
Loyalist Narratives : Collective Memories and Shared Future

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Résumé

The Black Studies scholar and activist, Martha Jones once described memory as the: ‘place where past and present collide’ (Jones, 2004:71). That clash involves a range of social processes including not just those of ‘remembering’ (Middleton and Edwards, 1990), but also of ‘forgetting’ (Schwartz, 1982) and sometimes of politically constructed amnesia (Huysen, 1995). Perhaps most importantly, memory often involves a presentation of past events that is highly selective, distorted and altered in to fit contemporary needs (Middleton and Edwards 1990). Moreover, this understanding serves as the justification for contemporary actions and the legitimisation of contemporary beliefs, attitudes, and needs (Olick, 2007; Wertsch and Roediger, 2008). This paper considers how, within Ulster Loyalism, collective memory shapes identity and gives form and direction to: ‘experience, thought and imagination in terms of past, present and future’ (Brockmeier, 2002:21). Social memories play an important role within contemporary Loyalism. They provide the tools to filter and reconstruct the past, to interpret contemporary events, and to determine what is seen as possible in the future. Moreover, while collective social memory often engages in highlighting continuity with the past (a central feature of Loyalist ideology), it can also alter contemporary views. Central to the paper will be the consideration of where such embedded memories and narratives sit in relation to the development of a ‘shared future’ – at a time when the region’s on-going ‘culture wars’ are putting community relations in Northern Ireland under considerable strain.

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