

Sample chapter from:

Contentious Rituals: Parading the Nation in Northern Ireland

Jonathan S. Blake
blake.jonathan@gmail.com

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Introduction

On a summer's afternoon, a crowd is packed along the Lower Newtownards Road in East Belfast, clutching cans of beer, bottles of Buckfast Tonic Wine, and Union Jacks. Some have even tied the flag like a cape around their shoulders. Young boys, seated on the curb, bang on toy drums. Men and women, young and old, suck on cigarettes. Food trucks grill cheap hamburgers and deep-fry potatoes and battered fish. Makeshift vendors sell hats, t-shirts, and other souvenirs, all bedecked with the icons of Ulster Protestants: the British flag, the Red Hand, King Billy—William III, the Prince of Orange—riding a white horse into battle. People mill about expectantly. It is a scene I have witnessed many times before: in Belfast's north, west, south, and center; in Derry/Londonderry; in Portadown; in Bangor; in tiny Markethill, a village deep in republican south Armagh. It is the marching season and we have come to watch a parade.

Even before we see it, we hear it: blasts of flutes, cracks of snare drums, thwacks of bass drums. Once the parade appears, the noise is thunderous and the view is just as loud. Up front is a marching band's color party, bearing flags (British, Northern Irish, Scottish, Orange Order, 1912 Ulster Volunteer Force, Royal Irish Rifles, and more) with military precision. Then comes the drum corps, with side drums slung over their right shoulders to rest on their left hips. Behind struts the bass drummer, wildly slamming the large drum on his chest. Next are the rows and rows of "fluters," instruments raised high. The bandsmen, in matching uniforms, move in unison, playing old favorites like "The Sash My Father Wore" or "No Pope of Rome." The former speaks proudly of family, tradition, and the need to defend "Our unity, religion, laws, and freedom"—with the sword if necessary. The latter dreams of a world with "No nuns and no

priests” and “No Rosary beads,” where “flute bands play ‘The Sash’ every day.” The crowd cheers and sings along to both.

Following closely behind is the Orange Orange lodge, a Protestant fraternal organization dedicated to God, Ulster, and the Crown. Leading the lodge are two brethren holding aloft a banner that presents the lodge’s name and a rich array of iconography: depictions of pivotal moments in Irish Protestant history, biblical scenes, or portraits of past monarchs and unionist heroes. The lodge members pace behind their banner, dressed in dark suits topped by an orange collarette. Behind the lodge marches another band, and then another lodge, and so on for, at times, up to an hour or more. Protestants in Northern Ireland perform 2,500 such parades each year: Protestant paraders marking Protestant history with Protestant symbols, marching past Protestant spectators singing along to Protestant tunes. Everything is Protestant—except the protestors.

For Northern Ireland’s Catholics, loyalist parades are not celebrations but affronts that vividly call to mind centuries of discrimination and repression by the Protestant state and decades of terror by Protestant paramilitaries. When such a pageant is due to pass near their communities, homes, or churches, many Catholics mobilize opposition: applying political pressure to re-route it, sitting in the streets with locked arms to physically block it, or praying the Rosary. When their efforts fail and the parade is permitted, Catholics protest from the sidewalks, bearing placards and sometimes shouting obscenities at the marchers.

Preventing violence in these tense situations requires the muscle of local activists and the state. On a regular basis, the police position themselves in the unenviable space between parade and protest. Some operations allow for soft caps; others require helmets, shields, and fire-

retardant full-body armor. On occasion, fighting erupts and bricks crisscross skies darkened by the smoke of shattered petrol-bombs. Violence like this was common during the Troubles, the thirty-year civil war in Northern Ireland that killed 3,700 people, but is far less prevalent today. The communal violence that has lingered on since the 1998 peace agreement has often revolved around disputes over parades. This is nothing new: violent sectarian clashes have accompanied loyalist parades in the north of Ireland since their origins in the eighteenth century.

Loyalist parades are the premier communal ritual of Northern Ireland's Protestants. Like all nationalist rituals, they display the nation: gathering national emblems and bodies in a single space, and thereby making visible the "imagined community." The flutes, drums, banners, and flags bring the abstract idea of the nation to life, helping each member feel the "deep, horizontal comradeship" of nationalism.¹ As a result, rituals of the nation play a prominent role in the culture and politics of modern life. Across varied forms—parade, rally, wreath laying, anthem singing, flag raising, state funeral—nationalist rituals are ways for a community to display itself and honor itself; mourn collective tragedies and celebrate collective triumphs; declare its present and imagine its future. They are opportunities for "societies [to] worship themselves brazenly and openly."²

Societal self-worship, however, is as much an act of exclusion as an act of inclusion. Representing the nation necessarily illustrates who is *not* a member. Consequently, nationalist rituals can become hotly contested. The history of nationalism is one of rival claims over

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), p. 7.

² Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 56.

territory, people, and power, and in the absence of politico-cultural homogeneity, any portrayal of the nation and its ambitions is a potential object of dispute. Loyalist parades in Northern Ireland, therefore, are not only national rituals, but *contentious rituals*—repeated, symbolic actions that make contested claims and that are actively challenged by others in society. The Protestant past, present, and future envisioned by Ulster parades conflict with the memory, experience, and aspirations of local Catholics. At particular times and in particular places, loyalist parades trigger a cycle of angry protest and counter-protest, further distancing Catholic from Protestant. These disputes harm the political peace process and undermine grassroots peace-building on a regular basis.

This feature places the loyalist parades that I shall examine in this book in the company of other divisive symbolic performances found throughout the contemporary world: provocative Hindu processions through Muslim neighborhoods in India that have precipitated many deadly riots, especially since the rise of Hindu nationalism in the 1980s; Confederate flag-flying in the American South, which is seen as an expression of Southern pride by many whites and a symbol of terror by many African-Americans; pilgrimages by Japanese leaders to Shinto shrines honoring war criminals from the Second World War that infuriate the people and governments of China, Taiwan, and the Koreas; prayer in the disputed holy places of Israel and Palestine, such as the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem and the Tomb of the Patriarchs/Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron, which are seen by many on either side as exclusively theirs; commemorative ceremonies marking dark moments in South Africa's racial history, like the Day of the Vow, when white Afrikaners celebrate a battle that killed thousands of Zulus. While the enactment of most contentious rituals does not produce violence or protest most of the time, it can still

exacerbate group tensions, intensify an “us versus them” mentality, and make conflicts more difficult to resolve.

National rituals, whether contentious or not, are typically thought of and studied as elite phenomena. A rich body of scholarship demonstrates the political power of national rituals for activists, movements, states, and rulers.³ This intuition is undoubtedly valid—it is elites who typically erect monuments, compose national anthems, and proclaim holidays. But it is, at best, a partial account. The full story must also include how and why ordinary people visit monuments, sing national anthems, and celebrate holidays—or not. Many national rites require mass participation that, in democracies, at least, is voluntary. And, as Eric Hobsbawm reminds us, “the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people... are not necessarily national and still less nationalist.”⁴ We cannot, therefore, assume that ordinary participants share the motivations and desires of national elites.

What is more, nationalist rituals produce social and political outcomes that benefit or damage the nation as a whole, such as increased solidarity or the intimidation of a rival group. Yet the costs—time, dues, fees, uniforms, potential risks at work—fall on the participants. Since the benefits do not discriminate between participants and nonparticipants there is no clear or direct incentive for individuals to take part. The public gains and private costs result in a dilemma of collective action, where no rational actor would voluntarily contribute.⁵

³ For example, David I. Kertzer, *Rituals, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

⁴ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 10.

⁵ See Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

Peel away the colorful costumes, lively music, boisterous crowds, and other elements of elaborate spectacle, and contentious rituals, at their most basic, are acts of collective claim-making. In divided societies, the claims they make are both emotive and significant: we are dominant, you are subordinate; this is our territory, you do not belong; we can act with impunity, your desires do not matter to us. Intended or not, this is provocation. These bellicose performances drive wedges between groups, fan the flames of suspicion and hostility, and occasionally spark violence. This book asks why people choose to take part.

Ritual Collective Action

A central claim of the book is that to answer this question, we must approach contentious rituals like loyalist parades as *rituals*—“symbolic behavior that is socially standardized and repetitive.”⁶ Though describing an act as “ritual” is often a way to ignore it or downplay its importance (“it’s merely symbolic,” “she’s just going through the motions”),⁷ I will argue that the ritual character of these contentious events is a key to their explanation. The argument developed in this book is rooted in theory and evidence from the study of participation in contentious politics as well as two fundamental insights from the multidisciplinary study of ritual. For over a century, scholars of ritual—in religious studies, sociology, and anthropology—have consistently found that rituals affect the people who take part in them and that a ritual’s meaning is almost always ambiguous.

⁶ Kertzer, *Rituals, Politics, and Power*, p. 9. The most comprehensive analyses of the concept are Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁷ Religion scholar Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 102, attributes the denigration of ritual in Western scholarship to Protestant-influenced understandings of thought and action—what he calls the “Protestant insistence on the ‘emptiness’ of ritual.”

The effects of ritual on participants are wide-ranging and profound, including the transformation of a person's social role and identity, cognitive consequences that affect one's understanding of their society and the wider world, and immediate as well as sustained emotional reactions for participants.⁸ The net result is that ritual participation is often both pleasurable and meaningful. Crowds and colors, symbols and solidarities, motions and emotions come together in public ritual, creating intense moments and lasting moods that we desire. When all goes right, Durkheim teaches, we reach "a state of exaltation."⁹

These varied effects provide what social scientists identify as "process-oriented" benefits, gains that are "intrinsic to the process of participation itself."¹⁰ Intrinsic benefits complement the extrinsic, outcome-oriented reasons generally thought to motivate human action, such as accomplishing an external objective or receiving direct material compensation. When process-oriented motivations are strong, participation need not be incentivized (solely) by expectations of benefits derived from attaining a certain outcome or consuming a selective material reward. Rather, the benefits that are internal and inherent to the process of acting collectively can motivate action. Conversely, when process-oriented motivations are weak, participation can be motivated by the prospect of extrinsic outcomes or material incentives. Human actions sit on a continuum between purely intrinsic, process-oriented behavior and purely extrinsic, outcome-oriented behavior. Most of our lives, I would wager, are spent somewhere between the two

⁸ See, for example, Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969); and Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995).

⁹ Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 220.

¹⁰ Jon Elster, *The Cement of Society: A Study of Social Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 44-46; and Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 240.

extremes. Rituals, according to the scholarly consensus, provide particularly rich opportunities for process-oriented benefits, which suggests that motivations for participation lean toward intrinsic motivations. This insight explains how participants in contentious rituals overcome the problem of collective action.

Students of ritual have also found that rituals speak in multiple voices.¹¹ Since some actors hear one voice, while others hear another, the very meaning of the ritual is ambiguous. As a result, participants need not share the interpretation of their action that organizers, rivals, or outside observers hold. Contentious rituals, in the eyes of these latter two groups, are often seen as really about demonstrating power or deliberately intimidating or insulting others. But, due to ritual's symbolic ambiguity, participants may understand it to mean something completely different. While the belief that a contentious ritual is aggressive or provocative may deter many people from taking part, ritual's multivocality and polysemy mean that potential participants do not necessarily believe it. Even if opposition to the contentious ritual is well known, this does not need to affect the meanings held by participants or their intentions in acting.

This view of contentious rituals, supported by my empirical study of Protestant parades in Northern Ireland, challenges three arguments prominent in the study of political conflict today. The *elite manipulation* argument proposes that elites strategically employ contentious rituals to provoke the out-group into overreacting. Such an overreaction, scholars find, can usefully polarize society, promote distrust between communities, create a negative image of the out-group

¹¹ See, for example, Victor W. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); and Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Routledge, 1985).

in local or international courts of opinion, or discredit in-group moderates.¹² The incentives of elites are clear, but the average participant is ignored in this perspective.¹³ As mentioned above, merely pointing to elite interests is an insufficient account for voluntary mass action. We cannot assume that just because a contentious ritual is beneficial for elites, mass participation will simply appear.

More suitable alternatives to my own account are two broad arguments about why individuals participate in politics generally, each rooted in a different view of human motivation. In one view, people act on their ideals, beliefs, and emotions. In the other, people act on their material self-interest.

The *idealist* argument sees contentious rituals as symbolic assertions of in-group status and power—and of out-group humiliation and subordination. Thus, they are mass events where individuals can collectively and publicly articulate their in-group pride and loyalty as well as animosity for the out-group. Since performances express these attitudes, participation should be explained by a person's thoughts and feelings about these groups. In particular, people should be more likely to participate the more they hold positive feelings toward their own group and negative feelings toward other groups.¹⁴ Overall, this approach suggests that participants are distinguished from nonparticipants by their attitudes towards the in-group and out-group.

The *rational-materialist* approach sees contentious rituals as no different than any other

¹² See Steven I. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Rogers Brubaker and David D. Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 24 (1998), p. 433.

¹³ For example, in his award-winning *Votes and Violence*, Wilkinson writes that Hindu political parties in India "organize unusually large religious processions" in order to provoke electorally-advantageous ethnic riots (p. 24). But Wilkinson never explains why this "unusually large" crowd turns out.

¹⁴ For example, Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 2nd. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

collective action. As a result, according to this perspective, people will only participate in contentious rituals when the expected private rewards outweigh the private costs. The most obvious way for this to happen is to provide participants with selective material incentives.¹⁵ Paul Brass, for instance, finds that contentious rituals in India are often enacted by “fire-tenders” and “riot specialists” who profit from the ensuing violence, both by looting and by payments from local leaders.¹⁶ Another way to motivate rational actors is to raise the costs of non-participation. Targeting non-participants with social sanctions—for example, shunning them or demoting their social status—has been found to incentivize participation.¹⁷

Both arguments share an instrumental view of participation, meaning that they see it as a method for achieving some result that “logically, causally, or probabilistically” follows from the action.¹⁸ In the idealist model, participants act in order to attain an external outcome that reflects their deeply-held beliefs. They seek to reshape the world to look more like their fixed ideals. In the rational-materialist model, participants act to maximize their personal welfare. In both arguments, the reasons to act are distinct from the action itself.¹⁹ I show instead that means and ends “are not always neatly separable” because people often approach ritual participation as an

¹⁵ Olson, *Logic of Collective Action*, p. 51.

¹⁶ Paul R. Brass, *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 9, 16-17, 285.

¹⁷ For example, Dennis Chong, *Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

¹⁸ Alan Hamlin and Colin Jennings, “Expressive Political Behaviour: Foundations, Scope and Implications,” *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (July 2011), p. 648. See also Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, trans. and eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 24.

¹⁹ Indeed, to remain coherent, instrumental arguments require an analytic distinction between desired ends (benefits) and the means used to achieve them (costs). See Albert O. Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements: Private Interest and Public Action* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 82-91; and James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), esp. pp. 23-26, 82-84.

end in and of itself.²⁰ From the point of view of the participants, the profound meanings and joys inherent in the experience of participation in parades and other rituals are themselves reasons to act.

Studying Ritual Collective Action

Testing my argument against the existing alternatives requires careful attention to data and method. I collected a wealth of original quantitative and qualitative data during eight months of field research in Northern Ireland. These data have three primary sources. First, I conducted semi-structured interviews with eighty-one participants and nonparticipants. Second, I designed and implemented a randomized household survey with 228 respondents in nine Protestant neighborhoods in Belfast. Third, I recorded ethnographic observations at many parades, protests, public meetings, marching band practices, and other related events.²¹

In my analysis of these data, I find four reasons for parading: expressing collective identity; taking part in tradition; the social and emotional pleasures of participation; and communicating with outside audiences, both Protestant and Catholic. The first three, best characterized as process-oriented reasons, are articulated by participants more often and with more passion. External communication, an outcome-oriented reason to parade, is expressed less frequently and appears less widely-held. The preponderance of evidence thus suggests that

²⁰ Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest*, p. 26.

²¹ For details on the data collection, see the Appendix A. Since my purpose is to explain participation, my research was limited to the Protestant community and Catholic voices are absent throughout the book. If this study proposed to explain the dynamics of parades and protests in Northern Ireland, the absence would be inexcusable. But given my aims, I explore variation within one community rather than between the two. Catholics remain an important part of the story, but their role is largely filtered through the perceptions of Protestants. See the similar discussion in Lee A. Smithey, *Unionists, Loyalists, and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 53.

participants are most interested in the performance of parades, the very act of participation, not their outcomes. I further show that despite the widely recognized political claims and consequences of parades, participants understand them as anti-political—that they transcend politics and exist outside of it. This view, which I call the paradox of anti-politics, helps explain how participants seem to downplay or ignore the divisive consequences of their parades.

By collecting data from both participants and comparable nonparticipants, my research addresses shortcomings in existing studies of loyalist parades and other “cultural forms of political expression” that only sample participants.²² These new systematic data allow me to compare participants to similar nonparticipants to determine what factors distinguish them and what factors they share. By methodically constructing these comparisons, I overturn several widely-held beliefs about parade participants. For instance, prevailing narratives describe loyalist paraders as either “outstanding patriots” or “sectarian bigots,” depending on one’s perspective. Both views are mistaken. Ethnic attitudes, I find, do not distinguish participants from their nonparticipant neighbors. I also demonstrate that, in contrast to extensive research on collective action, neither pre-existing social networks nor selective material incentives explain participation. In other words, participants did not have more social ties to other paraders prior to mobilization than comparable nonparticipants. Neither are they paid to take part or offered any

²² Neil Jarman, *Material Conflicts: Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Berg, 1997); Dominic Bryan, *Orange Parades: The Politics of Ritual, Tradition, and Control* (London: Pluto, 2000); Eric P. Kaufmann, *The Orange Order: A Contemporary Northern Irish History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Gordon Ramsey, *Music, Emotion and Identity in Ulster Marching Bands: Flutes, Drums and Loyal Sons* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011); and James W. McAuley, Jonathan Tonge, and Andrew Mycock, *Loyal to the Core?: Orangeism and Britishness in Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011). On other cases, see Verta Taylor, Leila J. Rupp, and Joshua Gamson, “Performing Protest: Drag Shows as Tactical Repertoires of the Gay and Lesbian Movement,” *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts, and Change*, Vol. 25 (2004), pp. 105-137 (the quote is from p. 106); Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); and Suzanne Staggenborg and Amy Lang, “Culture and Ritual in the Montreal Women’s Movement,” *Social Movement Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (September 2007), pp. 177-194.

other economic carrots.

Contentious Rituals

The arguments and findings presented in this book are specific to loyalist parading, but they speak to a broader class of political action: contentious rituals. Contentious ritual is my term for a ritual that is contested because of the political claims it is seen to make.²³ The concept calls attention to a type of public action that is cultural through and through, and, just as thoroughly, political. This double-irreducibility is central to understanding contentious rituals because it is a source of their appeal and power.

Mass, public rituals are politically valuable resources for several reasons. They can legitimate the status quo (or challenges to it), construct and maintain an identity, build solidarity, define a political reality, generate strong emotions, gather a crowd, represent a group, create common knowledge, sustain activists' commitment, and make political claims.²⁴ All the while, rituals are seen by many on both sides of the argument, or outside of it altogether, as legitimate culturally important forms of action, which makes them difficult for states to regulate or

²³ I say that contentious rituals are *seen* to make political claims (rather than simply making political claims) because I agree that "demonstrations do not speak for themselves, they are performances which must be... seen and interpreted." Ron Eyerman, "Performing Opposition Or, How Social Movements Move," in Jeffrey C. Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason L. Mast, eds., *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 197. Note that not all political rituals are contentious rituals. Political rituals, such as hegemonic state rituals, that are not widely contested are not considered contentious.

²⁴ The scholarship on rituals and politics is voluminous. See, for instance, Steven Lukes, "Political Ritual and Social Integration," *Sociology*, Vol. 9 (1975), pp. 289-308; Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in 19th Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*; Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Amitai Etzioni, "Toward a Theory of Public Ritual," *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (March 2000), pp. 44-59.

opponents to criticize.²⁵ These effects and advantages make rituals attractive to political actors—and troublesome for their political rivals. The result is that they often become central objects of political contestation.²⁶

Once a ritual becomes disputed, the effects can be anything but symbolic. The performance of a contentious ritual, and any challenges to it, can carry significant political consequences, including increased polarization, heightened tension, and violence. As political scientist Marc Howard Ross argues, “Cultural expressions are not just surface phenomena. They are *reflectors* of groups’ worldviews and on-going conflicts... [They] play a *causal* role in conflict... [And they] serve as *exacerbaters* or *inhibitors* of conflict.”²⁷ At their most dangerous, contentious rituals can trigger the onset of violent clashes. In fact, they are one of the most significant precipitants of riots globally.²⁸

In sixteenth-century France, for instance, “Almost every type of public religious event has a disturbance associated with it.” Disputes over religious worship, processions, and festival ignited violence. Riots even erupted from baptisms, weddings, and funerals, as Protestants and Catholics came to blows over which rite to use.²⁹ Centuries later, public celebrations of religious

²⁵ Charles Tilly, *The Contentious French* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 117, 313; Charles Tilly, *Contention and Democracy in Europe, 1650-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 31; Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence*, pp. 23-24; and Steven Pfaff and Guobin Yang, “Double-Edged Rituals and the Symbolic Resources of Collective Action: Political Commemorations and the Mobilization of Protest in 1989,” *Theory and Society*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (August 2001), pp. 539-589.

²⁶ The modifier “contentious” thus has a double meaning: the plain meaning of “controversial” or “likely to cause an argument,” and the meaning developed by McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, where contention means making claims that bear on the rights and interests of others. See Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 5.

²⁷ Ross, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict*, p. 3. Emphases in the original.

²⁸ Donald L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 272. For general and comparative studies, see *Ibid.*, esp. pp. 272-277; Ross, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict*; and Ron E. Hassner, “Sacred Time and Conflict Initiation,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (November 2011), pp. 491-520.

²⁹ Natalie Zemon Davis, “Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France,” *Past & Present*, Vol. 59 (May 1973) pp. 72-75 (quote from p. 72); and Barbara B. Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 59, 63.

holidays and life-cycle ceremonies continue to teeter “on the edge of violence.”³⁰ In Iran, during the Revolution, the rituals of Ramadan and Moharram, burials, and traditional ceremonies held forty days after a death—often at the hands of state forces—took on a political character. The state, feeling threatened by these contentious rituals, fired on celebrants—resulting in more burials and mourning rites.³¹ The same “cycle of funerals, confrontations, and more coffins” emerged in Libya during the anti-regime protests of 2011—and still take place in Syria’s civil war—as government forces killed mourners-cum-protesters marching in funeral processions for people killed in previous demonstrations.³² And in India, an epicenter of bloody contentious rituals, the calendar of communal festivals and religious rites “can at sensitive times actually channel and direct the shape, expression, timing, and spatial location of ethnic violence.”³³

Contentious rituals can also have profound political consequences short of violence. Even when they do not spark violent encounters, cultural practices such as flying flags, celebrating national holidays, erecting monuments, making pilgrimages to sacred sites, ritually slaughtering animals, and visiting cemeteries can exacerbate tensions between groups and make conflicts more difficult to resolve. For example, when the political opponents of the Croatian president repatriated the body of a long-dead political hero for reburial inside Croatia shortly after the

³⁰ Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, p. 275.

³¹ M.M. Salehi, “Radical Islamic Insurgency in the Iranian Revolution of 1978-1979,” in Christian Smith, ed., *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social-Movement Activism* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 54-61.

³² David D. Kirkpatrick and Mona El-Naggar, “Qaddafi’s Son Warns of Civil War as Libyan Protests Widen,” *New York Times*, February 20, 2011. On Syria, see for instance, David Batty, “Syrian Troops Open Fire on Mourners at Funerals for Pro-Democracy Protesters,” *The Guardian*, April 23, 2011.

³³ Stanley J. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 240. See also Peter van der Veer, “Riots and Rituals: The Construction of Violence and Public Space in Hindu Nationalism,” in Paul R. Brass, ed., *Riots and Pogroms* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 154-176; Brass, *Theft of an Idol*; Christophe Jaffrelot, “The Politics of Processions and Hindu-Muslim Riots,” in Amrita Basu and Atul Kohli, eds., *Community Conflict and the State in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 58-92; Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence*; and Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005).

Balkan civil wars, President Tadjman objected strongly to this “provocation.” In response, he proposed doing the same for one of his own political heroes, the head of the murderous, ultranationalist Ustaše, who had aligned with the Nazis during World War II.³⁴ In Lebanon at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the public observance of Ashura came to constitute both an act of personal piety *and* an act of collective protest against the Israeli occupation of the southern part of the country. Hizbullah-affiliated clerics shifted the meaning of the holiday’s rituals “from one of mourning, regret, and salvation to a revolutionary lesson that emphasized action against oppression.” Connecting the seventh-century martyrdom of Imam Husayn to contemporary politics explains, justifies, and gives religious significance to Hizbullah’s goals and tactics. It also turned the mass rituals into demonstrations of support for the organization, which has led to confrontations with supporters of other political parties. And to this day even lower Manhattan, perhaps the capital of disenchanting modernity, hosts contentious rituals. On Good Friday each year, undocumented immigrants perform the Stations of the Cross outside the Federal Building on Broadway. When performed inside of a Catholic church, the sacred rite is not contentious. But, by moving it to the doorstep of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement office, the portrayal of Christ suffering at the hands of his tormentors takes on a new, contested meaning—and is met with counter-demonstrators and a police presence.³⁵

Despite their political importance around the world, contentious rituals have largely been overlooked by students of collective action and contentious politics. Scholars tend to focus their

³⁴ Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 14.

³⁵ Alyshia Gálvez, *Guadalupe in New York: Devotion and the Struggle for Citizenship Rights among Mexican Immigrants* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), chap. 5, “El Viacrucis del Inmigrante and Other Public Processions.” Also my own observations in 2014.

research on a narrow range of political activities, so we only see a slice of the contemporary “repertoire of contention.”³⁶ Contentious cultural practices are often ignored by scholars in favor of other elements of the repertoire, such as protests, petitions, riots, and sit-ins. In particular, scholars have neglected the people who take part in cultural forms of political action, including contentious rituals. Across a range of cultural practices imbued with political meaning and engaged in political claim-making—from Hindu religious processions in India to Ashura observances by Shias in Lebanon to Roman Catholic sacraments in New York City—we have limited empirical knowledge about who participates, why they participate, or how they view the political aspects versus the cultural aspects of their action.

The thorough study of parading in Northern Ireland enables me to answer these questions for one case of contentious ritual with fine-grained data. Loyalist parades, in fact, are an ideal site to explore the characteristics and dynamics of contentious ritual because they exemplify the deeply political and deeply cultural nature of this type of public action.³⁷

Parades are a major political problem and source of disruption in Northern Ireland. Though conflicts over parades hopefully reached their worst in the mid-1990s, particularly around the Drumcree Church parade in Portadown, old disputes linger and new ones have appeared. As I write, in July 2016, Protestants continue to protest nightly in north Belfast over the decision to restrict the final leg of the Twelfth of July parade in 2013. Peaceful protest is one thing, but violence has been a regular feature of parades for far too long, and recent years have seen both Protestants and Catholic crowds resort to physical force.

³⁶ A concept elaborated most fully in Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

³⁷ I use loyalist parade as a general term to include loyal order parades and band parades.

At the elite level, political leaders have continually kicked the issue down the road, repeatedly resolving to form new official working groups.³⁸ When negotiations dedicated to parades (along with flags and dealing with the legacies of the Troubles) were finally convened during the second half of 2013, the parties failed to reach an agreement. They tried again in late 2014 and, at the final hour, reached the Stormont House Agreement, which stated that “powers to take responsibility for parades and related protests should, in principle, be devolved to the [Northern Ireland] Assembly.” But complex budget debates stalled implementation and devolution has yet to happen.³⁹

Disputes over parades regularly test the robustness of the Northern Irish peace agreements, widely considered a model case of negotiated settlement to civil war—one with “a lesson for conflict everywhere,” as Tony Blair has put it.⁴⁰ Parades remain a key unresolved issue and point to the limitations of the peace process, particularly its mismanagement of the politics of culture. As such, to study parading in Northern Ireland is to study the continuation of conflict after war. In this book, I explore how and why ordinary people choose to contest ethnic relations in the aftermath of ethnic violence and challenge the resilience of peace. This is fundamental to understanding enduring conflict in Northern Ireland and other “post-violence societies.”⁴¹

³⁸ This was the solution to parading problems reached by the St. Andrews Agreement in 2007, Hillsborough Castle Agreement in 2010, and *Together: Building a United Community*, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister’s 2013 strategy document.

³⁹ In November 2015, the Northern Ireland Executive, the British government, and Irish government agreed on a new deal to actually implement the Stormont House Agreement. In tried and true fashion, their solution for parading was to write a new “discussion paper... [that] will outline options.” Northern Ireland Executive, “A Fresh Start: The Stormont House Agreement and Implementation Plan,” November 17, 2015, p. 34.

⁴⁰ There is by now a large literature on the “lessons” we can (and cannot learn) from Northern Ireland. For a good overview, see Timothy J. White, ed., *Lessons from the Northern Ireland Peace Process* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013). The Blair quote is from Roger Mac Ginty, “The Liberal Peace at Home and Abroad: Northern Ireland and Liberal Internationalism,” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (November 2009), p. 690.

⁴¹ John D. Brewer, *Peace Processes: A Sociological Approach* (Malden, Mass.: Polity, 2010), pp. 16-28.

Northern Ireland's precarious peace often seems to be at the mercy of a minority of men in dark suits and orange collarettes, marching up the road to the sound of piercing flutes and booming drums.

Loyalist parades, furthermore, clearly illustrate some of the puzzling features of contentious ritual that distinguish them from other forms of collective mobilization. The commonly assumed purposes of parades—to offend and intimidate Catholics or to defend Protestantism and the union with Britain, depending on who one asks—are collective outcomes that cannot explain individual participation. Yet, as I will demonstrate, participants do not receive selective material incentives, as many important theories of participation predict. In fact, these theories notwithstanding, people actually pay money to be able to march in parades. And they do so week after week, year after year without tangible benefit to themselves or the larger community. Not to mention that parades, due to their deliberately ritualized features, veer toward the type of repetitive, “stereotyped performances” that scholars of contentious politics find ineffective as well as boring for participants and audiences alike.⁴² And, on top of it all, participants adamantly insist that their parades, which are considered political action by nearly all observers, have nothing to do with politics. This insistence provides an interesting contrast to decades of scholarship that has sought to show that acts which may appear apolitical are in fact imbued with political meaning and intended as everyday acts of political resistance.⁴³

Conflict, Collective Action, and Culture

⁴² McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, p. 138.

⁴³ See James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); and James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

The study of participation in contentious rituals touches on fundamental questions about ethnic conflict, collective action, and the role of culture in politics. First: why do people participate in ethnic conflict? Research on ethnic conflict tends to conflate conflict and violence, even though they are conceptually distinct. When “pursued within the institutionalized channels of the polity,” writes Ashutosh Varshney, ethnic conflict is a “regular feature of pluralistic democracies” that reflects differing interests and preferences among ethnic groups.⁴⁴ Even when ethnic disagreements take “the form of strikes and non-violent demonstrations on the streets, it is an expression of conflict to be sure, but it is not a form of ethnic violence.”⁴⁵ Political mobilization along ethnic lines, therefore, need not be violent.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, studies of participation in ethnic conflict have focused almost exclusively on its violent side. But rioting, rebelling, or committing genocide is not the same as taking part in an act of nonviolent conflict.⁴⁷ Contentious rituals and other episodes of conflict may cause offense, raise tensions, or even precipitate instability and violence, but participation does not carry the high risks to the individual of an act of violence nor does it violate widely-held norms against committing harm to other people or their property.⁴⁸ On the benefits side, contentious rituals do not provide the opportunities for looting or other economic gain that many have found

⁴⁴ Ashutosh Varshney, “Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict,” in Carles Boix and Susan Stokes, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 279, 278.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

⁴⁶ As Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 684, reminds us: “Even in the most severely divided society, ties of blood do not lead ineluctably to rivers of blood.” See also James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Explaining Interethnic Cooperation,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 90, No. 4 (December 1996), pp. 715-735.

⁴⁷ See Alexandra Scacco, “Who Riots? Explaining Individual Participation in Ethnic Violence,” Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2010; Macartan Humphrey and Jeremy M. Weinstein, “Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (April 2008), pp. 436-455; and Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

⁴⁸ Furthermore, Randall Collins, *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), shows that humans try to avoid violence as much as possible.

to incentivize violence.⁴⁹ Moreover, research on ethnic conflict developed largely in isolation from social movement research, where nonviolent, confrontational collective action is bread and butter. The social movement literature, in turn, primarily studies movements aimed at broadly “progressive” change in politics and society. It often overlooks collective mobilization aiming to preserve the status quo or produce mass displays of ethnic nationalism.

Loyalist parades are not acts of violence, but, on occasion, they do precipitate violence. The book’s second contribution is to enrich what we know about the dynamics of ethnic violence by spotlighting violence’s immediate triggers. Sparks are often left under-theorized or are simply presumed to appear,⁵⁰ but participation in such events cannot just be assumed. So a complete analysis of the dynamics of intergroup violence must include an explanation for the events that ignite it. This book provides a bottom-up account of a major trigger of communal violence in post-conflict Northern Ireland.

One of my main findings, however, is that participants do not always intend the trouble they arouse. Speaking to participants, it is clear that achieving the harmful outcomes of their behavior are not what motivates them to act. So I investigate how consequences that are so expected from parades are construed as unintended. In this analysis, I further our understanding of the relationship between culture and politics, a third contribution.

Three broad approaches to culture dominate the current conversation: structural-

⁴⁹ For example, Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City Revisited* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974); and Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 56 (2004), pp. 563-595.

⁵⁰ Important exceptions include Beth Roy, *Some Trouble with Cows: Making Sense of Social Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Brass, *Theft of an Idol*; Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*; and Ross, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict*.

functionalism, “culture as a system of symbols and meaning,” and “culture as practice.”⁵¹ The image of culture in the structural-functionalist account, famously espoused by Émile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons, is of a coherent system (“a culture”) shared by all members of a society.⁵² The second approach, pioneered by Clifford Geertz, views culture as the stuff of meaning-making: the manmade webs of significance in which we are all suspended.⁵³ The most recent approach, developed by Ann Swidler, rejects the earlier conceptions of culture as unified and shared across a society and instead sees culture as a “tool kit” to be wielded by people as they navigate their lives.⁵⁴

Though these approaches and their accompanying theories and methodologies are often seen as rivals and mutually exclusive, all three operate at various points throughout the book. The parade participants, for instance, are interested in the meaning of symbols, which Geertz helps us explain. And at times, I follow Geertz in trying to “read” what parades mean for participants. But I do not take culture as coherent, like he does. Instead, I analyze the various ways that participants use it strategically. My analyses of how participants employ discrete segments of culture, however, rest in a broader framework that considers culture’s relationship to other parts of the social structure. I pay particular attention to the relationship between the usage of culture and political power. Employing these diverse perspectives on culture enhances our understanding of how it works in political life.

⁵¹ William H. Sewell, Jr., “The Concept(s) of Culture,” in Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 43, 44.

⁵² See Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*; and Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (New York: Free Press, 1951).

⁵³ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 5.

⁵⁴ Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 51, No. 2. (April 1986), pp. 273-286.

Finally, studying participation in a contentious ritual increases our knowledge of rituals and other cultural behaviors generally. In particular, I explain why people choose to participate in rituals, an issue that is often ignored. Potential participants' decision to take part (or not take part) is simply taken for granted. For instance, in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*—easily the most influential modern account of ritual—Durkheim disregards choice, describing rituals as if they somehow compel participation. “When a native is asked why he follows his rites,” Durkheim writes, “he replies that ancestors have always done so and that he *must* follow their example.” Ritual participation, for the great sociologist, is a moral obligation, an “imperative,” and a “duty”—inner forces that leave little room for free will.⁵⁵ But, ritual is, above all, human action. Like all non-trivial human action, it is suffused with meaning and entails costs, benefits, and agency. This leads to a simple, perhaps obvious, yet often overlooked point: even when facing a ritual, people confront the choice to participate or not. As one of the preeminent scholars of ritual, Catherine Bell, states, “Ritual is never simply or solely a matter of routine, habit, or ‘the dead weight of tradition.’”⁵⁶

Outline of the Remaining Chapters

In the chapters that follow, I explain how and why men and women of various backgrounds choose to take part in contentious, ritual parades in Northern Ireland. Chapter 1

⁵⁵ Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 192. Emphasis added. See also Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance Between Ritual and Strategy,” *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (December 2004), p. 535; and Pierre Liénard and Pascal Boyer, “Whence Collective Rituals? A Cultural Selection Model of Ritualized Behavior,” *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 108, No. 4 (December 2006), p. 816. Of course, this does not mean that all participants are as engaged or want to be there. Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), esp. pp. 116, 353-354, distinguishes between central and peripheral participants. Those on the periphery do not experience the energy of the ritual and can end up feeling excluded from the ritual community.

⁵⁶ Bell, *Ritual Theory*, p. 92. See also pp. 207-208.

introduces the historical and political contexts of loyalist parading in Northern Ireland, outlining the relationship between parades, power, and sectarian conflict in the north of Ireland from the eighteenth century until today. I establish the political foundation of parades and explain the sources of disputes over them.

Chapter 2 analyzes the four main reasons that people choose to parade: collective identity expression; tradition; the pleasures of participation; and communication with outside audiences. I argue that these reasons include both instrumental and non-instrumental motivations, but the latter are more prominent. Participants are more interested in the process-oriented benefits intrinsic to the very performance of parades than any external outcomes that result from from them.

Chapter 3 explores the paradox of anti-politics—the contradiction that exists between parading’s fundamental political nature and participants’ public understanding of their action. The language of anti-politics, I argue, preserves participants’ self-image and collective identities and is a form of political power, since it lets participants shift debates away from criticism and compromise.

Chapter 4 demonstrates that parade participation does not follow the logics of idealism or rational-materialism, two established explanations for participation in contentious rituals. I show that, compared to their non-parading neighbors, participants are not distinguished by factors existing theories expect, such as sectarian attitudes and selective material incentives.

The conclusion briefly considers the similar cases of contentious processions in India and Israel. Harnessing these comparative cases, I offer counterintuitive ideas about the nature of contentious rituals and their relationship to pluralism, political power, and the state.