6   Ulster Loyalist Accounts of Armed Mobilization, Demobilization, and Decommissioning

Neil Ferguson and James W. McAuley

A section of the population here tried to overthrow the state by force of arms, and the British government, after the fall of Stormont, failed in their fundamental right, or the fundamental thing for them was to protect life and to me they failed in that. I could have easily got involved with the RUC, because, I mean, I wasn't involved in any criminal activity before I joined the Ulster Volunteer Force, but I felt that we had been let down by our government, who had handcuffed the security forces with their policy of appeasement and restraint rather than the same sort of policy they used in the conflict in the Falklands. If they had had the same attitude towards republicans, I don't think it would have been a war. I think it would have been a conflict that could have been put down in a couple of years. (Interview with UVF Volunteer, Belfast, Ferguson 2007)

This quote is from a former member of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and former prisoner who served thirteen years of a life sentence for murdering a republican paramilitary and who is now actively involved in conflict transformation, reflecting on why he decided to join the UVF during the 1970s. It is a quote that resonates with many of the accounts given by former loyalist paramilitaries about their reasons for shunning the 'legitimate' state forces in an attempt to combat violent militant Irish republicanism. This chapter will explore narratives shared by former loyalist paramilitaries which explored their participation in armed loyalist movements and actions, and how the paramilitary ceasefires and peace process facilitated their disengagement from politically motivated violence and their transfer into more civic or political roles within their community. These narratives were collected in a series of interviews conducted by both authors and their respective research teams over a decade from 2000 to 2010.

The fragmented response of loyalism[1] gave rise to a multitude of paramilitary organizations, based in the Protestant working class. As the response

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[1]   See Campbell (in this volume) for an extended discussion of working class loyalist mobilization and the collective memories which fuelled loyalist responses in the early 1970s.

began to become more structured, two main paramilitary organizations dominated, one was the Ulster Defence Association/Ulster Young Militants grouping; the other was the UVF/Red Hand Commando grouping. The Ulster Defence Association (UDA) founded in 1971 grew out of the wide network of vigilante groups that had appeared in loyalist districts and the UVF, which (although it had surfaced in 1966) began to organize and recruit heavily in the early 1970s. The dynamic behind growing paramilitary membership continued to draw on existing notions, especially narratives of siege and community defence. It also gave expression to the conviction felt by many Protestants that the constitutional position of Northern Ireland was under direct threat, that the government response was weak, and that Northern Ireland faced a challenge that was not being effectively met by state forces, which were unable or unwilling to effectively engage militant republicanism. It must also be remembered that the motivations for young Protestants joining one armed grouping over another are complex and will vary across location and time depending on the legitimacy, popularity, and strength of the organizations in that locality and the current threats the community faced. Indeed in the tightly knit communities of Belfast, living in one particular street instead of the one around the corner may be the only significant factor in choosing to join the Red Hand Commando (RHC) over the UVF or the UDA. Furthermore, even the coherence of the UDA and the UVF as singular organizations is questionable, and at times battalions or brigades move in contradictory directions to the overall organization (McAuley 1994).

In line with Bosi and De Fazio (in this volume) and Fillieule (2010, 2015), the narrative accounts of mobilization and disengagement presented here are broadly supportive of the wider literature surrounding engagement in political protest, viewing social mobilization as a dynamic process involving individual agency and interaction between political actors, groups, and the context in fuelling engagement and disengagement in political protest and violence. As the narratives will demonstrate, any analysis of the paths in and out of armed groups must incorporate the repeated interplay between micro, meso, and macro factors as demonstrated in recent research with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Italian Red Brigades (Bosi and Della Porta 2012), rather than relying on static grand macro theories (Fillieule 2015).

These narratives accounts explain how people sustain political protest (see Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2007, 2013) and the role of political socialization in that process (McLeod and Shah 2009; Petrovic, Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2014). In particular, these narrative

accounts share much with the work of Klandermans and his colleagues (1997, 2003; Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2007) and illustrate the importance of social identity and shared emotion in the interviewees' personal understanding of their engagement in politically motivated violence. In terms of political socialization, the narrative accounts illustrate that while the political socialization is a lifelong process, with movement into conflict transformation after the ceasefires of 1994 and the Good Friday Agreement testament to this, late adolescence and early adulthood is the key period for the political socialization of the former paramilitaries, as it is with many people who engage in protest or join social movements in other contexts (Ferguson, Burgess, and Hollywood 2008; McLeod and Shah 2009; Silke 2003). For all our interviewees it was during this period of their lives that they decided to join loyalist paramilitary groups.

The individuals providing these accounts of mobilization into loyalist groups share similarities; they all came from urban working-class backgrounds. Indeed many of the interviewees reflected on how their living conditions and socio-economic opportunities were similar to the Catholics who were agitating for civil rights.

> The questions that we have to ask, like when you look at civil rights, the people living in Brown Square and the Shankill were living in the same type of accommodation, the same type of conditions as the people in the Falls. There was no difference. They all had outside toilets. They all lived twelve to fourteen to a two-bedroomed house. So, I mean, what was the difference? (Interview with UVF Volunteer, Belfast, Ferguson 2007)

One of the key differences from their Catholic neighbours was that they had been socialized in the working-class loyalist traditions of band parades and Eleventh Night bonfires, while many had family members who had been in the Orange Order or who had attended political rallies organized by Protestant demagogues such as Ian Paisley:

> There was a very strong community spirit, very loyalist, very unionist, very Orange. My father would have been in the Orange Order, I grew up in the junior Orange Order, you know, as you do. Follow in the family and community traditions [...] I suppose you didn't think you were sectarian. You weren't even aware of it. You weren't aware of being a bigot or anything like that. It was just your traditions you grew up with. (Interview with RHC Volunteer, Belfast, Ferguson 2007)

Many of the loyalists we interviewed spoke of how they viewed Ian Paisley as a role model or looked up to him, or were naïve enough to believe in his 'black and white' rhetoric which fuelled their fears and pushed them towards loyalist paramilitary groups: 'I thought Ian Paisley was God. I thought whatever he said had to be true because he was a leader and he wore a collar and everything like that' (Interview with Ferguson 2004). While Paisley's role in recruiting young men into paramilitary groups was fiercely contested by himself and others (Taylor 1999; Tonge et al. 2014), he had a number of associations with members of paramilitary groups throughout his career and was involved in the creation of a number of quasi-paramilitary groups with links to members of the UVF and UDA, such as the Ulster Protestant Volunteers (UPV) in the 1960s, along with 'Third Force' and 'Ulster Resistance' in the 1980s.

However, Paisley had no proven involvement with the instigation of violence and he always stated that he never advocated the use of violence. Regardless of his role in these groups, his powerful speeches resonated with the fears of Ulster Protestants that they were being 'sold out' by Westminster and their lives and livelihoods were under threat from Irish Catholics and republicans. His messages and status as a 'man of God' had a profound influence on many working-class Protestants, an influence which caused many to consider using violence to defend Ulster and pushed some of them towards paramilitarism.

While these young paramilitary recruits had strong Protestant, unionist, loyalist (PUL) identities, were closely bound to their community, and had their fears amplified by Paisley and others, their political ideas were naïve and relatively unformed when they joined loyalist paramilitary groups:

> I didn't see us as setting out to achieve anything. I saw us more as a reaction, as a deterrent. I always hoped that the IRA would desist from what they were doing and then the UVF would be able to reciprocate, which I'm hoping is happening now, albeit a long time later. At that time [the early 1970s] I don't think anybody my age would have thought we'd be going into thirty years of conflict. (Interview with UVF Volunteer, Belfast, Ferguson 2004)

At a time when governments, academia, and the media are focused on radicalization and the role of radicalization in leading to engagement in political violence, it is important to remember that many purveyors of politically motivated violence are not radical or have not been radicalized

(Della Porta and La Free 2012). Many are politically and ideologically naïve, and their violence is the result of the more implicit pressures of group solidarity and/or explicit threats or feelings of threat than political intention (Fillieule 2015).

The interviewees were all young men living in a time of huge flux at the beginning of the 1970s and this offered lots of opportunity for adventure and risky behaviour, which provided novelty and excitement and led to some of them joining the Young Citizen Volunteers (YVC) or Ulster Young Militants (UYM) while most engaged in rioting and clashes with the neighbouring Catholic community or the security forces.

> At the age of eleven I can remember listening to gun battles between the B Specials and the IRA. So my earliest memory of some of the Troubles is that, coz at the bottom of the street was a wee off-licence or wee bar that used to be there called – and bullet holes riddled it the next morning. I was a child so it was a bit of excitement [...] From that age then until I think about sixteen or something I remember being involved in the riots. I laugh when I tell people [that] we were the first ones to be stoning the British troops. I think it was the Fusiliers or the Welsh Fusiliers. I can remember as clear them coming round on their wee jeep with none of this armour stuff that you have today, and it was a new experience for everybody, I think. It was certainly a new experience for a teenager. (Interview with UVF Volunteer, Belfast, Ferguson 2008)

Prior research within Northern Ireland and in other contexts has shown that eventual membership of armed political groups is the result of an incremental process of increasing acts of insurgence (Burgess, Ferguson, and Hollywood 2005; Ferguson, Burgess and Hollywood 2008; Oberschall 2004). The following is an example of such views:

> There was a number [of reasons for joining a loyalist paramilitary group], the main one was one of my best friend's father was shot dead. He was a UDR [Ulster Defence Regiment] man. His young sister was eleven years old. She was shot in the legs. My hometown had been completely destroyed by IRA bombs twice. There were four or five other UDR men in the area who were shot. There was a couple of British soldiers that had been shot dead in Lurgan outside the hospital. A couple of local policemen [were] shot in the town. So, just that whole environment at that time. I went to the funeral of my friend's father. His young sister was screaming for her daddy to come back. I can remember crying. I left that, but swore

[that] if I ever get the chance for revenge then I would [take it], so it was
mostly a human response to what was happening around me. (Interview
with UVF Volunteer, mid-Ulster, McAuley 2007)

Many of our interviewees discussed how they would begin on the fringes
of the conflict, perhaps running with gangs and getting involved in riots,
before being approached by, or approaching armed groups and becoming
involved in assassinations or bombings. Even when they engage in their
initial political activity, protest, or violence it is usually as the result of
local-level reactions to the events taking place around them and is without
any coherent or developed political strategy – it is a simple reaction to the
perceived unjust action of others. As mentioned earlier, much of this initial
activity is born from a frustration with the inability of the state to contain
or counter republican violence, again reiterated here by another former
UVF volunteer:

We wanted to smash back or hit back, and living in that area was a perfect
place to do it. So that was how I became involved. It's yes I wanted to
defend my area, yes I wanted to smash back at those who were creat-
ing the mayhem and the havoc and [I] genuinely and honestly felt that
the police weren't doing enough, you know, they weren't defending us.
(Interview with UVF Volunteer, Belfast, Ferguson 2008)

It is important to identify the necessary context for constructing loyalist
identity, the role of community within that identity, and the place of a
self-contained social system, which provides a coherence of meaning within
loyalism. Feelings of grievance, frustration, and perceived injustice are com-
mon factors which promote movement participation (Klandermans 1997;
Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013), especially when these feelings
are based on group-level comparisons which induce feelings of fraternal-
istic deprivation (Runciman 1966) and which also resonate with personal
experiences (Foster and Matheson 1999). For many of our interviewees,
this movement from an apolitical life into active political participation was
the result of some incident that had a dramatic impact on their world view.
Most of these critical events related to someone they knew being harmed or
killed, or that the violence of the Troubles was 'getting a bit near to home'.
In the words of a former loyalist paramilitary, membership in paramilitary
groups 'was an explosion waiting to happen and it happened when I was
fourteen, and by the time I was nineteen I had made a conscious decision
to join the UVF. Not before that.' This interviewee had heard that a young

man killed by one of 22 bomb explosions on 'Bloody Friday' in July 1972 shared the same name and age as himself. The effect this incident had on him was dramatic: 'And I thought, 'That's my fence sitting days over', and I joined the UVF. And there's so many stories like that where you talk to republicans and loyalists and you find out there was a moment. There was a moment when they crossed the Rubicon' (Interview with UVF Volunteer, Belfast, Ferguson 2004).

An unplanned and unpredictable occurrence or a critical incident, such as the Bloody Friday bombings, increases a person's chances of political mobilization by impacting on them in two distinct ways. Firstly, an individual's sense of collective identity is heightened as ethnocentrism increases as a reaction to the increased threat facing his or her community. Second, the critical incident precipitates a period of self-reflection that helps the individual to determine a boundary demarking acceptable and unacceptable expectations, treatment, and/or conditions. As with other interviewees, experiencing this critical event caused him to re-evaluate his life and the outcome was his decision to 'return the serve'. He began to engage in a campaign of violence against Irish republicans and the wider Catholic community, which led to his incarceration in HMP Maze for over half a decade.

During this period of self-reflection, the individual weighs up their 'resources', efficacy, social capital, and options for action and inaction, bringing in personal history, current circumstances, socialization experiences, socio-economic considerations, education experiences and prospects, sociopolitical context, etc., together as they try to make sense of the incident and create a future path for themselves. A number of scholars, including the philosopher Karl Jaspers (1970), have recognized the importance of the *Grenzsituation* (boundary situation) created by having to deal with a situation that prior knowledge or rational objective reasoning cannot prepare a person to overcome. These boundary situations or critical life events then force people to radically reconsider and reformulate their life trajectory. These boundary situations also demonstrate the dynamic linkage between macro-, meso-, and micro-level events interacting and producing the conditions for an individual to facilitate engagement in political violence and are common in other accounts of micro-mobilization in activist careers, criminal life histories, and engagement with terror groups (Fillieule 2015; Goodey 2000; Horgan 2014).

Interestingly, these young, politically naïve men are now engaged in politically motivated violence and actively engaged in committing murder or attempting to kill. Research has demonstrated that engaging in these

activities has significant negative implications for psychological and physical wellbeing and personal freedom (Burgess, Ferguson, and Hollywood 2007; Ferguson, Burgess, and Hollywood 2010, 2015; Grossman 1996; Jamieson, Shirlow, and Grounds 2010), yet while mobilized they are not politically or ideologically radicalized. In becoming 'radicalized' we mean they enter a process of political and ideological awakening and develop deeper political understanding, ideals, and aspirations. For our sample, their political education or radicalization did not begin until they were imprisoned.

The prison years had a profound impact on their political life, with their protests continuing in prison, but now focused on the prison regime; in these encounters they also honed their negotiation and communication skills, which would assist them in their political careers post-incarceration. Prison also offered them the opportunity to develop their political thinking and engage in prison education programmes; indeed, for many of the loyalists incarcerated, prison provided their first real attempt at education. The 'opportunities' prison provided began to fuel this process of political and ideological radicalization (McAuley 2000, 2001). These developments are succinctly expressed by a former UVF volunteer:

> I've been involved for something like 35 years and the next stage obviously when you get involved in the conflict, the more operations you carry out, the more you get involved, the bigger chance you've got of getting caught or killed. So I was caught, and put in prison, so I had those prison years where, and it should be no surprise to anybody, because some of the best leaders in the world developed their political thinking in prisons, Nelson Mandela [...] so it should come as no surprise that people in prison do develop because you've been removed from the conflict. (Interview with Ferguson UVF Volunteer, Belfast, 2006)

It is also clear that these prison years provided the space to think, which prompted these loyalist prisoners to reformulate their ideas and see the conflict from a fresh perspective while also developing a longer-term political strategy, that was only possible to develop in isolation from the action-reaction cycle of sectarian violence taking place on the streets of Belfast and elsewhere. Once released they found their thinking had moved forward and they were on a different page, in comparison to those continuing the conflict outside the prison walls. As another interviewee observed:

> Prison just gives you an opportunity to be detached from the conflict. It's a dubious way to be detached, but you're detached from it and it

gives you time to think. You come out with pretty clear ideas in your head. It's pretty difficult after that period of time when you're away and you go back and see your friends and colleagues from before and some of them are thinking in exactly the same way as they did in the early seventies. How's this happening like? And then they think because you've been in prison it's softened you or broken you or whatever, but that's not the case. It's just common sense, pragmatism. You can't go on killing each other forever. Some time you're going to have to talk, so why not do it now rather than go through another ten, twenty (or whatever) years of conflict? (Interview with UVF Volunteer, Belfast, Ferguson 2006)

So this reformulation and a renewed focus on education prepared them to leave prison ready for the next stage of their political journey, a stage which was exemplified by a move away from the employment of violence to a desire to engage with their local community to create the conditions for community development and conflict transformation. For most of the former loyalist combatants interviewed, one of the key reasons they began to disengage from political violence after the paramilitary ceasefires in 1994, was the desire not to witness another generation of children have the same experiences of political violence they had endured: 'Hopefully my kids will never see trouble like I seen. No never in my life do I want them to see that. I have a wee lad there and another child on the way' (Interview with UVF Volunteer, Belfast, Ferguson 2007). While social movement research and research from terrorism studies provide well-developed theoretical frameworks to explain mobilization into political movements, research on the processes involved in leaving social movements or disengaging from terrorist activities is much more limited (Ferguson 2011; Fillieule 2015; Horgan 2009; Klandermans 2003).

However, recent research on loyalist paramilitaries (Ferguson, Burgess, and Hollywood 2015), republican paramilitaries and members of the Italian Red Brigades (Bosi and Della Porta 2012), and with other armed groups from across the globe, such as Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups (Horgan 2009; Rashwan 2009; Vidino 2011), Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) (Reinares 2011), or neo-Nazi groups (Blee 2002; Bjorgo 2009), illustrate that a range of *push-and-pull* factors (e.g. losing faith in group ideology, burn out, change of circumstances, etc.) are involved in promoting or hindering an individual's demobilization from armed political groups.

Across the globe disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) processes have become a common and critical aspect of post-conflict

reconstruction initiatives (Knight 2008), with the reintegration of combatants into productive civilian life viewed as key to post-conflict security and recovery. Kingma (2000) provides four important reasons for engaging in DDR, namely, *humanitarianism* – many combatants are victims of the conflict in addition to being perpetrators of violence; *compensatory justice* – soldiers have done their duty and expect compensation because of *their potential contribution* – ex-combatants can be a major force in rebuilding war-torn societies; and finally, *they are potential 'spoilers'* who can jeopardize the peace process or engage in criminal activities which threaten economic and democratic stability and thus need to be dealt with.

However, there is no singular DDR programme and some approaches have been much more successful than others. One common measure of success is simply to count the numbers of combatants successfully demobilized, but there is a need to look beyond the numbers to explore the success of the reintegration of combatants into civilian society and this becomes much more difficult. Particularly when researchers try to understand the micro- or individual-level determinants of successful demobilization and reintegration.[2] So while the consensus is that these processes are fundamental to building peace, increasing security and assisting in economic post-conflict recovery (Doyle and Sambanis 2000), their complex nature makes it difficult to distinguish which strategy or intervention makes what specific beneficial contribution (Humphreys and Weinstein 2007).

However, as in the case with every political conflict across the globe, Northern Ireland is a unique situation in terms of conflict transformation, DDR, and the lessons which can be learned and exported (Ferguson 2010; Rolston 2007; Shirlow and McEvoy 2008). Thus, all potential lessons need to be carefully considered before application elsewhere. Just as with any analysis of mobilization, any analysis of demobilization and disengagement must be a multilevel analysis which considers the interactions between the micro, meso and macro. In this context, any individual demobilization narrative from a loyalist paramilitary needs to be understood against the backdrop of a wider organizational disarmament process which began in 1998 and concluded in 2009 for the UVF and RHC and 2010 for the UDA, which were also part of the wider Northern Irish peace process.

For our interviewees the key drivers for demobilization came from within the organizations, rather than necessarily from within themselves. In particular, the leadership and the ability of the leadership to 'turn the tanker' and guide the rank-and-file membership towards a less militarized

2   See Humphreys and Weinstein (2007) for an illustration of this complexity.

and more civilized role was key to them disengaging from politically motivated violence:

> I've seen people at the top and it's starting to filter slowly, slowly, slowly. A lot of stuff now going on is the foot soldiers, the ceasefire soldiers [...] and I know there are these thoughts within organizations, how do we address these kids? How do we basically get rid of them, you know what I mean, without them falling into ruin the way the LVF [Loyalist Volunteer Force] went, you know. (Interview with UVF Volunteer, Belfast, Ferguson 2008)

However, guiding the membership towards a new violence- and crime-free future is not as easy as many outsider observers, or loyalist leaders would like it to be. In particular, the paramilitaries fear that the peace process would make them 'redundant' and negatively impact on their ability to finance themselves. Or that this inactivity and lack of direction would in turn lead to the development of schisms within the organizations, such as that witnessed in the 1996 with the birth of the LVF, or the degeneration of different companies into organized crime gangs:

> At this point in time, the paramilitaries are disintegrating or mutating into gangs because it's, since 1994 when the ceasefire was called, it's what do you do now mate, we're redundant aren't we? [...] How do paramilitaries justify their existence if there's no conflict? Yes, we've tried to move and alter culture, trying to get people involved in the community, trying to get people involved in politics and some people just want to be by themselves, so we do try. But the greed, the money, I mean you're talking about big money. (Interview with UVF Volunteer, Belfast, Ferguson 2007)

While the role of the loyalist leadership in providing direction was often praised by the former loyalist paramilitaries, the leadership, or, more precisely, the lack of leadership and strategic direction within loyalism was viewed as a barrier to demobilization by former combatants. Generally, the barriers discussed usually related to the lack of capable leadership within loyalism and unionism more broadly or the lack of a grand political project within loyalism. The lack of a long-term political project was very much related to the nature of loyalism being focused on maintaining the status quo or simply combating the IRA, without any grand goal, such as achieving a united Ireland, to rally the troops around. The interviewees also tended to make comparisons with Sinn Féin and the Provisional IRA and bemoan how Sinn Féin and the IRA were better placed to provide opportunities to

their volunteers post-agreement than loyalism could. This former loyalist paramilitary sums up these problems:

> The educated, your articulate, you never got them in loyalist paramilitaries. I mean, that was one thing that there was a major, major shortage of. You had nobody to speak, to formulate policy, to talk about strategy, to talk about the way forward. It didn't exist. You had one or two thinkers, but not in the same degree as you would have had within the republican circles, so it was more or less a blind man fumbling in the dark. Where do we go from here and how do we go from here? How can we be used? (Interview with UVF Volunteer, Belfast, Ferguson 2008)

It is also important to note that while these former paramilitarists began their journey into these political movements from a start position of political naivety and only became politically educated and radicalized through their lengthy involvement or during imprisonment, when they disengaged from politically motivated violence they did not become de-radicalized or disengaged from political activity.

Since the ceasefires many former Northern Irish paramilitaries became involved in community and youth work as a form of community capacity-building or conflict transformation (Mika 2006), and likewise, the majority of our interviewees were now working on a variety of projects, such as, truth recovery and storytelling, co-ordinating restorative justice programmes, setting up mobile phone contacts to diffuse interface tension, developing sports and community activities, promoting racial tolerance, and/or were involved in local politics.

Thus, we have a paradox that while the political agency of the participants fuelled decades of conflict and political violence; violence that has left peace process of Northern Ireland stagnating under the shadow of the Troubles, yet it means they are also uniquely placed to initiate the attitudinal and behavioural changes necessary to persuade the younger generations not to continue the cycle of violence. Former political prisoners have been able to work together across community boundaries in a way that is less apparent among mainstream political parties (McAuley 2002; Shirlow and McEvoy 2008).

Indeed, the leadership shown by former prisoners has been instrumental in preventing the resumption of organized political and communal violence across Northern Ireland rather than successful policing or elite political accommodations (Shirlow et al. 2005; Shirlow et al. 2010). This point is clearly articulated by one of the former loyalist prisoners we interviewed:

> If anybody thinks that the PSNI [Police Service of Northern Ireland] are maintaining the peace in the interfaces, they are living in cloud cuckoo land. The paramilitaries are maintaining the peace at the interfaces. But that's good news. Some people would say, 'That's terrible – it shows the power they have', but given the year we had last year, and the year before that, and the year before that, and the year before that, it's not bad that we have this degree of calm at this point in time. (Interview with UVF Volunteer, Belfast, Ferguson 2007)

For the vast majority of our participants, their political lives were now focused on using non-violent means to bring future political changes. So while the participants were politically naïve when their journeys begin in the early days of the Troubles, after 30 years or more of being politically active their journey continues, yet for many the direction of their journey has changed to match the wider changes in Northern Irish society, however, their political identity and radical beliefs have not waned.

For the interviewees there was also a realization that to have a 'normal' peaceful society there would be a need for former combatants to become reintegrated into mainstream society and shake off the labels and associated stigma attached to being an 'ex-prisoner' or 'former paramilitary'.

> I've got to a position, which you know it is a position within the community, doing a lot of work the schools recognize, the police recognize, loads of things. I've dropped the tag of ex-prisoner and all that stuff, dropped that a long time ago. You know, some people feel that they still need to use that and we were saying, people like [David] Ervine[3] were saying, like there has to come a stage where you leave that behind [...] you have to move beyond that and move forward. (Interview with UVF Volunteer, Belfast, Ferguson 2008)

However, many have found this difficult especially as they felt rejected by mainstream society and the political elite; which tended to blame them solely for the Troubles:

> As someone who has worked towards trying to create a transition I realize all the difficulties involved in that and that again creates resentment [...]

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3   David Ervine was a UVF member and former prisoner who became leader of the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and was elected to the Northern Irish Assembly. For a detailed biography, see Moloney (2010) or Sinnerton (2003).

when you realize how tirelessly a lot of people worked to try and make
that happen these people [middle-class unionists] have really simplistic
views of the way things work. You just don't wind down thirty years
of militarism and paramilitarism just like that. You can't turn it off.
(Interview with UVF Volunteer, Belfast, Ferguson 2008)

During the interviews it was clear the narratives were still being written
and many were still active in politics, while for others the war was over
and it was time to move on and give time back to their families and/or
communities as a means of reparation for the time spent in prison. This
enduring politicization should not be surprising as research in other set-
tings has clearly demonstrated that while collective action is contingent on
holding a strong collective identity (Huddy 2001) once people are spurred
into action, it is difficult to simply switch it off (Van Stekelenburg and
Klandermans 2007).

It is clear that the accounts provided here demonstrate the dynamic role
of identity in collective action, and how, while the introduction of a peace
accord and the resultant societal change are powerful, they may not cause
individuals to de-radicalize and de-politicize and simply reintegrate into the
masses. Instead, we see continued radicalization and a strong attachment
to collective identity – just channelled into a new direction more fitting
with the new sociopolitical context.

Part of this process will also involve cognitive dissonance (Festinger
1957). In that, once people make a decision to follow a particular course of
action, they have to create justifications for pursuing this course. So the
more behavioural commitment to the group and group goals, the stronger
the feelings and cognitive justifications for this behaviour and the more
likely they will continue their activism in spite of the costs. As McCauley
and Moskalenko (2008) illustrate, the activist is likely to feel more pride in
group success and more anger and humiliation with group failure as they
rationalize and defend their actions and devise reasons to rationalize and
explain their behaviour.

Conclusion

Mobilization into loyalist paramilitary groups during the Troubles in North-
ern Ireland shares much in common with social movement theories and
research with other protest groups from Europe and beyond. In particular,
these narratives bear a remarkable resemblance to the narratives provided

by the IRA and Red Brigade volunteers interviewed by Bosi and Della Porta (2012), especially with the participants who followed the 'instrumental' and 'solidaristic' paths into these groups. These narrative accounts of mobilization, engagement in political action, and the processes involved in disengagement from politically motivated violence illustrate the complex range of factors which require consideration in order to understand the drivers pushing individuals in and out of these social movements. It must also be noted the majority of the participants in this study joined the UVF, UDA, or RHC in first decade of the Troubles, thus their experiences and motivations will differ from more recent recruits, and especially from those who joined after the 1994 ceasefire. Future research with a variety of ideologically different violent and non-violent groups from across the globe, who maybe are still actively engaged or have perhaps disengaging or even disbanded, will allow theory to develop and provide researchers and policymakers with an improved means of conceptualizing the scale and intricacy of mobilization and demobilization processes.

Interviews

Conducted by Ferguson, Belfast, 2004
Conducted by Ferguson, Belfast, 2006
Conducted by Ferguson, Belfast, 2007
Conducted by Ferguson, Belfast, 2008
Conducted by McAuley, mid-Ulster, 2007

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