

Lest We Forget: Observations from Belfast's Twaddell Avenue

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Abstract

This paper explores the evolution of parading in civic space in Belfast, Northern Ireland. I draw upon previous ethnographic study of the Twaddell Avenue protest camp as an example of spectacle and resistance in public space. This camp, sometimes referred to as a 'civil rights camp' or 'protest camp', is the product of ethnosectarian division and ongoing contestation around space in Northern Ireland. This camp, and the act of parading around which it revolves, appropriates public space as an expression of identity, territory, and collective memory. It also provides a lens with which to examine broader social, political and economic issues facing post-ceasefire, post-industrial Belfast.

I. Spectacle and Resistance

It is 2012 in the small streets of a Catholic/Nationalist neighborhood called Ardoyne in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

People gather here, tensely, hemmed in by police officers in riot gear. On the other side of the main street, cut off by dozens more police, another crowd assembles. This one is bigger, with a celebratory air.

A Protestant/Unionist Orange Order parade passes—a handful of men in suits and sashes, holding colorful fringed standards and Union flags. They stride somberly down the road. It is a strange sight—no supporters follow them, no music plays... they are accompanied by still more armored police. They pass, but the street remains tense, the two groups separated, each on a different side of the road.

A water cannon arrives and parks. A car is set on fire.

An hour later, another parade passes, this time a Nationalist protest against the Orange Order. They hold a banner, which states: *“ARDOYNE RESIDENTS HAVE RIGHTS TOO! WE ARE NOT SECOND CLASS CITIZENS.”* They walk directly across the intersection towards the Unionist group behind police lines, who are holding their own banner bearing the legend: *“END HATRED OF ORANGE CULTURE.”* The air fills with hundreds of voices shouting, chanting, jeering, shaking their fists; the first bottles are thrown, glass shattering on the pavement—the two groups are literally within “a stone's throw” of one another.

A line of police Land Rovers arrives at the roundabout as a blockade.

The rioting begins, like a well-worn and practiced performance.

In any other city, in any other place, this might have been an average public space. A roundabout, connecting arterial routes, ringed by shops and houses and traffic. A thoroughfare, one whose footpaths conducted the “sidewalk ballet” of everyday life and movement (Jacobs 45). A normal parade, a celebration. In Belfast, Northern Ireland, however, space and ritual are inextricably tied with—and polarized by—notions of territory and identity. This has always been true to some extent, but was exacerbated by the recent conflict known as “the Troubles,” where over 3,600 people died and over 40,000 were injured in a thirty-year period (Connolly et al. 221).

There are, broadly, two competing ethno-sectarian groups in Northern Ireland: Catholic/Nationalist/Republicans who generally favor a united Ireland and end of the constitutional link to Great Britain, and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalists who identify as British and desire to remain as part of the UK. Republicans and Loyalists are more uncompromising in their views, and during the Troubles, enacted this opposition through violence, intimidation, and threat. Republican paramilitaries state that they fought against British state, Army, and police forces for Irish independence although many of their victims were civilian Catholics and Protestants; Loyalist paramilitaries fought against Republicans and the specter of a United Ireland but the majority of their victims were civilian Catholics. The majority of conflict took place in public space—“the street as battlefield”—and in particular in

working-class districts (McDowell and Switzer 83). Protestants and Catholics resorted into segregated hinterlands populated by those of the same identity group. These were divided from each other by physical barriers and buffer zones known as “interfaces,” reinforcing a sense of safety but also a fear of the ethno-sectarian “other” (Feldman 37). Over the years, space in Belfast has become a site of contest, violence, and division—a proxy for issues of territory, culture, and power within and between the two groups.

Each year on 12 July (“the Twelfth of July” or “the Twelfth,” as it is more commonly referred to), a Protestant Orange Order parade takes place at the interface between the Nationalist/Republican Ardoyne and Unionist/Loyalist Woodvale neighborhoods. It is one of dozens of parades and feeder parades that take place on the Twelfth throughout Northern Ireland to commemorate the victory of Protestant King William of Orange over Catholic King James in 1690—a symbolic triumph for Protestantism in Ireland. The feeder parade past Ardoyne, however, “remains arguably the most predictable occasion and place for serious street level violence and communal conflict in Northern Ireland” (Hayward and Komorova 777). Whilst Unionist/Loyalists see the event as a cultural expression, Nationalists experience the parade as triumphalist and sectarian, and this leads to tension, fear, and sometimes, violence (Ferman 65).

In recent years, the Greater Ardoyne Resident’s Collective (GARC) has staged protests and counter-parades on the Twelfth against the Orange parade’s passage (Henry 2011). To curtail the rioting which erupted as a result of these clashes, the Parades Commission determined in 2013 to halt the Orange parade so that it could not complete its route at the Ardoyne-Woodvale interface. The contested stretch of road would have taken about seven minutes to walk. A standoff between police and Orange Order members (known as Orangemen), the marching bands, and parade supporters ended in rioting: petrol bombs, bricks, and bottles launched across police Land Rovers, a frenzy of shouting and jeering and the periodic blast of water cannons (*BBC News* 2013a).

Tensions were high after the December 2012 flag protest, sparked by a vote that the Union flag would only be flown from Belfast City Hall on 18 designated days (Nolan et al. 9). The decision incensed some Loyalists, generated violence, and polarized opinion (Nolan et al. 10). The Parades Commission’s ruling the following July was seen by some as a continuing rejection of Protestant identity and an appeasement to Sinn Féin, the major Nationalist political group in Northern Ireland (Black 2014). Since 12 July, 2013, Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist protestors have consequently installed themselves in a camp on the corner of Twaddell Avenue, across from the Ardoyne roundabout and close to the invisible boundary where they were stopped (Fig. 1). This camp, sometimes referred to as a “civil rights camp” or “protest camp,” appropriates public space as an expression of resistance, identity, and territory. It is both a microcosm of broader social, political, and economic issues facing post-Troubles, post-industrial Belfast, and a lens with which to examine contemporary Loyalism.

The protestors’ aim is twofold: to see the return of the Orange Order parade “home” to its lodge, completing the parade; and to see the ending of the Parades Commission. Loyalists view the Commission as undemocratic as its

members are appointed by Westminster, not elected. They claim the camp will remain manned 24/7 until these goals are achieved. Each evening and Saturday afternoon, a parade is held there as a symbolic attempt to return “home.” Each time, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) Land Rovers line the road, blocking their return. It is a spectacle as much as it is routine; it is a show of resistance but also of intransigence.



Fig. 1. The view from the protest camp at Twaddell Avenue, Belfast, Northern Ireland. April 2014. Photo credit: Elizabeth DeYoung.

II. Parading Public Space

Public space can be defined as “those physical spaces under public ownership or oversight that are open to public participation and social mixing” (Hocking 11). Hocking goes on to note that public space in all societies is, to some extent, contested (22). However, with the end of “the Troubles,” civic space continued as a site on which to frame issues of territory, identity, and the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland (Bryan 566).

Public space played a major part in defining relationships of identity and power in Northern Ireland. A vital center of industry for the United Kingdom, Belfast bore more similarities to places like Liverpool and Glasgow than it did to the rest of Ireland. After the partition of the North from the South of Ireland in 1921, a one-party Protestant Unionist government was installed. Wealthy Unionists owned the shipbuilding and linen industries, which were staffed largely by working-class Protestants.

Unionist hegemony over civic space was enforced by the resurgence of Orange Order parades from the late 18th century onwards, supported by the “respectable middle classes” (Jarman 62). Unionist officials began to use

parading as a means to garner political support and link collective memory to contemporary politics, thereby achieving cross-class unity and maintaining a cohesive power base. The Orange Order played a major role in this. The Order, formed in 1795 as a Protestant fraternal organization, is known to be anti-Catholic and pro-Union, but it also encourages place-based loyalties, creates and maintains social networks, and provides a means of symbolically constructing community (Bell 210). A key part of this is parading through civic space.

The single largest event, which reinforces Unionist identity, is the Twelfth of July. This day commemorates the victory of Protestant King William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, thereby securing a Protestant ascendancy in Northern Ireland (Bell 99). According to Shirlow, this historical narrative alludes to a mentality, which sees continually defeating the Irish nationalist or Catholic enemy as necessary to maintaining the Union (5). According to the Orange Order, however, the event is a celebration of constitutional democracy in the British Isles (Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland).

In the era of one-party rule, membership of the Orange Order was *defacto* among politicians and prominent businessmen, and government officials and wealthy industrialists led the annual march. Brass and silver bands played as did Scottish pipe bands, asserting links to Ulster-Scots heritage and the British Army. The Twelfth was a “respectable” occasion, marked by a sense of regiment, order, and decency. That is not to say it lacked pomp, circumstance, and spectacle: huge crowds filled the streets, which were decorated by elaborate arches; rows of sharply attired Orangemen marched in sashes and bowler hats, carrying standards printed with historical events and religious symbols. The effect was one of “visual exuberance” (Jarman 76).

In contemporary Northern Ireland, the Twelfth holiday “generates the biggest parades and crowds, the most color and noise...and the most disruption and protest” (Jarman 125). The build-up to the day itself necessitates a series of activities: Union flags are affixed to every lamppost, and red-white-and-blue bunting crisscrosses the streets. Youths construct towering, elaborate bonfires from pallets, plywood sheeting, and discarded furniture—sometimes crowned with the Irish tricolor (Nolan 125)—and set them ablaze on the night of the 11th. On the following day, religious services, parades, and festivities take place throughout the province.

These ritualized practices, in which all members of the group play a role, provide a specific means in which exclusive Protestant identity is “represented and renewed” over time (Bell 137). The involvement of young people marks a continuity from generation to generation of collective identity and tradition. The “rhythmic patterning of rituals,” drawn from a common historical narrative, serves to connect the individual to a larger group and provide a sense of legitimacy, heritage, and place (Jarman 9). This reflects Halbwachs' notion of “collective memory”—that through participating in commemorative practice, group members reconstruct and reshape their understanding of the past within a present-day framework (Halbwachs 188). The Battle of the Boyne in 1690 and the triumph of Protestantism in Ireland are used to legitimize contemporary ties to place and understandings of belonging. Sites, artifacts, and practice help to

create and reconstitute an “imagined community” that binds people and place together (Anderson 14). It is important to note that the maintenance of this community rests on its opposition to the “other”: a sense of solidarity and civic spirit emerges from seeing the “in-group” in relation to the “out-group” (Nationalist/Catholics). Identity is therefore based on “various forms of exclusion and construction of otherness” (Byrne 7).

This exclusive affirmation of identity is especially important to some Protestants today given demographic and industrial decline and feelings of territorial insecurity, particularly in urban Belfast. As Hayward and Komarova note, “when ritual performance takes to the streets, it can intensify the collective experience of identity in relation to territory” (780). Parade routes serve as a symbolic demarcation of Protestant territory as the physical integrity of this community is being eroded (Bell 107). In this sense, the paraded city is a “place of the imagination...realized in the act of movement”, harkening back to a time of Protestant hegemony over civic space and industry (Jarman 88).

The decline of Unionist hegemony and the Protestant *status quo* in Belfast took place post-Second World War. Urban renewal and slum clearance programs began to break up tight-knit neighborhoods and old social networks (Weiner 76). The cramped terraced houses crowded along the Shankill Road, for example, were bulldozed, and the families living there moved to suburban estates. Furthermore, socially mobile Protestants moved out to surrounding towns over the years, either in search of skilled employment or to distance themselves from the violence of the Troubles (Weiner 40).

As a result, the Protestant population remaining in Belfast is aging and declining where the Catholic community is growing in number. NISRA has estimated that 95,000 Protestants and 46,000 Catholics died between 2001 and 2011, while there were 89,000 Protestant and 118,000 Catholic births (Nolan 21). During this period, the demographic balance in Belfast city experienced a small but important shift: the Catholic population increased by 4.2% and the Protestant numbers declined by 11.9% (Nolan 22). This is reflected in higher levels of vacancy, dereliction, and open space in working-class Protestant neighborhoods.

Nationalists are thereby perceived to literally be gaining ground as boundaries between highly segregated areas begin to shift. Parades and protests around parades test these fragile balances of territory and culture. Because parades are mobile and involve the passage of people through different areas and boundaries, they challenge the notion of exclusive territories. Demographic change may influence attitudes to parading and, in a broader sense, of access to territory (Strategic Review of Parading Body 15). Within Belfast, some Nationalist areas that were once paraded on the Twelfth have been abandoned. Part of the concerns of the Orange Order with restrictions around parading is that these areas where they are no longer able to walk freely will only increase (Jarman 128). This explains, in part, the resistance to parading restrictions at Twaddell Avenue.

III. Camp Twaddell: A Place of Resistance

For Loyalists, parading is a means of expressing pride in an exclusive Protestant culture and heritage and confirming Northern Ireland's Britishness. However, Catholic Nationalists see these parades as triumphalist, sectarian, and antagonistic (Jarman 124; Ferman 65-66). It is a question of balancing human rights: the right to walk down the public highway, and the right to be free from sectarian harassment (Author interview with Simon, 2014). In the spring of 2014, at the height of the protest, two community workers, John and Geordie, first offered to bring me to the Twaddell camp.

The protest camp is located at the corner of a roundabout where Twaddell Avenue, Woodvale Road, and the Crumlin Road converge. This functions as a demarcation between the Nationalist Ardoyne and Unionist Upper Ardoyne neighbourhoods, which are further divided by physical barriers. During the Troubles, this small district saw a disproportionate amount of violence and experienced loss and trauma on both sides. The intersection of the three roads served as a thoroughfare for both Loyalist and Republican paramilitaries (Black 2014). Sectarian murder, gun battles, and shootings of (and by) British Army and police officers, were an everyday feature of life in the streets. Indeed, a quarter of all politically motivated deaths in Northern Ireland occurred within a mile of central Ardoyne (Shirlow and Murtagh 61). The deep suspicion of the "other," on both sides of the divide, can be traced to the legacy of conflict.

The Twaddell camp was enclosed by the grinning teeth of steel palisade fencing. Dozens of colorful banners were hung along the outside, given in support of the protest by Orange lodges, political groups, and a cross-section of Protestant/Unionist areas from Northern Ireland and further afield. Union and Orange Order flags fluttered from the lampposts. These banners and flags outside Twaddell function not only as a visual spectacle, but as a delineation of boundaries and of territory. The camp, located on the roundabout, is visible to those on the "other side", in Ardoyne, and uses physical objects to mark symbolic presence. Inside sat a small caravan with a worn Union flag rug at the entry. I was introduced to two protestors; a man, Jackie, and a woman, Diane, who got up to make us tea. I felt sheepish about my previous expectations of aggressive firebrands and closed-off, suspicious characters.

The media has not been kind to Loyalists. The news presents "a perpetual diet" of stories concerning paramilitary and criminal involvement (Shirlow 3; *BBC News* 2013c, 2013d). They are often portrayed as the aggressor: "[the media] don't let the truth get in the way of a good story," one protestor said to me (Author field notes, unpublished). On the Twelfth of July each year, for example, the news highlights the "provocative nature of Orange parades" (Parkinson 15). Yet, other factors are omitted in such narratives. For example, historical evidence suggests that although parades are a significant factor in the possibility of sectarian violence, they are by no means the only reason for it.

The essence of general thinking concerning Loyalists is that there is a predominant element of drug-dealing, criminality, and paramilitary clout

(Shirlow 177). Such depictions do not account for the realities of working-class areas—on both sides—burdened with the legacy of conflict, poverty, social marginalization, and chronic unemployment (Shirlow 4). In terms of the Twaddell protest, it is important to note that assuming it is an ignorant and reactionary event allows us to avoid that mainstream society nurtures the conditions which bred it: including political, social, and economic exclusion and feelings of collective insecurity (Gallagher and Shirlow 153).

De-industrialization has disproportionately affected the Protestant working-class, which grew up around shipbuilding, manufacturing, heavy engineering, and linen (Shirlow and McGovern 386). A self-sustaining ethos—and visible discrimination of Catholics—was established where apprenticeships were given out through family connections and the Orange Order: “You walked out of school and into the shipyard” (McKay 93). The contemporary economy has radically changed, leaving behind a working-class Protestant population which now experiences chronic unemployment—indeed, between 1950 and 1994 there was a 58.4% decline in manufacturing employment (Shirlow and McGovern 388). Mass unemployment has severed young people from the social links and personal development opportunities which work provides, effectively ghettoizing them within their segregated areas (Bell 1). There is also a lack of educational attainment among young people. Using the standard measure of five “good” GCSEs, Protestant boys with free school meal entitlement achieve less than any of the other main groups in Northern Ireland and hover near the very bottom when compared with groups in England (*BBC News* 2014).

In an interview with Shirlow, one Loyalist states: “In Protestant working-class areas, schools are run down, hospital services are run down, and communities are run down - we have gradually become the underclass” (202). Catholic Ardoyne, too, suffers from high levels of economic inactivity and social marginalization. But their experience is not seen as “shared” across class lines but rather, “community members believe themselves to be competing against the ‘other’ community for scarce resources and recognition” (Hayward and Komarova 782).



Fig. 2. Protestors march down Woodvale Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland towards the interface with Ardoyne. November 2014. Photo credit: Elizabeth DeYoung.

IV. Night Parade: Spectacle and Protest

The Twaddell camp reflects feelings of insecurity for working-class Protestants in post-ceasefire Northern Ireland. A sentiment exists that a confident Nationalist political movement, led by Sinn Féin, is increasingly using its power to wage a “culture war” (Corr 2014) to strip away Protestant traditions. Rather than Northern Ireland being taken out of Britain, the focus of concern for Unionist/Loyalists is now of “Britishness” being taken out of Northern Ireland. On the Twelfth of July 2013, for example, Orange Order Grand Master Edward Stevenson said Protestants were facing “an almost daily onslaught on their British heritage and culture” (Nolan 161, *BBC News* 2013a). As Shirlow and McGovern put it, “The threat of the collective other represents the antithesis of the collective self”, underlining a “siege mentality” (382). Yet, it is worth noting that the number of Loyalist parades have increased in number year on year, and European Union funding has been made available to the Orange Order, the Unionist Apprentice Boys of Derry, and the Ulster-Scots language (Nolan 162).

From a Loyalist perspective, however, their sense of belonging has been continuously eroded: their industrial heritage has given way to unemployment, traditional parades are increasingly curtailed, and the Union flag has been taken down from City Hall. The symbolism of these events is strong for a population, which has always been “an embattled minority”, with an uncertain relationship

with middle Unionism and the British state (McKay 27). Certainly, looking back to the days of the old Stormont government, where Twelfth parades featured politicians and prominent businessmen, their absence today at the Twaddell camp is notable. Attendance at and participation in parades is miniscule to what it once was, a shadow of the past. The shop owners, the industrialists, the sense of “ascendancy” are gone because the old streets are gone, the jobs are gone, the factories are silent. Furthermore, in socioeconomic terms it is now arguably Catholics who are “ascendant” (Shirlow and McGovern 389).

This links to the sense of loss at the Twaddell camp, and of abandonment by the political elite. Indeed, it seems Unionist politicians have lost touch with working-class Loyalists: in INTERCOMM and Byrne's 2013 study of flag protestors, the general impression was that there was no meaningful relationship between the two, with “anger, frustration, and apathy” as main identifiers (14). Nolan et al. note the most frequently voiced concern is that “no-one listens to us” (12). Moreover: “those whose daily lives are most directly affected by symbolic defeat are most likely to channel their emotional reaction into a decision to protest and to ‘defend’ one’s group in the public arena.” (Hayward and Komarova 781). For those alienated from the political elite and from employment and educational opportunities—for those living on the boundaries—the Twaddell camp and parades have become both a catalyst for grassroots protest and a microcosm of wider issues facing working-class Protestants.

In 2014, I attended a number of the nightly protest parades, which occur at Twaddell (Fig. 2). I walked there one evening, footsteps cutting a path around vacant lots and barriers in the fading light. Up Shankill Road, past chippies and shops shuttered with metal, skirting Woodvale Park and noting the gradual appearance of police Land Rovers. At around 7:20 pm, groups of Orangemen, members of the band, and supporters usually congregate for the protest by the bus stop on Woodvale Parade, down the road from the camp. I was early—groups of men in Orange collarettes were passing by in twos and threes on their way to the meeting-point.

The sense of camaraderie is palpable. Some people bring sandwiches and make tea, some donate money, some take shifts in the 24 hour *rota* at the camp. I asked another man about the day-to-day attendance; he said that people each have their routines—that it's difficult with work and family commitments. It is something that the Twaddell protest continues to plod—“march”—along, and that on any given night of the week, people mingle along the footpaths, milling around, chatting to one another and drinking styrofoam cups of tea. Nearly three years after my fieldwork, it must be noted that attendance has diminished markedly, yet a core crowd remains.

Some supporters who attend the night parades have miniature flags, or wear knitted Union flag or Linfield football caps. People wave and shout greetings to each other. There is no alcohol or suggestion of violence. A band member finishes a story with a raucous laugh and small children weave through the maze of people. It is as much a communal gathering as anything, and has brought a sense of cohesion previously rare among the many elements of

Unionism. The commonality that stretches across all intra-division is this belief in the inalienable right to march.

I asked Simon, a community worker on the Shankill Road, about this aspect of the Twaddell camp, bringing people together, and he agreed:

It surprises people, you see, because there were always, you know... there's factionalism within Loyalism, and there always has been - there's the Democratic Unionist Party, the Ulster Unionist Party, the Traditional Unionist Voice, the Progressive Unionist Party, the Ulster Defence Association, the Ulster Volunteer Force, Red Hand Commando, etc., etc. This whole campaign around Twaddell has galvanized opinion, and it has galvanized opinion around one common theme, and that is, a basic denial of human rights. The right of you or me, or somebody else, to walk up that road.

And I suppose we can mirror that by the Nationalist community who would say well, my basic right to live unoffended and free from sectarian harassment is being compromised by these marches. You know, how the fuck do you sort that out? Seriously, how do you sort it out? Tolerance and respect are required, but it's a two-way street. (Author interview with Simon, 2014).

Down Woodvale Parade, the parade formed up. Rather than the traditional Orange Order uniform of impeccable suits, gloves, and bowler hats, these men wore jeans and sweatshirts, a collarette draped around their neck. These "sashes" are bedecked with patches denoting lodge numbers and mysterious pins and medals. At the fore were men bearing the standards of the Orange lodge blocked from their return route. The accompanying band, Pride of Ardoyne too, was out of uniform. There was a group of flute players, which followed the drummers. The staccato notes of the snare drum cut the air. Warming up, practicing snatches of songs, they lined up behind the Orangemen. Color parties marched in small, shuffling steps, carrying flags, and standards. The music got a group of old women across the street dancing, linking elbows and stomping feet and giggling. Two little girls next to me imitated their moves, shrieking with laughter. The mood was buoyant and the music boomed through the streets. Though confined to a certain area, the sound of the parade crosses actual and symbolic boundaries and the band music can be heard in Ardoyne, a sonic encroachment of territory (Radford 38).

The night parade at Twaddell is almost like a ritual in its repetitiveness. Each night, marching bands and Orangemen gather in formation. They parade the side streets behind Twaddell Avenue; people walk apace to the thud of the drums. As they approach the police Land Rovers parked across the roundabout, the crowd grows denser. The PSNI know there will be no trouble but it is deemed illegal to walk to the corner by the roundabout; the end is meant to be by Woodvale Drive. The protestors know they can't breach the line of Land Rovers, but they march past the official end point anyway, right up to the corner, and the band follows. The PSNI sound a warning. The big bass drum player whacks away at the sides of his drum, walking in circles, swaying like a tree. On the back of his jacket, "Lest We Forget." People smoke cigarettes and

stand in groups. After a while everyone disperses. The Land Rovers begin to reverse out and drive away.

V. Marching On

I always left Twaddell with the band music stuck in my head and a lingering notion that the public has it wrong when they demonize the protestors. Their act of resistance is a means of uniting a wider “community” and expressing a sense of loyalty to place, territory, and collective narrative, however flawed or controversial that loyalty might be. The ritual build-up, the pomp and pageantry reinforce a sense of common identity and social belonging. One only has to attend a parade—the roll of the drums and shrill of the pipe, the colorful flags and banners, Orangemen marching in sync, buzzing crowds of onlookers—to understand, in a way, the appeal and energy of the atmosphere.

The Twaddell protest is reflective of not only the importance of parading in civic space but of wider discontent within Unionism. Working-class Protestant/Loyalist areas have not seen the dividends of the peace process. In my conversations, feelings of being “left behind” by the political elite, “losing ground” to Sinn Féin and the Nationalist agenda—these insecurities stem from very real conditions which plague working-class neighborhoods across the divide in Belfast. Poverty, educational under-attainment, and unemployment conspire to limit opportunity and mobility. A declining population, matched by a growing Nationalist demographic, elicits fears of Protestant estates disappearing altogether.

Nearly three years later, the protest limps onwards, its numbers much reduced. “People ask us if we are going to stay, and the simple answer is—yes,” said one protestor (McAdam and Young 2015). The fact that they are still there is testament to the strength of feeling in a cross-section of the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist working-class. It would be easy—and inaccurate—to subscribe to stereotype, to write the Twaddell protestors off as ignorant, regressive, or reactionary. My first visit to the camp, and the many parades to follow, showed a different side to things, full of complexities and contradictions. This show of resistance, this traditional spectacle of parading is important to the protestors, and their feelings are genuine, though one may not necessarily agree with them. My expectations, gleaned from the news and public sentiment, were initially negative and fearful. I am grateful for the introductions, the handshakes, the cups of tea, and snatches of conversation and banter that were extended to me at the camp.

As another July approaches, the issue of resolution at Twaddell and the niggling threat of violence on the streets hangs heavy. In July 2015, riots again broke out on the Twelfth as police stopped the march past Ardoyne. The year before, those with influence in the area had appealed for calm. But frustration and anger prevailed, and public space again became the arena for violence. Eight police officers were injured by bricks and bottles, and a car driven by an Orangeman ploughed into a group of Nationalist protestors. Relations are at a stalemate, with little goodwill on either side of the divide.

As Simon said—I am not certain if he intended the pun—any resolution will have to be “a two-way street.” I do not know if the protestors will ever be allowed to march home.

Note: The names of all interviewees have been changed.

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