Bounding the Borders: Claiming Space and Making Place in Rural Scotland

Susan J. Smith


Stable URL: [http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0020-2754%281993%292%3A18%3A3%3C291%3ABTBCSA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-U](http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0020-2754%281993%292%3A18%3A3%3C291%3ABTBCSA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-U)

*Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* is currently published by The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers).

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at [http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html](http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html). JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at [http://www.jstor.org/journals/rgs.html](http://www.jstor.org/journals/rgs.html).

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

---

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
Bounding the Borders: claiming space and making place in rural Scotland

SUSAN J. SMITH
Department of Geography, University of Edinburgh, Drummond Street, Edinburgh EH8 9XP

Revised MS received 26 January 1993

ABSTRACT
Recent social geography has translated a longstanding interest in crowd behaviour into a growing literature on the relevance of popular culture, collective memory and the spatiality of social life. The emphasis has been on the significance of collective behaviour - in the forms of carnival, riot, festival and procession - as a means of claiming space in a bid to assert identity and resist oppression. These behaviours have been conceptualized as forms of ritual rebellion and are frequently linked with the strategies of marginalized urban minorities. This paper, based on the celebrations of a dominant majority in the rural Borderlands of Scotland, argues that the carnivalesque is of wider significance and, in doing so, exposes the relational qualities of marginality and the ambiguity of the mainstream.

KEY WORDS: Scotland, Festival, Culture, Spatialization, Racialization, Boundary

INTRODUCTION
The study of crowd behaviour has attracted social researchers throughout the present century. Robert Park (1904) devoted his doctorate to the theme and the 'social drama' (Turner, 1974) has fascinated analysts ever since. One of social geography's main preoccupations in studying collective action has been the quantitative and qualitative analysis of riot (Peach, 1985; Keith, 1987). However, Cohen's (1980, 1982) engagement with the Notting Hill Carnival and Harrison's (1988) documentary on the history of the crowd, usefully locate riot as just one social form arising from an imbalance in the cocktail of hegemony and rebellion that infuses public life. In geography, the complex and contested character of collective action is explored by Marston (1989), and its importance as a vehicle linking culture with politics (a goal which Emy (1989) shows is as much prized in political science as in cultural studies) is laid out in recent works by Jackson (1988, 1992).

Current interest in the study of collective behaviour as manifest in social drama and public ritual can be read as a critique of the limitations of Modernism's search for 'world-class historical Revolutions in politics and world-class Masterpieces in culture' (Berman, 1984, p. 125). The emphasis instead is on the localized character of struggle (Jackson, 1992), on the relationship between claiming space and making place, and on the way in which particular sited events become associated with particular values, historical occasions and sentiments (Shields, 1991). In accepting the importance of local knowledge, geographers are poised to make a direct contribution to a growing sociological interest in the importance of collective memory and in the spatiality that is integral to it. Johnston's (1991) claim that the cult of the anniversary has spread more widely in the last decade than ever before is made in an era described by Friedland (1992) as 'the geographical moment' locating place 'as the position from which the critique of modernity is to be mounted, as a site for resistance...' (p. 15).

This theme of resistance runs through most analyses of crowd behaviour as cultural performance. This might be expected given that research to date has focused primarily on the bid made by marginalized minorities to win space within the mainstream metropolitan cores. Urban space has effectively become the terrain on which analysts have anchored the restructurings of late modernism (Soja, 1988); world cities are the symbols of postmodern culture (Featherstone, 1991), and it is on city sites that collective behaviour (most notably in the form of urban
social movements) has been portrayed as a means to claim space, assert identity and resist oppression.1

This paper takes a different view, turning attention away from strategies of resistance adopted by urban minorities and building on the work of Frankenber (1957) and Ladurie (1979) to interrogate instead the celebrations of a rural majority located in the Scottish Borders. On an initial reading, the studied festival form is an affirmation of a locally dominant view of the life, culture and aspirations of an old market town. It is a vigorous assertion of the values of local history and tradition, and a ritualized statement of expectation that these mainstream values will endure. A recent attempt to defend the continuity of this tradition appears only to confirm its potency as a symbol of local identity, as well as its capacity both to distinguish and to marginalize ‘outsiders’. However, the festivities occupy a distinctive geographical setting – a borderland which is itself a place on the margin, marking the edge of Scotland and nudging the English frontier. The ambiguous social, political and physical positioning of the border communities within both Scottish and UK space demands a further reading of the festival form. This reading reveals the precarious position of rural life in the borders and shows that Festival is cast most appropriately as a poly-vocal dialogue, effacing the conventional oppositions between margins and mainstream as it engages with forces that simultaneously resist and oppress.

These readings are based on my own encounters in the ‘field’. Most methodological questions raised by this approach are now well-aired in the literature. However, three inter-related issues merit attention. These concern the positionality of the enthographer (Katz, 1992), the problem of ‘the single ethnographic voice’ (Jackson, 1993), and the distance between the experienced, written and read ‘texts’ (Barnes and Duncan, 1992).

This paper is written from the standpoint of a white female English immigrant to Scotland, engaged with the projects of anti-racism and feminism, and in sympathy more with metaphors for change than with rituals of tradition. This is the position that determines the content and orientation of the paper, and it explains why certain issues are treated in more depth than others. Yet, it is not a position necessarily shared by fellow participants in the events I describe. Furthermore they, and our shared experiences, are all located outside the spaces and times of this written text. This paper is therefore the text of a text whose meanings depend not only on what is written and who is writing, but also on how it is read. These observations all create a seemingly insurmountable difficulty for the project of ethnography, in so far as its aim is authentically to represent a world of lived experience.

One way to negotiate this difficulty may be found in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, which Folch-Serra (1990) uses to draw attention to an important distinction between subjective and creative understanding. Creative understanding does not hinge on authentic representation. It does not depend on a capacity to empathize (either with our subjects or with each other) but on an ability to recognize and build on the complete irreducibility of the positions of participants in a dialogue in which speakers must not, and never do, completely understand each other, because the continuation of dialogue is in large part dependent on neither party knowing exactly what the other means (Folch-Serra, 1990, p. 259)

By regarding my observations and interpretations as segments of dialogue (which both preceded this paper and have continued beyond it) I hope to confront some of the discrepancies between ‘my’ views and ‘theirs’ without privileging either or settling for a compromise. My attempt to do this is reflected in the form of the paper, which begins by describing a popular-festive form and goes on to summarize participants’ own accounts of a recent disruption to it. I then outline my own interpretation of what the disruption signifies, and set this interpretation in the context of an unresolved dialogue.

THE SIGNS IN THE STREET

Reflecting on his work ‘All that is solid melts into air’ Berman (1984) observes that he has ‘come to see the street and the demonstration as primary symbols of modern life’ (p. 125). The street is an important cultural site, prone, at certain times and for certain groups, to ‘become associated with particular values, historical events and feelings’ and likely to be adopted variously as a symbol of good, evil, normal, deviant, right or wrong (Shields, 1991, p. 29). Among the specialisms that Bonnett (1992) urges us to use to make everyday space a useful category of analysis, the street might then be seen as a ‘specialized’ zone of pageantry.

Annually, in the early summer (mainly June) the streets of many rural towns in the Scottish borders
provide sites for the enactment of public rituals — galas, ridings and other anniversary celebrations — which, among other things, celebrate and affirm the character, value, history and continuity of local life. One of the most elaborate, longstanding and best attended of these celebrations is the Peebles Beltane Festival. Its origins lie in the mists of antiquity, but the modern celebration is a Victorian revival, born in the heyday of "invented tradition"... when old ceremonies were staged with an expertise and appeal which had been lacking before, and when new rituals were self-consciously invented to accentuate this development' (Cannadine, 1985, p. 108).

The Beltane rolls together the 'Ganging of the Marches' (dating from at least 1652, but revived in more or less its present form for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897), the May fair (granted by Royal Charter in 1621), and the Beltane Queen Coronation (introduced in 1899). It has been described as 'the sight of a lifetime... one of the finest celebrations of its kind in Scotland... [which sets] the pattern for similar presentations all over the world' (Cleland, 1932, p. 7). Today, it is widely regarded as 'the major event in the town', involving both adults and children and serving for many of them as 'the climax of the year'.

The Beltane is fundamentally a celebration of local tradition and my impression, having participated in it annually for the last seven years, is that every component of the week-long festival hinges on, and contributes to, the social and physical boundedness of the Burgh. It is the time of year when the distinction between 'gutterbluid' and 'stoorfoot' is sharpest, lineage is most valued and spatial metaphors most often punctuate the language of public life. It is the moment which secures the attachment of local history, shared meanings and common aspirations to a bounded space, through a pastiche of ritual formality and festive frivolity. The events testify to the importance of what Shields (1991) calls the spatialization of social life through an untidy conflation of events hovering between not one but two cultural forms — Carnival (an all-embracing public spectacle, 'based on laughter and consecrated by tradition... lived by people who are all participants') and ritual ceremony (a more serious, formalized 'official, ecclesiastical, feudal and political' occasion designed to be observed rather than engaged with) (Bakhtin, 1965).

The key events of the week, ceremonial and spectacular, weave history into geography to create a vivid tapestry of local life. The programme is as follows.

**Local history and tradition**

The opening ceremony, introduced in 1930, is a religious service at the Cross Kirk — a key symbol of local history and tradition. A procession led by the Silver Band and followed by the Pipe Band leads the Beltane Principals, past and present, from the High Street to an outdoor service in the 700 year old ruin. The Principals are solemnly introduced to the congregation and the new Kirk warden is installed. The warden is always a member of the local Clergy and the importance of locality is evident in the acceptance speech of the 1992 appointee who was actually born in Peebles but signalled delight (and implicit surprise) at the honour of having been selected for the post despite the fact that he had recently been working in Edinburgh.

**Local geography and defence**

The next major event occurs on the following Wednesday with the installation of the Cornet (a young man, charged to take the Burgh Standard into safekeeping and to represent the Burgh's interest in other local events throughout the year) and the appointment of the warden of Neidpath Castle. Having celebrated local history and tradition on Sunday, the events of Wednesday are pre-occupied with the bounding and defence of these traditions.

The Cornet (installed in an open-air service outside the Parish Church) and his cavalcade of supporters take part in a spectacular riding (187 horses in 1992) to inspect the Burgh Boundaries and protect the rights of way. Meanwhile, the Warden of Neidpath Castle (appointed in a service held in the grounds of the castle itself) takes charge of the town's main symbol of defence, which, according to the second verse of the Beltane song,

```
... grim and grey wi' years/Looks doon wi' war scar'd face/and sentinels our royal toon/Wi' majesty and grace
```  

Not surprisingly, the preservation of local custom and livelihood against the threat of incomers, outsiders and unwanted social change, is a common theme in the speeches of the newly appointed wardens.

The events of Wednesday also testify to the gendered character of the Beltane. The Cornet is installed together with 'his lass' whose task is to 'help and support' him as a representative of the Burgh. The Cornet, 'an outstanding example of a true Peeblian' (as defined in the 1972 Beltane Programme, p. 21)
must, therefore, be male, ‘a worthy son of Peebles representing local manhood and ... acting as an ambassador’ (Smith, 1990, p. 269). According to the Beltane committee,

A Cornet by definition is a young man picked to lead ... historically women didn’t mount up to go and lead raiding parties or secure the valid boundaries ... as far as we are concerned a man is a man and a woman is a woman and we’ve got our roles. It is no use getting silly about it. You don’t want the crowning lady being a man.

The Warden of Neidpath, equally tied to the gendered task of defence, has only twice been a woman: as the 1991 Warden noted, the real borderers are ‘fierce independent men’.

Local culture and display
The culmination of the Beltane occurs on Saturday, again with two related events, both of which are concerned with display: with the consolidation and promotion of a local culture whose traditions have been defined and defended throughout the week. The day begins with the proclamation of the Beltane fair, reasserting the town’s commercial value and its economic prosperity, as well as its function as a site of exoticism and pleasure (in today’s festivals the main trading occurs at a travelling funfair, but as Stallybrass and White (1986) show, this dual aspect of fair has long historical roots). This dimension of the festival is important but is overshadowed by the main event of the day: the crowning of the Beltane Queen.

This ceremony puts the young people – the future – of Peebles on show as they enact an elaborate pageant on the steps of the Parish Church. This is probably the grandest of the queen-crowning ceremonies in the borders which attracts huge crowds from within and outside the Burgh. Children from every year of all the local primary schools take part, forming part of the enormous ‘court’ (dressed in colourful national costumes and including characters from nursery rhymes and fairy tales, toys, historic figures and so on), participating in the crowning ceremony itself (e.g. as maids and pages, heralds and courtiers) and parading around the town (the Queen’s domains) on elaborate floats accompanied by a dozen brass and pipe bands and any number of exhibitors still-costumed from the previous evening’s fancy-dress competition.

This Beltane pageant is part of every young Peeblean’s childhood and it plays a key role in handing on the Beltane tradition from generation to generation, reminding them of their place in a burgh

Within which, in bygone days/Kings and Queens were wont to tarry/For the famous Beltane plays.

This pageantry also stresses the importance of Peebles’ culture as a prized local identity which all its incumbents should value and wish to retain. The Beltane song notes ‘The exile oft wi’ pride recalls/The dear auld Border hame’ and another of the festival anthems points out that

As Beltane time comes roond each year/The exile, stirred by mem’ries dear/Wad gie a wealth o’ gowd an’ gear/Tae spend a day in Peebles.

The impression that the world revolves around the Burgh is confirmed by the artifacts and practices associated with the ceremony. The Queen’s Robes and Medallion were a present from New Zealand Peebleans in 1928 and many other items in use for the Coronation are gifts from ‘exiles’. Every year, immediately after the crowning ceremony, the telegram boy reads out that year’s ‘telegrams for the Queen’ which regularly include a message from the West Australian Beltane Society, the West Australian Peebles Ladies Circle, the South Harris Beltane Supporters Club, and from families in California, Ontario, Melbourne and Sydney.

Fun and frivolity
The formal Beltane is punctuated by a variety of semi-formal and informal events, many of them centred on games and competition. These include the children’s sports on Tuesday evening which, in the context of ‘popular-festive’ events, can be considered ‘a condensed formula of life and the historic process: fortune, misfortune, gain and loss, crowning and uncrowning’ (Bakhtin, 1965, p. 235), as well as a medium for social identification (Hobsbawm, 1984). They include the Wednesday evening horse races which culminate in the presentation of the Beltane Bell. On Thursday evening, the schoolgirl Queen attends a concert in the Burgh Hall after which she is ‘walked home’ by the Cornet amid a crowd of singing, capering children accompanied by the brass band playing, loudly if not always tunefully, the Beltane song and assorted marches. Throughout the week, there are parties (held by each of the Cornet, the Queen and the brass and pipes bands), concerts, late night bars, and a pervasive air of excitement and anticipation.

The biggest and most carnivalesque of the semi-formal events, however, is a fancy dress parade on
Friday evening. This originated as a competition for the best dressed carthorse, roadster and ‘accompanying characters’, became a cycle parade in 1923, and today attracts a multitude of elaborate floats and exotic costumery (judged in several categories). There are prizes for children (generally dressed in topical costumes, parodying local themes and recent events), as well as adults and the procession embraces all the supposedly topsy-turvy elements of Carnival including cross-dressing and exchange of status (see Burke, 1978). The same themes are often picked out in a noisy impromptu concert in the High Street performed by members of the Rugby Club.

Authentic, invented traditions?
The Beltane takes place every year, at a specified and inviolable time. It is both ritual and routine. Yet, unlike Cohen’s (1980, 1982) Notting Hill Carnival it is not easily seen as an event precarious balance between consensus and conflict; unlike Jackson’s (1992) Caribana it appears as an affirmation of, rather than an implicit challenge or threat to, the established order; unlike Marston’s (1988, 1989) St Patrick’s Day celebrations it is not an obviously-contested terrain. The Beltane is a celebration of ‘Peebles-folk’ by local people. It is a civic, rather than a commercial event, planned by a local committee and supported by civic associations such as the Peebles Gutterbluid Society, the ex-Cornets’ association and the Callants Club. This localism sets the terms of reference for all other participants so that the Beltane can be read as an event with meanings entirely opposed to the themes of resistance and opposition that have been emphasized in other recent studies of the Carnivalesque. Rather than providing a programme of confrontation and change, it seems akin to those elements of the Medieval and Renaissance Festival which represent, through procession, competition and performance, a ritual of stability and continuity for an old order ‘in which society affirmed its wisdom and asserted its control over the world and its destiny’ (Strong, 1973, p. 41).

At an initial reading, therefore, the events of the Beltane comprise a dramatic re-enactment and celebration of shared traditions, mythologies and values; an alliance of art and power, a combination of visual and aural spectacle, designed to create and sustain a sense of order and harmony, to restate and reaffirm key ideals and to reinvigorate the popular memory (Burke, 1978). As such, the festival provides the people of Peebles with a link to the past (and an implicit model for the future) which cannot be said to be wholly authentic, yet is not entirely invented either. It is not difficult to think of the Beltane as at once a popular-festive performance of the kind Bakhtin (1965, p. 208) finds ‘filled with powerful historic awareness’ embodying ‘the very process of becoming, its meaning and direction’ (pp. 20–1) as well as the kind of invented tradition which Hobsbawm (1984) believes exists in part to legitimize the present with reference to the past. The Beltane can, and probably must, be read as both a reservoir of authentic local sentiment and a mythical set of ritual practices ‘which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity’ (Hobsbawm, 1984, p. 1).

Simultaneously invented and authentic, the Beltane provides the element of melodrama which Rose (1988) identifies as a key aspect of local culture, providing the focal point in time and space for ‘a group of people bound together by some kind of belief, stemming from particular historical and geographical circumstances, in their own solidarity’ (Rose, 1990, p. 426). It is a form of crowd activity in which ‘the individual body ceases to a certain extent to be itself . . . the people become aware of their sensual, material bodily unity and community . . . The body of the people . . . is conscious of its uninterrupted continuity with time, of its relative historic immortality’ (Bakhtin, 1965, p. 254). As the 1992 Cornet-elect heard during his toast at the annual dinner of the Royal Burgh of Peebles Callants’ Club22 ‘Beltane springs from the pages of history of our Royal and Ancient Burgh and we . . . have an inherent duty to our forefathers to ensure its preservation at all costs’. Likewise, the centrality of the act of Coronation, in which the town pledges allegiance to a ‘virgin’ Queen – a symbol of continuity and renewal whom virtue leads and love illumines – testifies to the sense of security attained when people ‘reaffirm the rightness of the moral rules by which they live or feel they ought to live’ in a society ‘held together by its internal agreement about the sacredness of certain fundamental moral standards’ (Shils and Young 1953, p. 66 and 80).

The conduct of the 1991 Beltane, however, illustrates that it would be a mistake to interpret the festivities simply as a reiteration of a mainstream culture and an affirmation of the common good.

THE GOLLIWOG AFFAIR
The issue of racism has generally had a less prominent place in Scottish political and social life than it has in...
England. The relatively small size and wide dispersion of Scotland’s Asian, Afro-Caribbean and Chinese populations has helped engender an element of complacency among official bodies, and the Commission for Racial Equality did not open an office in Scotland until the mid-1980s. As Miles and Muirhead (1986) show, public awareness and official recognition of the extent and character of Scottish racism came relatively late and this partly explains why, even in 1990, some of the children in the court of the Beltane Queen were dressed as golliwogs.\(^{25}\)

The golliwog costumes date from 1927, when three boys blacked up and joined the ‘Tales and Nursery Rhymes’ section of the children’s parade.\(^{26}\) One or more golliwogs have appeared most years—but not every year—since in various parts of the queen’s court (in 1938 they appeared in the group ‘Darkies, Golliwogs and Clowns’; and when festivities resumed after the war they joined ‘All the Fun of the Fair’). However, after the 1990 Beltane, this practice was challenged. What happened quickly became the subject of speculation, exaggeration, rumour and local myth, not unlike local reactions to the anti-racist discourse of racism in favour of a claim for localism.\(^{27}\)

Refuting the charge of racism
One of the most persistent arguments for retaining the golliwog costumes was the claim that they are not racist. The reasoning is laid out in a series of letters published by the \textit{Peeblesshire News}. The first line of attack holds that it is possible to find an ethical argument against every costume in the Beltane parade, and since it would be unthinkable to ban them all, why single out one. Letter-writers suggested (with deliberate irony) that perhaps the Pied Piper should be replaced by an Environmental Health Officer, that Fairies ‘could be a dodgy one’, that Snow White should be accompanied by seven ‘friends’ and ‘should the Beltane Queen really have FUR on her cloak?’.\(^{27}\) One person argued that if any costumes were to be withdrawn, it should be Arabs on the grounds that ‘the Gulf war is surely more important than the racist views of a few people’.\(^{28}\) And on 13 May Doug Mann launched a song entitled ‘I Wanna be a Golly in the Beltane Parade’ which includes the complaint:

\begin{verbatim}
Tae dress as an Egyptian/I hear wid be jist fine, 
A Geisha or a gaucho/Frae distant Argentine, 
a sonsie Heilan laddie/Or ev’n an Injun brave 
So what’s so wrong wi’ Gollies/In the Beltane Parade?
\end{verbatim}

A second line of reasoning runs that if it can be proved that golliwogs are harmless rag dolls whose derivation has nothing to do with ideas about race, then there can be no charge of racism and no grounds
for excluding them. This spawned a debate on the derivation of the term ‘wog’; which Dr S. L. attributes to two North American sources: ‘golly, the Negro dialect word of the time for God, and the English and American dialect word for tadpole, polli for head and wog coming from the middle English word wygle, meaning wiggle’. Subsequent correspondence similarly maintained the innocence of the term, noting, for instance, that ‘the golliwog theory in relation to colour is quite wrong . . . a wog could be any colour, except white’.

The third strand of the argument reasons that if golliwogs are not offensive to black people, they cannot be construed as racist and need not be removed from the Beltane parade. One letter-writer therefore claims that Robertson’s jams received no opposition to their trademark from minority ethnic groups and another doubts ‘that there is a coloured Derson in this country who would fail to be amused by the cute faces and happy laughter of our children who paint their faces black’. This reasoning gains support from those who use the fact that golliwogs, or golliwog-like figures, are in use elsewhere to infer that they cannot be offensive. One writer thus draws an analogy between the Peebles’ Golliwogs and ‘Black Pete’ which accompanies St Nicholas in the Netherlands and apparently survived the interference of ‘certain busy-bodies’ who objected to it ‘for exactly the same reasons trotted out by Mrs M. in order to ban the poor little golliwogs of Peebles’. Another reader sent three pictures of businesses using the golliwog symbol, implying that it must therefore be alright for anyone to use it.

In a final bid to reinstate the banned costumes, commentators not only argued that because golliwogs are not offensive to black people, they cannot be construed as racist and need not be removed from the Beltane parade. One letter-writer therefore claims that Robertson’s jams received no opposition to their trademark from minority ethnic groups and another doubts ‘that there is a coloured Derson in this country who would fail to be amused by the cute faces and happy laughter of our children who paint their faces black’. This reasoning gains support from those who use the fact that golliwogs, or golliwog-like figures, are in use elsewhere to infer that they cannot be offensive. One writer thus draws an analogy between the Peebles’ Golliwogs and ‘Black Pete’ which accompanies St Nicholas in the Netherlands and apparently survived the interference of ‘certain busy-bodies’ who objected to it ‘for exactly the same reasons trotted out by Mrs M. in order to ban the poor little golliwogs of Peebles’. Another reader sent three pictures of businesses using the golliwog symbol, implying that it must therefore be alright for anyone to use it.

In a final bid to reinstate the banned costumes, commentators not only argued that because golliwogs are not offensive to black people, they cannot be construed as racist and need not be removed from the Beltane parade. One letter-writer therefore claims that Robertson’s jams received no opposition to their trademark from minority ethnic groups and another doubts ‘that there is a coloured Derson in this country who would fail to be amused by the cute faces and happy laughter of our children who paint their faces black’. This reasoning gains support from those who use the fact that golliwogs, or golliwog-like figures, are in use elsewhere to infer that they cannot be offensive. One writer thus draws an analogy between the Peebles’ Golliwogs and ‘Black Pete’ which accompanies St Nicholas in the Netherlands and apparently survived the interference of ‘certain busy-bodies’ who objected to it ‘for exactly the same reasons trotted out by Mrs M. in order to ban the poor little golliwogs of Peebles’. Another reader sent three pictures of businesses using the golliwog symbol, implying that it must therefore be alright for anyone to use it.

In a final bid to reinstate the banned costumes, commentators not only argued that because golliwogs are not offensive to black people, they cannot be construed as racist and need not be removed from the Beltane parade. One letter-writer therefore claims that Robertson’s jams received no opposition to their trademark from minority ethnic groups and another doubts ‘that there is a coloured Derson in this country who would fail to be amused by the cute faces and happy laughter of our children who paint their faces black’. This reasoning gains support from those who use the fact that golliwogs, or golliwog-like figures, are in use elsewhere to infer that they cannot be offensive. One writer thus draws an analogy between the Peebles’ Golliwogs and ‘Black Pete’ which accompanies St Nicholas in the Netherlands and apparently survived the interference of ‘certain busy-bodies’ who objected to it ‘for exactly the same reasons trotted out by Mrs M. in order to ban the poor little golliwogs of Peebles’. Another reader sent three pictures of businesses using the golliwog symbol, implying that it must therefore be alright for anyone to use it.

In a final bid to reinstate the banned costumes, commentators not only argued that because golliwogs are not offensive to black people, they cannot be construed as racist and need not be removed from the Beltane parade. One letter-writer therefore claims that Robertson’s jams received no opposition to their trademark from minority ethnic groups and another doubts ‘that there is a coloured Derson in this country who would fail to be amused by the cute faces and happy laughter of our children who paint their faces black’. This reasoning gains support from those who use the fact that golliwogs, or golliwog-like figures, are in use elsewhere to infer that they cannot be offensive. One writer thus draws an analogy between the Peebles’ Golliwogs and ‘Black Pete’ which accompanies St Nicholas in the Netherlands and apparently survived the interference of ‘certain busy-bodies’ who objected to it ‘for exactly the same reasons trotted out by Mrs M. in order to ban the poor little golliwogs of Peebles'. Another reader sent three pictures of businesses using the golliwog symbol, implying that it must therefore be alright for anyone to use it.

In a final bid to reinstate the banned costumes, commentators not only argued that because golliwogs are not offensive to black people, they cannot be construed as racist and need not be removed from the Beltane parade. One letter-writer therefore claims that Robertson’s jams received no opposition to their trademark from minority ethnic groups and another doubts ‘that there is a coloured Derson in this country who would fail to be amused by the cute faces and happy laughter of our children who paint their faces black’. This reasoning gains support from those who use the fact that golliwogs, or golliwog-like figures, are in use elsewhere to infer that they cannot be offensive. One writer thus draws an analogy between the Peebles’ Golliwogs and ‘Black Pete’ which accompanies St Nicholas in the Netherlands and apparently survived the interference of ‘certain busy-bodies’ who objected to it ‘for exactly the same reasons trotted out by Mrs M. in order to ban the poor little golliwogs of Peebles’. Another reader sent three pictures of businesses using the golliwog symbol, implying that it must therefore be alright for anyone to use it.

In a final bid to reinstate the banned costumes, commentators not only argued that because golliwogs are not offensive to black people, they cannot be construed as racist and need not be removed from the Beltane parade. One letter-writer therefore claims that Robertson’s jams received no opposition to their trademark from minority ethnic groups and another doubts ‘that there is a coloured Derson in this country who would fail to be amused by the cute faces and happy laughter of our children who paint their faces black’. This reasoning gains support from those who use the fact that golliwogs, or golliwog-like figures, are in use elsewhere to infer that they cannot be offensive. One writer thus draws an analogy between the Peebles’ Golliwogs and ‘Black Pete’ which accompanies St Nicholas in the Netherlands and apparently survived the interference of ‘certain busy-bodies’ who objected to it ‘for exactly the same reasons trotted out by Mrs M. in order to ban the poor little golliwogs of Peebles’. Another reader sent three pictures of businesses using the golliwog symbol, implying that it must therefore be alright for anyone to use it.

In a final bid to reinstate the banned costumes, commentators not only argued that because golliwogs are not offensive to black people, they cannot be construed as racist and need not be removed from the Beltane parade. One letter-writer therefore claims that Robertson’s jams received no opposition to their trademark from minority ethnic groups and another doubts ‘that there is a coloured Derson in this country who would fail to be amused by the cute faces and happy laughter of our children who paint their faces black’. This reasoning gains support from those who use the fact that golliwogs, or golliwog-like figures, are in use elsewhere to infer that they cannot be offensive. One writer thus draws an analogy between the Peebles’ Golliwogs and ‘Black Pete’ which accompanies St Nicholas in the Netherlands and apparently survived the interference of ‘certain busy-bodies’ who objected to it ‘for exactly the same reasons trotted out by Mrs M. in order to ban the poor little golliwogs of Peebles'. Another reader sent three pictures of businesses using the golliwog symbol, implying that it must therefore be alright for anyone to use it.

In a final bid to reinstate the banned costumes, commentators not only argued that because golliwogs are not offensive to black people, they cannot be construed as racist and need not be removed from the Beltane parade. One letter-writer therefore claims that Robertson’s jams received no opposition to their trademark from minority ethnic groups and another doubts ‘that there is a coloured Derson in this country who would fail to be amused by the cute faces and happy laughter of our children who paint their faces black’. This reasoning gains support from those who use the fact that golliwogs, or golliwog-like figures, are in use elsewhere to infer that they cannot be offensive. One writer thus draws an analogy between the Peebles’ Golliwogs and ‘Black Pete’ which accompanies St Nicholas in the Netherlands and apparently survived the interference of ‘certain busy-bodies’ who objected to it ‘for exactly the same reasons trotted out by Mrs M. in order to ban the poor little golliwogs of Peebles'. Another reader sent three pictures of businesses using the golliwog symbol, implying that it must therefore be alright for anyone to use it.

In a final bid to reinstate the banned costumes, commentators not only argued that because golliwogs are not offensive to black people, they cannot be construed as racist and need not be removed from the Beltane parade. One letter-writer therefore claims that Robertson’s jams received no opposition to their trademark from minority ethnic groups and another doubts ‘that there is a coloured Derson in this country who would fail to be amused by the cute faces and happy laughter of our children who paint their faces black'. This reasoning gains support from those who use the fact that golliwogs, or golliwog-like figures, are in use elsewhere to infer that they cannot be offensive. One writer thus draws an analogy between the Peebles’ Golliwogs and ‘Black Pete’ which accompanies St Nicholas in the Netherlands and apparently survived the interference of ‘certain busy-bodies’ who objected to it ‘for exactly the same reasons trotted out by Mrs M. in order to ban the poor little golliwogs of Peebles'. Another reader sent three pictures of businesses using the golliwog symbol, implying that it must therefore be alright for anyone to use it.
SUSAN J. SMITH

it should not be at the say-so of outsiders. On 17 May the Peebleshire News' Poetry Corner (p. 6) was devoted to the poem ‘Goodbye Golly’ by ‘GAWL’ which runs:

What a big fiasco.
On decisions, that they’ve made;
They’ve changed the old tradition,
Of the Beltane Queen Parade.

I’m a Peebles Gutterbluid,
Born and bred like many; 
But stoorifoots have all the say, 
And the locals haven’t any

It was frequently argued that the controversy did not arise because people have strong feelings about golliwogs in particular but rather because they have strong views about the ‘sanctity’ of the Beltane tradition. This is borne out in the letters pages of the Peebleshire News:

‘How dare someone who is only a visitor tell the people of Peebles and our children to get rid of our loveable Golliwogs’.

‘I am disgusted at the suggestion that golliwogs be taken out of OUR Beltane ... for countless years we have enjoyed OUR Beltane processions with all races represented’.

‘... are any of these “leaders” [responsible for banning the golliwog] Gutterbluids? I ask this because a Peeblean obviously has the Beltane future closer to his/her heart than someone who has only seen a few crownings’.

‘Although the mass of the Peebles public were for “as you were” on the gollywog questions, one woman, a virtual outsider, has won the day’.

‘Our festival is timeless ... please do not subject it to every wind of change, however specious the arguments of the opposition’.

The implication here is that attempts made by people perceived to be outsiders to ban any costume, to tell Peebleans what any other costumes symbolized in the context of the Beltane festival, or to change any other feature of the festival, would have been resisted. From this perspective, the problem was not the people of Peebles showing an insensitivity to the meaning of the golliwog, but rather people outside Peebles being insensitive to the meaning of the Beltane. As a member of the Beltane committee pointed out in a television interview with Craig Charles (‘Them and Us’, a British television programme):

The people of Peebles are annoyed because we are being told what to do by outside forces. The racist point of view doesn’t come into it. It’s more of an ‘outsiders telling us what to do and organize our life in Peebles...’

Such was the strength of local feeling that, in the end, the bid to keep the golliwog costumes became more than a set of arguments conducted through the press. Both kinds of arguments for retaining the costumes were rapidly translated into action.

Resisting the ban

Active attempts to prevent the withdrawal of the golliwog costumes occurred in a number of ways. Initially, the Beltane committee itself tried to find a way to keep them. ‘... there was an idea at one stage that ... these golliwogs [could] be modified. Could we call them gollies, for instance ... Could we use the costumes but dress the children up with multi-coloured faces’. The Beltane committee apparently went as far as contacting Robertson’s jam who explained what alterations they had made to their logo to avoid it portraying a black person as a figure of fun.

A compromise agreement was therefore reached with headteachers to introduce a new toy to the parade: a Rag Doll, which, according to newspaper reports, would have made substantial use of, rather than replace, the existing golliwog costumes and may have included blackened faces and woolly wigs. In the end, the schoolteachers decided that this, too, was inappropriate in the light of local education authority guidelines.

In the wake of this second decision, a well-organized campaign to keep the original costumes was mounted which included, in addition to songs and poetry (noted above), the sale of ‘save the golly’ badges and golliwog T-shirts. However, the most visible and striking element of protest occurred on Friday night in the Fancy Dress Parade and in the Rugby Club concert which preceded it.

For some weeks prior to the Beltane there was an air of expectation surrounding Friday night. On 22 March the Peebleshire News reported rumours in the town that if the old costumes were dropped a ‘golliwogs’ convention’ would be organized. By 31 May it was reporting ‘a nationwide response in favour of a mass “black-up” by Peebleans protesting at an Edinburgh schoolteacher’s “outside interference”’. The same article reported one publican’s intention to rename his pub ‘the Golliwogs Rest’ for the duration of the festivities, and a local shopkeeper (identified by
FIGURE 2. The Fancy Dress Parade

the press as the brother of the offending outsider) who planned to put a giant inflatable golly into his shop-window. A local businessman offered a cash prize for the best golliwog (under 16) in the Fancy Dress Parade and in an editorial on 7 June, Andrew Keddie reported 'it looks like Friday night will be Golly night'. And so it was.

Figures cited by the press suggest that between 50 and 200 people dressed up as golliwogs. The first ones appeared during the Rugby Club concert whose stage backcloth sported a large golliwog image and whose street show featured a golliwog drummer, a performance (by a golliwog) of 'Good Golly Miss Molly' and a mass rendering of 'I want to be a Golly ...'. However, it was only as the parade assembled for judging on Tweed Green that the full extent of the protest became apparent. Virtually every other float included a golliwog. Costumes ranged from the merry and benign (a mixed group of gollies carrying a banner with the words of the golliwog song), to the mocking (a Mrs M. carrying a fishing net containing a toy golliwog), the ironic (golly-busters and a golliwog detector van, see Fig. 2), the insulting (front: I'm no golliwog; back: I'm a monkey) and the positively menacing (a Ku Klux 'Clansman' sporting tartan kilt and white hood). An element of parody was also present, with the parade led by two 'greened-up' 'Irishmen' (MacNamara's Band). The whole parade made its way slowly along the High Street from the 'Gollywogs Rest' to the parish church and into the residential area North of the Tweed.

The Beltane has always been spatialized and gendered; in 1991 it was also racialized. The outburst did not represent a new direction for the Beltane: it simply made explicit facets of the celebration — its exclusiveness and its capacity to marginalize outsiders — that were already there but which are normally submerged in an atmosphere of bonhomie. Nineteen ninety one was not a typical year, but, as Mitchell (1983) points out, the strength of the case study is its tendency to focus on those unusual and idiosyncratic events which expose fundamental sentiments and relationships which are taken for granted on more typical occasions. What the events of 1991 provide us with, then, is a unique opportunity to see how an essentially racist idea could become so important to a local tradition — a tradition which is itself a celebration of respect for identity — that its questionable origins are obscured and its racism denied. In the final section I attempt to explain (but
not defend) this by using my own interpretation of the events to argue that, notwithstanding its place at the core of local life, the Beltane is, after all, a contested terrain.

STRUGGLES FOR SPACE

The conduct of the golliwog episode shows, perhaps more clearly than any routinized element of the Beltane, the extent to which the festival is not simply a mainstream statement about the niceties of local traditions and values. It is, crucially, a vehicle which reproduces those ideals and guards them against the perceived challenge of outside forces. This interpretation is consistent with Cohen's (1985) argument that carnivals, fairs and festivals are all boundary-marking rituals and that such symbolic boundary-building becomes increasingly important as the actual geosocial boundaries of a community are undermined.

In Peebles the threat to community posed by the outmigration of young ‘gutterbluids’ and the immigration of ‘stoorefeet’, prompted respectively by local deindustrialization and a housing market appealing to commuters and retirement settlement, is a recurrent theme.44 I suggest, therefore, that in seeking to defend the image of the golliwog against the charge of racism and in seeking to invalidate this charge on the grounds that it is made by outsiders, the 1991 protesters showed that the Beltane is as much about resisting marginality as about affirming the mainstream. To illustrate this I shall argue first, that in refusing a label for rural Scotland (‘racist’) that is more commonly associated with urban England, the form of 1991 Beltane symbolizes local resistance to the intrusion of English politics into Scottish affairs. Secondly, I will suggest that in contesting the meanings attached to parts of the festival by outsiders, the events of 1991 constitute a protest against the encroachment into local life of those middle class, ‘high’ cultural values associated with the urbanized Scottish Lowlands, especially Edinburgh. Therefore, the 1991 festivities challenged the presuppositions of an hegemonic Scottish culture. Beltane, it seems, expresses not only the exclusivity of local life, but also the distinctiveness of the Borders within Scotland and the autonomy of Scotland within the UK.

A Scottish heritage within Britain

Some would attribute the very existence of a festival like the Beltane to Scotland’s marginality within the Union. As McCrone (1992) notes, ‘many argue that Scotland is particularly prone to myths and legends about itself because it lacks the formal political institutions of state autonomy’ (p. 17). The Borders, moreover, are at the margin of Scotland, and they have historically been literally a contested territory with England (Duncan, 1992). Located in the zone most conducive to ‘thinking through the politics of difference and presence’, they are the kind of site where ‘difference and conflict is constructed and lived’ (Pratt, 1992, p. 243). Events in the borders can thus be read as the epitome of a more general Scottish struggle for identity within Britain.45 When set in its Borderland context, therefore, the 1991 Beltane serves to highlight one of the most crucial of the growing list of oppositions dividing the two largest nations of the Union (McCrone, 1989), that between Urban England and Rural Scotland.

One reason why the charge of racism associated with retaining the golliwogs was viewed as less relevant or real than the challenge to heritage of dispensing with them is rooted in the view that ‘race-relations’ problems are the province of urban England not of rural Scotland. Miles and Dunlop (1987) show that the so-called ‘race-riots’ of the early 1980s were identified by the Scottish press as distinctively English phenomena, and until recently there has been a tendency for politicians, decision makers, and some academics to contrast Scotland’s harmonious ‘race-relations’ with England’s more turbulent and problematic inner cities. The Peebles golliwog affair was attractive to the ‘English’ mass media precisely because it appeared to violate this ‘norm’. Thus whereas Border television portrayed the events as harmless and amusing, Craig Charles, filming for ‘Them and Us’ (a British television programme), drew parallels with the English racism he had himself experienced at school. ‘Have the people of Peebles’ he asked on national television ‘had a sensitivity by-pass’?

For most participants of the 1991 Beltane, the answer was ‘no’. From their perspective, the solemnity and significance of the Festival was always more important than their protest against the violation of one small part of it. This is illustrated in the effort expended to ensure that the protest did not disrupt the formal events of the Beltane week. Well before the ceremony, officials (with the assistance of the press) issued clear instructions concerning when the golliwogs would and would not be an acceptable presence. They were not to join the riding on Wednesday (the two who did were not on a horse) and, crucially, they were not to appear on Saturday, either in the parade or in the repeat of the Rugby
Club's street theatre. The outgoing warden of the Cross Kirk asked the congregation on Sunday to restrict the 'quite understandable' protest to Friday night, and an ex-provost, keen to retain the costumes, made it known to the *Peebshire News* (who printed his instruction under a front page headline ‘“Untold damage” warning from Beltane chairman’ (7 June 1991)) that, while he supported the aims of the protestors, 'this must not be carried over to the Saturday. That is the children's day'. The Beltane committee itself was also active in the town.

What we said was don't dress up as golliwogs on Saturday morning. Leave that to the children. Leave that to the Ceremony. That's an important day, so leave it. If you want to make a statement, make it on Friday night.

Had the protest spilled over to Saturday, the anniversary celebrations would have been disrupted, and the protestors would have undermined their own case (which was to keep the tradition intact and unchanging). In practice, the golliwogs appeared in significant numbers only for the Fancy Dress Parade — on the night ear-marked for fun and frivolity and in the form of a huge 'joking event' expressing local outrage at the suggested and effected change to the more formal part of the ceremony. Between Friday night and Saturday morning, the 'Golliwogs Rest' pub once again became the Green Tree, Rev. I. M. Golly lost his black face and became Ricky Fulton's Rev. I. M. Jolly (Figs 3a and 3c), Mrs M. replaced 'her' golliwog with a pink doll, Golly with dog became clown with dog (Figs 3b and 3d), and all the golliwog floats disappeared. So complete was the transformation that the chairman of the Peebles March Riding and Beltane Queen Festival Committee publicly thanked 'all those people who, like myself, recognized the dangers of playing up to the national media and went to the trouble of changing their costumes to participate in the Saturday morning parade'.

This transformation suggests to me that motivation for, and conduct of, the events of 1991 could not only have been about the exercise of racism. The (virtual) disappearance of the golliwogs is striking testimony to the presence of another agenda. It emphasized the significance of the Beltane in forging a local collective identity, and indicates its potency in marking the difference between Scottish and English public life. Peebleans would not allow their reaction to an attack on local tradition to be appropriated as part of what they see as an essentially English debate on race and racism. Despite the intense mass-media interest, people did not play up to the press, and did not oblige the waiting cameras with a display of golliwog costumes on Saturday morning.

However, the subtlety of this transformation was glossed over by the national (British) press, which insisted on targeting the 'English' race issue to the exclusion of documenting the conduct of local affairs. One of the English tabloids apparently rang the offices of the *Peebshire News* to ask about the timing of the 'annual Peebles golliwog parade' (*Peebshire News*, 28 June 1991, p. 16), and one television programme appears to have edited clips from the two days together to give the impression that the golliwogs were out in force during the main Beltane ceremony. By conflating the semi-formality of Friday's fancy dress parade with the formality of Saturday's crowning and processions, the mass media managed to miss the key point of the protest. This simply added weight to the view held locally that the charge of racism is a meaning attributed to the event by outsiders, rather than a sentiment inherent in the activities of the protestors.

The conduct of the 1991 Beltane should not, then, be read only as an expression of racism. It is also a vehicle of resistance: a challenge to the importation of ideas from urban England into rural Scotland, and, indeed, part of a more general affront to England's claim on British identity (see Asad, 1990).

**An identity within Scotland**

Peebles is not only part of the border with England; it is also at the edge of Scotland. The Borders are neither Highland nor Lowland in character, and they are spatially marginal to, and socially marginalized by, both the 'high' cultural image of Edinburgh, which routinely claims space as 'The Festival City', and (to a lesser extent) the revival of an urban enterprise culture in Glasgow (which, having been 'Miles Better' is now 'Alive! . . . and flourishing'). Shields (1991, p. 276) sees such margins as 'signifiers of everything “centres” deny or repress'. In this context, the Beltane may be shot through with pomp and ceremony but it is essentially the manifestation of a cultural form struggling for survival. The townscape of Peebles are dwarfed by the urbanized Central Belt, whose cities have always shown more affinity for the Highlands than the Borders (whose own rural character — grounded in woollen mills and rugby clubs — lacks the same distinctiveness and mass popularity, notwithstanding the romanticism attached to it by Sir Walter Scott). The position of the Borders is further compromised by a revived Scottish Nationalism which...
inevitably stresses commonalities rather than differences within Scotland and which, equally inevitably, grounds these in core rather than borderland concepts (where 'core' means either more urban or further North).

As a symbol of resistance to these marginalizing definitions of Scottish life, the discourse of the Beltane seeks to reposition Peebles at the heart of Scotland and to protect the Burgh from the homogenizing forces which surround it. Those elements of the 1991 festivities which saw the preservation of the golliwog as part of the defence of a local tradition can therefore also be seen as part of a quest to secure recognition for the Burgh's distinctive contribution to the history and geography of Scotland. This quest is manifest both in opposition to the Scottish 'other' (the Burgh motto translates as 'increase by swimming against the stream') and in a spirited defence of the autonomy of local affairs.

In the 1991 Beltane, hostility to the Scottish other was manifest in vehement opposition to perceived interference by Mrs M., an insider turned outsider by
virtue of an attachment and perceived allegiance not to local traditions but to the formality and bureaucracy of the national (Scottish) capital. The general view, as presented by a Beltane committee official, was that

It was ridiculous that these costumes had been withdrawn because of a complaint by one silly woman... the view of the town was that this was a silly woman poking her nose in and we have had to alter the Festival because of a silly woman... in Edinburgh. [Author's emphasis]

It was a short step from attributing blame to an outsider to constructing the outsider as 'other' and as an enemy to local life (the same kind of process was observed by Frankenberg (1957) in his study of a village on the Wales-England border). Mrs M. therefore came to represent the 'limousine liberals of Edinburgh' who 'impotent to solve the real problems of our day are turning to make-believe in preventing children dressing up in the time-honoured tradition of golliwogs'. In this guise, images of Mrs M. were almost as popular among participants in the fancy dress parade as the golliwog costumes. A schoolteacher reprimanding a golliwog and a triumphant Mrs M. with a golly caught in a fishing net were two of the more striking contributions.

In the light of the distinctions drawn between the Borders and the rest of Scotland, arguments about the meaning of the golliwog can further be seen as part of a statement on the particularity of local affairs. The form of the 1991 protest was therefore justified by appeal to the argument that, for an 'insider', the meanings attached to the golliwog in the context of the Beltane parade do not have the same connotations as they might in a wider Scottish setting or at other times of the year. The very act of restricting the golliwogs to the fancy dress parade can thus be seen as a bid to ensure that the local meaning of the golliwog—a rag doll associated with fun and frivolity—was the one that prevailed. The protest was deliberately located in a zone of informality within a spectacle which is part of a conversation among locals and not a performance for the outside world. Given that neither tourism nor commerce is the rationale for this festival, this local explanation is plausible. The meaning of the Beltane can only be appreciated in the context of the history and identity of Peebles, and this is unique within Scotland.

This appeal to exclusivity can also be seen as part of the more general claim to local autonomy which is embedded in the form of the fancy dress parade. The parade is the point in the celebration where local views are always aired, and it is always dominated by local events, or by events thought relevant to local life.

For instance, a few years ago you know the salmonella scare with the eggs—we have got a local councillor here who is an egg-producer so there was literally dozens of folk dressed in various forms of eggs—farmers. Edwina Currie, you know, all hitting this topic. Another year one of the council bucket lorries knocked down one of our ceremonial lamp-posts in the High Street. So you've got folk carrying lamp-posts and that kind of thing. So if there is a local topical issue folk will dress up accordingly.

The locally topical issue of 1991 was popular protest against outside interference in the affairs of the Burgh. The golliwog had become the symbol of that interference, and the theme had become so prominent that it would have been impossible for the 1991 festivities to contain a statement about local affairs without including golliwog costumes. The vehicle for the protest (the image of the golliwog) was seen by many participants as relatively incidental to their case, but if they were to be part of the event that symbolizes the relevance and autonomy of local politics in the conduct of Scottish affairs, they were bound to dress up as golliwogs. As Bakhtin (1965) puts it:

The carnivalesque crowd in the marketplace or in the streets is not merely a crowd. It is the people as a whole, but organised in their own way, the way of the people. (p. 255)

The parade of golliwogs which appeared at the 1991 Beltane was not simply a mindless expression of common sense racism. It was also a statement about the distinctive identity of the Scottish borders and of the autonomy of the 'ancient and royal' burghs that comprise it.

The politics of position

For the most part, I disagree with the justifications put forward for the golliwog protest. For me, the display was as much about racism in Scotland and about the marginalization of black people in Britain as about the significance, integrity and value of local tradition. To say this, however, is itself a challenge to those who saw or experienced the protest as a quest for space in the Borderlands of a marginalized nation. It is, further, a challenge which (as an earlier section showed) can legitimately be resisted on the grounds that my
(‘English’) perception of what happened is itself part of the problem.

A pre-occupation with positionality does not resolve this dilemma, but it does locate some of the differences between my view of the 1991 festivities and that held by other participants in our different life histories and standpoints with respect to the Beltane fair. Thus, for example, whereas some ’insiders’ claim that the golliwog costumes are the same kind of thing as all the other costumes, representing one part of a crucial local tradition, I (laying no claim to that tradition, and without a personal biography formed by it) see them as something quite different from most other costumes (though on a par with those depicting Red Indians and Yellow Chinamen), representing an unwanted vestige of British colonialism and Western imperialism. From one perspective, the fact that the protest centred on the golliwogs was accidental, and incidental, since the point of the struggle was to retain the right to attach local meanings to a local event. From the other perspective, it was inevitable that the golliwog costumes would attract an outsider’s disquiet, so that any attempt to retain them would be seen first as an expression of racism and only second as part of some other social project.

Likewise, whereas people convinced of the uniqueness and exclusivity of Peebles argue for the ’harmless rag doll’ interpretation of the golliwog, from my perspective as an outsider, the very inclusion of a golliwog image is testimony to the extent to which the Beltane is inseparable from a colonial history in which Scotland is implicated, and from a global Geography to which Scotland is linked. ’Insiders’ and outsiders alike would agree that some uses of the golliwog are demeaning; our differences centre on whether the local can be detached from the global, on whether meanings can be exclusive to localities and, in the end, on just how private the Beltane is.

From the dialogue between these two positions it is obvious that the golliwog affair is more complex and ambiguous than it first appears. Scotland is marginalized in the Union, the Borders are marginal to Scotland, and the claim lodged by the people of Peebles for a space of their own is valid. To interrogate the 1991 protest only for its racism (and especially for its ’English’ racism) is therefore to trivialize the other facets of the ceremony which arise from the Beltane’s distinctive location in UK space. As Katz (1992) shows, no standpoints are innocent, not even those of oppressed people. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that what I have portrayed as an act of oppression — the perpetuation of an image of Africans as childlike and irresponsible — must also be seen as an act of resistance towards ideas which are equally experienced as an attack on heritage, identity and integrity. I therefore go some way to sharing the views of the 1991 protestors: possibly not far enough for them; perhaps too far for some readers. My point, though, is that while I see the analysis of racism as a necessary part of the interpretation of the Beltane, I do not regard it as anything approaching a sufficient explanation for the events that occurred in 1991.

CONCLUSION

The Peebles Beltane is an attractive and enjoyable annual celebration of local life in rural Scotland. In 1991, it was overlaid by what many must see as a shocking display of ’common sense’ racism. When faced with this charge, local people both denied it (by arguing that, if anything, it is an idea more appropriate to urban England than to rural Scotland) and trivialized it (by portraying the threat to local tradition as more significant than any threat posed by that tradition). In practice, however, the character of these arguments betray not only the pervasiveness of common sense racism but also a manifestation of resistance to other kinds of oppression. The form of the 1991 Beltane did contain an expression of racism, but it also contained a challenge to the marginalization of the Borders within Scotland, and to the subjugation of Scottish culture to ‘English’ affairs.

The Beltane appears usually as a more-or-less uni-vocal celebration of local history; in 1991 it evinced a more-or-less uni-vocal display of ’common sense’ racism. However, by examining other facets of the festival exposed by (or realized through) the golliwog affair, Beltane’s essentially polyvocal character becomes apparent. It is hegemonic but also rebellious, it requires conformity yet embodies resistance, it is exclusionary and usurpationary. In short, it exposes the relational qualities of marginality. Oppressors can also be oppressed and the marginal also marginalize, to the extent that it is no longer possible or appropriate to think of ’the’ dominant group or culture, or to oppose ’the’ core to ’the’ periphery. The festivity has an ambiguity that can be embraced but not resolved, and this tension means that while place building can and, in a changeable world, probably must be radical and invigorating, it can also be conservative and demeaning. The celebration of self is, however innocent it seems, inextricably harnessed to the subjugation of other. To understand how and why,
we need to explore further the relational qualities of marginality, the ambiguity of the mainstream and the politics of position.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the curators of the Tweeddale Museum and to Sara Hill and Betty Smith for assistance in collating source materials. Edinburgh University's Human Geography reading group provided a valuable sounding-board for an earlier draft and I am especially indebted to Bob Hodgart, Peter Jackson, David McCrone, Clyde Mitchell, Jan Penrose, Roger Lee, and three anonymous referees for their enthusiastic and insightful comments. The ideas in this paper formed part of my inaugural lecture, delivered in the Department of Geography at the University of Edinburgh on 15 October 1992.

NOTES

1. An exception, perhaps, is Ley's (1988) study of world fairs, which are urban events controlled by dominant majorities rather than oppressed minorities.
2. The 1932 Beltane Programme contains a note ‘In the Olden Days’ which traces the origin of the event to a pagan ceremony dedicated to the worship of Beal or Beil, the Celtic god of light (Tweeddale Museum archive no. 5956).
3. All unattributed quotes refer to a taped interview with a member of the Peebles March Riding and Beltane Queen Festival Committee, conducted on 18 October 1991.
4. In the ambiguous role of both ‘insider’ (member of the Burgh Band which plays a central role in the week’s celebration, and resident of a nearby village) and ‘outsider’ (English immigrant, now resident just the wrong side of the Tweed/Clyde watershed, and a woman in what I experience as a largely pleasurable but inescapably patriarchal event).
5. A person born within the Burgh bounds. (Due to the closure of maternity facilities, this is no longer possible without a home birth, and no consensus on the implications of this has been reached.)
6. An immigrant, or an outsider.
7. This is evident even in the principal actors of the celebration itself: the 1992 crowning lady, for instance, was married to a former warden of Neidpath Castle, and is the mother of two previous queens and a chief maid.
8. Shields defines spatialization as ‘a social construction of the spatial and its imposition and enactment in the real topography of the world’ (p. 255) and directs attention to the way that ‘people treat the spatial as charged with emotional content, mythical meanings, community symbolism and historical significance’ (p. 57).
9. The Cross Kirk was erected in AD1261 on the site of the discovery of a large cross and inscribed stone. It became a monastery in AD1474 and functioned as the Parish Church between the reformation and 1874.
10. The Schoolgirl Queen, her maids, pages, and courtiers, other key actors in the children’s pageant, the crowning lady, the Cornet, ‘his lass’, their supporters (the ex-Cornet and Cornet-elect and ‘their lasses’, and a procession of past Cornets).
11. This practice arose to prevent encroachment on the common lands, which were marked off from adjoining properties by turf mounds. This policing of the boundaries became unnecessary after the division and disposal of the common lands, but it is claimed that the turf mounds were visible in living history (Peebles March Riding and Beltane Queen Festival Committee, 1974).
12. The ‘theme tune’ of the whole week, which is sung at least once, and often numerous times at every event, was composed by Thomas Hope Brown.
13. The castle was owned by the family of Sir Simon Fraser who defeated the English at Roslin Moor in 1303. Although it stands just outside the Burgh boundaries, and is not Peebles’ only defensive site (the Parish Church now stands on the site of the original Castle of Peblis), it has become the gateway to the town and a powerful symbol of the Borderers’ solidarity.
14. In 1991, the outgoing (female) Warden of the Cross Keys Kirk spoke, to a chorus of laughter, of a time when the Beltane committee might appoint the ‘Cornet and her Lad’.
16. The gendering of the traditions and images of some key areas of Scottish culture is further documented by McCrone (1992) in his discussions of Kailyardism, Tartanry and Cydesidism.
17. Lines written by R. W. on the occasion of the Ancient Custom of Riding the Marches being Revived to Celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, verse 2.
18. ‘Come Owre the Hills Tae Peebles’ verse two.
19. The Beltane Bell (a prize in the horseracing events of Wednesday evening) was presented by the United States Peeblesshire Society in 1913; the Coronation Chair was a present from South Africa (1922); the Queen’s Sceptre from Singapore (1927), the Indian carpet from Darjeeling (1928) and the Cornet’s flag from Johannesburg (1935).
20. This is not always within bounds acceptable to the law: on more than one occasion the brass band has been cleared from the streets by a generally tolerant local constabulary for dancing a noisy reel in the early hours of the morning, and one year the pipe band had its drums confiscated on the eve of the grand procession for disturbing the peace. More serious disturbances
have arisen involving territorial disputes between local youths and teenagers from neighbouring towns.

21. The importance attached to repetition in the context of the Beltane is hard to understated, and much is made of the Cornet who rode the boundaries, sometimes alone, during every year of the 1939–45 war. Yet, the form of the ceremony has changed in the past, with the addition of new events, the alteration of the routes of the main processions, and changes in the position and status of the Burgh boundaries.

22. The Callant’s club, founded in 1935, is open to a maximum of 150 men who must have been born, or resident for more than 15 years, in the Burgh. One of its key objectives is the preservation of the histories and traditions of the Burgh.


24. Words from the Coronation Ode.

25. The golliwog is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) as ‘a black-faced grotesquely dressed (male) doll with a shock of fuzzy hair’. Black Markets (1990-1) views them as a demeaning racial stereotype whose continuity is indicative of cultural colonialism.

26. They therefore postdate the ‘Red Indians’ by four or five years, as well as the ‘Darkies (coon dress and bones)’ which first joined the parade in 1905 or 1906 [missing programmes from the archived collections account for the imprecision].


35. There is, for instance, no evidence that anyone opposed the disappearance of the ‘darkies’ in 1975, or even noticed the fact that no golliwogs were on parade in 1945, 1957, 1958 or 1971.


43. But even before that, two golliwogs on a tandem had accompanied the Cornet and his supporters as they rode the Burgh boundaries on Wednesday, and even attempted to ford the river Tweed.

44. The address at the 1992 Ex-Cornets Association dinner was entitled ‘Are Peebleans an endangered species?’ and warned of a shrinking indigenous population, unable to carry on the traditions of the town (*Peebleshire News* 13 November 1992 p. 9).

45. The Borders have accommodated some of the most vocal supporters of Scottish independence, notably the controversial poet Hugh MacDiarmid.


47. A few golliwogs did appear on Saturday: one was prevented by police from joining the children’s parade to the Parish Church steps; some others tagged onto the back of the parade of floats which tour the town after the ceremonies have ended (it is usual for parts of the fancy dress parade to reconvene at this stage in the festival). I counted no more than a dozen ‘golliwogs’ at this point.

48. As indicated, for example, by the flourishing of the Celtic Society of Edinburgh from 1820, which advanced the cause of the kilt, bagpipes and other trappings of ‘tartanry’, and took on some of the aims of the Highland Society founded in London in 1778 to encourage ‘ancient Highland virtues and the preservation of ancient Highland traditions’ (Trevor-Roper, 1984, p. 26).


50. If the Beltane is about tourism in any sense it is concerned with congregation and participation by ‘insiders’, not with the detached observation that Urry (1990) associates with the ‘romantic gaze’.

51. Despite the proclamation of the Fair, the only substantial trading that happens on Saturday occurs at the funfair and in the pubs. Most shops and other attractions close for at least part of the day to enable employees to participate in the festival.

REFERENCES


CLELAND, W. (1932) 'The history of the Beltane festival', in the Beltane Festival Programme (archive no. 5956, Tweeddale Museum), pp. 3–9
EMY, H. V. (1989) 'From a positive to a cultural science: towards a new rationale for political studies', Political Studies 37: 188–204
GILROY, P. (1987) 'There ain't no black in the Union Jack'. The cultural politics of race and nation (Hutchinson, London)
KATZ, C. (1992) 'All the world is staged: intellectuals and the projects of ethnography', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 10: 495–510
PARK, R. (1904) 'Masse und Publikum (The crowd and the public)' in ELSNER, H. Jr. (ed.) The crowed and the public and other essays (University of Chicago Press, Chicago), pp. 3–81


Bounding the Borders: Claiming Space and Making Place in Rural Scotland

Susan J. Smith


Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0020-2754%281993%292%3A18%3A3%3C291%3ABTBCSA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-U

References

Drama and Politics in the Development of a London Carnival
Abner Cohen


Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0025-1496%28198003%292%3A15%3A1%3C65%3ADAPITD%3E2.0.CO%3B2-2