

'Remembering': Victims, Survivors and Commemoration  
**'The Ulster Unionist Victims' Movement:  
Political Opportunities and Injustice Masterframes'**

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### Abstract

This paper provides an analysis of the origins, development and decline of what I term the 'Ulster Unionist Victims Movement', a protest-based social movement that has developed since the inauguration of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. The social movement, which represents a dense network of Protestant Unionist organisations, originated as a protest against what it viewed as discrimination meted out to Protestant Unionists during the political dispensation following the Northern Irish peace process. Utilising social movement theory to analyse the social movement, I assess how political opportunities and cultural framing processes interact in the evolution of social movements to provide a richer and more dynamic analysis of how social movement actors change over time.

### The Unionist Victims' Movement

In 1999 a group of Protestant Ulster Unionists in Northern Ireland formed an 80-strong committee composed of victims' groups, Protestant clergy, political parties and cultural organisations. Calling themselves the 'Northern Irish Victims of Terrorism Association' (NIVTA), they announced to the media their intention to embark upon a 117-mile trek across Northern Ireland. Titled the 'Long March', the march, as the organisers made clear, was a demonstration of 'human rights' for what they perceived to be a victimised Protestant Unionist community in Northern Ireland. On subsequent occasions the organisers and participants spoke about the march upholding 'Protestant civil rights' (*Irish Times*, June 19, 1999), of promoting 'pride not prejudice' and 'heritage not hatred' (*Belfast Telegraph*, June 25, 1999). The notion of a march for civil rights derived resonance with the tactics utilised by other civil rights movements from the past, especially Martin Luther King's Selma-Montgomery civil rights march in 1965 and the Northern Irish civil rights march from Belfast to Derry in 1969. Evoking the theme of civil rights for Protestant victims, an organiser of the 'Long March' stated: 'we want to show who are the real victims in Northern Ireland. We aim to highlight the fact that Protestants have legitimate grievances which have been ignored' (*Belfast Telegraph*, May 26, 1999). Another organiser, a clergyman, stated:

The Protestant community is battered and bruised. We feel like strangers in our own country and we feel ignored, mistreated and betrayed. We believe this project is going to stir the heart of Ulster Protestants that their cause is just and right. (*Belfast Newsletter*, June 17, 1999).

In roughly the same period, between 1998 and 2000, in the region of ten Unionist victims' groups emerged as newly formed organisations. Some of these victims' groups were prominent organisers and participants in the 'Long March'. Although these victims' groups are funded by the British state as organisations that provide support for those who have experienced violence or bereavement during the civil conflict in Northern Ireland, many of the groups have mobilised beyond this constituency to arrange and participate in high-profile political protests.

The investigation of why social movements rooted in protest activities develop at specific historical junctures, the extent to which they are able to further sustain themselves, even in periods of prolonged 'latency' (Melucci 1995), and how they affect the world around them, has long been a

focus of theorists (See Meyer 2004). As a starting point, this paper examines both the extent to which the Unionist mobilisation against the post-conflict dispensation in Northern Ireland can be analysed as a social movement, and the degree to which social movement theory can illuminate the dynamics of this ongoing mobilisation. The paper goes on to consider the relationship between the existing opportunities for the group to mobilise and how they have interpreted and framed these conditions for the purpose of mobilising the 'Unionist community' to collectively protest against the perceived injustices experienced by Unionists in the post-conflict dispensation.

### Are they a social movement? Consensual versus conflictual Movements

I begin by illuminating the extent to which the collective actors examined in this paper deserve the epithet of a 'social movement'. The groups examined in the paper coalesced shortly after the signing of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement in 1998. An array of Unionist victims' groups, church organisations, political parties and the Orange Order, this collective mobilisation emerged to lead a protest against the strictures of the agreement, which they have accused of being inherently discriminatory against all Protestant Unionists in Northern Ireland. It is the intention of this paper to demonstrate that although the leaders and participants may not consciously define their collective action as a social movement (although they provided names for their mobilisations: NIVTA and Love Ulster, for example), this should not discount us from including the mobilisation within existing categories and definitions of what a social movement conforms to. Despite the fact that theorists continue to hotly debate the precise properties of social movements, there is certainly adequate consensus on this issue to show that the mobilisation of Unionist groups from 1998 onwards are indeed a social movement, not to be confused with other types of mobilisation.

Such is the temptation of theorists to describe almost all examples of collective mobilisation as a social movement (vigils, boycotts and parades), it seems that everything that moves is a movement. In order to utilise a more parsimonious definition of social movements, della Porta and Diani's (2006) conceptual distinction between social movements and other forms of collective action provides a cogent way forward. In particular, della Porta and Diani (2006: 22-23) make a distinction between *conflictual* and *consensual* movements. *Consensual* movements are rarely involved in conflict with a clearly defined adversary in social and political terms and prospected solutions to perceived problems 'do not imply redistribution of power nor alterations in social structure, but focus instead on service delivery, personal and community empowerment' (ibid.: 23). Notably, the authors preclude mobilisations which conform to the *consensual* category as social movements.

*Conflictual* movements, and thus social movements, alternatively, are involved in 'conflictual relations with clearly defined opponents'. Rather than failing to attribute blame for their current predicament, conflictual movements are engaged in political and cultural change with antagonists seeking control of the same stake. *Conflictual* movements are further involved in the formation of dense informal networks. While keeping their autonomy and independence, the various social actors and groups within the network 'engage in sustained exchanges of resources in pursuit of common goals' (della Porta and Diani 2006: 21). In a corollary, the various networked actors comprising *conflictual* movements share a distinct collective identity. More than the sum of protest events, a social movement process is confirmed when collective identities develop to allow a sense of common purpose and shared commitment to a cause. The formation of collective identity allows the multiple groups to often cross cleavages. Deleuze and Guattari's (1984) notion of the 'rhizome', horizontal connections between things that have no necessary relation with each other, is embodied in social movements through the construction of collective identity.

For the purpose of empirically elaborating the differences between the *conflictual* social and *consensual* non-social movements, I note the discrepancies existing within the field of Unionist victims' groups in Northern Ireland. *Consensual* movements adequately describe the vast range of range of victims' groups in Northern Ireland, many of whom keep a very low public profile. Most groups (such as NAVER/SAVER, RAFT and South Down Action for Healing Wounds) are small, 'stand alone', apolitical organisations which concentrate on providing services, like counseling, complementary and alternative therapies, befriending and social and welfare advice. As such, these groups are concerned with therapeutic and cathartic mechanisms to assist victims with health problems arising from bereavement or injury. Occasionally these groups may mobilise on issues of poor service delivery from state institutions; but there appears not to be any concerted attempt to identify adversaries or attempt to redistribute power or social relations.

On the other hand, a smaller band of victims' groups in Northern Ireland (like FAIR, HURT, West Tyrone Voice) can be placed in the *conflictual* category. They have created dense networks and alliances with a myriad of Unionist and Protestant groups, such as Church based organisations and

the Orange Order, to form a protest movement aimed at bringing to public attention what they argue is the victimisation of all Unionists in the post-conflict political dispensation in Northern Ireland. The forms of protest based collective action examined in this paper therefore can be seen as belonging within the *conflictual* social movement type.

### Political opportunities and framing

Now that I have briefly elaborated how the Unionist collective action analysed in this paper could be viewed as a 'social movement', the paper turns to an examination of both the opportunities afforded to the social movement to organise and how the movement has used framing strategies as part of an attempt to mobilise the whole Protestant and Unionist 'community'. Of particular interest is the degree of success the movement has had in its stated aims of unifying Unionism by framing the post-conflict dispensation in Northern Ireland as a process which causes injustice for Protestant Unionists.

Two of the ways that theorists have often conceptualised social movement evolution and organisation is in terms of 'political opportunities' and 'cultural framing processes' (see McAdam *et al* 1996: 2).

Simply defined, political opportunities refers to how 'changes in the institutional structure or informal power relations of a given national political system' (McAdam *et al* 1996: 2) helps or hinders 'activists' prospects for advancing particular claims and mobilizing supporters (Meyer 2004). The tactical and organizational forms of the social movement are therefore developed by activists optimising strategic opportunities in pursuit of particular claims at a particular time (Tilly 1978). Cultural framing processes explains mobilisation in terms of how activists work together to formulate 'shared meanings and definitions that people bring to their situation' (McAdam *et al* 1996: 5). In this scenario, objective structural changes or grievances are not in themselves required to engender mobilisation; what is more important is that activists collaborate to define opportunities in a process that McAdam (1982) termed 'cognitive liberation'.

Although these concepts ('political opportunities' and 'cultural framing processes') have often been used in competing and mutually exclusive ways by theorists, more recently there has been a concerted attempt to analytically unify them in empirical case studies. A key argument proposed in this paper is that the development of what I call the 'Unionist Victims Movement' (UVM) can be accounted for by illuminating how political opportunities and cultural framing processes, rather than necessarily incongruous elements, instead combine dialectically and are mutually dependent on each other.

This argument connects with social movement theorist Mario Diani's (1996) assertion that mobilising messages are more likely to prosper, compared to others in a specific period, when an alignment with the dominant 'masterframe' connected to the prevailing political environment occurs. The dominant 'masterframe' that the UVM tries to align its message to is an 'injustice masterframe', 'an interpretation of what is happening supports the conclusion that an authority system is violating the shared moral principles of the participants...it provides a reason for non-compliance' (Gamson *et al* 1982: 123). The UVM tries to align its message with an 'injustice masterframe' that articulates Protestant Unionists as discriminated against in the post-conflict dispensation. However, as political opportunities have changed for Unionists – particularly with hard-line Unionist parties engaging with power-sharing – the UVM has tried to correspondingly alter its framing message with little success. The paper thus goes on to assess the movement's success in terms of its framing strategies: its attempt to unify the Protestant Unionist 'community' to challenge perceived injustices.

As a case study, the UVM provides further analytical interest because it appears particularly peculiar considering that Unionists, the majority ethno-national grouping in Northern Ireland, have been identified as historically displaying more propensity for perpetuating the discourse of dominance and democratic 'majorityism' than victimhood and minority politics (Donnan and Simpson 2007). In this way, this paper redresses a lack of social movement literature on groups using an 'injustice masterframe' but who are in fact the historically dominant 'ethnonational' group rather than a historically marginalised minority. The paper further seeks to remedy a lack of social movement theory regarding the mobilisation of social movements in the context of societies undergoing post-conflict transition.

### From 'triumphalism' to victimhood?

Ulster Unionist history in Northern Ireland has often been characterised in terms of a 'triumphalist' mentality fuelled by their hegemonic authority over the state's political and economic institutions (see

Donnan and Simpson 2007: 8). Certainly, Unionism historically evoked an image of a confident democratic majority secure in their political and identity within the Union (Finlay 2001; Mitchell 2003). In more recent years, a discernible counter-trend has been identified. This trend points to a new Unionist encapsulation. Unionists are now more likely to be portrayed and portray their own experience, as Finlay (2001: 3) notes, as that of 'defeat and associated emotions...More than one author has claimed to detect self-pity and a predilection for victimhood'.

There are a number of factors that contribute to this transformation of identity. Firstly, there has always been a residual propensity for Unionists to see themselves as a minority. Although Unionists were a substantial majority in Northern Ireland, able to use this numerical constituency to dominate the polity, overall on the island of Ireland they are a substantial minority and often fearful of the Irish Republic who once claimed political sovereignty over Northern Ireland. Furthermore, many of the victims' groups are located in isolated rural parts of Northern Ireland near the Irish border. It is here where Unionists are the distinct minority and where they feel the most vulnerable. (Donnan and Simpson 2007).

Unionist confidence has most clearly been eroded during the Northern Ireland peace process, especially in the aftermath of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in 1998. The GFA, which is predicated on cross-community power sharing between Nationalists and Unionists, negates the polity being Unionist majoritarian or controlled from Westminster. Of equal problem for many Unionists is that the GFA is seen as ushering in legislation that discriminates Unionists by favouring Nationalists. Informed by a liberal pluralist, multicultural framework, the GFA has sought to redress a number of imbalances and grievances identified by Nationalists (Mitchell 2003: 615).

Labeled the 'equality agenda' by Nationalists, Unionists have alternatively identified it as an anti-Unionist agenda (see MacGinty and du Toit 2007). Examples of legislation perceived to be anti-Unionist include legislation which can curb Orange Order parades and the reform of the Police Service. The reform of the police service, a force which was historically almost wholly Protestant, featured its rebranding replete with new symbolic insignia and recruitment quotas (Bryan and McIntosh 2005). These quotas, designed to redress the imbalance of Catholics in the force, have been framed by Unionist politicians as blatant discrimination against Protestants (Ganiel 2007). Alongside reforms which are aimed at creating pluralism are those which are largely addressed to Irish Republicans in exchange for embracing the political path. Such 'concessions', state Unionist politicians, range from the release of prisoners convicted of paramilitary offences, amnesties for so-called on-the-run paramilitaries and the downscaling of British military presence.

For Unionist victims of republican violence, the lack of appropriate justice which has characterised the post-conflict phase has made composite their sense of disenfranchisement from the peace process. Although a small minority of Unionists originally supported the GFA, this was quickly turned into a substantial minority (see MacGinty and du Toit 2007: 23-27). Unionists opposed to the political dispensation which emerged as part of the post-conflict transitional phase in the late 1990s have thus sought to construct alliances and networks which constitute the UVM.

### **Political opportunity structures**

The peace process has fuelled Unionist disenfranchisement from the political process and a heightened sense of victimhood. Simultaneously, the post-conflict transitional phase has paradoxically acted to enable the formation of victims' groups. This can be seen in how the British state, following years of policy inertia regarding victims, have deliberately funded and implemented a series of official initiatives designed to set the victims' agenda, especially in regard to supporting victims' groups.

The analysis of post-conflict transitional societies in terms of providing political opportunities for social movement mobilisation has so far been overlooked by theorists. Yet post-conflict societies undergoing such processes of discernible change provide distinct opportunities for activists to mobilise. Indeed, the theoretical basis of political opportunity structures and their impact on mobilisation was predicated on a curvilinear hypothesis (Eisinger 1973; Tilly 1979). That is, social movements are less likely to emerge in closed/repressed systems or systems with ample institutional access. The curvilinear approach posits that mobilisation is more likely to occur in 'opening' systems where there is a space for toleration by a polity and when claimants are neither sufficiently advantaged to obviate the need to use dramatic means to express their interests nor so completely repressed to prevent them from trying to get what they want (Meyer 2004).

Certainly, the marked 'opening' of the political system to the issue of how victims should be supported can be witnessed since 1998. Whereas prior to the instigation of the Northern Irish peace process

there was a marked policy silence by the British State on victims, since 1997 there have been a number of high profile legislative initiatives designed to encourage the formation of victims' groups. The first policy shift came in 1997 when the then Northern Ireland Secretary of State requested that Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, a former public servant, 'examine the feasibility of providing greater recognition for those who have become victims in the last thirty years as a consequence of events in Northern Ireland' (Bloomfield 1998: 8). Since then, other important state initiatives included the establishment of a Victims' Unit to spend and allocate funds to victims' groups; the formation of a Memorial Fund to pilot schemes for victims' Groups; and the creation of regional Trauma Advisory Boards, which aim to co-ordinate the provision of health services to victims' groups. Funding is another area that the state has supported the formation of victims' groups. From April 1997 to March 2007, the British state has furnished, by its own calculations, £43,962,152 (see: <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2007-04-16d.130694.h>) on organizations they identify to be involved in providing support for victims' groups. At present, it is estimated that there are circa sixty victims' groups.

The British state has thus progressively taken a leading role in setting the victims' agenda. The reasons underlying this level of involvement are multi-faceted. On one level it stems from the perceived legal obligations of a responsible nation state. It is widely held internationally that protecting and upholding victims of injury is one of the *raison d'être* of the state, and if a government fails to attend victims and their injuries it is failing in one of its most basic political duties (Biggar 2002). On another level it can be seen as deriving from its desire to bolster sustainable peace building. How societies deal with victims' related issues is seen as a barometer of its progress in trying to entrench peace (Hamber 2006). This perspective is primarily informed by the belief that only by successfully confronting the legacy of the violent past can this 'bolster national attempts to "re-establish" society, and as such can have a healing and restorative dimension' (Hamber 2006: 562).

The British state has thus created a highly favourable and inclusive set of conditions for the nascent mobilisation of victims' groups. It has done this for a number of reasons, all of which are viewed as conducive to maintaining peace-building. However, the appearance of political opportunity structures (hereafter POS), no matter how explicitly encouraging for activists to mobilize, does not completely explain how groups assess and interpret these opportunities. POSs, as Benford and Snow (2000: 631) elaborate, 'is seldom, if ever, a clear and easily read structural entity. Rather, its existence and openness is subject to debate and interpretation and can thus be framed by movement actors as well as by others'. While POS provide the potential for activists to mobilize a constituency, it still requires interested activists to transform such opportunities into specific modes of collective action.

Moreover, in the sense of the POS undergoing processes of 'opening' to facilitate mobilisation, the simultaneous closing of the system is a mobilising agent for activists. This can be seen, I argue, in how Unionists view the British state's role in the victims' agenda. While the state provides a wealth of resources for victims' groups to mobilise, at the same time the state has been perceived to be detrimental to Unionists by discriminating against them. The simultaneity of opening/closing as a mobilizing factor has a strong resonance with the ideas of many theorists.

Although the notion of grievances as a direct mobilizing agent has often been discounted by theorists, who argue that systemic strain is a constant (see Crossley 2002), the notion of suddenly imposed grievances or a developing crisis following a period of the system opening has been identified as a powerful generator of movements. Melucci (1996), for instance, notes how mobilisation is often more likely to be triggered when there is repression/closure following a period of openness as expectations are raised only to be frustrated.

A perhaps more complex analysis of how structural change and system crisis can engender mobilisation can be seen in the ideas of Habermas (1981; 1987), who argues that the bureaucratic intervention of the state into areas of social life once restricted to the private sphere has resulted in the 'colonization' of the individual's 'lifeworld'. The increased role of the welfare state in the issue of victims in Northern Ireland has removed from the private sphere to the public notions of grieving and suffering. However, such rational 'administrative planning', as Habermas defines it, 'produces unintended, unsettling and publicizing effects' (1988: 72). Thus the uprooting of traditional Unionist notions of suffering from the private to the public sphere facilitates new opportunities for mobilisation by placing it into a political framework through the discourse of communicative action. Furthermore, because the administrative system appears unreceptive to forms of public opinion generated by the colonization of the public sphere, 'the system frustrates the very same projects that it sets in motion, amplifying the intensity of these projects and their tendency to follow "alternative" and "contentious" routes' (Crossley 2002: 162). The remainder of the paper maps out the alternative and contentious routes of the Unionist victims' movement. Specifically, I utilise the notion of 'framing' to show how Unionists define pertinent opportunities to engender mobilisation as a victimised group.

## Victimhood as a masterframe

The verb 'framing' has often been used by theorists to explore the schemata of interpretation used by activists to 'to locate, perceive, identify and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large' (Goffman 1974: 21). Rather than such interpretations accruing from a purely ideological structure, 'movement actors are viewed as signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders' (Benford and Snow 2000: 613). Framing thus denotes an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction. It means that 'movement activists interpret political space in ways that emphasize opportunity rather than constraint; they may stimulate actions that change opportunity, making their opportunity frame a self-fulfilling prophecy' (Benford and Snow 2000:631).

Although groups can and often do develop idiosyncratic 'frames' for their own individual exigencies, analysts have noted the widespread presence of 'masterframes', which are diffused and contested between groups. A 'masterframe' can be appropriated or used by any number of groups. 'Masterframe' also suggests that movements and conflicts do not develop in isolation but tend rather to be concentrated in particular political and historical periods.

The 'injustice masterframe', in particular, facilitates a way of viewing a situation or condition that expresses indignation over a perceived outrage and which finds some agency to blame for the transgression. Importantly, though the 'masterframe' is non-group specific, the recognition of 'injustice' does not automatically correlate with a universal notion of grievances. Perceptions of grievances are fundamentally rooted in cultural standards. Hardships can be endured by groups if they view them to be just; it is when hardships go beyond their shared definitions and level of normal expectation that the 'masterframe' is evoked for mobilisation (Crossley 2002).

The ownership of 'victimhood' acts a 'masterframe' for the conflict transitional phase in contemporary Northern Ireland as both Nationalists and Unionists struggle to appropriate and control this 'masterframe'. Since 'masterframes' are disseminated from group to group, it is necessary to demonstrate how the 'masterframe' of 'victimhood' has been prevalent in Northern Ireland for a number of years. The 'masterframe' of 'victimhood' can be seen as predominately deriving from Irish Nationalists. The minority population in Northern Ireland, many Irish Nationalists viewed themselves as a discriminated minority, denied basic democratic civil rights (Farrell 1976). The instigation of the Northern Irish Civil Rights Movement (CRM) in 1967 sought to utilise the 'injustice masterframe' that had been successfully mobilised by the African-American civil rights movement. This alignment with the African-American civil rights movement could most clearly be seen in the slogans, songs and the repertoire of tactics used by the CRM (Purdie 1990).

From the point of the eruption of the 'Northern Irish Troubles' in 1969, the 'masterframe' of 'victimhood' was used by some Nationalists to elaborate their unequal status. As a corollary to this, the first fledgling Nationalist victims' groups began to emerge in the 1980s. as part of a concerted campaign to illuminate the role of the British state in colluding with Unionist paramilitaries to murder Nationalists (Dawson 2003). Unionists, as mentioned earlier, on the whole, viewed themselves as the democratic majority rather than as a victimised community. Furthermore, because victims' groups were seen as a purely Nationalist phenomenon, Unionists viewed these groups as anti-state.

The question, therefore, is how did Unionists appropriate and contest this 'masterframe' to the point in which currently there are currently many more Unionist victims' groups than there are Nationalist? To understand in a broader context how Unionists have appropriated the 'masterframe' of 'victimhood' to facilitate a cultural and political shift from perceived majorityism to the status of the victimized can be illuminated better by tracking the three-step processual nature of framing: 'diagnosis', 'prognosis' and 'motivation'. Finally, I assess the degree of success of the UVM's 'framing' by examining to what extent it has been able to align its message to shifting political opportunity structures.

## Diagnosis

The first step required for mobilisation is 'diagnosis' framing. The diagnosis stage refers to activists working together to identify a set of circumstances as being particularly unfavourable to them as well as labeling the culprits responsible for their misfortune. 'Diagnostic framing' demonstrates that social problems exist only to the extent that certain phenomena are interpreted as such by people (Della Porta and Diani 2006:74).

Unionist victims' groups are almost exclusively made up of victims of republican paramilitary violence (rarely do they contain victims of loyalist or state violence). It is therefore unsurprising that they blame Irish republicans for what they see as the cause of their suffering. This process of identification can be witnessed in the literature and press releases of the largest Unionist victims' group, 'Families Acting for Innocent Relatives' (FAIR). FAIR (2000) seek to illuminate 'what 25 years of IRA/Sinn Fein death squads have done to the Unionist community without justification or reprisal'. Alongside Irish Republicans, and often categorised by the UVMs as co-conspirators with republicans, the UVM identify the British state as responsible for perpetuating their victimhood. Explaining their origins, another prominent victims' group, West Tyrone Voice (WTV), state:

like other pro-British innocent victims' groups, has its genesis in the latter months of 1998, in the wake of the early and accelerated release of terrorist prisoners in accord with the provisions of the Belfast Agreement 1998. Victims realised that there was nothing in this Agreement for them, felt keenly the injustice of such early release of terrorists back on to the streets, and came together to 'voice' their concerns (WTV 2008: 1).

As a corollary, the diagnostic frame is often distinguished by its selectivity, that it reduces a series of disparate social phenomena to dominant themes (Della Porta and Diani 2006: 74). Specifically, a number of Unionist concerns regarding the ongoing peace process and the putative concessions meted out to republicans at the expense of Unionists have been diagnosed as an 'injustice' perpetuated by the British government. Not only are those individuals who have experienced republican violence to be categorised as victims, but all Unionists are to be diagnosed as victims of injustice under the current political dispensation.

The diagnostic frame thus seeks to identify who is a victim. This process of diagnosis can be clearly seen in how the UVM evokes the Unionist community as a discriminated community. The Long March, mentioned in the introduction, for instance, stated its aims as: 'the right to live free from murder, fear and intimidation, recognition and support for the victims of terrorism, respect for democracy, parity of esteem for Unionists and economic justice for deprived Unionist communities' (*Belfast Newsletter*, June 17, 1999).

The UVM attempts to align the 'injustice' frame with other Unionist groups by bridging their concerns. Such alignment and bridging represents an attempt to link a number of congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a range of issues. This can be most clearly viewed in how the UVM often hold protests which include a number of, at times, disparate Unionist groupings. The Long March, for instance, featured not only Unionist victims of republican attacks, but Unionist politicians, high ranking members of the Protestant clergy and the Orange Order. By aligning frames under the rubric of the 'injustice masterframe', groups and individuals hitherto excluded from the trope of victimhood have been able to lay claim to the label, no matter how implausible this may have been previously. For instance, the Orange Order, an organisation Nationalists have compared to the Ku Klux Klan (Finlay 2001) for their perceived triumphal parades through Nationalist districts, by equating themselves to victims of violence and human rights abuses, can also credibly in the eyes of Unionists adopt the 'injustice frame'. The Orange Order thus not only seek to support the victims' groups, but further claim they too are victims because their 'right to free assemble' is limited by the current political dispensation. The Long March, for the Orange Order, was thus a symbolic reassertion of their right to free assemble and parading, which they claim is unfairly curbed by legislation.

For Irish Nationalists, alternatively, the idea that the Orange Order can claim to be victims appeared ludicrous. As the 'Long March' left Derry, Nationalist groups lined the streets with some holding banners proclaiming: 'march of shame'. A Nationalist leader stated of the march:

This march is not about civil rights, it is about stirring up sectarian tensions and is about hate and triumphalism, and it is a slur on the memory of Martin Luther King that this march of shame should be compared with the Washington march. (*Irish Times*, June 19, 1999).

This process of 'framing contests' that arise in response to the articulation of 'injustice masterframes' occur as oppositional groups mobilise with attempts to 'rebut, undermine, or neutralize a person's or group's myths, versions of reality, or interpretative framework' (Benford 1987:75). Since 'framing' occurs in a multi-organisational field, other parties, such as the media also become implicated in the process of framing. The Nationalist and Unionist press, in particular, attacked or defended the Long March. The *Belfast Newsletter*, a pro-Unionist organ, for instance, ridiculed Nationalist attempts to frame the Long March as a 'walk of hate' by alternatively calling it 'the walk of pride' of the 'Protestant civil rights march'. The protagonists typically directed much of their attention to the media, including asking them to intervene. Jonathan Bell, the spokesperson for the Long March, told journalists in a

press conference: 'you people must carry the plight of the innocent victims, the real victims of ethnic cleansing, the activities and savagery of the republican death squads and their war crimes across the community' (*Belfast Newsletter*, June 25, 1999).

## Prognosis

The second framing stage, the 'prognosis frame', involves the planning of tactics to remedy the problem. The actions devised by the UVM look to highlight that they are a civil rights movement experiencing injustice. The repertoire of tactics formulated by a movement thus seeks to create an objective fit between strategic political goals and the organisational form of the social movement. (Tilly 1978).

The Long March, with its analogy of a civil rights movement, was led from the front by participants who had been maimed in Republican violence or were family members of those killed. Other tactics used by the movement have included forming a 'human chain' and commemorative remembrance rituals at the site where victims were killed by republicans. These tactics can be seen as confined within the 'injustice masterframe': they are selected because they derive a strong resonance with non-violent repertoires of protest which derive from civil rights movements.

It is also at the prognosis stage where intra-movement acrimony can occur as activists lack consensus over what tactics to use. An obvious example of this was when FAIR, the most high-profile and active victims' group, split in 2000 a number of members left to form a new victims' group, citing the need for a new approach free from political controversy. A spokesperson for the new break-away group, NAVER/SAVER, stated: 'I feel that FAIR has got dragged into the political arena'. The leader of FAIR, Willie Frazer, replied that he would continue to emphasise 'justice and human rights' (*Belfast Newsletter*, July 21, 2000). The Long March also came in for criticism. A Unionist politician, Fraser Agnew, who had taken part in the Long March stated that the march 'was like emotional blackmail...I believe innocent victims are being exploited for political ends' (*Belfast Telegraph*, September 25, 1999).

## Motivation

The third frame, 'motivation', requires a system of incentives to mobilise people. Activists, at this stage, use the emotional vocabulary of propriety or duty to provide compelling accounts of why their constituency should engage in action. In one sense this is achieved by placing a huge moral value on participation. In a proposed victims' march to protest against power sharing with republicans, the organisers articulated the cost of failing to act: 'we cannot allow the sacrifice of many over the past 30 years to have been in vain. Please help us to secure a truly peaceful future for our children by being present' (*Belfast Newsletter*, September 2, 1999). Of the proposal that Irish republicans could be involved in Northern Ireland's government: 'if you want these people in the government of your country then stay at home. If you do not want psychotic serial killers in the government of your country then turn out' (*Belfast Newsletter*, September 25, 1999).

## Success?

The question is how successful has the UVM been in mobilising people to participate in their cause? The aims of UVM that I have identified include mobilising Unionists by 'framing' the political dispensation as a process that victimises them. The UVM have utilised the 'injustice masterframe' to portray Unionists as a discriminated group. In assessing whether a social movement deploys effective frames for mobilisation, Benford and Snow (2000:619) argue that the frames proffered by the movement have to derive 'resonance' for the constituency they target. Two sets of interacting factors account for the degree of frame resonance: 'credibility' and its relative 'salience'.

The 'credibility' of a frame requires a strong degree of consistency and this is facilitated by the congruency between the movement's beliefs and its actions. The repertoire of protest tactics utilised by the UVM largely drew strong resonance with the template for civil rights campaigns initiated by the African-American movement. The use of marches, human chains, sit-down protests have variously been used by the UVM in an attempt to confirm their 'human and civil rights' agenda as a victimised group. The high-profile and leading role of victims of violence in the protests has further helped evince a sense of consistency between 'civil rights' and 'victims'. The leader of FAIR, Willie Frazer, has

suffered a number of deaths within his family.

Problematically, for the movement there has been some inconsistencies between the groups' framing processes regarding nonviolent direct action and their tactical actions, which somewhat contradict the tenets of 'civil rights'. Since 'framing' is rarely a static cognitive structure, it is therefore always in process, evolving over time through a dialogical and dialectical debate between various interested actors as well as the shifting POS (Steinberg 1999). The UVM's use of civil rights tactics have substantially developed in relationship with current POS and in, some ways, have increased the movements' inconsistent framing.

The UVM increasingly sought to frame provocation as an integral constituent of their activism. The movement has not only sought to place into the public arena issues of Unionist civil rights, but through their actions they have tried to force others perceived as opponents to publicly respect their civil rights. The failure of oppositional groups to show respect and tolerance thus acts to condemn them whilst simultaneously confirming the status of the UVM's victimhood.

This tactic can be clearly seen in the 'Love Ulster' movement which emerged in August 2005. 'Love Ulster', like the 'Long March' was a dense network of Unionist groups formed to highlight Unionist grievances. Although the organisers stated that the movement was 'led by victims of some of the worst atrocities that the Province has had to endure' (*Belfast Newsletter*, October 29, 2005), 'Love Ulster' was formed after a campaign by a Unionist newspaper, the *Shankill Mirror*, who elaborated the movement's aims: 'To promote Unionist unity; to demand the democratic rights of the Unionist community are recognised and respected; to oppose one-way government concessions to republicanism; to give ordinary people a voice on these and other concerns' (*Belfast Newsletter*, October 29, 2005). The Love Ulster movement, as its title made clear, was also an invocation for all 'to respect the rights of the Unionist community'. This request was thus directed at their opponents – specifically Irish republicans - and any failure of republicans to reciprocate would be evidence of their antipathy and hatred of Unionism. The repertoire of tactics developed by Love Ulster sought to show that this seemingly simple act – to Love Ulster – was something that Irish Nationalists could not accept.

In 2006 Love Ulster arranged a march to take place through the centre of Dublin. The organisers stated: 'we hope we will be allowed to walk peacefully in Dublin to convey the message about how our relatives died at the hands of the IRA' (*Sunday Life*, January 29, 2006). Willie Frazer, the parade organiser, stated a few weeks before the parade, 'We're not going to Dublin to cause trouble but, of course, we wouldn't be surprised if republicans attacked the parade' (*Sunday Life*, January 1, 2006). As predicted by the media, the parade was called off just before it was due to start when up to a thousand republicans instigated a riot. Forty one rioters were arrested and fourteen, including six police officers, were hospitalised. The moderate Nationalist media was incensed by the violent protests of republicans claiming that it was little more than a publicity coup for 'Love Ulster'. One commentator stated of the protestors: 'They've let Love Ulster head home satisfied that the Republic is a cold and inhospitable house for Protestants...Unionists crave victimhood and on Saturday they were handed it' (*Irish News*, February 28). Willie Frazer, the organiser for Love Ulster confirmed this view:

There are quite a few people in Dublin on Saturday who will never go over the border again. It has done nothing to reassure them; in fact they are more convinced than ever that nothing has changed in the Republic. We believe it is because we were victims of republican terrorism and that is what their problem was...This was a case of highlighting the victims' issue and saying that this is our culture' (*Belfast Telegraph*, February 28, 2006).

The tactics utilised by 'Love Ulster', while managing to mobilise and coalesce adherents who are vehemently opposed to the Good Friday Agreement, its direct and perhaps confrontational focus has antagonised and alienated more moderate Unionists who may share their concerns about the peace process. Indeed, the Unionist media, which was once generally sympathetic for the victims' movement have increasingly turned against it. Gail Walker, a newspaper columnist who once supported FAIR and 'Love Ulster', stated of a proposed new Love Ulster march in Dublin for 2007: 'if you really love Ulster, stay away' (*Belfast Telegraph*, June 24, 2007).

Alongside frame consistency, the success of a movement's framing strategy can be assessed in terms of its 'frame salience': its relevance to its targets for mobilisation. The UVM tries to promote saliency by demonstrating to all Unionists that they are victimised by the current political dispensation. A large portion of the UVM's activity is thus geared towards gathering and exposing information which underlines evidence of inequality and injustice. More experientially, the UVM tries to engage with the symbols and more broadly the culture that mediates agents' perceptions and understandings of the

world (Crossely 2002: 136). As such, the symbols of revolt used by civil rights movements, as Tarrow (1998: 118) elaborates, neither wholly derive from tradition or are newly invented, but 'the costumes of revolt are woven from a blend of inherited and invented fibers into collective action frames in confrontation with opponents and elites'.

And so with the UVM, its attempt to fashion a new Unionist identity, that of a minority community suffering injustice, was constructed through the deployment of highly emotional symbols and rhetoric that have a strong prior basis in Unionist self-identification. The departure point of the 'Long March', Derry, was chosen because it has historically been evoked as a place of Unionism under siege. In the late seventeenth century the city's Protestants were placed under siege and ever since it has been symbolically used to remind Unionists not to succumb to external and internal threat. The organisers further used the example of the exodus from the city by a large percentage of Unionists in recent decades, as well as ongoing attacks against Protestants in the city, as evidence that Unionists remain under siege. The presence of Protestant clergy and the articulation of religious discourse, which especially made reference to the image of the persecuted innocent that lies at the heart of the Christian gospel, is a constituent part of Unionist politics and self-identification (Morrow 1997:55). It also re-elaborates the conflict in Northern Ireland as not only a struggle for political power, but is also a moral and spiritual battle, in which the explanatory power of fundamentalist religion resonates with the experience of persecution and violence. The Long March, for example, began with a prayer. In many ways, the degree of saliency and relevance the UVM has evinced appears limited. Even from the start, the numbers of recruits they managed to mobilise for protests were substantially lower than they predicted. A 'Love Ulster' parade in Belfast in 2005 only managed a few thousand marchers despite anticipating up to 40,000. The UVM were always ultimately 'preaching to the converted': those that were opposed to the Good Friday Agreement. The success of the UVM was to coalesce disparate elements of Unionism (victims' groups, clergy, political parties, Orange Order and even paramilitaries).

The shift of Unionist identity required for a wholesale move to the status of victimhood, however, has depended on the powerful Unionist political parties who aligned themselves to the UVM. In particular, The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), led by Ian Paisley was willing backers of the UVM because they were the most powerful and visible anti-GFA party in Northern Ireland. Party members of the DUP had often been seen at UVM protests, including making speeches at rallies.

A profound change in the current political opportunity structure, however, has worked to cause a substantial rift within the UVM. This change is due to the fact that whereas the DUP once vehemently opposed power-sharing with republicans, they have now engaged in something of a *volte-face* by going into partnership with republicans in a new power-sharing executive in 2007. The integration of hard-line Unionists in power-sharing is founded to some extent on a resurgence of Unionist triumphalism. Ian Paisley, the leader of hard-line Unionism, has spoken of republicans being defeated and humiliated. This self-confidence stems from the framing of the peace process as ending with the defeat of republicans and the consolidation of the UK union. Such positive Unionist engagement with devolved government does not allow for self-encapsulation based on marginalisation and victimhood.

Victims' groups, especially FAIR, who are opposed to power-sharing with republicans at any cost, now accuse their former close allies, the DUP, of betrayal and have mounted protests outside government buildings where DUP ministers hold posts. The DUP, alternatively, have stated that FAIR, and particularly its leader Willie Frazer, do not speak for all victims and that he would elicit more support if he was 'genuinely involved in victim support rather than opposition politics' (<http://www.victims.org.uk/04.05.07.htm>). The effect of this chorus against the UVM is to suggest that victimhood should be restored to the private arena where such grieving is better suited and that protests should be limited to service delivery. Even though many Unionist politicians and much of the Unionist media were once aligned to the political 'injustice masterframe' they now morally devalue the perceived 'politicisation' of the victims' agenda.

While this is partly due to the fact that political parties strategically manipulate victims' groups for their own political exigencies, it also to do with wider political and cultural notions of victimhood prevalent in post-conflict transition societies. Although during times of political uncertainty victims can be held up as 'moral beacons', as their suffering acts as a pertinent reminder of the wrongs meted out by adversarial groups, when political élites decide that many of the issues which concern victims are finished, there is an expectation that victims will oblige by 'moving on'. The persistence of victims' groups to raise politically inexpedient issues can open them to accusations of being 'dinosaurs' or only concerned with gaining 'blood money' (see Hamber 2006).

## Conclusion

This paper has applied social movement theory to illuminate the origins, development and decline of the Unionist Victims' Movement in Northern Ireland during the post-conflict phase in Northern Ireland. By demonstrating how political opportunities and cultural framing processes interact in the evolution of social movements, this helps provide a richer and more dynamic analysis of how social movement actors change over time (Bosi 2006). While political opportunities and mobilising structures, such as the provision of British state funding and recognition of the victims' agenda in the late 1990s, provided resources for groups to form and mobilise, the UVM utilised framing processes to elaborate the post-conflict phase as one which discriminates against all Protestant Unionists in Northern Ireland. In so doing, the UVM has sought to create dense networks with a range of Unionist groupings by aligning and bridging together their disparate aims and identities under the rubric of the civil rights 'injustice masterframe'. However, lack of resonance and saliency of the UVM's framing strategies to connect with the wider Unionist community in Northern Ireland not only reveals the multiple cleavages within Unionism, but also how shifting and closing political opportunities has rendered the message of the UVM seemingly incoherent to its professed aims as a civil rights movement. This can be most clearly seen in how the movement, in the face of dwindling political support, has increasingly sought to use provocation as a means to initiate mass support. The withdrawal of support from key allies, particularly the DUP, as Unionists seek to progressively engage with political power sharing has also stymied the UVM network of alliances.

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#### Web Page Information

<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/victims/groups/jn08unionmove.html>

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