

April 19, 2016

Dear PPWers,

This is Chapter 1 of my book manuscript, *Contentious Rituals: Parading the Nation in Northern Ireland*, which examines why people participate in controversial ethno-religious parades that regularly polarize the Protestant and Catholic communities. Chapter 1 comes after an introduction that describes a Belfast parade and raises broad questions about ethnic conflict, contentious politics and mobilization, and culture. The chapter following it presents the history and politics of loyalist parades in more detail.

The chapter has two purposes. The first is to define and describe contentious ritual as a general category and provide examples to pique the interest of non-Northern Ireland specialists. So please let me know whether you find the definition satisfying, whether you think all the examples fit the definition, and whether the chapter effectively conveys the general applicability of the concept. (Also please tell me about contentious rituals from the cases that you know.) The second purpose is to briefly sketch the theoretical framework of the rest of the book. The goal here was to condense an entire dissertation chapter into a few paragraphs. Did it work?

I'm looking forward to the conversation.

Thanks,

Jonathan Blake

Chapter One

The Puzzle of Participation in Contentious Rituals

After the ban on the procession was lifted, people turned out in droves to take part. But the ritual's opponents would not relent. The next year, coordinated attacks left many dead and injured along the parade route.

At another procession, celebrants carried symbols held sacred by their rivals in a deliberate attempt to upset them. It worked. The members of the rival group were enraged, attacking the provocative ritual "as though," an onlooker observed, "they had drunk a chalice of serpents."

At yet another, opposition was so intense in the lead up to the parade that local government forbade it for fear of violence. A lawsuit on behalf of the participants made it to the highest court in the land; and though the court ruled in their favor, local conditions prevented the march from ever taking place.

Three processions, three bitter reactions: none in Northern Ireland. Yet like the parading there, these contentious rituals—Shia Ashura in Karbala, Iraq in 2003 and 2004; a Christian procession in Alexandria, then a Roman city, in 391 C.E.; and an attempted march by Neo-Nazis in Skokie, Illinois in 1977¹—blur the line between culture and politics. They are cultural action through and through, and, just as thoroughly, political action.

It would be easier to view events such as these as strictly cultural or strictly political, as supporters and opponents, respectively, as well as more neutral observers often do. But it would be inaccurate. Contentious rituals cannot be reduced to either culture or politics. As sociologist Ziad Munson argues, events can be simultaneously cultural and political, with neither diminishing the authenticity of the other. They "can speak in two voices."² In the American pro-life movement, he elaborates, "Events are not really political with a religious veneer or vice versa; instead, they are irreducibly political at the same time as they are irreducibly religious."³ This double-irreducibility is central to understanding contentious rituals because it is a source of their appeal and power.

In this chapter, I begin to unravel why this is so. After defining the term, I examine several patterns among contentious rituals. In highlighting the political aspects of many rituals, the examples present a puzzling feature of participation. Since the production of a public, political event is an archetypal collective action, why would anyone choose to take part? The scholarly literature suggests people are motivated by deeply-held beliefs or their material self-

¹ On Karbala: Michael Martinez and Aamer Madhani, "Freedom Puts Shiites on Road to Karbala; Millions Are Expected to Make Pilgrimage for Religious Holiday Outlawed by Hussein," *Chicago Tribune*, April 17, 2003; and Yochi J. Dreazen, "Scores Are Killed In Wave of Blasts At Shrines in Iraq," *Wall Street Journal*, March 3, 2004. On Alexandria: Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York: Norton, 2011), p. 90; Edward J. Watts, *The Final Pagan Generation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), pp. 1-2. On Skokie: Philippa Strum, *When the Nazis Came to Skokie: Freedom for Speech We Hate* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1999).

² Ziad W. Munson, *The Making of Pro-Life Activists: How Social Movement Mobilization Works* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 177.

³ Ziad W. Munson, "When a Funeral Isn't Just a Funeral: The Layered Meaning of Everyday Action," in Nancy T. Ammerman, ed., *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 126.

interest. But these explanations do not account for the special features of ritual that make it a distinct form of human behavior. I suggest that a better explanation for participation must be rooted in the ritual nature of the action. The chapter ends with a framework for understanding participation in contentious rituals that I will use for the rest of the book.

Politicized Ritual, Ritualized Politics

Edward Leach noted nearly fifty years ago “the widest possible disagreement as to how the word ritual should be understood.”⁴ Since then, the number of definitions has only increased.⁵ For some scholars, ritual is an exclusively religious phenomenon. Acts with secular concerns as their object, in this view, do not qualify.⁶ But, as critics of the restrictive definition illustrate, “these theological residues” lead to an overly narrow concept that obscures our understanding of a more general behavior.⁷ Other scholars define ritual very broadly, identifying it as an aspect of all social action or calling any repeated action a ritual.⁸ But, as critics of the expansive definition point out, the term loses its analytic bite when stretched so thin.⁹ I take a position in the middle. Following anthropologist David Kertzer, I define rituals as “symbolic behavior that is socially standardized and repetitive.”¹⁰ This definition is broad enough to include both religious and secular symbolic acts, but narrow enough to exclude certain actions and make the concept theoretically useful. Additionally, I restrict my analysis to rituals that are public and collective since these are most politically salient. Rituals that are conducted individually or in private, while important, are beyond the scope of this research.

A point that follows from this definition is that rituals are not only a feature of pre-modern societies and polities. They did not fade away with rationalization, economic

⁴ Edmund R. Leach, “Ritual,” in David L. Sills, ed., *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 13, (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 526.

⁵ The most comprehensive analyses of the concept of ritual are Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁶ See, for example, Jack Goody, “Religion and Ritual: The Definitional Problem,” *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (June 1961), p. 159; Max Gluckman, “Les Rites de Passage,” in Max Gluckman, ed., *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1962), pp. 22-23; Max Gluckman, *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), p. 251; Victor W. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 19; and Evan M. Zuesse, “Ritual,” in Lindsay Jones, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2005), p. 7834.

⁷ Robert E. Goodin, “Rites of Rulers,” *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (September 1978), p. 281. See also Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff, eds., *Secular Ritual* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1977).

⁸ See, for example, Edmund Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure*, 2nd ed. (London: Bell and Sons, 1964), p. 13. In a somewhat different sense, see Erving Goffman, *Interaction Rituals: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior* (New York: Pantheon, 1967). See the useful discussion in Andrew L. Roth, “‘Men Wearing Masks’: Issues of Description in the Analysis of Ritual,” *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (November 1995), pp. 315-320. For Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), all social interactions have elements of ritual, even if they are not repeated.

⁹ I agree with philosopher John Skorupski’s view: “What use does a term have which brings together a man shaking hands, a man praying to his god, a man refusing to walk under a ladder, a man clapping at the end of a concert, a man placing medicine on his crops? None at all.” John Skorupski, *Symbol and Theory: A Philosophical Study of the Theories of Religion in Social Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 171, quoted in Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by Jain Rite of Worship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 66. See also Robert Bocock, *Ritual in Industrial Society: A Sociological Analysis of Ritualism in Modern England* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974), p. 15.

¹⁰ David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 9.

development, or the “disenchantment of the world”: modern societies and states continue to practice rituals. In fact, many contemporary rituals that appear ancient—royal coronations, for instance—were invented in the modern era.¹¹

A central reason why rituals remain prominent in modern politics is that they are valuable resources for political actors. They can legitimate the status quo (or challenges to it), build solidarity, define a political reality, generate strong emotions, gather a crowd, represent a group, create common knowledge, sustain activists’ commitment, and make political claims.¹² All the while, rituals have three specific advantages for their organizers. They are seen by many as legitimate, culturally important forms of action, which makes them difficult for states to regulate. Their meaning is ambiguous and open to interpretation, which provides cover for performing otherwise unacceptable actions.¹³ Additionally, ambiguity increases the potential breadth of support since it gives people flexibility see what they want in the event.¹⁴ And rituals are appealing to potential participants and observers, which makes them an effective way to gather a crowd in the streets. These effects and advantages make rituals attractive to political actors—and troublesome for their political rivals. Therefore, rituals often become central objects of political

¹¹ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

¹² See Goodin, “Rites of Rulers”; Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in 19th Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*; Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*; Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Mabel Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Sean Wilentz, ed., *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics since the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Amitai Etzioni, “Toward a Theory of Public Ritual,” *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (March 2000), pp. 44-59; Michael Suk-Young Chwe, *Rational Ritual: Culture, Coordination, and Common Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Steven Pfaff and Guobin Yang, “Double-Edged Rituals and the Symbolic Resources of Collective Action: Political Commemorations and the Mobilization of Protest in 1989,” *Theory and Society*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (August 2001), pp. 539-589; and Amitai Etzioni and Jared Bloom, eds., *We Are What We Celebrate: Understanding Holidays and Rituals* (New York: NYU Press, 2004).

¹³ Charles Tilly, *The Contentious French* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 117, 313; Charles Tilly, *Contention and Democracy in Europe, 1650-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 31; Steven I. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 23-24; Pfaff and Yang, “Double-Edged Rituals.” For a more general argument on the power of “ritualization,” see Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*.

¹⁴ Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Routledge, 1985), p. 21; Kertzer, *Ritual, Power, and Politics*, pp. 69-75.

contestation. I call these *contentious rituals*.¹⁵

Contentious rituals are repeated, symbolic actions that make political claims and that are actively challenged by others in society. A ritual can be considered contentious not merely when it makes a contested claim, but when the ritual act is itself contested. Not all political rituals, therefore, are contentious rituals.¹⁶ Hegemonic state rituals, for instance, are clearly political, but are not contentious rituals, because their performances are not widely challenged.¹⁷ A parade celebrating the Fourth of July certainly makes a political claim, but not one that is widely challenged in American society.¹⁸

Context is the defining factor. A similar display of American patriotism in Afghanistan would face popular contestation. A gay pride parade in San Francisco or Tel Aviv is far less contentious than the same parade in parts of the American South or Jerusalem, where they are

¹⁵ My concept of contentious rituals, and the relationship between rituals and conflict that it implies, differs from two prominent views of rituals and conflict: the channeling of conflict thesis and the ritualization of conflict thesis. The “channeling of conflict” thesis suggests that in conflictual environments, social tension can be sublimated into “rites of rebellion” instead of violence. These rituals represent the conflict and allow participants to blow off steam, thus managing tension and preventing violence. See Max Gluckman, *Rituals of Rebellion in South-East Africa* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1954); René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); and Etzioni, “Toward a Theory of Public Ritual.”

Whereas the “channeling of conflict” thesis views rituals as conflict, the “ritualization of conflict” thesis views conflict as ritual. This approach seeks to explain the recurrent features and patterns in violence. Stanley Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 230, calls it the “routinization and ritualization of collective violence,” arguing that these concepts “may help us to perceive some of the organized, anticipated, programmed, and recurring features and phases of seemingly spontaneous, chaotic, and orgiastic actions of the mob.” Violence, in this view, is understood as a ritual performance with actors following a script. See also Natalie Zemon Davis, “Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France,” *Past & Present*, Vol. 59 (May 1973), pp. 51-91; and Rogers Brubaker and David D. Laitin, “Ethnic and Nationalist Violence,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 24 (1998), pp. 444-446. In some societies, warfare is so standardized and symbolic that there is a “special permanent site for the hostilities,” i.e., a stage. “In many of these cases,” notes Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, p. 130, “as soon as an individual is seriously wounded, hostilities cease and a round of post-battle ritual begins.” See also the discussion of dueling and other forms of limited, staged violence in Randall Collins, *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), chap. 5, “Staging Fair Fights.”

These two perspectives offer important insights on the causes and nature of violence, but are distinct from the approach taken here—though not necessarily incompatible. Rituals, in the first view, are a substitute for conflict; in the second view, conflict becomes standardized and repetitive (i.e., ritual-like). In my view, contentious rituals are a form of conflict. They are a way in which groups express their rights and interests and make claims that bear on the rights and interests of others. The modifier “contentious” thus has a double meaning. First is the plain meaning of “controversial” or “likely to cause an argument.” Second is the meaning given by the contentious politics research program associated with McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, where “contention involves making claims that bear on someone else’s interest.” Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 5; also Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 5. The performance, or attempted performance, of a contentious ritual thus in and of itself is an episode of political conflict, not a substitute for conflict or a description of the form that conflict takes.

¹⁶ My concept is also distinct from two other related concepts. Ross’s “contested cultural expression” is a broader category that encompasses more than ritual actions, including objects and symbols, such as monuments and museums; see Marc Howard Ross, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Gaborieau’s “ritual of provocation” is a narrower category because contentious rituals can, but need not, elicit provocation or violence; see Marc Gaborieau, “From Al-Beruni to Jinnah: Idiom, Ritual and Ideology of the Hindu-Muslim Confrontation in South Asia,” *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (June 1985), pp. 7-14.

¹⁷ Though once the state’s hegemony begins to slip, its rituals can become sites of contestation. See Pfaff and Yang, “Double-Edged Rituals.”

¹⁸ I am not arguing that everyone accepts the parade’s claim or that these parades are not sites of contestation over the meaning of citizenship, inclusion, rights, etc. Simply that the rituals themselves are not typically contested.

explicitly, loudly challenged.¹⁹ Most funerals, burials, and reburials, even of important political figures, are uncontested. But some dead bodies lead contentious lives. When the political opponents of the Croatian president repatriated the body of a long-dead political hero for reburial inside Croatia shortly after the Balkan civil wars, President Tudjman objected strongly to this “provocation.” In response, he proposed doing the same for one of his political heroes, the head of the murderous, ultranationalist Ustaše, who aligned with the Nazis during World War II.²⁰ The Stations of the Cross, when performed inside of a Catholic church, is not contentious. But when performed by undocumented Mexican immigrants outside the Federal Building in downtown Manhattan, it is.²¹ By moving the sacred rite to the doorstep of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement office, the portrayal by undocumented immigrants of Christ suffering at the hands of his tormentors takes on a new, political meaning—and is met with counterdemonstrators and a police presence.

The sources of a dispute over a ritual are varied.²² Here I propose three. First, people and groups might contest the insertion of explicitly political rhetoric, symbols, and claim-making into a ritual that is typically understood as apolitical. For example, when partisan speeches were delivered at the 2002 memorial for liberal US Senator Paul Wellstone, conservatives denounced it and the mourning rite became “perhaps the most politically contentious event” of the year.²³

Second, opponents may dispute where the ritual takes place—in part because rituals can help legitimate a claim to territory. Muslims in Jerusalem, for instance, dispute Jewish prayer atop the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, while not contesting Jewish prayer elsewhere.²⁴ Likewise, Indian Muslims as well as the Indian state objected to Hindu worship inside the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India before it was demolished in 1992.²⁵

The third source of contestation is the ritual’s very performance. In this case, opponents dispute any and all performances of the ritual. For example, many Chinese and Korean citizens protest any visits by Japanese officials to the Yasukuni Shrine, which commemorates war criminals from the Second World War.²⁶ Animal rights activists protest the enactment of *kapparot*, a ritual performed by ultra-Orthodox Jews before Yom Kippur that involves swinging a

¹⁹ Katherine McFarland Bruce, “LGBT Pride as a Cultural Protest Tactic in a Southern City,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Vol. 42, No. 5 (October 2013), pp. 608-635; Madelaine Adelman, “Sex and the City: The Politics of Gay Pride in Jerusalem,” in Madelaine Adelman and Miriam Fend Elman, eds., *Jerusalem: Conflict and Cooperation in a Contested City* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014), pp. 233-261.

²⁰ Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 14.

²¹ Alyshia Gálvez, *Guadalupe in New York: Devotion and the Struggle for Citizenship Rights among Mexican Immigrants* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), chap. 5, “El Viacrucis del Inmigrante and Other Public Processions.”

²² I ignore disputes over ritual performance within communities that do not have explicitly political ramifications, for example, changing the text of a prayer. Of course, the line between what is political and what is not is fine and shifting.

²³ Alyssa Samek and Karrin Vasby Anderson, “The Day the Campaign Died: The Wellstone Memorial, Civic Piety, and Political Propriety,” *Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (April-June 2011), p. 156.

²⁴ As do many, if not most, rabbinic authorities. See Ron E. Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), pp. 113-134; and Gershom Gorenberg, *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount* (New York: Free Press, 2000).

²⁵ Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds*, pp. 76-78; Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*, pp. 246-248.

²⁶ Jennifer Lind, *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Jessica Chen Weiss, *Powerful Patriots: Nationalist Protest in China’s Foreign Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

chicken around one's head and then killing it.²⁷ Similarly, since the late nineteenth century, Hindus in India have protested, often violently, the ritual slaughter of cows for Muslim holidays and other religious occasions.²⁸ Mere rumors of such cow slaughter have set off clashes.²⁹

The primary issue in all these instances is a dispute about the meaning of the ritual. Two conditions make disputed interpretations particularly likely. One common condition under which a ritual begins to face open, sustained opposition is a changing political context. Under new social, cultural, or political conditions, an old practice can take on new meanings. For example, the annual Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day parade in Montreal became a site of contestation over French Canadian national identity in 1960s during the wide-ranging transformations known as the Quiet Revolution. As Québec underwent deep social, political, and economic changes, a new generation of secular *Québécois* nationalists began to reject the parade's representation of the nation as a child saint, finding it both overly religious and infantilizing.³⁰ Protests against the parade mounted through the decade, reaching their climax in the rioting of 1968 and the dramatic toppling the float with the statue of John the Baptist in 1969.³¹ In societies where a religion is persecuted or restricted, practicing the faith can take on an politically oppositional flavor. When Pope John Paul II led enormous outdoor masses throughout Poland in 1979, participation was seen by many as both an act of religious devotion and of political protest against the communist state. Even though the pontifical masses were themselves routine, and the pope generally refrained from direct criticism of the regime, attending became an act of resistance. The pope insisted that his visit was in honor of the 900th anniversary of the martyrdom of Saint Stanislaus—a commemoration he had begun planning years earlier while still Archbishop of Krakow—and was not intended to be political, but that did not detract from people's experience and interpretation of the masses as political opposition.³²

Political change can also open the opportunity for opponents of a ritual to publicly express their objections.³³ African-Americans in the American South, for instance, could not mount public challenges to the flying of the Confederate flag or the display of other Confederate symbols until the undoing of Jim Crow. From the Civil War to World War II, the leading historian of the flag writes, "the Confederate battle flag was the object of virtually uncontested

²⁷ Martha Groves and Matt Stevens, "Orthodox Jewish Chicken-Killing Ritual Draws Protests," *Los Angeles Times*, September 11, 2013; "U.S. Activists Protest Over Yom Kippur Ritual Chicken Slaughter," *Ha'aretz*, October 2, 2014.

²⁸ Anand A. Yang, "Sacred Symbol and Sacred Space in Rural India: Community Mobilization in the 'Anti-Cow Killing' Riot of 1893," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (October 1980), pp. 576-596; Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*, p. 234; Sean Farrell, "Ulster Sectarianism and the Lessons of South Asian Historiography," *History Compass*, Vol. 8, No. 9 (September 2010), p. 1028.

²⁹ Shabnum Tejani, "Music, Mosques and Custom: Local Conflict and 'Communalism' in a Maharashtrian Weaving Town, 1893-1894," *South Asia*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (August 2007), p. 233.

³⁰ Geneviève Zubrzycki, "Aesthetic Revolt and the Remaking of National Identity in Québec, 1960-1969," *Theory and Society*, Vol. 42, No. 5 (September 2013), p. 446.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 454, 457-458.

³² George Weigel, *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 129-137. For a similar analysis of the Polish Catholic Church in the 1960s, see Maryjane Osa, "Pastoral Mobilization and Contention: The Religious Foundations of the Solidarity Movement in Poland," in Christian Smith, ed., *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social-Movement Activism* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 77-78.

³³ On opening political opportunity structures more generally, see, e.g., Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

public reverence in the South... Few people abused the flag, and few people complained openly about its public presence. Not coincidentally, African Americans were virtually excluded from the South's public life during most of those years."³⁴ Similarly, the Northern Irish peace process created the "political space" for Catholics to stage large-scale protests against loyalist parades.³⁵

But even in a stable political environment, "interpretive activists" can change a public meaning of a ritual, often making it contentious. These activists's goal is to transform a ritual from an apolitical cultural object into an available political tool. They succeed by translating the ritual for participants and observers "so as to demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt the overlap between the meaning of the cultural object and the meaning of a particular political idiom that they endorse or oppose."³⁶ For example, Hizbullah-affiliated clerics in parts of Lebanon helped shift the meaning of Shia Ashura rituals "from one of mourning, regret, and salvation to a revolutionary lesson that emphasized action against oppression."³⁷ Before the shift, observance of the holiday and public performance of the associated rites were an act of personal piety. After the shift, it constituted both an act of personal piety *and* an act of collective protest against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. The clerics promoted a novel interpretation of the existing ritual in order to align its meaning with their political program. Connecting the martyrdom of Imam Husayn in the seventh century to contemporary politics explains, justifies, and gives religious significance to Hizbullah's goals and tactics. It also turned the mass rituals into demonstrations of support for the organization, which has led to clashes with supporters of other political parties.³⁸

These many examples suggest three points worth highlighting. First, the contestation can be transnational. Particularly with modern media, the audience of a ritual is now global. As the Yasukuni pilgrimage shows, a ritual can be challenged from across the sea. Second, a ritual's political claims are not always intended by its performers and/or organizers. It is unlikely, for instance, that Hasidim practicing *kapparot* intend to have any political relevance or make any statement about the rights of fowl. Yet their intentions are irrelevant to the activists who oppose them. Challenges to a ritual, then, can be expected or even sought, or they can come as a surprise. And third, rituals are a part of the contemporary "repertoire of contention" in societies around the world. Despite Charles Tilly's finding that the use of "authorized public assemblies" and "celebrations and other popularly initiated gatherings" for public claim-making declined with the rise of mass, national politics, rituals remain a lively venue for contentious politics.³⁹

Once a ritual becomes disputed, the effects can be anything but symbolic. The

³⁴ John M. Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag: America's Most Embattled Emblem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 1.

³⁵ Dominic Bryan, "Parade Disputes and the Peace Process," *Peace Review*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2001), p. 45.

³⁶ Peter Stamatov, "Interpretive Activism and the Political Uses of Verdi's Operas in the 1840s," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 67, No. 3 (June 2002), pp. 345-366. Quote from p. 346.

³⁷ Lara Deeb, "Living Ashura in Lebanon: Mourning Transformed to Sacrifice," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2005), p. 131. See also R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000) p. 91: "these rituals [are not] inherently extremist, but they become sources of extremism for the Ashura penitent who exacts vengeance on Husayn's contemporary persecutors... Such prescribed prayers and rituals, interpreted by an extremist preacher, locate the believer in a sacred cosmos that rewards martyrdom or imprisonment endured in a divine cause."

³⁸ Deeb, "Living Ashura in Lebanon," p. 128, n. 34.

³⁹ Charles Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758-1834* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 344, 345; and Tilly, *The Contentious French*.

performance of a contentious ritual and its contestation can cause significant political consequences, including increased polarization, heightened tension, and violence. As Marc Howard Ross argues, “Cultural expressions are not just surface phenomena. They are *reflectors* of groups’ worldviews and on-going conflicts... [They] play a *causal* role in conflict... [And they] serve as *exacerbaters* or *inhibitors* of conflict.”⁴⁰ At their most dangerous, contentious rituals can trigger the onset of violent clashes. Anthropologist Stanley Tambiah finds that the calendar of communal festivals and religious rites in India “can at sensitive times actually channel and direct the shape, expression, timing, and spatial location of ethnic violence.”⁴¹ Although this relationship appears to be particularly strong in modern India, it is found in divided societies around the globe, historically and today.⁴² In fact, contentious rituals are one of the most significant riot precipitants around the world.⁴³

Examples abound. In sixteenth-century France, riots between Catholics and Protestants were “timed to ritual, and the violence seems often a curious continuation of the rite.” Disputes over religious services, processions, and festivals ignited riots. They even erupted from weddings, funerals, and baptisms.⁴⁴ Four centuries later, the major cleavages in France were ideological rather than sectarian, but each party’s holidays still “provided a welcome occasion for counterdemonstrations by opposing parties.” The playing of the “Marseillaise” at the end of a republican Bastille Day parade in 1929 was disrupted by 500 Communists singing the “Internationale.” The police intervened, and minor disorder ensued.⁴⁵ Violence has flared repeatedly in Pakistan on holidays when Shias and Sunnis each take religious processions through the streets of Karachi.⁴⁶ Groundbreaking ceremonies to rebuild destroyed mosques in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2001 were disrupted or canceled due to violent resistance by local Bosnian-Serbs.⁴⁷ Several months later, attacks by Bosnian-Serbs against Croats on pilgrimage to a Catholic sacred site in 2001 were only prevented due to a large presence of NATO troops

⁴⁰ Ross, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict*, p. 3. Emphasis in the original.

⁴¹ Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*, p. 240. See also Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence*; Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Sudhir Kakar, *The Colors of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion, and Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 44-51; Peter van der Veer, “Riots and Rituals: The Construction of Violence and Public Space in Hindu Nationalism,” in Paul R. Brass, ed., *Riots and Pogroms* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 154-176; Paul R. Brass, *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Christophe Jaffrelot, “The Politics of Processions and Hindu-Muslim Riots,” in Amrita Basu and Atul Kohli, eds., *Community Conflict and the State in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 58-92; and Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005).

⁴² For general and comparative work, see Donald L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), esp. pp. 272-277; Ross, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict*; and Ron E. Hassner, “Sacred Time and Conflict Initiation,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (November 2011), pp. 491-520.

⁴³ Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, pp. 272-277, estimates, “Processions, demonstrations, and mass meetings precipitate violence in perhaps one-third to one-half of all ethnic riots” (p. 272).

⁴⁴ Davis, “Rites of Violence,” pp. 72-75 (quote from p. 72); and Barbara B. Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 59, 63.

⁴⁵ Tilly, *Contentious French*, pp. 320-321 (quote from p. 320).

⁴⁶ Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*, p. 164. See a related discussion in Ahsan I. Butt, “Street Power: Friday Prayers, Islamist Protests, and Islamization in Pakistan,” *Politics and Religion*, Vol. 9 (2016), pp. 1-28.

⁴⁷ Sébastien Pisani, “Reconciliation Stumbles over a Stone,” *SFOR Informer*, No. 113, May 16, 2001, available at: <http://www.nato.int/sfor/indexinf/113/s113p15a/t01051615a.htm>; Nicolas Girault, “Second Cornerstone Ceremony,” *SFOR Informer*, No. 116, June 27, 2001, available at: <http://www.nato.int/sfor/indexinf/116/p04a/t0104a.htm>. Also Michael Sells, “Crosses of Blood: Sacred Space, Religion, and Violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina,” *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (2003), p. 322

and international and local police.⁴⁸ And, as I will detail in the next chapter, Protestant parades in the north of Ireland have triggered violence from the eighteenth century onward.

The conflict need not be across ethnic or religious lines for contentious rituals to end in bloodshed. During the Iranian Revolution, security forces fired on celebrants gathered for burials, traditional ceremonies held forty days after a death, and the rituals of Ramadan and Moharram—all of which took on a political character as the revolution gained momentum.⁴⁹ The same “cycle of funerals, confrontations, and more coffins” took place in Libya during the anti-regime protests of 2011, as government forces killed mourners-cum-protesters marching in funeral processions for people killed in previous demonstrations.⁵⁰

Contentious rituals can also have profound political effects short of violence. Even when they do not spark violent encounters, cultural practices such as flying flags, celebrating nationalist holidays, erecting monuments, making pilgrimages to sacred sites, ritually slaughtering animals, and visiting cemeteries can exacerbate tensions between groups and make conflicts more difficult to resolve.

Puzzling Participation

Sitting at the intersection of culture and politics, contentious rituals generate several public goods—that is, results that can be enjoyed by the entire community, regardless of whether a person contributed to their creation. For instance, the political claims made by contentious rituals are generally made on behalf of a wider community, including those not actively involved. The participants speak (or claim to speak) for the movement, sect, or nation as a whole. They furthermore contribute to social cohesion. By bringing members of society together to take part in shared practices oriented at shared beliefs and symbols, rituals recreate society and generate strong bonds of solidarity among members.⁵¹ Contentious ritual may be especially good at this, since opposition from the outside can heighten the bonds of solidarity among in-group members. Contentious rituals also publicly represent the community. As public and purposive behavior, they reflect the community’s values and display the group as it wishes to be seen and to see itself. An effect of this is that rituals help define the group’s boundaries: by representing who the group is, rituals also clarify who the group is not.⁵² By defining the contours and content of a

⁴⁸ Jean-Philippe Lavigne, “NPBG Monitors Pilgrimage of 6,000 to Komusina,” *SFOR Informer*, No. 120, August 22, 2001, available at: <http://www.nato.int/sfor/indexinf/120/p11a/t0111a.htm>, cited in Kimberly Zisk Marten, *Enforcing the Peace: Learning from the Imperial Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 124.

⁴⁹ M.M. Salehi, “Radical Islamic Insurgency in the Iranian Revolution of 1978-1979,” in Christian Smith, ed., *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social-Movement Activism* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 54-61.

⁵⁰ David D. Kirkpatrick and Mona El-Naggar, “Qaddafi’s Son Warns of Civil War as Libyan Protests Widen,” *New York Times*, February 20, 2011. This has also been a common dynamic during the Syrian Civil War. For instance, David Batty, “Syrian Troops Open Fire on Mourners at Funerals for Pro-Democracy Protesters,” *The Guardian*, April 23, 2011; Khaled Yacoub Oweis, “Eleven Killed as Syrian Funeral Becomes Protest,” *Reuters*, May 21, 2011; “Syria Security Forces ‘Open Fire at Kurd’s Funeral,’” *BBC News*, October 8, 2011.

⁵¹ See Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995); as well as important elaborations, interpretations, and critiques, such as Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Dædalus*, Vol. 96, No. 1 (Winter 1967), pp. 1-21; Steven Lukes, “Political Ritual and Social Integration,” *Sociology*, Vol. 9 (1975), pp. 289-308; Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, esp. pp. 61-67; Roth, “‘Men with Masks’”; Etzioni, “Toward a Theory of Public Ritual”; Robert N. Bellah, “The Ritual Roots of Society and Culture,” in Michelle Dillon, ed., *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 31-44; and Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*.

⁵² Cohen, *Symbolic Construction of Community*, pp. 50-63.

group identity, rituals direct members and outsiders toward a particular vision of the group.⁵³ For both in-group and out-group members, then, contentious rituals can come to stand in for the wider community. They symbolize the group. Finally, rituals can be communally valued not for what they do or provide, but simply for what they are. That is, rituals are often valued for their own sake, as fun, exciting, and meaningful moments in the life of the community and its members.⁵⁴

A key feature of all these outcomes is that they can be shared by participants and non-participants alike. Throughout the social sciences, action that produces a non-excludable, public good is known as collective action.⁵⁵ The problem with collective action, as the economist Mancur Olson famously argued fifty years ago, is that no rational individual is motivated to participate. Rather than contribute their own time, effort, resources, or voice, each person relies on others to make the necessary contributions. As a result, the theory predicts, the collective action will not be achieved. But contentious rituals happen all of the time. Despite the elegant theoretical reasons to free-ride on the work of others, people repeatedly choose to participate in contentious rituals.

Yet the question of participation is of little interest to many people who think about rituals. In both popular perceptions and academic accounts, an individual's choice to take part (or not take part) in a ritual is often assumed or ignored. In popular culture, a dominant image of ritual is of mindless automatons worshipping their gods or saluting their leader—picture, for instance, the sea of Nazis at Nuremberg in the 1935 propaganda film *Triumph of the Will* or Hate Week in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The individual is given over to the group, and his or her thoughts, desires, and interests are irrelevant.

Scholarly approaches, too, often gloss over the question of participation. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*—easily the most influential modern account of ritual—Émile Durkheim disregards choice, describing rituals as if they somehow compel participation. “When a native is asked why he follows his rites,” Durkheim writes, “he replies that ancestors have always done so and that he *must* follow their example.” Ritual participation, for the great sociologist, is a moral obligation, an “imperative,” and a “duty”—inner forces that leave little room for free will.⁵⁶ Jeffrey Alexander, an eminent contemporary interpreter of Durkheim, notes that in early societies “participation in ritual performance is not contingent, either for the actors or the observers. Participation is determined by the established and accepted hierarchies of gender and age, *not by individual choices* that respond to the sanctions and rewards of social

⁵³ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 129; Lukes, “Political Rituals and Social Integration,” p. 301.

⁵⁴ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 45. For a vivid example, see Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, pp. 216-217.

⁵⁵ For rational choice perspectives on ritual, see Chwe, *Rational Ritual*; David Siddhartha Patel, “Islam, Information, and Social Order: The Strategic Role of Religion in Muslim Societies,” Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 2007; and Alfred Stepan, “Rituals of Respect: Sufis and Secularists in Senegal in Comparative Perspective,” *Comparative Politics* (July 2012), pp. 379-401. Chwe, Patel, and Stepan demonstrate that rituals provide a communally valued function (i.e., a public good), but do not address why individuals participate. Specifying the collective benefits of rituals is insufficient to explain individual choices, so the rationalist framework these scholars use to explain macro-outcomes lacks a plausible micro-foundation. For a critique of Chwe and the idea of culture as common knowledge, see Lisa Wedeen, “Conceptualizing Culture: Possibilities for Political Science,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 96, No. 4. (December 2002), esp. pp. 718-719.

⁵⁶ Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, p. 192. Emphasis added.

powers or segmented social groups. Every relevant party in the band or tribe *must* attend to ritual performances.”⁵⁷ And cognitive and evolutionary anthropologists Pierre Liénard and Pascal Boyer argue that ritual is characterized by feelings of “compulsion”: “given certain circumstances,” they state, “people *just feel that they must* perform a specific ritual, that it would be dangerous, unsafe, or improper not to do it.”⁵⁸

The decision to participate is also skipped in studies of political rituals. This omission results in part from the stance toward ritual just described, but also because many of the political rituals that have been researched are state-sponsored rituals, particularly in authoritarian regimes, where participation may not raise the same questions about free choice.⁵⁹ As Václav Havel illustrates with his famous greengrocer, under authoritarian conditions, one cannot opt out of participation. The greengrocer puts the “Workers of the world, unite!” slogan in his shop window not “to express [his] real opinions,” but because “that is the way it has to be.” His fear of the repercussions of not displaying the slogan has made him “unquestionably obedient.”⁶⁰ Yet this parable teaches us much more about the power of authoritarian systems to obtain compliance than it does about rituals.

Rituals do not necessarily compel participation or brainwash. Though the term has come to be used as a “bad word signifying empty conformity,”⁶¹ ritual is, above all, human action. Like all non-trivial human action, ritual is suffused with meaning and entails costs, benefits, and agency. This leads to a simple, perhaps obvious, yet often overlooked point: even when facing a ritual, people confront the choice to participate or not. As religion scholar Catherine Bell argues, “Ritual is never simply or solely a matter of routine, habit, or ‘the dead weight of tradition.’”⁶²

⁵⁷ Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance Between Ritual and Strategy,” *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (December 2004), p. 535. Emphases added. Of course, this does not mean that all participants are as engaged or want to be there. Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, esp. pp. 116, 353-354, another important Durkheimian, distinguishes between central and peripheral participants. Those on the periphery do not experience the energy of the ritual and can end up feeling excluded from the ritual community.

⁵⁸ Pierre Liénard and Pascal Boyer, “Whence Collective Rituals? A Cultural Selection Model of Ritualized Behavior,” *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 108, No. 4 (December 2006), p. 816. Emphasis added.

⁵⁹ “Dictatorships make participation in festival mandatory, or at least the appearance of participation mandatory,” notes Mabel Berezin, “The Festival State: Celebration and Commemoration in Fascist Italy,” *Journal of Modern European History*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2006), p. 72. See George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975); Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self*; Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*.

⁶⁰ Václav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” in Václav Havel et al., *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central Eastern Europe*, ed. John Keane (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 13. Also Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*; and James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 66, who observes, “Ritual subservience reliably extracted from inferiors signals quite literally that there is no realistic choice other than compliance.”

⁶¹ Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London: Routledge, 1970), p. 1, who is bemoaning this usage. “Many sociologists,” she continues, “use the term ritualistic for one who performs external gestures without inner commitment to the ideas and values being expressed.”

⁶² Bell, *Ritual Theory*, p. 92. See also *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208; Courtney Bender, *Heaven’s Kitchen: Living Religion at God’s Love We Deliver* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 168, n. 8; and James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 204. Perhaps unexpectedly, the choice to participate in rituals also appears in pre-modern societies; see Watts, *The Final Pagan Generation*, p. 24; and James Grehan, “The Legend of the Samarras: Parades and Communal Identity in Syrian Towns c. 1500-1800,” *Past and Present*, Vol. 204 (August 2009), p. 110. Even the authors of Leviticus, the most ritual-minded book of the Bible, recognized the role of personal choice to take part; Bryan D. Bibb, *Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds in the Book of Leviticus* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), p. 68.

Bell's observation is even more pertinent to rituals that are intensely contested. In contentious ritual, where participants regularly face public opposition to their choice of behavior, it is hard to imagine that participation could be "blind and thoughtless habit."⁶³ In a discussion of the "habitual elements of culture," sociologist Courtney Bender writes: "We perform many acts without thinking about them or, as Bourdieu suggests, without the idea that they should even be thought of."⁶⁴ The contention around contentious rituals, however, injects the idea that their performance *should* be thought of, indeed *must* be thought of. Other human beings, after all, seem visibly disturbed by the ritual's performance.

Crises, Bourdieu argues, give rise to "critique which brings the undiscussed into discussion, the unformulated into formulation." Under these conditions, "that which is beyond question" becomes questioned: myths, traditions, and everything else that typically "goes without saying" are suddenly articulated and contested.⁶⁵ For participants, opposition to a cherished ritual poses (or should pose) such a crisis. The contention around contentious rituals means that the decision to participate cannot simply come and go without saying—it needs to be accounted for.

The prevailing explanation of contentious rituals, however, leaves this decision to participate unsaid. Building on a substantial body of theory and evidence about the role of elite manipulation in ethnic conflict, the explanation is that political elites strategically use contentious rituals to increase their own power.⁶⁶ Contentious rituals, the argument goes, are used by elites to polarize society by provoking the out-group into overreacting in order to promote distrust between communities, create a negative image of the out-group in local or international courts of opinion, or discredit in-group moderates. The incentives of elites are clear, but the average participant is ignored. Steven Wilkinson, for instance, writes that Hindu party leaders in India "organize *unusually large* religious processions" in order to provoke electorally-advantageous ethnic riots.⁶⁷ But why this "unusually large" crowd turned out is left unexplained. Since elite interests do not satisfactorily explain mass participation, readers are left guessing why

⁶³ Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 103.

⁶⁴ Bender, *Heaven's Kitchen*, p. 51.

⁶⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 168, 169, 167.

⁶⁶ See Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence*; Brass, *Theft of an Idol*; and Brubaker and Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," p. 433; Ron Aminzade and Doug McAdam, "Emotions and Contentious Politics," in Ronald R. Aminzade, Jack A. Goldstone, Doug McAdam, Elizabeth J. Perry, William H. Sewell, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, eds., *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 43-44; and Adrienne LeBas, "Polarization as Craft: Party Formation and State Violence in Zimbabwe," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (July 2006), pp. 419-438. On elites and ethnic conflict, Jack Snyder and Karen Ballentine, "Nationalism and the Marketplace of Ideas," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Fall 1996), pp. 5-40; Rui J.P. de Figueiredo, Jr., and Barry R. Weingast, "The Rationality of Fear: Political Opportunism and Ethnic Conflict," in Barbara F. Walter and Jack Snyder, eds., *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 261-302; Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: Norton, 2000); V.P. Gagnon, *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990's* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); and Benjamin A. Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

⁶⁷ Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence*, p. 24. Emphasis is mine.

people participate in the (often risky) elite-promoted contentious rituals.⁶⁸

Explaining Participation

There are two broad arguments prominent in the literature that provide plausible accounts of popular participation in contentious rituals, each rooted in a different view of human motivation. In one view, people act on their ideals, beliefs, and emotions. In the other, people act on their material self-interest.

The attitudinal argument sees contentious rituals as symbolic assertions of in-group status and power, as well as out-group humiliation and subordination. Thus, they are mass events where individuals can collectively and publicly articulate their in-group pride and loyalty and out-group animosity.⁶⁹ This suggests that participation is best explained by a person's feelings toward these groups. In particular, people should be more likely to participate the more they identify with their ethnic group.⁷⁰ Similarly, since contentious rituals are a way to express grievances against or hatred of the out-group, people should be more likely to participate the more animosity they hold toward the out-group.⁷¹ Overall, this approach suggests that participants are distinguished from nonparticipants by their attitudes towards the in-group and out-group.

The rationalist approach sees contentious rituals as no different than any other collective action. As a result, according to this approach, people will only participate in contentious rituals when the private rewards outweigh the private costs. The most obvious way for this to happen is

⁶⁸ Not only is it theoretically unsatisfying, this approach is empirically untenable. It is ordinary people, not elites, who "ultimately determine the success of these events," so ignoring them leaves us with major gaps in our understanding of contentious rituals and other mass public actions. Jon E. Fox, "National Holiday Commemorations: The View from Below," in Rachel Tsang and Eric Taylor Woods, eds., *The Cultural Politics of Nationalism and Nation-Building: Ritual and Performance in the Forging of Nations* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 40; see also Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, "Everyday Nationhood," *Ethnicities*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (December 2008), pp. 536-563.

⁶⁹ See Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*; Roger D. Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Roger D. Petersen, *Western Intervention in the Balkans: The Strategic Use of Emotions in Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). In *Western Intervention*, p. 100, Petersen specifically predicts that resentment of ethnic status reversal leads to "parades and demonstrations that highlight grievances about political status."

⁷⁰ See Ashutosh Varshney, "Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Rationality," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March 2003), p. 93; and Amilcar Antonio Barretto, "Nationalism, Collective Action, and Rationality," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (2012), pp. 327-28; Bert Kländermans, Jojanneke van der Toorn, and Jacquelin van Stekelenburg, "Embeddedness and Identity: How Immigrants Turn Grievances into Action," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 73 (December 2008), pp. 992-1012; Bernd Simon, Michael Loewy, Stefan Stürmer, Ulrike Weber, Peter Freytag, Corinna Habig, Claudia Kampmeier, and Peter Spahlinger, "Collective Identification and Social Movement Participation," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (March 1998), pp. 646-658.

⁷¹ Grievance-based accounts of collective action, which have long been out of favor, have recently begun to be revisited. See, for instance, the "meaning-laden approach to grievances" elaborated in Erica Simmons, "Grievances Do Matter in Mobilization," *Theory and Society*, Vol. 43, No. 5 (September 2014), pp. 513-546. Maurice Pinard, *Motivational Dimensions in Social Movement and Contentious Collective Action* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), esp. pp. 40-44, shows that many of the studies that find that grievances have no effect look at the emergence of conflict and contentious political movements. By contrast, studies of individual participation are generally much more favorable toward grievances.

to provide participants with selective material incentives.⁷² Paul Brass, for instance, finds that in India, contentious rituals are often enacted by “fire-tenders” and “riot specialists” who profit from the ensuing violence, both by looting and by payments from local leaders.⁷³ Another way to motivate rational actors is to raise the costs of non-participation. Targeting non-participants with social sanctions—for example, shunning them or demoting their social status—has been found to incentivize participation.⁷⁴

Explaining Ritual Participation

Ritual is a distinct form of social action.⁷⁵ Yet neither the attitudinal explanation nor the rationalist explanation takes its specific and distinctive characteristics into account. Ritual’s special elements and features, however, can help explain why people are drawn to participate in them. By ignoring the ritual aspects of contentious rituals, the prevailing accounts provide an incomplete explanation. The argument developed in this book, by contrast, takes the ritual aspects seriously. It is rooted in theory and evidence from the study of participation in contentious politics as well as two fundamental insights from the multidisciplinary study of ritual. For over a century, scholars of ritual—in religious studies, sociology, and anthropology—have consistently found that rituals affect the people who take part in them and that rituals are symbolically ambiguous.

The effects of ritual on participants are wide-ranging and profound. Rituals can have social effects, for instance, signaling and effecting a person’s transition from one social identity to another, such as from child to adult. They can also have cognitive consequences, shaping how participants understand their society and the wider world.⁷⁶ And rituals have an emotional effect on participants. Durkheim argues that rituals produce the experience of “collective effervescence” in participants: causing “passions... so torrential that nothing can hold them,” “an intense hyperexcitement of physical and mental life,” and “a state of exaltation” that transport the participant to “a special world inhabited by exceptionally intense forces that invade and transform him” and “excite him to the point of frenzy.”⁷⁷ Randall Collins, building on Durkheim, describes similarly potent effects as “emotional energy,” stating it gives “individual participants... feelings of confidence, enthusiasm, and desire for action in what they consider a

⁷² Olson, *Logic of Collective Action*, p. 51; Samuel L. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Mark I. Lichbach, “What Makes Rational Peasants Revolutionary?: Dilemma, Paradox, and Irony in Peasant Collective Action,” *World Politics*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (April 1994), pp. 383-418; Mark I. Lichbach, *The Rebel’s Dilemma* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

⁷³ Brass, *Theft of an Idol*, pp. 9, 16-17, 285.

⁷⁴ Timur Kuran, “Ethnic Norms and their Transformation through Reputational Cascades,” *Journal of Legal Studies*, Vol. 27 (June 1998), 623-659; Michael Taylor, “Rationality and Revolutionary Collective Action,” in Michael Taylor, ed., *Rationality and Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 63-97; Dennis Chong, *Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), esp. chap. 3.

⁷⁵ Roth, “Men Wearing Masks,” p. 320.

⁷⁶ Lukes, “Political Rituals and Social Integration,” p. 301; Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, p. 14.

⁷⁷ Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, pp. 218, 220.

morally proper path.”⁷⁸ Many of these sociological insights have been supported by recent psychology experiments.⁷⁹

What is more, rituals are meaningful experiences for participants. In particular, rituals allow participants to imagine unmediated access to a cherished, often mythic, past. Through repetition, rituals imply an uninterrupted flow of history, so the participant feels herself following the path of ancestors, walking in their footsteps and reproducing their actions. This is especially potent when the ritual has been passed down within families. Some scholars argue that rituals can even effectively collapse time, giving participants the feeling of walking *alongside* ancestors and participating *with* them.⁸⁰

The net result is that ritual participation is often pleasurable and meaningful.⁸¹ The crowds, sounds, movement, purpose, symbols, solidarity, attention, effervescence, and so on come together in ritual, creating desirable moments for participants. At their best, these moments “are high points of experience” that people seek.⁸²

Identifying the benefits of ritual participation helps explain the appeal of taking part. It also directs us away from a common methodological pitfall in the study of ritual. Observers often begin their analysis with an argument about what the ritual “is *really* about.”⁸³ Contentious rituals, in such an analysis, are usually viewed as intimidating demonstrations of power or deliberately inflammatory acts. This is fine as an interpretation of the effects of the event, but problematic when this view is attributed to participants and used to explain their actions. For instance, arguing that an event is provocative, so people must take part in order to provoke.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Note that Collins’s “interaction rituals” differ from what I call rituals, but I believe the mechanism he identifies remains relevant. Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, p. 42; also, Randall Collins, “Social Movements and the Focus of Emotional Attention,” in Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, eds., *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 27-43. See also Knottnerus’s “structural ritualization theory,” which builds on Collins, in J. David Knottnerus, “Religion, Ritual, and Collective Emotion,” in Christian von Scheve and Mikko Salmela, eds., *Collective Emotions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 312-325.

⁷⁹ Scott S. Wiltermuth and Chip Heath, “Synchrony and Cooperation,” *Psychological Science*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (January 2009), pp. 1-5; Piercarlo Valdesolo, Jennifer Ouyang, and David DeSteno, “The Rhythm of Joint Action: Synchrony Promotes Cooperative Ability,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (July 2010), pp. 693-695; Piercarlo Valdesolo and David DeSteno, “Synchrony and the Social Tuning of Compassion,” *Emotion*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (April 2011), pp. 262-266; Scott S. Wiltermuth, “Synchronous Activity Boosts Compliance with Requests to Aggress,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (January 2012), pp. 453-456; Scott Wiltermuth, “Synchrony and Destructive Obedience,” *Social Influence*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2012), pp. 78-89; Rachel E. Watson-Jones and Cristine H. Legare, “The Social Functions of Group Rituals,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (February 2016), pp. 42-46.

⁸⁰ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Orlando: Harcourt, 1959), pp. 68-69; Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958), pp. 392-393; and Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), pp. 44-45.

⁸¹ See also Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, p. 14; Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, p. 45.

⁸² Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, p. 42.

⁸³ Munson, “When a Funeral Isn’t Just a Funeral,” p. 122.

⁸⁴ See a related critique in Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman, “Making Things Political,” in John R. Hall, Laura Grindstaff, and Ming-Cheng Lo, eds., *Handbook of Cultural Sociology* (New York: Routledge, 2010), esp. p. 489; and Paul Lichterman, *Elusive Togetherness: Church Groups Trying to Bridge America’s Divisions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), esp. p. 249. Scholars have argued that attributing preferences to an actor is a problem, but have paid less attention to the similar problem of attributing meaning to an actor. See David D. Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change among the Yoruba* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 16, citing Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971).

An advantage of focusing on the lived experience of participation is that it forces the analyst to confront participants' perspectives on the nature and meaning of the ritual. Their views often do not match the analyst's, but this divergence is to be expected: rituals are polysemous—they have multiple meanings—which introduces inherent ambiguity. Asserting the “real” meaning of the ritual collapses its various meanings into a single interpretation, inadvertently making an assumption about participants's perspective—often one that the participants themselves would not recognize. People's motivations to participate in an action are mediated by their understanding of the meanings of the action. So no matter how obvious the interpretation is to the analyst, it is not productive to uncritically project it onto participants. Rather, to understand why someone takes part in an action, we must know what the action means to them.

Ambiguity is a central feature of ritual, not a bug. Rituals are deliberately symbolic, and symbols are multi-vocal, meaning “a single symbol may stand for many things.”⁸⁵ As a result, every symbol holds a “range of meanings.”⁸⁶ Since people can understand the same symbol in many different ways, the meaning of ritual is necessarily ambiguous. This imprecision helps make symbols socially and politically useful: it allows different groups and constituencies to see different things in the symbol or ritual.⁸⁷

Ritual ambiguity and multi-vocality have three implications for our understanding of participation in contentious rituals. First, even if opposition to the contentious ritual is well known, it does not necessarily affect the meaning it holds for participants or their intentions in acting. Ambiguity means that the opponents' interpretation is not universal or definitive. Second, among the participants themselves, there may be varying interpretations of the ritual. There is not one hegemonic interpretation, and participants can find their own meaning from a range of possibilities. This may lead to people choosing to participate for different reasons. Third, the ritual's mass participants and its elite organizers may not share interpretations or intentions. It is plausible that organizers and political elites use contentious rituals to polarize society. But it does not follow that ordinary participants see it in the same way. In sum, each participant can have a understanding of their action that is independent of in-group elites, out-group opponents, and even fellow participants.

Conclusion

Contentious rituals sit on the border between culture and politics, with a leg in each. Yet we often want to see them as one or the other. This approach is insufficient. A binary view of contentious ritual misses much of their appeal and power. As Munson argues, “the very ambiguity we face in classifying events as religious [or, more generally, cultural] or political is a basis for the power such events have to be transformative.”⁸⁸

The remainder of this book presents an account of one set of contentious rituals that is attentive to both facets. In particular, it uses the theoretical framework developed in this chapter

⁸⁵ Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, p. 50. He adds, “This property of individual symbols is true of ritual as a whole.”

⁸⁶ Cohen, *Symbolic Construction of Community*, p. 15. Emphasis in the original. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, p. 50.

⁸⁷ Cohen, *Symbolic Construction of Community*, p. 21; Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, rev. ed. (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1985), esp. pp. 206-208; and Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, pp. 69-75.

⁸⁸ Munson, “When a Funeral Isn't Just a Funeral,” p. 128.

to explain why people participate loyalist parades in Northern Ireland. I begin, in the next chapter, by introducing parading in more detail. This analysis of the history of parading into the present day will highlight two features of the contentious ritual framework. It will show that culture and politics are inseparable in the performance of loyalist parades. And we will begin to see the two traits of ritual—the benefits of experience and the ambiguous meanings—at work.