, the crowd gets thicker by the minute. I distinguish foreign languages spoken by a group standing next to me who are being chatted up by a person handing out religious tracts. Two women wearing tribal Indian-American feather headpieces (Really! In red, white and blue!) observe the procession nearby. Now this is Orangefest^{xiii}. The mundane steps aside to make way for the festival rhythms but it doesn't completely recede. The streets are not completely devoid of occasional passers-by who are clearly not here to observe or participate but on their way to something else. The shops are open this year again. The city centre has many rhythms.



12th July 2011. Dublin Road, Belfast city centre. Orangefest.

Arrhythmia: Wednesday, July 13th, 2011. Ardoyne, North Belfast
BBC News, (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-14128807>)

'Second Night of Riots in Belfast. Petrol bombs and other missiles have been thrown at police during rioting in the Ardoyne area of north Belfast. The police fired a number of plastic bullets and a photographer was hit. The trouble broke out after police in riot gear took up position ahead of an Orange parade walking past the Ardoyne shops on Tuesday evening. Police said a number of officers were injured. One received minor burns to his face when his head was engulfed in flames when hit by a petrol bomb. Stones, bottles and fireworks were thrown at police. Water cannon was used to push back the crowd of about 200 people. ...

Sinn Fein MLA Gerry Kelly said ... "The difficulty was that there was an Orange parade" ... "People have made great efforts, but a parade coming through a catholic area is a problem. "I would appeal to the Orange Order, especially in Belfast where there seems to be an attitude of no talking, they need to talk."

The DUP MP for North Belfast Nigel Dodds said people had to realise that the Crumlin Road was a "shared space and not just a nationalist road". "The people engaged in the violence didn't even see the parade go past," he said. "There was a peaceful protest against the parade and it dispersed.

"This violence was intended, created and brought into existence by a small group of militant extreme republicans who were determined to have it, come what may." ...

There were also pockets of violence in Belfast and Londonderry. In the Markets area of Belfast, a number of youths threw stones and missiles at police in Stewart Street and a car was set on fire. Police arrested three juveniles and two men on suspicion of riotous behaviour. In Derry, seven people, including a 14-year-old boy, were arrested for rioting. A crate of petrol bombs was also recovered in the Fahan Street area of the city. In Armagh, there were reports of public disorder in the Friary Road and Killylea Road areas. And in Ballymena a car was burnt out in Dunclug'... .

Are the Manifestations of Conflict Changing?

In an analysis published online, the BBC political editor for Northern Ireland Mark Davenport asks 'should we be depressed about the annual ritual rioting in Ardoyne? Or heartened that the number of police officers injured was fewer than last year, and the disorder shorter in duration?'^{xiv}. Speaking about last year's four nights of rioting in Ardoyne after the evening return of the Twelfth Orange Order parade through the area, a participant in the Conflict in Cities research suggested that if one compared that to the situation from previous years, when violence at one interface would have created violence right across the city, and sometimes right across Northern Ireland, the rioting in 2010 (and as we've seen so far this year) was contained. In this respect, and to the extent to which the violence was judged to be between Catholic, nationalist young people, mostly from outside the area, and the stewarding services and the police (not Protestant against Catholic and nationalist against unionist young people) there were aspects of this riot which are considered an improvement on previous years. This returns us to the question posed at the beginning of this commentary: to what extent has rioting in and around the marching season ceased to be as intense and as wide spread as it used to be for years after the ceasefires in the mid 1990s? Has its nature changed and does it still have the power to destabilise the whole peace process?

Certainly, Belfast, along with other main cities in Northern Ireland has a long history of riots and protests that occur mostly, but not exclusively, around annual parades and commemorations. A look at the literature and interviews we have been doing for the Conflict in Cities research suggest that there has been a process of 'street-level' intensification and localisation of conflict since the 1998 Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement. It has been described as a 'shift from organised violence to civil disturbance' (interview, 07/04/2011) which has been most clearly demonstrated in 'interface' areas of Belfast. At some level these developments have not come as a surprise. As one interviewee suggested (01/07/2011) the 1998 Agreement itself created a framework that legitimized and turned urban space into a more public stage on which conflict could now be manifested. Other interviewees stressed that the outstanding divisive issues were simply being acted out in the streets (07/04/2011) and that to an extent street-level disturbances were amplified by the gap left in those spaces where paramilitaries would have interfered before. This gap seems to have gradually started filling with young people in particular but this is not to suggest that rioting which now seems to be very age- and often gender- bound is necessarily politically motivated.

In fact, one can conclude from the arguments of many commentators, community activists, various commission officials, church representatives and, not least, politicians seen in the media, that there is a difference between street disturbances and violence that were frequently seen in Belfast in the years immediately after the GFA and what we are witnessing now. Most commentators seem to agree that there is presently no political cause behind violent incidents and that most of what is going on is about thuggery and the control of communities through intimidation. It is worth perhaps quoting Lord Alderdice (from the Independent Monitoring Commission) who as a guest in the BBC Politics Show (10/07/2011), argued that:

'there is a difference in the context in the violence and trouble that there is now. At the time when [the Independent Monitoring Commission] came into being there was still a serious thought that there was a relationship between political parties in the Assembly... and paramilitary organisations and an ambivalence over violence. That situation is completely changed and the emotional drivers that took many people into paramilitary violence in the 70s and 80s simply aren't there. What you've got now are people who, in many cases on the loyalist side, are simply young hooligans and vandals, not under the control of anybody in particular; And on the dissident republican side people who have no political agenda that can be followed through reasonably and in some cases are just protecting themselves, the wealth that they've got through extortion and smuggling of fuel and drugs, and are not prepared to accept that they've got no mandate and no political agenda. ... But a lot of this is not so much orchestrated [as it is] young men, hooligans... Nobody thinks, whatever the trouble might be on the streets, that this is about bringing down power-sharing and the present constitutional arrangement'.

One should not be quick to conclude that riotous behaviour, however recreational, does not have political overtones; that it cannot be exploited for political purposes and by people with political agendas; or that if somebody's motives for rioting are recreational their actions do not have political consequences. It does not mean either that considering rioting a recreation isn't a sign of deeply disconcerting and far stretching social problems (which makes them also political). Mark Davenport points out that despite much good work being done by local community organisations, councils and funding bodies to keep young people away from places like North Belfast around the height of the marching season (for example by keeping them busy with playing football during the evenings or with trips away), 'for some disaffected youth, soccer can't compete with "recreational rioting"... there are limitations to what can be achieved without progress on wider issues like flags, parades, shared schools and shared housing'^{xv}.

And yet the term 'recreational rioting' is now dangerously close to becoming an explanation rather than a symptom and it is interesting that for all the media frenzy over the causes of rioting we've seen this summer I have not seen a serious public debate over the reasons why some of Northern Ireland's young people have so much disaffection that they eagerly channel into rioting. How has it come to be that such a serious social anomaly as wrecking other people's lives and property has now acquired the hedonistic attraction of a spectator sport? What and who structures the lives of these youngsters?

A lot of the explanation for the disturbances we have seen this summer (and this is especially the case where the east Belfast trouble was concerned) focused on the feelings of disaffection, alienation, loss of direction, lack of civic/community leadership and of real political representation among working class unionist communities. Commenting on the Slugger O'Toole blog Chris Donnelly writes: 'Alienation is a much vexing term and its frequent application invites ridicule. Yet it is entirely appropriate to acknowledge that it is in areas of relative social and economic deprivation that disaffection with the peace and political processes has and will always fester. ... That rioting occurred almost exclusively in nationalist and loyalist working classes areas is therefore not surprising^{xvi}'.

*With the helpful comments and generous editorial suggestions of Martina McKnight and Liam O'Dowd.

ⁱ The summer period, spanning roughly from June to August, when the majority of parades are held. Most of the (around 3800) parades that are held every year are organised by and/or associated with the Loyal Orders (such as the Orange Order, the Apprentice Boys and the Royal Black Institution) the membership of which is Protestant, unionist and loyalist. Often accompanying the above organisations on their parades are marching bands. Although the vast majority of parades occur peacefully a small number have been contested by nationalist communities. Contestation normally occurs when the route of a given Loyal Order parade passes through what is considered a nationalist (residential) area. The contested nature of parades is differently defined by unionists and nationalists. In places where parades are contested they have in practice become a battleground for power struggles over identity, rights and justice (Bryan, 2006; Cohen, 2007).

ⁱⁱ 'Everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm', writes Lefebvre in *Rhythmanalysis. Space, Time and Everyday Life* (2004: 15). Rhythm implies 'the notions of polyrhythmia, eurythmia and arrhythmia'... 'Polyrhythmia? It suffices to consult one's body; thus the everyday reveals itself to be a polyrhythmia from the first listening. Eurhythmia? Rhythms unite with one another in the state of health, in normal (which is to say normed!) everydayness; when they are discordant there is suffering, a pathological state (of which arrhythmia is at the same time symptom, cause and effect)' (Ibid: 16).

ⁱⁱⁱ UTV News, <http://www.u.tv/news/UVF-organised-east-Belfast-riot/c76968fa-6384-410a-b853-9e9354e6f575>.

^{iv} <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-11168010>.

^v Chris Donnelly, 'East Belfast UVF: Mission Accomplished?', (24/06/2011). Available from: <http://sluggerotoole.com/2011/06/24/east-belfast-uvf-mission-accomplished/> .

^{vi} <http://www.paradescommission.org/> .

^{vii} I later learn these are LOL No 1932 Ligoniel True Blues, the Ballysillan LOL 1891 and the Earl Of Erne LOL No 647.

^{viii} Where Crumlin Road meets Twaddell Avenue and Woodvale Road – traditionally an area of interfacing between nationalist and unionist communities.

^{ix} Parades Commission determination document, p. 7, Available from: <http://www.paradescommission.org/parades/?parade=34444>.

^x <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/2/contents> .

^{xi} Parades Commission determination document, p. 5, available from: <http://www.paradescommission.org/parades/parades/protests/?protest=240> .

^{xii} Ibid.

^{xiii} In recent year the Twelfth celebrations in Belfast city centre have been re-branded under the name of Orangefest reflecting attempts to open the event to wider audiences and to create a more family-friendly and festival atmosphere.

^{xiv} Flags, Parades and Politics – Is There a Solution? (13/07/2011). Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-14144723> .

^{xv} Flags, Parades and Politics – Is There a Solution? (13/07/2011). Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-14144723> .

^{xvi} The Summer of 2011: Comments on the Violence and Political reactions (22/07/2011). Available from: <http://sluggerotoole.com/2011/07/22/the-summer-of-2011-comments-on-the-violence-and-political-reactions> .