Parading Persuasion: Nonviolent Collective Action as Discourse in Northern Ireland

Lester R. Kurtz, George Mason University
INTRODUCTION

Given the ubiquitous and deadly nature of violent conflict in the modern world, many have sought to shift from violent to nonviolent means of conflict to avoid prolonging or escalating deadly conflicts or igniting a catastrophic conflagration. In keeping with Louis Kriesberg’s (1998) call for research into constructive conflict, we offer here a case study in a sociology of persuasion while also addressing a gap in the social movement literature: the role of strategic collective action in the discursive processes of meaning construction.

Our goal is to explore implications of multiple lines of research regarding how social movements engage in and manage conflict. Recent developments in the study of social movements have been enriched by theoretical insight from social movements research, especially the framing literature and the cultural analysis of movements and can be further enhanced by the analytical tools used in conflict studies, including the conflict transformation and resolution literatures and nonviolence studies.1

Though scholars have been involved in research both on social movements and conflict methodology (Benford, 1993; Jasper, 1997; Kurtz, 1992, 1999;
Kriesberg, 1998; Smithey & Kurtz, 1999), the fields have rarely been brought together, (e.g. Jasper, 1997). We believe that the discursive nature of persuasive methods can provide a bridge between the fields. This approach allows us to argue that collective action events are part of meaning construction (Gamson, 1988) and that methods matter; the variation of methods and tactics used by social movement organizations (SMOs) are an important component in concerns such as the expression of grievances and reaching movement goals.

Parading disputes in Northern Ireland provide an illustrative case for the study of persuasive methods as an alternative to violence or other coercive methods. Historical analysis and data from field research in two rural Northern Ireland towns show that loyalist and nationalist parties to parading disputes have choreographed their actions to redefine the meaning of conflict events in their favor by using persuasive methods that attempt to transform traditional stereotypes and the conflict itself. In examining this empirical case, we use analytical tools from conflict transformation theory in the sociological study of social movements. In particular, we explore two themes: first, a proposition that methods matter, i.e. that the means by which a conflict is carried out has implications for social movements and future relationships between SMOs and other parties involved in conflicts (Jasper, 1997, p. 320). Second, we wish to examine the idea that collective action is itself a part of the discursive practices that are important to understanding the contribution of social movements to social change. In this article, we focus on methods that are persuasive; they are designed to communicate an argument or send a message, thus potentially influencing parties’ understandings of each other and the conflict itself.

In each of the towns where data was collected, loyalist and nationalist organizations conducted collective action events in ways that expressed their grievances to their opponents but also sought to alter their image and the image of their opponents to third parties. One of the towns, which we call Loughbregan, is primarily Catholic and nationalist with a small minority population of Protestants. Ballyreagh, the other town, has a Protestant majority representing approximately 60% of the population, and a reputation for being staunchly loyalist. Both towns lie in a predominantly nationalist region of Northern Ireland. In everyday life during data collection, community relations were fairly innocuous, but for nationalist and loyalist activists and Orangemen, parading was a “battleground” in which political and cultural conflict in Northern Ireland was expressed at the local level. Both nationalists and loyalists felt besieged, and parading served as a lightning rod for their grievances. For researchers, parading provides an opportunity to study the type or quality of the methods that disputants use.
The social movement organizations (SMOs) in our study harnessed some
degree of persuasive potential in their actions. This is not particularly surprising;
indeed, the costs of engaging in some forms of violent or coercive insurgency
are high (Zunes, Kurtz & Asher, 1999). In Ballyreagh, loyalists carefully choreo-
graphed a public conciliatory gesture toward Catholic marching bands that was
designed to project a message about tolerance to their opponents in the nation-
alist residents’ committee and other third parties. Similarly, nationalist residents
in Ballyreagh instituted their own crowd control in order to portray the secu-
ritry forces deployed during nationalist parades as oppressive. In the other town,
Loughbregan, the local Orange lodge’s decisions to avoid public confrontations
with nationalist protestors portrayed the protestors as heavy-handed and unreas-
sonable. In each of these situations, the use of nonviolent persuasive methods
sought to alter public perceptions of parties to the conflict, including third
parties. We believe that our case studies, together with theoretical insights from
conflict and social movement studies, will aid in the development of a soci-
ology of persuasion that demonstrates the relevance of collective action for the
construction of meaning in conflict situations.

SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY AND MEANING
CONSTRUCTION

The study of strategy, methods, and tactics has generally taken a back seat to
such issues as the emergence and maintenance of SMOs, but some attention is
being given to the relationships between movement methods and their outcomes.
That research has tended to focus on disruptive and violent methods (Guigni,
1998); we hope that our work contributes by incorporating nonviolent methods
into the field of study. We see useful connections between the conflict literature and the culturally
oriented social movement work that emphasizes meaning construction. Drawing
on the work of Goffman (1974), some social movement scholars have incor-
porated cultural issues by describing a process in which movement elites work
at mobilizing participants and creating public oppositional knowledge by
“aligning” the ideology and goals of their movement organizations with the
worldviews of members and potential recruits (Benford & Snow, 2000; Coy &
Woehrle, 1996; Hunt, Benford & Snow, 1994; Snow et al., 1986). This school
has had notable impact on the study of social movements but has focused on
the emergence of social movements and preparation for collective action; the
role of action itself has received less attention.

Bert Klandermans (1992, p. 81) notes that little attention has been given to
“the social construction of meaning in action situations.” Stephen Ellingson
(1995) echoes Klandermans, saying that “The relationship between collective action events and the success or failure of movement discourses remains under-theorized and ungrounded in detailed empirical studies” (p. 104). Benford and Snow (2000, p. 627) have also recently called for additional research on the dialectical relationship between collective action frames and events. We respond with an analysis of collective action methods used in Northern Ireland parading disputes.

**Discourse and Collective Action**

Scholars who have taken the “linguistic turn” in studying collective behavior expand the analysis of meaning construction by emphasizing the contested nature of meaning (Benford, 1993; Ellingson, 1995; Gamson, 1992a; Kane, 1997; Sewell, 1996; Steinberg, 1999) through discursive analyses of the rhetoric and narrative (Fine, 1995; Kane, 2000; Polletta, 1998) produced in social movement activities and historical events (Berezin, 1997). They argue that meaning construction is not located solely in the strategic efforts of movement elites to manipulate participation; discursive processes are also influenced by the interaction or collision of cultural codes and contexts within contingent and unpredictable processes of articulation and interpretation (Ansell, 1997; Kane, 1997). Importantly, that process includes the nature of events and collective action (Bakhtin, 1981; Benford & Snow, 2000; Ellingson, 1995; Klandermans, 1992; Sewell, 1996; Steinberg, 1999; Tilly, 1995a, b).

We agree with Sewell (1996) and Ellingson (1995) that the moment of collective action itself is important to the ongoing construction of meaning; indeed, actions can become a part of persuasive discourse, conveying messages, arguments, frames and ideas. Framing is not limited to recruitment and mobilization but also refers to the way events transpire. Ellingson (1995) focuses on a dialectical process of meaning construction in which “speakers” (those who shape and articulate an SMO’s message) “shuttle between creating diagnoses and solutions to some social problem, implementing a solution through collective action, and then incorporating the action into their particular discourses . . .” (p. 135). This dialectical process shapes the course of a conflict.

In his analysis of conflict between abolitionists, anti-abolitionists and “law and order” advocates in antebellum Cincinnati, Ellingson argues that the work of framing and counterframing (Benford, 1987; Klandermans, 1992; Ryan, 1991) is not only a matter of one opponent’s responding to another’s arguments; the process is influenced by collective actions (Gamson, 1988). SMO spokespersons alter their frames and reconstruct their discourses in response to collective action events. Ellingson’s focus on collective action and meaning
construction by “speakers” (newspaper editors in his case) is helpful, though it is also important to emphasize that the interpretation and construction of meaning is not exclusively the purview of spokespersons, but also participants and third parties. The significance of Ellingson’s study lies in his emphasis on the dynamics of the event itself and how the dialectical relationship between an event and the discourse or framing process unfolds, transforming the definition of the situation in the larger community.

A similar emphasis can be found in Sewell’s (1996) study of the storming of the Bastille in 1789 and its implications for France’s transition from monarchy to democracy and the emergence of the modern concept of revolution. Events, he observes, can “change the course of history” and transform social relations. Historical events, although sometimes long in preparation, burst onto the scene and generate cultural creativity and new discourses. Although the events we examine in Northern Ireland hardly changed the world in the way the storming of the Bastille did, they provide a window onto how events can be designed to deliver arguments and shape subsequent interpretations (Jasper, 1997, p. 316). Events, as Klandermans (1992) argues, “can change the relative importance of different collective belief systems over time” as “different ideological packages” are accepted or rejected (cf. Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

Whereas Ellingson and Sewell analyzed the consequences of violent events, we are analyzing nonviolent events for evidence that methods are connected to meaning construction. The events that we examine were themselves part of the discourse in which movement participants employed collective action tactics to persuade multi-audiences in a multiple-organizational field (Klandermans, 1992). In this article, we propose that analyses of “events” and “collective actions” could be more explicit and that more could be made of the nature and quality of SMO actions. The major contribution of Ellingson and Sewell’s major contribution lies in their emphasis on the dialectical influence of collective action and meaning construction on the trajectory of social conflicts; we propose that the collective action itself is part of the discourse.

As we will show, SMOs can strategically choreograph events to disseminate discursive arguments to multiple parties during a conflict, not just before or after an event. True, the ways in which SMOs choose to conduct their actions will be influenced by political opportunity (Irvin, 1999; McAdam, 1982) previous experience, culture, biography and ongoing discourse, and they will affect subsequent discourse (Gamson, 1992b; Gamson, 1995; Irvin, 1999; Jasper, 1997; Lederach, 1995). However, SMOs and their participants can also deploy capabilities, exert some control over the process and thus exhibit agency (Gamson, 1992a; Giddens, 1984; Sewell, 1992), or as Jasper (1997) eloquently puts it, “artful” or “virtuosic” choices (pp. 11, 303). With that in mind, we turn
to the issue at the theoretical core, the analysis of persuasive methods of collective action as a part of collective discourse.

TOWARD A SOCIOLOGY OF PERSUASION

If, as we contend, different types of collective action methods are relevant to the construction of meaning by and between social movement organizations, we need a way of distinguishing between methods. Scholarship in the fields of nonviolent action theory and conflict transformation provides us with analytical tools for that purpose. In particular, methods that are persuasive in nature lend themselves to our argument that collective action is itself a component of discursive processes.

Persuasion, in the case of collective action, is a source of power harnessed in methods that attempt to alter the minds and behaviors of opponents and relevant third parties. Thus, persuasion by its nature deals with meaning construction and transformation. Strategies that feature persuasion involve methods that change perceptions by redefining elements such as the issues under dispute and the identities of people involved. We conceptualize persuasion as an inducement (Kriesberg, 1998); like other inducements such as reward and coercion, persuasion is a way of wielding power. We will address persuasion as a mode of collective action, a source of power that can take many forms in terms of behavior. We will refer to those forms as methods (e.g. boycotts, parades, and vigils). The application of a method to a specific confrontation is a tactic. Methods and tactics can be incorporated with resources into strategic plans intended to reach movement goals (Ackerman & Kruegler, 1994, pp. 7, 17). A persuasive strategy predominantly uses methods and tactics that draw on the power of persuasion. When we refer to the use of persuasion, reward or coercion, we mean the use of methods that involve their respective power sources.

Nonviolent Action Theory and Persuasion

Nonviolent methods of persuasion are studied by practitioners and analysts of nonviolent direct action (Ackerman & Kruegler, 1994; Sharp, 1999), “People Power,” or to use Gandhi’s term, Satyagraha (Truth force or Soul force) (Gandhi, [1945] 1987), and both persuasion and coercion are widely acknowledged as important components of nonviolent action. Such analyses of nonviolent action have tended to address asymmetrical conflict situations, especially between traditionally powerful institutions and popular movements. However, with regard to disputes between popular movements over identity
issues such as land and sovereignty (such as in Northern Ireland), we know far less about the contributions of various nonviolent methods and tactics to outcomes, especially as power levels become less disparate. If and when coexistence offers the most reasonable solution to such disputes, we should understand the capacities and limitations of nonviolent action to reach it (Weiner, 1998).

Nonviolent action of any sort is more likely than violence to soften antagonisms between opponents and create space for negotiation and accommodation (Sharp, 1998). But, are some forms of nonviolent action more conducive to coexistence? To the extent that nonviolent action is not purely a tool of realpolitik in asymmetrical power struggles but can also promote coexistence, it is more likely to utilize persuasion over coercion. This assumes that the predominate use of coercion (violent or nonviolent) is more likely to produce counterproductive legacies of fear and bitterness than persuasion. We believe this is a crucial concern within many post-cold-war political struggles and also has a strong foundation in nonviolent theory (Gandhi, 1938; King Jr., 1986). In this view, nonviolence that is conducive to coexistence aims not to force an opponent into some particular behavior against the opponent’s will but aims to transform the adversary’s will (cf. Schelling, 1976; Darby, 1986).5

Persuasion is a central force in nonviolence because of its potential to redefine conflicts and to transform definitions of issues by adversaries and third parties. “Nonviolent struggle employs social power to ‘work’ through and affect human minds” (Bond, 1992, p. 55). Scholars of nonviolent action argue that nonviolent methods may prove successful through substantially limiting an opponent’s options or persuading and potentially converting their collective will.

Persuasion and Constructive Conflict

The other sphere of conflict research we wish to bring to bear on movements research is that of conflict transformation and conflict resolution (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000; Kriesberg, 1998; Weiner, 1998).5 Scholars in this field seek to understand how participants in allegedly intractable conflicts can develop mutually acceptable and nonviolent outcomes, i.e. the transformation of intractable conflicts into tractable ones (Nagle, 1989; Thorson, 1989). These efforts have been spurred on by the global proliferation of ethnic conflicts (Weiner, 1998), and they seek to understand which methods are likely to lead to tractability, why, and under what circumstances. Thus, Kriesberg (1998) advocates research into “constructive” as opposed to “destructive” conflict. Methods that impose harm on adversaries tend to encourage self-perpetuating conflicts, often leading to “intractable” spirals of violence. Alternatively, like the German theorist
Georg Simmel, Kriesberg suggests that conflicts may be considered constructive when they facilitate future relationships between adversaries, i.e. conflicts that Simmel (1964) refers to as “integrative.”

In order to illuminate the relationship between methods and conflict outcomes, Kriesberg has categorized methods into three classes: persuasion, coercion, and reward. Coercion and violence are considered more destructive, polarizing opponents and perpetuating the intractability of a conflict whereas nonviolent methods, such as persuasion and reward, lend themselves to problem solving and compromise (cf. Irvin, 1999, p. 207).

Whether principled or pragmatic, some features of nonviolent strategies tend to foster constructively waged rather than destructively waged struggles. Certainly, the adversary tends to be less dehumanized by the process; and indeed, nonviolent action often appeals to the empathy and reasonableness of the adversary. It can even garner respect from the adversary (Kriesberg, 1998, p. 113).

Thus, persuasion potentially paves the way for cooperation between opponents (Bond, 1992; Gandhi, [1945]1987; Northrup, 1997; Teixeira, 1999; cf. Sharp, 1973, p. 69). To the extent that nonviolent methods are less coercive, we expect them to leave opponents open to negotiation and dialogue; any move away from violence is a move, however tenuous, toward coexistence (Simmel 1971). In the empirical world, of course, conflict styles are rarely pure, and persuasive methods can sometimes be used to coerce (e.g. when persuasion brings external pressure to bear on an opponent). Often, adversaries use combinations of coercive and nonviolent methods just as many nationalist social movements, including ones in Ireland, use both violent and nonviolent methods (Ackerman & Kruegler, 1994; Irvin, 1999; Kriesberg, 1998; Sharp, 1973). Thus, we have in mind a continuum of conflict methods stretching from the most nonviolent to the most violent (Kurtz, 1992) that can also be conceptualized as incorporating multiple inducements including coercion, persuasion, and reward.

These theoretical claims suggest that the quality of the methods employed can shape the flow of conflicts and thus the maintenance, decline, and effectiveness of SMOs. In short, work in the fields of nonviolent action and conflict transformation provide us with analytical tools to distinguish variation in the type or quality of methods employed by social movements.

In this paper, we explore ways in which persuasive methods have been used at the local level in Northern Ireland parading disputes; moreover, we propose that strategic choices to avoid conflict may actually involve persuasive inducements. Kriesberg’s (1998) constructive conflict model and the conflict transformation field suggest that methods matter to outcomes and provide analytical tools for talking about variation in methods. Persuasive methods, in
particular, lend themselves to the ongoing endeavor of understanding the role of meaning construction in social movements. Thus, what interests us is a process in which SMOs choreograph nonviolent persuasive tactics to influence others, to leverage support for their claims, to bring their image into line with the beliefs and attitudes of opponents and third parties, to alter the discursive field of the conflict, and finally to transform the conflict itself.

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

While we cannot assess large-scale or long-term outcomes based on our data, we argue that there has been a general shift in conflict methods in Northern Ireland away from coercion (such as military and paramilitary action) and toward persuasion and reward (such as the peace process) that we believe justifies our examination of the local use of nonviolent conflict methods. Shifts in conflict methods at the national level are also discernable at the local level as key actors reassess strategies for engagement in parading disputes. Northern Ireland’s peace process, embodied most recently in the popular referendum of 1998, the Belfast Agreement (also called the “Good Friday Agreement”), and the establishment of a local assembly, is admittedly an unstable set of affairs (Byrne, 2001), but it represents a “seismic shift” in an allegedly intractable conflict (Byrne & Carter, 1996; Dunn, 1995). In 1998, the main political parties, governments and most paramilitaries agreed to establish a local power-sharing alternative to the direct rule from Britain that has prevailed since 1972. Symbolic moves toward de-militarization, inspection of IRA arms, policing reforms, and participation in the latest assembly represent a cumulative shift away from coercive methods and toward discourse and negotiation.

For elite agreements to have a comprehensive and lasting effect, however, there must be a corresponding shift at local levels (Lederach, 1997; Turpin & Kurtz, 1997). Since 1995, residents’ committees have been established in some towns to contest the “right” of Protestant organizations, especially the Orange Order, to walk through neighborhoods where the residents are primarily Catholic. There is evidence to suggest that Loyalists have also discovered, or have felt compelled to develop and use, persuasive methods. Thus, the Orange Order and other loyalist organizations have choreographed parading events to send symbolic messages to opponents and third parties. Such developments in parading correspond with an incremental privileging of persuasion over coercion at the national level during the past twenty years.

The civil rights campaigns of the late 1960s employed primarily persuasive nonviolent methods until, in the early 1970s, the formation of the Provisional
IRA and increasingly severe actions by the security forces paved the way for more than two decades of open violence (Bew & Gillespie, 1999; Hennessey, 1997). An attempt to form a power-sharing government in 1973, and subsequent efforts by the Irish and British governments to seek political solutions set precedents for the inclusion of most, if not all, stakeholders in the conflict (Byrne, 2000). Despite early attempts at power-sharing, violent events involving republican and loyalist paramilitaries as well as British security forces continued. However, following the hunger strikes of 1980–1981 (O’Malley, 1990), Sinn Féin, the political arm of the republican movement, began to shift republican strategy from armed struggle to constitutional politics. The resulting dual republican strategy was referred to as fighting “with an Armalite in one hand and a ballot paper in the other” (see Elliott & Flackes, 1999, p. 437); the Provisional IRA declared cease-fires in 1994 and again in 1997. Loyalist and unionist parties also softened their stances, and loyalist paramilitaries declared cease-fires in 1991, 1994 and 1998 (Elliott & Flackes, 1999; Hennessey, 1996). Political parties, including those aligned with both republican and loyalist paramilitaries, joined all-party talks and signed the Belfast Agreement along with the Irish and British governments on April 10, 1998. It was resoundingly endorsed in a popular referendum and led to the establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive.

Overall, there has been a clear, albeit incomplete, transformation of conflict in Northern Ireland, a shift from the use of physical force toward constitutional methods that are more persuasive than coercive (Fitzduff, 1996; Irvin, 1999; Kennedy-Pipe, 2000). Approximately half of the politically related deaths between 1969 and 1998 occurred between 1971 and 1976, and substantially decreased after the 1994 cease-fires (Elliott & Flackes, 1999; Fay, Morrissey & Smyth, 1999). Having seen how the Northern Ireland conflict has been transformed, we turn to a community-level analysis of conflict over parading disputes, a local battleground for the expression of political grievances.

**PARADING IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

Parades are an important feature of loyalist culture in Northern Ireland and have become an increasingly important locus of antagonism, especially when Protestant loyal institutions, such as the Orange Order, insist on parading in primarily nationalist neighborhoods. Parades can operate as a microcosm of broader political struggles representing and reenacting, in a symbolic way, the deep history of division between Protestants and Catholics (Jarman, 1997). Yet, only a small minority of the total parades annually is considered a threat to civic order by the Northern Ireland Parades Commission, which placed
restrictions on only 152 (4.5%) of the 3,403 parades occurring between 1 April 1999 and 31 March 2000 (Parades Commission for Northern Ireland, 2000). There are several kinds of loyalist parades, the most well known being those that commemorate cultural and political events such as the annual July 12th celebration of the Battle of the Boyne (1690) in which the Dutch Protestant usurper to the British throne, King William III, defeated the Catholic King James who had fled to Ireland with French military support. Other parades include those leading to church services and band competitions, as well as local district parades (Jarman & Bryan, 1996). There are also several kinds of bands ranging from small accordion and flute bands to “blood and thunder” bands that often play louder and more provocative sectarian songs (Jarman, 2000).

Neil Jarman and Dominic Bryan (1998) argue that loyalist parades have predominated for both cultural and political reasons. Functionally, they “perform memory” (Jarman, 1997, p. 1), but also under unionist control, loyalists were simply at greater liberty to exercise that function and to restrict nationalist parades. Parades are not, however, limited only to the Protestant community; nationalist communities also hold parades, and while they are far less frequent and prominent, they have grown in number. Nationalist organizations such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Irish Nationalist Foresters have represented nationalist political views for most of this century, but have been eclipsed by republican parades commemorating events such as Bloody Sunday, the Hunger Strikes, and the 1916 Easter Rising (Jarman & Bryan, 1996). Catholic church parades are also sometimes part of parading disputes. So, be it the historical content of parades in the forms of Protestant ascendancy and republican struggle against a colonial oppressor, or the immediate contest over the right to parade, parading makes for highly contested ground in Northern Ireland.

Parading is an apt subject for an analysis of conflict methodology because it incorporates a long conflict history and has involved inducements of both persuasion and coercion. While parading is symbolic in nature and technically nonviolent, it is also unambiguously tied to coercion, and the symbols displayed in parades often recall coercive events, such as the Battle of the Boyne and Bloody Sunday. Early manifestations of Orange parades in the late 1700s opposed the United Irishmen movement while nationalist parades around the turn of the century promoted Home Rule, the devolution of power from Britain. Parades are thus symbolic statements about the very issues that have motivated violence in Ireland; they can symbolically suggest violence and represent a power struggle between partisans (Byrne, 1995; Jarman & Bryan, 1998). Against the backdrop of the Troubles, as the conflict in Northern Ireland is often called, parades have nevertheless provided a less violent battlefield than acts of overt violence. Jarman and Bryan (1996) contend that,
In the past, parades have often served as a surrogate for low level warfare, and with the arrival of the cease-fires in 1994, the issue of parades became a prominent and highly visible means of displaying and mobilising behind traditional political demands in an alternative site of conflict (p. 41).

While highly charged, parades are nevertheless symbolic rather than overtly violent. Like the transition from violent to constitutional methods in the sphere of national politics, parading has on occasion taken a more persuasive tone or has provided a public event in which protestors could deploy persuasive methods.

As a symbolic ritual, parades convey meaning; the elaborate use of specific symbols function to evoke emotion and guide action. As Zdzislaw Mach (1993) notes, “Whatever other function sign and symbol may fulfill, it is clear that they make it possible for human individuals to send and receive messages, and therefore to establish relations between people . . .” (p. 23). Ritualistic collective action may heighten in-group solidarity, but it also facilitates a form of communication with opponents and third parties.

Symbolic action is an important component of struggle that not only evokes traditional images and feelings about the way the world is, but can also present a “model for” ways the world can be (Geertz, 1973). Mach (1993) argues that

A group interested in changing the symbolic model of the world held by other participants of a social system uses symbolic forms to create a reality consistent with the desired state of affairs. Symbols present new ideas and values and combine them within new contexts, fill them with emotions and produce the symbolic reality, their interpretation of the world which, when accepted, becomes part of the world and thus the basis of perception and action (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). In such a way symbols become active factors in social change (p. 51).

Collective action, such as parading, that strategically harnesses the power of symbols may thus contribute to social change through the communication of new ideas and models for new social arrangements. We consider this persuasion, though the potential of parades in Northern Ireland to intimidate and polarization also cannot be underestimated.

Two fairly recent developments demonstrate the appropriation of parading as a venue for symbolic struggles. First, nationalist residents’ committees have formed in some towns for the purpose of contesting loyalist parades through their neighborhoods. The committees insist on negotiations with the Protestant organizations that organize the parades, but loyalists feel that the residents’ committees are fronts for the republican movement and are thus uncomfortable negotiating with them. Second, an Independent Commission on Parades, established by the British government in March 1997, was authorized to review
the parading situation and to ban, sanction, and mediate parades. It is disdained by many loyalist organizations who see it as an illegitimate body that violates their democratic right to parade, and by many nationalists who claim it is a biased instrument of the British government (though nationalists have been more open to working with the commission than loyalists).

PARADES AND TWO NORTHERN IRELAND TOWNS

Over the course of one year (1999), Lee Smithey conducted participant observation and two sets of interviews with forty-eight adults who lived in one of two rural towns, participated in parades, protested parades or were involved with monitoring parades. The first set of interviews was exploratory in nature involving thirteen people who had knowledge of the community’s history and dynamics or were connected to the parading disputes. The interviews focused on the history and makeup of the town, significant conflict issues and events, the use of various conflict methods, and an assessment of community relations.

Findings from the interviews administered to the first purposive sample instructed the design of a second interview guide that was used with a separate sample of thirty people determined by quota and snowball sampling. The overall content of the second semi-structured interview was similar to the first, but it was oriented toward the respondent’s history and activity, knowledge of local conflict events, and attitudes regarding community relations.

The majority of interviews (29) were conducted in a town that we call Loughbregan. Though the town’s population is predominantly Catholic, Smithey oversampled Protestants to help ensure an accurate picture of parading disputes. Most of the subjects were Protestant (13) and Catholic (16) residents; interviews were conducted with three representatives of the Orange Order and two representatives from the residents’ committee. Eight additional interviews were conducted in a nearby town that we call Ballyreagh, which is approximately 60% Protestant and 40% Catholic. Two Orangemen and three members of the local nationalist residents’ committee were interviewed along with three Catholic residents. Overall, thirty-two men and sixteen women were interviewed.

Local and national newspapers (Belfast Telegraph, Irish News, and The Newsletter) were read regularly over the course of data collection and clippings taken for future reference. A local library provided access to older copies of one local paper on microfiche, and past editions of national news (Belfast Telegraph, Irish News, and BBC Northern Ireland) sources were collected from Internet archives.
Participant observation involved attending parades, protests, or public events such as Eleventh Night bonfires and civic events. Lee Smithey lived in a town near both Loughbregan and Ballyreagh, but proximity to Loughbregan allowed a wider range of participant observation such as daily errands, cultural events, Protestant and Catholic church services, and local fairs. Living in the area and performing volunteer work also provided useful contacts and opportunities for conversation and referral.

The cumulative data allow us to inspect the intentions and methods employed by participants in parading disputes within the context of the larger shift from coercive to persuasive methods. Interviews were transcribed and entered along with field notes into a hyper-link software package called Storyspace allowing the categorization of data by pre-conceived and emerging themes. Abbreviated data from all sources were also entered into a timeline using Lotus Organizer.

**SUBFORMS OF PERSUASION**

We have proposed that collective action events may serve as mechanisms of discourse and that the type of methods used is significant. We have organized the empirical analyses of this paper such that it incorporates a combination of two types of conflict methods (persuasion and avoidance) and two external parties (opponents and third parties). After we introduce the reader to the relevant parties to parading disputes in each town, we address specific conflict events and the use of persuasion. In one situation, attempts are made to persuade opponents and third parties, and in the other, avoidance proves persuasive to third parties.

We will introduce the parading situation in each of two rural Northern Ireland towns and discuss the discourses and decisions of the participants. We will present the frames that motivated collective action by loyalists and nationalists in each of the towns and show how their tactical choices were either designed to project persuasive messages or were recognized as having persuasive potentials, making it clear that each of the organizations involved used collective action as a vehicle for counterframing within a multi-organizational discursive field. We begin with persuasive messages intended for opponents and third parties in Ballyreagh before addressing avoidance and persuasion in Loughbregan.

**Ballyreagh**

When data was collected in Ballyreagh, it was approximately 60% Protestant and 40% Catholic; it also lies in a predominantly nationalist region. This divided
town has a history of contentious parading disputes and has been no stranger to coercive methods; many of its long-term residents experienced violent events over the course of the Troubles. British flags and signs in the center of the town signaled a strong loyalist presence and a loyalist residents’ committee had been formed for the purpose of promoting Protestant culture. A nationalist residents’ committee was also formed in 1999 to protest loyalist parades and promote broader nationalist concerns. Neither committee addressed parading exclusively, but the issue was a major concern for each because it played into their respective grievances. Interviewees from both sides of the parading dispute contrasted the intransigence of their opponents with their own admirable goals of tolerance, democracy, equality and mutual respect.

Ballyreagh’s Loyalists

Loyalist interviewees considered themselves under siege by an encroaching nationalism that could potentially subject Protestants to discrimination in employment and housing. According to Matthew, an Orangeman and member of the loyalist residents’ committee,

> We feel that we’re besieged here, and that they would like to overrun Ballyreagh and squeeze us out. They have said it. They have said that they’ll drive us into the sea, the same as what the Arabs said about the Israelites. But there’s Scottish blood here, strong, Presbyterian [blood] . . .. The young people are staying, but we have seen other areas, other wee villages and that, towns where the Protestants have been intimidated out, and they’ve been murdered or their houses have been burned in [our county], and they’ve had to get out.

Matthew contrasted Protestants’ dedication to British democracy and tolerance, to republicanism, claiming that it

> is much more akin to fascism, where they would try to force their ideology and their beliefs onto the majority of the people against their will. And, they’ll use whatever means and whatever methods: murder, torture, corruption . . .

Likewise, they considered Catholicism dangerous and citizenship in a united Catholic Ireland as inviting religious discrimination. By contrast, they characterized Protestants as good tolerant neighbors who “have always shown tolerance to the Catholic people and have always held out the hand of friendship.”

Ballyreagh’s Nationalists

Nationalists in the local residents’ committee also believed they were victims of injustice and discrimination. According to Gerard, a member of the nationalist residents’ committee, “To put it in a nutshell, [you] get trampled on. You’ve the loyalist tradition forced on you whether you want it or not, and that’s just
basically the height of it.” They saw their experience as indicative of nationalists’ experiences across Northern Ireland where state agencies, security and police forces inevitably act in the interests of Protestant unionism. For nationalists, overcoming that legacy would require a new era of equality and respect. They depicted themselves as the reasonable party that was prepared to enter into dialogue and relationship despite loyalist intransigence. Mickey, a republican member of the nationalist residents’ committee, expressed both frustration and a desire to improve relations with their opponents.

One of the biggest problems in this town is the matter of relations. For relations to develop, there has to be a basis of equality and mutual respect, and unfortunately, in this town, there is no respect for the nationalist tradition. . . . The loyalist tradition doesn’t want to co-exist with the nationalist tradition; it wants to dominate it, and has consistently done so over the years. And it’s only now that the likes of Gerard and all of them have the courage to take a stand, that things are starting to improve. I definitely see the thing of relationship building as being a long-term thing.

In short, Ballyreagh’s nationalists whom we interviewed framed conflict in the town in terms of the equality and respect that they claimed they were not afforded.

Both loyalists and nationalists developed victim frames to express their grievances, depicting themselves as a minority fighting against an oppressive majority. Thus, the nationalist residents’ committee focused their efforts on pointing out problems and inconsistencies in loyalist parades to the Parades Commission, the RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary), and the media. The loyalist residents’ committee used similar methods such as critiquing the nationalist residents’ committee in the media, but they also developed an intentional strategy designing public events tailored to their ideological arguments.

Here, we focus on two particular events to show how loyalists and nationalists used collective action events to project their message to opponents and third parties. First, during a Catholic feast day parade in 1999, the loyalist residents’ committee in Ballyreagh sponsored an unusual Orange demonstration. Under prior arrangements with the police, mediators, and nationalist bands, nine Orangemen conducted a public action in which they stood in a line across the road. With television media present, the Orangemen, who represented lodges in towns with contested parades, moved to the side of the road and quietly observed the march as it passed. The security forces had also agreed to tone down their presence by keeping a large portion of their people a short distance away from the parade. The Orangemen’s choreography was designed to welcome the Catholic parade and symbolically pose a question to the nationalist community: If Catholics are allowed to parade in the predominantly Protestant town of Ballyreagh, why are Orangemen not allowed to parade through Catholic areas such as Garvaghy Road in Portadown? This action was
carefully planned to present an argument through a symbolic gesture. The loyalist residents’ committee’s message was two-fold: Protestant loyalists are tolerant, and nationalists are hypocritical for insisting on marching through a primarily Protestant town like Ballyreagh while refusing to allow the Orangemen in Portadown to march through a predominantly nationalist area.

Ballyreagh’s nationalist residents’ leaders also recognized the utility of carefully planning public events. Much of their efforts were spent documenting both nationalist and loyalist public events in order to build a body of information that could be publicly presented on behalf of the nationalists to authorities such as the Parades Commission. However, on at least one occasion, they organized themselves in a novel way to publicly demonstrate a point. In previous years, a large security presence was established in the town to police Ballyreagh’s two nationalist parades on St. Patrick’s Day and on August 15. “Every single year, nationalists always came off worst,” according to Gerard; RUC baton charges inevitably injured bystanders. During one of the 1999 parades, leaders of the nationalist residents’ committee organized a handful of men to police the nationalist crowd in a careful attempt to rob the RUC of a reason to launch a charge. Nationalists wanted to show that the heavy RUC presence in previous years was unnecessary and motivated by a sinister agenda. Since many nationalists commonly consider the RUC an “armed wing of unionism”, Ballyreagh’s nationalist residents’ committee could easily incorporate a critique of RUC heavy-handedness into their discourse of injustice.

*Ballyreagh: Sending a Persuasive Message to Opponents*

Persuasion is an attempt to alter the minds and behaviors of opponents. Strategists use persuasive methods tailored to convey a specific argument in hopes that their action will affect a change in the attitudes and behaviors of others through a rational or emotional appeal. These tactics can range from public statements to banners, signs and public gestures. In Ballyreagh, both nationalists and loyalists disseminated arguments to persuade their opponents and third parties, and the use of symbols, such as flags, and the placement and behavior of participants aided local SMOs in their efforts.

The nationalist residents’ committee in Ballyreagh disseminated their message primarily through protesting Orange parades and through representations to the media. They wanted to emphasize common nationalist concerns over British occupation through the display of “Ban the RUC” posters and black flags at loyalist parades. By drawing attention to instances of discrimination and inequality, the nationalist group pursued a strategy that mirrors residents’ campaigns across Northern Ireland and can be traced back at least to the Northern Ireland civil rights movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s.
Persuasion was most clearly directed at Ballyreagh’s loyalists in the nationalists’ publicly expressed desire to engage in dialogue with loyalists. They insisted on respect and equality through dialogue with loyalists over the right to parade and restrictions on parades. According to nationalist activists Mickey and Gerard, they were “hoping to build relationships in Ballyreagh,” but found it difficult because their attempts at persuasion fell on deaf loyalist ears.

Well, I know [we] . . . would be very much open to dialogue on the issue, but again you find that usually a lot of these people aren’t open to persuasion. If they have to ask to do something, the significance is taken away from it. Unless they’re tramping over your garden without your permission, the kick’s not in it, like. I suppose it’s very like the Ku Klux Klan in America: if they had to ask the blacks if they could chase them, the fun wouldn’t have been in it.

This statement indicates that the nationalist residents aspired to a persuasive strategy, even if they also felt that their opponents were not open to dialogue. Ruaraí, another Republican activist, described their strategy in Ballyreagh as one of “dialogue.”

Whether they like it or not, republicans are part of this community, and a sizeable part. Just the way that you could say that we were part of the problem for many years, we’re also part of the solution. Loyalism was part of the problem. They’re also part of the solution. It’s trying to get everyone in together and sit around a table and thrash it [out] – that’s what they’re doing in [the new political assembly at] Stormont. Why can’t they do it in this town? It’s a strategy of dialogue.

In short, Ballyreagh’s nationalist residents publicly called for face-to-face dialogue in which they could reason with or persuade their loyalist neighbors.

The local loyalist residents’ committee also attempted persuasion, though it is less a part of their cultural and political history (Parkinson, 1998). They were not “open to dialogue on the issue,” since they associated the residents’ committee with “Sinn Féin/IRA.” As Daryl, one of Ballyreagh’s loyalist activists put it, “I’ll never sit down with people who have blood on their hands.” Yet, by offering what they presented as a friendly gesture welcoming nationalist bands, the loyalist residents partook in a kind of public dialogue.

Daryl, one of the loyalist activists, acknowledged a new awareness among unionists and loyalists of the power potential in persuasive methods (Parkinson, 1998). Referring to their decision to symbolically “invite” the Feast of the Assumption parade through the town, he said,

I’ll be honest with you. It’s something that the Protestant people should have been doing thirty years ago. I’ll be the first to admit this, and I’m sure you’ll agree with me. The Protestant people have always been reactionary rather than proactive. If anything happens reactive – bang, out in the streets, block the roads, that’s the way we’ll settle this.
In welcoming the Catholic feast day parade, Orange representatives intended to send the specific message conveyed in the following media statement,

We should like to make quite clear that, contrary to some nationalist fears, we respect the right for nationalists to walk in Ballyreagh. We believe we have found the answer to the parades issue. The key is tolerance. We have shown, by standing to the side of the road as nationalists prepared to walk their traditional route, that we welcome and respect their rights as the same rights that Protestants have to walk Ballyreagh. After all, we are all equal in our town, but if nationalist residents groups would only show the same tolerance in other areas we would have no parades problem and no need for a Parades Commission.21

The core of the argument contradicted a commonly held view that loyalists wanted to keep nationalists from marching while keeping the privilege for themselves, and it appealed to opponents in nationalist residents’ committees to cease their protests against Protestant parades in their respective towns.

By framing their actions as “tolerant,” (despite their refusal to dialogue directly) they appealed to a widely held value that might resonate with the worldviews of their opponents. If nothing else, they thought the decision to welcome the parade through the town might have caught their opponents off guard and robbed them of the ability to effectively critique a standard protest. Charlotte Ryan (1991) refers to this tactic as “absorption” (pp. 90–91) in her book on media strategies for SMOs, and Sharp (1973) calls it “political jiu jitsu” (p. 113). Matthew offered his interpretation of the event and its effectiveness.

I would say, they weren’t ready for it. It threw them a bit. They didn’t know what to say. They were expecting the road to be blocked or a big massive protest. We had a peaceful and dignified protest, and it wasn’t protesting against them. It was to highlight the fact that we were there, and we were allowing them to parade through this staunchly Protestant town. And they didn’t like it; there’s no doubt that they didn’t like it.

By limiting the number of participants, organizers intentionally designed the gesture to lessen intimidation, thus surprising their opponents and projecting the image of a tolerant loyalist community.

However, other interviews suggest that nationalist residents were not taken in by the loyalist residents’ tactic. The idea that Protestants claimed a position from which they could “allow” a Catholic parade through the town only heighten their own sense of frustration with Protestant triumphalism. They could not accept it as a genuine gesture interpreting it instead as if it were simply a failed attempt to block the parade.

Despite their cynicism over the loyalists’ methods, the nationalist residents’ committee had also used a persuasive tactic. When Gerard and other nationalists policed their own community at a nationalist parade in 1999, they intended to show the RUC that their heavy security measures were disproportionate and not
necessary. Gerard described the event and attributed its success to self-policing while laying responsibility for previous confrontations at the feet of the RUC.

There was a larger nationalist crowd in Ballyreagh than there’s ever been this number of years. Right? I gathered up . . . not even ten men. And, we policed our own people, and there wasn’t [clicks fingers]. Not a word. And the police, they agreed this year to stand back, and there was a couple of dozen invisible and ordinary clothed [officers], no riot squad. It was the most peaceful day in Ballyreagh for years upon years. Now, what does that tell you? It tells the nationalist people, when the RUC isn’t there in force to beat you in the street, we can enjoy ourselves. It was a carnival atmosphere. What are they going to do from here on in? Are they going to bring their heavy mob back in again, and say we need it? . . . But we proved this year that they were wrong, and we were right. They don’t need that [force] to police us.

In this interpretation, violent confrontations in previous years were a consequence of the RUC presence, not the other way around. Like the loyalists’ framing of tolerance through their welcoming of the nationalist parade, the nationalist residents furthered their discourse of equality and respect by insisting, through their collective action, on respect from the RUC.

In short, both nationalists and loyalists pursued strategies that presented symbolic and persuasive appeals. Each side acknowledged that their tactics were technically aimed at persuading their opponent, though they were pessimistic about their effectiveness on hard-line activists.

**Ballyreagh: Appealing to Third Parties**

Nationalist and loyalist activists were just as concerned about persuading third parties, such as other townspeople and media audiences across Northern Ireland and the world. Both sides used symbolic gestures to rally public opinion against their opponents. Nationalist leaders were willing to negotiate, loyalists were not; thus, nationalists were left to deal with third parties such as the RUC, the Parades Commission and the local population. Meanwhile, unionists and loyalists were concerned about improving their public image, both domestically and internationally.

In an appeal to third parties, nationalists claimed the moral high ground by showing their willingness to participate in dialogue. On several occasions, representatives from the nationalist residents’ committee spoke with representatives of the Parades Commission to register their concerns with the commission. Also, according to Gerard, their demonstration of self-policing to the RUC was aimed not only at the RUC but at other parties in the field of discourse, including the loyalist residents’ committee and third parties outside the local scene.

We showed this year without a doubt; we’ve shown not only to the RUC, we’ve shown it to all of the people in [this region] or anybody from outside that wanted to see it or view it.
We’ve proved . . . [that nationalists] can go and enjoy their day with a carnival atmosphere, with women and youngsters smiling, the whole lot. They can enjoy themselves and go on about their business without interference from anybody. We proved that point this year.

Similarly, loyalists claimed they were displaying tolerance and being good neighbors by welcoming a Catholic parade. Each of these approaches can be considered persuasive in that they intentionally sought to present opponents and third parties with a positive image and a moral stance that they hoped would resonate with prevailing norms of justice and civility.

Appeals to third parties can, of course, introduce an element of coercion. In this context, persuasion is still less coercive than violence, but it raises the question of whether the minds of opponents are being changed or whether outcomes are the product of moral, economic, or political pressure by third parties. This is not entirely surprising since, as we mentioned earlier, conflict methods fall along an analytical continuum between the poles of coercion, persuasion, and reward.

One nationalist leader, attempting to persuade third parties to withdraw support from the loyalist organization, contended in a media statement that “Those who are seeking to raise tensions in an attempt to score cheap political points should be shunned by all right-thinking people . . . .” The goal of this appeal was not primarily to persuade opponents in the loyalist residents’ committee but to indirectly coerce them into compliance under pressure from third parties. Similarly, loyalists also intended to portray their opponents negatively, hoping to improve their own image, expose nationalist intolerance, and rally support for Orange Order parades locally and across Northern Ireland.

Daryl explained the tactic:

The only way you can put your point across in any country is to get the media there. Now, in us telling the media that we were going to block the road, the media were there. And then, whenever we stood to the side of the road, the media were going, ‘What’s happening here? . . . It was symbolic . . . that blockage was removed, not by the RUC, but by our tolerance in moving to the side of the road by ourselves and then showing the hand of friendship and letting them walk through.

The tactic was, in one sense, choreographed to send a message to opponents, but their attention to the media shows their intent to send a message to a broader audience. As if to highlight the effectiveness of the tactic, Daryl contrasted it with a coercive option that they dismissed in favor of their persuasive tactic.

I could have that parade stopped in the morning if I wanted to. I could bring tractor trailers [in to block the road] . . . . We have to show the rest of the world that we are tolerant, and we are allowing this parade to go ahead. And, all we are asking for is that we’re allowed to [walk our route uncontested] – I think that would make more of an effect than stopping them from walking.
Thus, the loyalists clearly considered a symbolic action to be potentially superior to the use of force. Loyalists were, on one level, communicating with nationalists by suggesting that they offered “the hand of friendship,” but they also emphasized a desire to “show the rest of the world” that they were tolerant. By symbolically claiming the moral high ground, they hoped to influence public opinion to support their right to parade on public roads, thus coercing residents’ committees across Northern Ireland to abandon their protests under pressure of public opinion.

The persuasion of third parties illustrates the power of collective action as a form of discourse. Not only do movement leaders present frames to mobilize movement participants; they are also used to recruit third-party allies to the cause or at least to gain support in the broader culture and sociopolitical context. Movement actions themselves convey messages and become vehicles of persuasion.

Loyalist and nationalist activists in Ballyreagh made verbal statements to the media expressing their grievances and called on authorities such as the Parades Commission or the RUC to change policies. However, their comments often interfaced meaningfully with collective action events. Both the commentary and the event were designed to work together in publicly presenting a persuasive argument. The success of an action event also relies at least partially on the presentation of an argument to a configuration of foes and allies in a multi-organization field of conflict (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Klandermans, 1992). Space concerns do not allow us to pursue this subject in depth, but by choreographing events in such a way that appeals to opponents and third parties, SMOs can seek a favorable response from an opponent or much-needed outside support.

Loughbregan

Loughbregan is a small rural town with a primarily Catholic and nationalist population where Protestants make up only between 1% and 5% of the town’s population. In our discussion of its parading disputes, we will refer to three main groups: Protestants, moderate Catholics, and republicans or the residents’ committee. This categorization is based on the closeness of the enclave-like Protestant community and the distinction many subjects made between the majority of Catholics in Loughbregan and a smaller group of politicized and vocal republicans.

Loughbregan’s Moderate Catholics

Politically, most of Loughbregan’s Catholics were moderate nationalists who tended to vote for the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). By
moderate, we mean they were only marginally inclined to political issues, or were not radicalized. Those who were politically inclined did not support an armed campaign but preferred a united Ireland achieved through constitutional means. They were concerned about social issues (such as public services and economic development), preserving Irish culture, and maintaining Loughbregan as a cultural and economic hub for surrounding smaller towns.

Moderate Catholics were sensitive to the plight of local Protestants or expressed a measured attitude toward the local Orange lodge and culture. Mark, a local educator, commented, “The vast majority of people are tolerant, decent, middle-of-the-road, tax-paying, law-abiding citizens. It doesn’t mean they love the Orange Order. It doesn’t mean they want to stand in the streets and throw stones at them.” Some expressed regret over the town’s lack of diversity, but in general, Loughbregan’s moderate Catholics were primarily concerned with non-political issues, and the small Protestant population did not merit much attention. When asked, these subjects spoke favorably of their Protestant neighbors, though some expressed reservations over Orangeism at large. These residents also clearly distinguished themselves from the town’s more radical Republican element.

**Loughbregan’s Republicans**

A smaller but vocal number of republicans, those most involved in parading issues, have given the town a reputation as a republican stronghold. Because of IRA operations, the town was classified for many years as a “no go area” for off-duty RUC personnel. Still, the security presence in the town was heavy, and a number of republican activists and IRA volunteers were killed and were commemorated by an engraved mirror on one interviewee’s living room wall with the title “Loughbregan Roll of Honor.” Besides shootings, republican activists endured heavy surveillance and intimidation from security forces. They were often stopped in their cars, their houses were searched, and as Patrick explained, they were often detained for interrogation and intimidation. They also had difficulties with employment because employers associated them with paramilitarism. Republicans in Loughbregan were familiar with struggle, and it played an integral role in their identity.

For the republican activists, grievances over parades were part of a larger campaign that has intensified since the 1994 cease-fires. So, as with parading disputes in Portadown and Belfast, the Loughbregan residents’ committee asked the Orange Order to consult with them before holding parades. Kathy, a middle-aged secretary and SDLP activist, explained that protesting parades served to “channel the energies of the foot-soldiers of the IRA, maybe into something which they thought was positive. They were still fighting the fight, but they
weren’t fighting it with guns; they were doing it in a different way.” Nationalist protesters were participating in a broader struggle through local solidarity campaigns, as Áine, an articulate republican activist, suggested: “To me, . . . the parades conflict is like a microcosm of the wider conflict in this society, and until that is resolved, the wider conflict won’t be resolved.” For these activists, parading contained familiar and persistent themes: Protestant triumphalism, collusion between security forces and the Orange Order, British political subterfuge, and intimidation by the security forces.

Thus, activists expressed general grievances by protesting the Orange parades that passed through their town. For the most part, they were not irreconcilably troubled by the local lodge and band, though some residents had problems with the parade passing the Catholic chapel, especially during Mass. Patrick expressed his frustration at the security operation that tended to accompany the Orange parade.

When [two or three bands come for a competition], there’s dozens . . . [of the police] landrovers on the hill, and you’ll see an odd landrover around the town, but the park and the backways are also full of landrovers. And, there’s army dropped in and lying in the ditches; . . . this town’s under siege whenever it happens.

Large security operations intensified the view among many republicans that “the RUC are the armed wing of the Orange Order,” not some kind of neutral enforcers of just law. They assigned a similar partisanship to the Parades Commission. From their perspective, the RUC was protecting a parade that might be compared, as Áine put it, to a Ku Klux Klan parade passing through Harlem.

Yet, the Loughbregan Orange lodge was not considered a threat to Catholic residents, partly because of the small size of the Protestant population. Some residents, however, still considered parading a form of triumphalism or a “coat trailing” exercise that flaunted Protestant historical ascendancy. Loughbregan’s activist residents thus added resisting Orange parades to the repertoire of Easter parades, hanging tricolours, “ban the RUC” posters, and black flags. Attempts to engage the local Orange lodge in dialogue and their subsequent blocking of parades were born out of the same demand for equality and respect that motivated Ballyreagh’s nationalist residents’ committee. However, for Loughbregan’s nationalists, their campaign was mostly symbolic of their solidarity with other nationalist residents’ groups across Northern Ireland, just as Ballyreagh’s loyalist residents’ committee declared solidarity with Portadown’s Orangemen.

**Loughbregan’s Protestants**

Like many loyalists in Ballyreagh, Loughbregan’s Protestants considered themselves under siege. An exodus of Protestants in the latter half of the last
century and an in-migration of Catholics from Belfast shifted the makeup of the local population. Today, Protestants make up only 1% to 5% of the population, leaving few Protestant-owned businesses. Diminishing numbers and cultural differences made them feel marginalized in Loughbregan. Most claimed that, over the past thirty years, many Protestants left the town under varying levels of intimidation ranging from boycotts, vandalism, property damage, arson, and bombing. Even if not threatened directly or told to move on, war-weariness eventually set in. Attacks on Protestants included vandalism and arson at the public primary school, burnt shops, broken windows, attacks on the local Orange hall, and the burning of the Presbyterian church hall. Thus, some of Loughbregan’s Protestants saw themselves as a kind of remnant who remained through force of will.

Challenges to Orange parades locally and elsewhere only heightened Protestants’ sense of alienation. Jim, an Orange leader in Loughbregan, observed that

Since [the first year of conflict over the] Drumcree [parade] and the marching season, yes, [community relations] have deteriorated even worse I think. I don’t go up to the town for a social drink now, because I feel almost it’s a bit enemy territory now. That’s terrible to say that about your own town, but we do feel that it’s enemy territory now unfortunately.

Protestants interpreted resistance to Orange parades as a clear sign that they were not welcome in Loughbregan. The following exchange with Harold, an Orangemen who grew up in Loughbregan but has moved to a nearby town, encapsulates the importance of parading.

Harold: The majority of the time, people just get on with their lives, you know, and there is no bother. It’s hard to explain, but there’s a general unwillingness if you like to tolerate or show any respect to the Orange or Protestant tradition, you know. Anything that goes on in Loughbregan, festivals or anything, it’s all geared to the Roman Catholic community. Now, fair enough, it is the Roman Catholic town, but you know, I personally just think that if they could tolerate us for two days a year, you know? . . . I don’t really think that’s asking a big lot.

Interviewer: What do Protestants want? It sounds like you’re saying a certain level of respect, a certain level of . . .

Harold: Just to tolerate Protestants in their midst. These residents, whenever they talk about they don’t want any Orange Parades . . . They just don’t want any Protestants . . . If a town has no Orange parades, it sort of becomes just a Republican ghetto. It’s sort of another form of ethnic cleansing if you like. I know it’s not a very extreme case, but it’s just another wee way of telling you you’re not wanted here. You know?

Interviewer: So what is it that they want?

Harold: I would say the Sinn Féin Republican people just want a one-hundred percent Republican town, you know. Now, a lot of other Roman Catholics are happy enough to live with their neighbours and don’t have a problem with it . . .
Interviewer: And they’re pretty deliberate about that?

Harold: Oh, yeah. Now, they would probably tell you they want to live in peace, but you know, they’d be smashing your windows that night.

For Harold and other Protestants in Loughbregan, parading was a central expression of Protestant identity, and its importance was probably heightened for Loughbregan’s Protestants since they had few other public outlets for the expression of their culture. They were quick to point out that they held only a few brief parades, that they were locals and that, in any event, they were entitled to express their culture in a public space.

Like loyalists and Orangemen in Ballyreagh, Loughbregan’s Orange lodge also declined to meet with the residents’ committee claiming that the latter were closely connected with Sinn Féin, and therefore the IRA. On principle, they would not negotiate with terrorists. As James put it, “You know that if you take a Sinn Féin man, like, he has maybe blood on his hands.” They also claimed that parades had intentionally been made contentious by the republican movement, and that parading in Loughbregan was a matter of local republicans “getting on the band wagon” of a broader nationalist campaign that did not necessarily apply to Loughbregan, a notion echoed by some moderate Catholics. Protestants felt that nationalists’ grievances were unwarranted, and they resented their few parades being made into a political issue.

Unlike our earlier characterization of the residents’ committee, Orange members emphasized that their activities were not part of larger Northern Ireland campaigns; they did not intend to stir up trouble, and recently have limited parades to the most traditional annual ones. However, despite their insistence that their parades were not political, some of their comments resembled Orange Order arguments made elsewhere: they had a legal, and therefore moral, right to walk “down the Queen’s highway.” Jim, the Orange leader felt that the lodge had a right to walk through the town, and besides, in his opinion, they were not disturbing anyone.

You might say to me, “Why do you want to parade through a Catholic town? That’s fair enough, yes, but it’s not a matter of parading through the town . . .. I see it as a right, something I’ve been doing for thirty years . . .. You know, why should someone up there tell me that I can’t walk through my own town?”

Having introduced the parties to parading disputes in Loughbregan, we turn now to a detailed look at how recent parading disputes have been conducted.

Loughbregan: Avoidance, Persuasion and the Paradox of Repression

The first sign of friction over parading in Loughbregan appeared when several nationalists standing across the road blocked a Royal Black Preceptory parade.
in August 1996. That situation was temporarily resolved when the Orangemen offered to shorten their parade, but the following summer a nationalist residents’ committee was established to insist on dialogue with the Orange Order over parades. The local lodge declined to walk through the town and later issued a statement to a local paper in which they stated that

> We as law-abiding members of Loughbregan LOL 321, in the light of the civil unrest and the utilization of the forces of the Crown and in the interest of peace within our community for this year will reluctantly waive the lawful right to walk through the mainstreet of our hometown on the annual 12th July morning parade, 1997. We have not compromised our lawful right to parade the main shopping street of our home town. This action has been taken to avoid the enemies of our Protestant heritage being given the opportunity to create a situation resulting in civil disorder . . .

Some interviewees reported that a large crowd gathered (perhaps two hundred people) to protest but that the Orangemen exited their hall and walked away from the crowd in the center of the town. They then boarded a bus and were taken to a nearby town to participate in a parade. The Royal Black Preceptory also decided not to hold their August parade. The Parades Commission restricted the Twelfth parades in 1998 and 1999, and the lodge processed away from the town center again in 1998. Finally in 1999, there was no physical resistance to an Orange “church parade” held on the day before the traditional Twelfth rallies. The church parade was allowed a certain latitude by the residents because of its religious overtones. The Royal Black Preceptory conducted another church parade later in the month at which residents observed but did not interfere. The RUC scaled back its security coverage for that event, and it was hailed by the local RUC Superintendent as a “yardstick” for an upcoming nationalist parade in Ballyreagh.

Though the Orange lodge and residents had not engaged in violent or highly coercive conflict, parading in Loughbregan was still considered contentious when our interviews were conducted. The tactics of turning away from the town center or not parading adopted by the Loughbregan Orangemen on some occasions were not as intentional and direct as those adopted by the Orange leadership in Ballyreagh. Because of their minority status in the town, the Loughbregan Orangemen felt that they had few options open. To engage in dialogue with the residents’ committee would mean sacrificing closely held principles, but to use any method with coercive undertones might provoke retaliation such as vandalism, and they did not feel that they could bring that hardship on their Protestant neighbors.

The Orangemen’s decision to turn away from nationalist protestors might be considered a form of avoidance as opposed to coercion, persuasion or reward, and we do not want to present avoidance as a source of power. Conflict scholars
have rightly warned about the destructive potential of avoiding conflict and thus simultaneously failing to address the conditions that fuel conflict in the first place (Simmel, 1971). However, we can distinguish between the avoidance in everyday life that Terrell A. Northrup (1992) refers to as cultural “collusion” that perpetuates the deep cultural divisions that exacerbate identity conflicts, on the one hand, and avoidance used *as a method* within a conflict situation, on the other. In the former, segregation perpetuates psychological bases for conflict, while in the latter, avoiding confrontation is one strategic choice among others.

Some Protestants in Loughbregan saw the Orange Order’s decisions to avoid confrontation with the residents’ committee as an unfortunate but necessary consequence of limited options. Their decisions to limit their parading were influenced by fear, but there is evidence that turning away from protestors was also strategic and effective. Loughbregan’s Orangemen were not aggressively engaged in public discursive contests with the nationalist residents, but they were able to manipulate their image and that of the nationalist protestors while minimizing the potential for retaliation against their Protestant neighbors.

The use of avoidance was effective partially because it magnified their numerical weakness and positively influenced community interpretations of Orange Order methods, especially those of moderate Catholics. Not showing up for their 1997 parade also empowered the Orange Order and the Protestant community. One longtime Protestant resident whose family owned a business for many years in Loughbregan, stated,

> Well, I mean the situation in Loughbregan was defused by the band not appearing. All these people were left standing basically with egg on their face because there was nobody there to protest at, and if there’s nobody there to protest at, I mean, what do you do? You go home.

She implied that the methods were effective because they successfully portrayed the residents’ committee as ineffective. Beth, a social worker, suggested that the ploy was not lost on the residents’ committee. “I think the Orange Lodge changed its mind and didn’t walk, and that annoyed [the residents’ committee] more because they were just sitting there and nobody actually came.” By eschewing the rules of confrontation upon which the residents relied, the Orange lodge made the protestors appear impotent, as local Orange leader Jim explained:

> So, the first year we decided to go to [another town], and we sort of took the sting out of the whole thing in Loughbregan, the whole parade issue you know, and we sort of gained the high moral ground, for want of a better word. They were left here, and we didn’t show up basically.

A prominent Protestant, Alex, also picked up on this interpretation when he reflected on the humor and impact of the Orange Order’s decision to walk away from the protestors and board a bus in 1997.
The protest committee, the residents' committee, was lined up in the upper square and sort of saying, ‘They’re going to be late . . . where are they?’ I really thought it was rather clever. I think it went down well locally. The Orangemen were for once not stirring it up, and if these other fellows had a cold wait or that sort of thing, it would serve them right.

Overall, Protestants understood the Orangemen’s dilemma and felt their decisions to turn away from confrontational situations was wise and even clever. From a Protestant perspective, avoidance turned out to be a subtle way of exerting influence in an otherwise intimidating situation. They discovered that their actions were useful in boosting their image at the expense of the residents’ committee.

Did it do the residents’ committee any harm? The vast demographic differences between Protestants and Catholics meant that the residents’ committee’s solidarity campaign to insist on negotiations with the local Orange Order was cast in a negative light. Under these circumstances, the residents appeared autocratic and unreasonable. By not provoking open confrontation, the local Orange lodge highlighted this disparity and gained the approval of moderate Catholics by taking advantage of the paradox of repression that we have discussed elsewhere:

In an asymmetrical conflict, when the opponent representing the status quo uses force (psychological, physical, economic, or otherwise) to repress its nonviolent opponents, the repression often weakens the regime’s authority . . . . Paradoxically, the more the regime applies force, the more citizens and third parties are likely to become disaffected with the regime to the extent that the regime disintegrates from internal dissent (Smithey & Kurtz, 1999, p. 111).

The Orange lodge minimized the parading issue, thus removing a target against which the residents’ committee could agitate. The choice by the Orange lodge highlighted the vulnerability of the small Protestant population and portrayed the residents’ committee as ruffians.

The lodge’s decisions to avoid face-to-face conflict in public had a significant effect on moderate Catholics who were uncomfortable with the residents’ committee’s protests and felt they were irrelevant, unjustified or offensive. Kathy, a Catholic secretary and native Loughbregan, admitted:

Now, my own personal opinion was that the Orangemen were really entitled to walk here. It was their local district, and so long as they were not causing any offence to anyone else, I didn’t really see any reason why they shouldn’t. In fact, if anything, the [nationalist] protesters then almost became more offensive than the [Orange] marchers.

A leader in the residents’ committee also acknowledged that if the committee persisted too long in its protests, it would risk irritating other Catholics in town; the Orange lodge’s tactics exacerbated those tensions.
Indeed, our data shows that the residents’ campaign, and the involvement of
offensive and contentious “outsiders” who came in to support it frustrated
moderate Catholics in Loughbregan. For both Protestants and most moderate
Catholics, outsider nationalists and republicans were seen as either intimidating
or offensive; in contrast, local Orangemen were afforded the benefit of the
doubt. Betty and Tom, a long-time Protestant couple in Loughbregan, made a
clear distinction between outsiders, whom they referred to as “trouble makers,”
and the town’s locals. Similarly, June, the hairdresser, who had completely
forgotten about an impending Orange parade, was crossing the street on her
way to work when she saw the parade being blocked.

I just looked out at the [nationalist protestors] that were standing and thought, ‘You stupid
sods. There’s not one of you’se out there with a brain.’ . . . Half of them wouldn’t be out
of their beds before one o’clock in the afternoon. These were people that did not live in
the town. I objected to them objecting, and that really pissed me off.

June also expressed her frustration at the nationalist residents’ committee, and
commended the Orangemen for their tactic:

There was no point aggravating the situation, and I don’t know where it would have ended
if they had walked on that day . . . it just doesn’t bear thinking what would have happened
because there were too few Orangemen really and . . . I just thought, well they proved
themselves that they were man enough to say, “Right, we’re not even going to take you
on; we’re just going to go,” and I thought, I had to take my hat off to the Orangemen. I
thought “Good on you; you didn’t push your luck.” Not that I’m saying they shouldn’t
have stood their ground. I don’t mean that. They were big enough to say to themselves,
“Fair enough, we’re not going to push the issue; we’re still going to go out and have a
good day.”

Others characterized the lodge’s decision as “reasonable” or did not feel that
blocking the small local lodge’s parade was warranted. These opinions were
embodied in a petition that was circulated among Catholics requesting that the
Orange Order parades be allowed to continue. The petition was then presented
at a public meeting organized by the residents’ committee. There were other
instances in interviews in which moderate Catholics argued on behalf of local
Protestants, saying or implying that they had a right to parade, “because it is
their town too” or “because they’ve always lived here.”

After two years of protests, when the residents’ committee tried to block the
Orange lodge’s parades, the committee began to unravel. There were likely
some organizational problems, but the interview data also provide reason to
believe that the Orangemen’s strategy contributed to the decline of the
campaign. When it became clear that the Orange lodge would probably continue
its use of avoidance, the committee tried to adjust its strategy, but they were
unable to agree on new tactics. Simply observing the parades during the summer
of 1999 seemed like an unacceptable compromise to activists like Patrick and Áine who felt that noticeable public protests were necessary.

Like the first year, the Orange parade didn’t turn up, and they said if that was to happen that we’d go down and protest outside the police barracks for a half an hour. Now, there was about eighty to one hundred people at that time, and the majority of them wanted to go to the barracks to have a protest. The committee members refused to do that. I don’t know whether they were afraid of having their photographs taken or whatever, but that was the outcome so the committee, the residents’ committee, is practically [non-existent] now.

Internal leadership problems and competing interests apparently played an important role in stealing the campaign’s fire, but the lack of Orange resistance also seems to have contributed. The campaign lost its momentum when the number of participants diminished. Arthur, a Catholic pub owner, explained, “If the Orangemen are left to their own and forgot about, people lose interest in them.” The Orange lodge may have facilitated disinterest among some nationalist and republican activists through their strategic avoidance.

Between the paradox of repression, which may have encouraged the residents to tone down their activities, and the Orange lodge’s strategy of minimizing the object of the campaign’s efforts, the residents’ committee was unable to remain effective. Loughbregan’s Orange lodge did not engage in a highly strategic campaign using persuasive methods, but they benefited from the elements of persuasion harnessed by their strategy of avoidance.

This scenario amounts to a discursive process in which the tactical choices of opponents transformed public understanding of the conflict. Here again, we assert that methods matter. The local Orangemen in Loughbregan were not attempting to transmit a highly developed argument like the Ballyreagh loyalist residents’ association, but Loughbregan’s Orange lodge did choreograph their actions to take advantage of a power disparity. Although motivated in part by fear, parading away from their traditional route enabled the Orangemen to persuasively portray the residents’ committee as unreasonable and evoke sympathy from moderate Catholics.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have focused on strategic choices made by the Orange Order and nationalist and loyalist activists in Loughbregan and Ballyreagh because they reflect an interesting transformation of conflict methods across Northern Ireland. As part of the politics of persuasion, partisans to parading disputes addressed adversaries and third parties by choosing persuasive tactics in attempting to change their opponents’ motivations and actions or to enlist the support of third party public opinion.
During the past three decades, a significant but incomplete transformation of the Troubles in Northern Ireland has included an increasing attention to the use of nonviolent methods such as persuasion and reward to carry on the struggle in a more constructive manner. Of particular significance has been a widened effort to engage in persuasion, i.e., to alter peoples’ viewpoints through a process of empathetic reflexivity at most, and through shrewd public relations at least.

We have presented three ways in which the tactics employed contained coercive components but have also been adapted to persuasive ends. First, local loyalists and nationalists intentionally used persuasive methods to send messages to opponents. Second, they also appealed to third parties in order to improve their image and bring pressure to bear on adversaries. Finally, in one of the cases, decisions by the local Orange lodge to avoid conflict with a nationalist residents’ committee exerted influence on their moderate Catholic neighbors by portraying themselves as harmless. Their strategy of avoidance proved persuasive in that it evoked sympathy among moderate nationalist residents. By demonstrating the way in which parading events were proactively designed and executed and retrospectively interpreted, we have shown that collective action methods can be mechanisms of discourse and that the quality of the methods are relevant to the transmission of discursive messages.

Although the participants interviewed in our parading conflicts did not engage in direct negotiations or reach mutually acceptable arrangements, each side avoided the extreme polarization that accompanies violence. Indeed, the use of symbolic persuasive methods in a public space is itself a kind of dialogue. Many methods, of course, are neither purely persuasive nor purely coercive (Kriesberg, 1998; Sharp, 1973), and political movements in Northern Ireland often use a combination of methods, though there is an ongoing shift away from coercion and toward persuasion.

The comments of one young Orangeman, Alistair Patterson, presented in a BBC Northern Ireland television production on the Orange Order (Devlin, 1999), illustrates the shift toward more persuasive methods. More importantly, he connects the use of such strategies with a potential willingness to dialogue over parading issues.

I think the elements within the Orange order who have said really clearly, “No surrender,” we don’t want to give in to this or whatever, I think they’re starting to look at things in a different light. And, they’re starting to feel like, right, the way we’ve protested over these last few years, it hasn’t actually worked. It hasn’t gotten us anywhere. So, I think there’s some of them . . . coming around to [understanding] there’s different ways of going about this. We can get our message across, and it’s time to start talking to people, start talking to the media. I think maybe in a way we have made a mistake, you know, to say never; we’re never going to talk to the Parades Commission. Never is a long time.
A split in Orangeism over the blockading of neighborhoods and towns during the summer of 2000 by loyalists expressing solidarity with the Portadown Orangemen also illustrates the tension within the order over the best strategy and methods to adopt.

This project has been motivated by a desire to further the study of conflict methods and tactics at the grassroots level, but the findings also illuminate the role of collective action and variation in the type of methods used by SMOs in contests of meaning construction. We have used data collected in two Northern Ireland towns and brought social movement, conflict transformation and nonviolent action literatures together in an attempt to present a useful but undertheorized overlap between these fields. Collective action has, until recently, taken a back seat to concerns over social movements’ mobilization needs. Cultural approaches to social movement research have uncovered the complex ways in which meaning is constructed, not just by movement elites but through the interaction of narratives. Some scholars have begun to explore historical events and collective action as important moments that “punctuate” the collective construction of meaning. We elaborate on this approach by proposing that some methods of collective action can be considered part of the discursive process, especially attempts to persuade opponents or third parties.

Research from the conflict transformation and conflict resolution fields have provided analytical tools that distinguish persuasion, coercion, and reward as sources of power that become embodied in methods and tactics. By focusing on the use of persuasive methods in parading disputes, we have shown that collective action can be designed to send messages to opponents and third parties such as the media or international supporters. Loyalist and nationalist activists in Ballyreagh carefully choreographed their public actions in order to send messages to each other and especially to other parties such as the media and security forces. SMOs thus exhibit agency and wield the power of persuasion through their methodologies. Through persuasive collective action, they participate in a discourse that encompasses multiple parties to a dispute and can alter the field of alliances and oppositions in which they contend. In this way, Loughbregan’s small Orange lodge managed to evoke sympathy from moderate Catholics in their town and thus robbed the nationalist residents’ committee of some advantage.

We believe similar research that incorporates the type of methods into events analysis can ultimately address a range of important issues such as how movements arrive at the use of certain strategies and methods. Historical and cultural factors are bound to constrain the range of methods used by SMOs, but they can also provide sources of inspiration for clever innovations. Similarly, individual biographies are likely to predispose some participants to certain methods.
and prejudice them against others. The nature of collective action is also likely to have profound effects on individuals who participate in collective action events, either inspiring them and deepening their commitment or alienating them (Smithey, 1995). Thus, choice of methods probably plays a role in the internal meaning construction of a movement. Our conversations with Protestants in Loughbregan indicated that some of them took a certain pleasure in having behaved “cleverly” by avoiding open confrontation with nationalist protestors. Additional attention should also be given to the fact that conflict scenarios are multi-organizational fields in which a range of opponents and audiences interact in the process of conducting and socially constructing conflict. The configuration of opponents in the field will inform the choice, deployment and effectiveness of collective action methods.

Finally, social movement scholars should also marshal the research suggested here and join with conflict resolution scholars in addressing the effectiveness of various methods and combinations of methods for reaching movement goals and the implications for the outcomes of conflict scenarios. Our examination of local parading disputes in Northern Ireland does not have the scope necessary to make an authoritative assessment of constructive or destructive outcomes at this stage in Northern Ireland’s history. However, we hope we have demonstrated that some local parading disputes reflect a much broader, though perhaps temporary, shift away from violent methods toward persuasion in the form of constitutional politics and grassroots activism.

NOTES

1. On the framing approach see the classic article by Snow et al. (1986) and further developments in the area (see Benford & Snow, 2000). On the cultural analysis of social movements, see esp. Ansell (1997); Benford and Snow (2000); Ellingson (1995); Kane (2000); Polletta (1998); Sewell (1996); Steinberg (1999); Swidler (1995). The conflict studies on which we rely come in two related streams: the conflict transformation and resolution literature (see Coser, 1956; Deutsch & Coleman, 2000; Kriesberg, 1998; Lederach, 1997; Weiner, 1998), and the nonviolence perspective from Gandhi ([1945]1987) and developed by Gene Sharp and others (Sharp, 1973; Sharp, 1999; Ackerman & Kruegler, 1994; Teixera 1999).

2. The distinctions between nationalism and republicanism or loyalism and unionism are often not clear, and usage is contested, changing from context to context (Bryan, 2000, p. 15), but we offer a brief explanation here for readers uninitiated in Northern Ireland politics (see also McGarry & O’Leary, 1995; Ruane & Todd, 1996). In its broadest sense, nationalism, refers to the universe of political positions that advocate a united Ireland. More specifically, “nationalist” refers to those people, primarily Catholic, whose political goals emphasize civil equality for all, especially Catholics. Many nationalists value Gaelic culture and a united Ireland but tend to prefer pluralistic and democratic political means. “Republicans” are nationalists who insist on equality and a
united Ireland but have been willing to use both violent and political means. In this paper, we will tend to use the broad sense of the term nationalism, as when we refer to nationalist residents’ committees. However, we will also refer to republicans when individuals have connections to republican organizations such as Sinn Féin, the IRA or to radical elements in local nationalist politics.

Though the analogy is not perfect, nationalism is to republicanism as unionism is to loyalism. In its broadest sense, “unionism” refers to a commitment to Northern Ireland’s remaining in the United Kingdom. In its particular sense, unionism refers to a stance institutionalized in political parties (e.g. Ulster Unionist Party and the Democratic Unionist Party) that focuses on Northern Ireland’s membership in the United Kingdom, British identity, and more importantly, the relationship to the crown (Hennessey, 1996; Miller, 1978; Ruane & Todd, 1996). “Loyalism” refers to an ideology or cultural stance, held by many Protestants who insist on Northern Ireland’s remaining part of the United Kingdom while also defending Protestant culture and identity. Loyalists’ cultural commitments may include Protestant evangelicalism and a contractual or covenantal view of their relationship to the British crown (Brewer & Higgins, 1998; Whyte, 1990). Like republicanism, the term “loyalism” often refers to extreme unionists, sometimes including paramilitary organizations. (However, in the peace process, contemporary working-class republicanism and loyalism have both exhibited an openness to constitutional politics.)

We will tend to refer to “unionism” as a branch of constitutional politics, and “loyalism” for activists such as loyalist residents’ committees and the Orange Order.

3. “Loughbregan” and “Ballyreagh” are pseudonyms.

4. We recognize the Weberian distinction between power and authority, but our use of the term power has a much broader meaning. Persuasion and reward roughly correspond with what Weber calls authority while coercion may approximate Weber’s concept of power (Bell, 1999; Sharp, 1973).

5. Our conceptualization of nonviolence extends the Sharpian model to more fully incorporate a relational feature: the state of future relations (constructive or destructive) between opponents. We propose that methods should be judged not just on the manner in which they achieve “success” but the extent to which the methods promote mutually agreed outcomes. Nonviolent methods may incorporate coercion and still prove more constructive than violent methods that employ coercion, but those instances are presumably less constructive than nonviolent methods that aim to persuade or convert the opponent.

6. Social psychologists have also made important contributions to the study of persuasion and attitude change, though we will not address those sources in this article (see Chaiken, Gruenfeld & Judd, 2000).

7. Kriesberg (1998, p. 119, n. 2) points out that similar tripartite classifications are common in the literature. Deutsch (1973) has also made a similar connection between methods and outcomes, distinguishing between cooperative and competitive processes. Sharp’s (1973) distinction between the mechanisms of conversion, accommodation and nonviolent coercion is also similar.

8. Persuasion and conversion, especially as conceptualized by Sharp, are related but not exactly the same. Persuasion may or may not involve a broader conversion of an opponent; conversion is a consequence of persuasion, but also goes beyond it. Sharp (1973) also acknowledges the constructive potential of conversion and accommodation to diminish “the likelihood of bitterness, hatred and desire for revenge,” factors that stand in the way of coexistence (p. 766).


11. An all-male Protestant organization dedicated to upholding the Protestant faith and British sovereignty in Northern Ireland, the Orange Order claims that it parades to witness to its faith and to commemorate historical events such as the Battle of the Somme and the Battle of the Boyne.

12. Observation and comments by some interviewees provide evidence of links between party political organizations (such as the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin) and local loyalist and nationalist residents’ organizations.


14. A few parades attract a great deal of attention, are prone to escalation and violence and thus tend to define the struggle. These hot spots include the Orange Order’s annual parades and protest marches in Portadown, the Apprentice Boys’ “Relief of Derry” parade in Derry/Londonderry and loyalist parades on the Ormeau Road in Belfast (Hughes, 1998).

15. In the period from 1985 to 1994, loyalist parades increased by almost 50% while republican parades increased by only 15% (Jarman & Bryan, 1996).

16. Symbols play a particularly notorious role in Northern Ireland (Bryson & McCartney, 1994). For a broader discussion of ritual and conflict see Benford and Kurtz (1987).

17. When snowball sampling produced few female interviewees, female referrals were specifically requested to bring female representation up to the level of 50% of male representations.

18. All names are pseudonyms.

19. The concept of “double minorities” is common in the literature on Northern Ireland (Byrne & Carter, 1996; FitzGerald, 1988; Whyte, 1990). Uninitiated readers might find Protestant unionist alienation counter-intuitive, but it plays a profound role in perpetuating conflict in the province (Dunn & Morgan, 1994; Miller, 1978).

20. The primary parading dispute in Northern Ireland is waged over a desire by members of the District Orange Lodge in Portadown to parade down a stretch of the primarily Catholic Garvagh Road. The dispute became highly contentious in 1995 when the lodge was temporarily prohibited from processing their traditional route. Violent clashes involving residents, Orangemen and heavily fortified security forces ensued in 1995 and subsequent years, sometimes spreading across Northern Ireland. Some will argue that comparisons between parading in Ballyreagh and Portadown are not accurate because they do not consider Ballyreagh a Protestant town but rather mixed.

21. Local newspapers are not cited as part of measures to protect the identity of respondents.

22. This is not to suggest that nationalist leaders felt that the RUC was a neutral third party. On the contrary, they considered the RUC to be an integral part of the system of British domination in Ireland and biased toward the Protestant community.
23. Black flags are used to protest the murder of Rosemary Nelson who died in a car bomb explosion and had served as a solicitor for the Garvaghy Road residents.

24. The Royal Black Preceptory is an all-male loyal organization that is related to the Orange Order.

25. See Anne Kane’s (2000) analysis of discursive battles within the Irish land movement that resulted in a constitutional and nonviolent strategy that led to the restoration of land rights to farmers.

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Nonviolent Collective Action as Discourse in Northern Ireland


