

Conclusion

The Orange Order and the Protestant nationalists, including Unionists and Loyalists, constitute part of a Protestant establishment that strives to preserve its dominant position in Northern Ireland's political and private affairs. The Orange Order's institutional and cultural support for the Protestant national resistance against Irish control has been crucial since its creation in 1795. However, it is important to note that the Orange Order is just an element of the persistent sectarian divide between Protestants and Catholics. The sectarian conflict is not only a matter of Protestant institutions, although they may be strongly involved in pursuing pro-Protestant goals.

The conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland has produced more than four centuries of violent disputes since Henry VIII in 1541 declared Ireland an English colony. This followed the introduction of Protestant settlers through "plantations" in the 1600s, which started a hierarchical colonial system where the Scottish and English population had more privileges than the native Irish. Ireland since then had been subjugated by foreign rulers who were, among other things, Protestants. We conclude that the Irish conflict is more complex than it immediately appears on the surface.

One of the basic reasons why the nationalist conflict has prevailed until today is the importance of the historical background of the Irish-British relationship, and how that history is perceived by later generations. By the time of the Irish secession in 1949 from Britain, the North of Ireland lived in tension since most of its population rejected the idea of being ruled by an Irish state whose religion was Catholic, and had cut all ties with the United Kingdom. From the Irish Act of Union in 1801 there was only left a rump, Northern Ireland. Since partition in 1921 the Protestant community has struggled to preserve a British identity by constructing and preserving the links between them and British symbolic institutions.

In this respect one of the most important properties of national identity is that a group's identity can be reinvented, and contextualized in the present. For the benefit of the Ulster

Protestant identity, former acts of loyalty and moments of pride between them and Britain are today highly celebrated as part of the continuity of the collective history of the Protestant nation. For example, the Battle of the Boyne celebrated every twelve of July by the Orange Order is a recreation of a glorious past in the Ulster Protestant imagery.

In order to articulate group-awareness, the uniqueness of the Protestant national identity was built upon the myth of Protestantism; that is, the idea that the Protestants were a “chosen people” and protected by God to build a prosperous destiny. The Protestant religion bestowed the British, including the English, the Welsh and the Scots, with a political distinctiveness based primarily on the spirituality of Protestantism contrasted with the antagonism played by the Catholic monarchies during the wars of empire with the rest of Europe.

Defining identities represents a discursive process result of years of history and national memories. National identities are based on the common past and cultural heritage of every national group. Hence identification with the main source of national pride might remain intact. In the case of Protestant identification with the British nation it is (and was) basically done by means of citizenship and by a sense of affinity with the British institutions: the Crown and the Protestant Church. Such identification has remained constant in Northern Ireland. Part of its persistence relies in the correlation between national identity and religion which in the case of Ulster Protestants represents a necessary condition for national consciousness. This is to say that for many Ulster Protestants a British identity could hardly survive without the Protestant religion.

We can conclude that the Protestant religion is an essential element of the Protestant-Ulster cultural identity and of the Protestant nation. It follows that Protestant nationalism can be understood as a strong sense of belonging to a Protestant nation with strong British cultural ties – politically expressed through Unionism and symbolically through Loyalism. Historically the legacy of Protestant cultural and religious traditions has included the inheritance of the group’s traditional enemies and thus traditional conflicts. Religion as a national symbol is not only part of a cultural national identity, but it is useful as long as it helps to differentiate one’s group from

others. In this context differentiating “us from them” is not only a cultural exercise, but a national strategy of survival, preservation and cohesion. We conclude that the link between religion and nationalism involves religious identification being equated with national identification. This social phenomenon is reflected in a homogeneous collectivity that shares common values, history, and –among other things– common religious and cultural traditions.

Another characteristic of religion and nationalism is that in a situation of conflict or in a scenario defining national interests, “religious institutions can provide the infrastructure for mobilizing a group regardless of whether or not the group grievances are religious in nature.”¹ In a conflict zone like Northern Ireland, though, most religious institutions do not represent the belief and goals of the local or regional church. Other religious organizations such as fraternities or secret societies have helped to reinforce nationalist’s movements by providing its own religious frameworks deviating to some extent from the main theological doctrines to which they belong. That is, they develop a sectarian world view intended to preserve the community to which they belong, although in a rather unconventional way. The Orange Order is a clear illustration of this kind of association. In this thesis we have tried to demonstrate that religion as a national symbol is prone manipulation; religious frameworks transmitted to the devotees can be corrupted linking the idea of religious-national identity with political interests.

Regarding the first part of my hypothesis, which states that “the Orange Order stands as one of the leading Protestant institutions in developing a sense of identity and common history amongst the Protestants,” we can conclude that it has been supportive in developing a separate form of nationalism distant from a common bond with Great Britain other than Protestantism and loyalty to the Crown. This means that the Orange lodges sustain a Protestant nationalism distant from the civic British nationalism shared by Scots, Welsh or other ethnic groups (Asians, Latin-Americans, or Africans) in Britain. Instead, the Orange Order has promoted a Protestant nationalism based on the idea that Ulster or Northern Ireland is the homeland of Ulster

¹ Fox, *Ethnoreligious Conflict*, 119.

Protestants, and neither Catholics or Irish nor other ethnic groups are entitled to become members of their nation; access to the state's power by other non-members may be considered as illegitimate as well. In theory, this nationalist attitude is part of an exclusive nationalism which is intolerant and sectarian – a movement of social resistance.

According to the complementary part of my hypothesis which suggests that “by providing a symbolic religious framework and ideological differentiation the Orange Order holds certain leadership in maintaining group hostilities and segregation towards Catholics and Irish nationalists” we can conclude that the Orange Order is one of many important and influential leading actors in maintaining hostilities against the Catholic/Irish population. The Orange Order has proved to be very influential in developing a symbolic and ideological Protestant identity; however, it could hardly replace the political role of the Unionist party or the vigilance of the Protestant paramilitary groups, though some Orange members belong to one of these associations.

We can also conclude that the religious framework contained in the Law and Ordinances of Orangeism has legitimized a movement based on coding the Catholic/Irish/Nationalist as enemy. Containing Catholics seems to be the rationale of the defense of Protestantism. Therefore, if Protestantism is part of the Ulster Protestant identity and containing Catholics is a Protestant national goal, we can conclude that those Catholics living in Northern Ireland are doomed to be ostracized because the survival of the Protestant nation depends on how effectively the Catholic/Irish national enemy is controlled.

Consequently, sectarianism and discrimination has been the moving forces behind the Orange Order's protestant-loyalist ideology. When the Law and Ordinances of Orangeism stresses that the Orange member “should by all lawful means, resist the ascendancy of the Catholic Church, its encroachments, and the extension of its power,” they are not only delimitating the cultural and national boundary at the ideological level but most importantly, they are setting the conditions under which conflict and resistance is likely to take place. To quote Jonathan Fox, “the conviction that frameworks of belief constitute absolutes truths results in

fundamentalists applying their imperatives both inwardly and outwardly.’² In Northern Ireland it is precisely the draconian and fundamentalist attitude towards the Catholics and towards its brethren that distinguishes the nationalist ideology of the Orange Order.

From the Protestant nationalist position of the Orange Order, we conclude that the prospects for a peaceful reconciliation with the Catholic community are complicated and distant. Although many people would argue that the Order’s view is not representative of all the Protestants, the recent electoral triumph of the Protestant majority in the Northern Ireland Assembly has shown that cross-communal assimilation is still far from happening. The fact that Protestant Irish do not like or sympathize with Catholic Irish is the result of diverse convergent causes (psychological, anthropological, historical, religious, political, etc...) and in the end all of them and none of them can be true. One can only hope that Protestant leaders will cease to link religion to national and political interests and that the mainstream secularity of the world will force the influence of Orangeism and like movements to decline.

² Fox, *Ethnoreligious Conflict*, 22.