The Dissidents: A study of the role played by kinship, tradition and social identity in the formation and evolution of violent dissident republicanism

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Thesis completed under the supervision of Prof. Gary Murphy in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Dublin City University, School of Law and Government

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John Mooney

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Chapter 7 - Figure 1. From Ideological Continuity to Criminal Hybridisation

Title: The Dissidents: A study of the role played by kinship, tradition and social identity in the formation and evolution of violent dissident republicanism

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Abstract

This thesis asks why violent republicanism continues to exist on the island of Ireland despite state efforts to eradicate it. It addresses the question by exploring the evolution of violent republicanism from eighteenth-century agrarian secret societies to the contemporary dissident landscape. It challenges many of the accepted narratives which consider modern dissidents to be nothing more than peace spoilers and ideological actors by offering instead a conceptualisation of the movement as a radical and violent subculture, which is continually evolving. Grounded in archival analysis and primary field interviews with paramilitaries, victims, police and intelligence officers, the thesis maps out the internal mechanics of dissident groups and the modern dark networks they inhabit.

The research shows that while groups like the New IRA and Continuity IRA maintain historical names and military titles for structural validation, they really function operationally as social networks in the modern social milieu. Ideological purism has largely degraded into a general form of violent republicanism, local vigilantism and alliances with transnational organised crime networks. The findings reveal that dissident republican groups have fundamentally transitioned from centralised, politically driven insurgencies into a networked subculture, sections of which operate along the crime-terror nexus. This thesis concludes that tradition, kinship, and social identity are playing a central role in preserving what has become a violent subculture.

Introduction

The ongoing activities of violent dissident republicans on the island of Ireland continues to attract academic attention and discussion about the nature of their sporadic terrorist campaign and its durability. The topic has been the subject of limited and very narrow academic inquiry by scholars who have sought to explain the nature of contemporary violent republicanism and the political ideology of those who oppose the Northern Ireland Peace Process. Dissident republicanism has been a feature of Irish society for more than three decades though its history can be traced back as far as 1760 and even further. Violent acts perpetrated by republican ultras who refuse to accept the negotiated settlement which led to the Good Friday Agreement of April 1998 is less frequent and intense than it was during the Northern Ireland Troubles but it still remains a significant security problem for both the Irish and British governments. Dissidents have killed more than 100 people and carried out scores of shootings, bombings and attacks since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (Edwards, 2011). They were responsible for one of the single greatest atrocities of the Northern Ireland Troubles: the Omagh bombing of August 1998 which killed 29 people and unborn twin girls and injured 250 people. Their victims have included British soldiers, members of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Prison Service but also children, women and men from the Catholic and Protestant communities, and others involved in organised crime. They continue to pose a significant threat. The stated aim of this violent movement is to force a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland in order to bring about its reunification with the Republic (Horgan, 2013; Mooney and O'Toole, 2003; Morrison, 2014). Ostensibly, secret paramilitary groups like the New IRA and Continuity IRA say they hope to establish a sovereign socialist republic through the use of violence. In this regard, they continue to recruit new members, refine their bomb-making capabilities, and plan and mount attacks but much of their time, activity and thinking is devoted to other activities. In the past decade, they've become deeply immersed in vigilantism, extortion, gangland murders and feuding.

It is in this contemporary reality that this doctoral thesis sits when it explores the role played by tradition, kinship and social identity in the survival and durability of this secretive violent movement, which has become evolved into a factionalised network of republican gangs, hybrids,

criminals and vigilantes. This study argues that invisible influences are now the primary driving forces in preserving violent dissidents of all hues, or what has now become a violent subculture.

Violent dissident republicans are usually portrayed in the literature as terrorists who will never accept a negotiated settlement, or who will never be satisfied by politics or appeased by mainstream opinion (McGlinchey, 2021, p. 24). They are often described as irrelevant peace spoilers who reject any political agreement that falls short of a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland and the establishment of a united Ireland. This analysis is deeply flawed as it overlooks what the movement has become: a hybrid of both the new and old. It also ignores the movement's violent history, its unseen internal culture and the transformative nature of violent groups. It also fails to notice the impact of the societal changes which have altered the dynamics of the underground dark networks which republican ultras inhabit, and the rapidly changing international security environment which influences them. This thesis argues that viewing dissidents as peace spoilers or presupposing that armed dissident republicanism is a historically determined residue, or a by-product of the Northern Ireland Peace Process, ignores the unseen roles played by tradition, kinship and social identity in the survival of this new republican movement. Hence it argues that framing the emergence of dissidents as simply a reaction to the Northern Ireland Peace Process and the Provisional IRA's decision to embrace democracy and abandon its armed struggle is both foolhardy and naive. It is flawed because it provides very little scope for examining why some people, the majority of whom do not openly express radical political views, join secret organisations wedded to violence.

This study examines republican dissidents through a contemporary lens, paying close attention to their day-to-day activities on both sides of the Irish border, the paths to membership of these unlawful groups, and their construction. It also examines the dark networks they inhabit and their interactions with criminal groups, extremists and hostile state actors. It also looks at republican ultras through the prism of convergence and divergence and where some organisations sit on the crime-terror nexus. By collecting information on the daily activities of these groups, looking at specific cases and examining the dark networks they inhabit, as opposed to just their acts of terrorism, one discovers a much larger body of undocumented activity by republican ultras and their supporters which are very different from those explored in the literature. This is largely

because the scholarly focus has so far been on dissident capability and examinations of their ideology as opposed to the dissidents themselves.

Studies of dissident republicanism most often analyse the topic as a form of terrorism or insurgency, or a reaction to the decision by the Provisional IRA and its political wing Sinn Féin to pursue their aims through constitutional means. Though some of the existing literature is invaluable, there are aspects of contemporary republicanism which it does not grasp and has overlooked. Much of the scholarly research has failed to examine these groups and their members through a contemporary lens and more importantly has ignored the novel events which may be shaping the movement's evolution. Crucially the existing literature fails to recognise the unpredictable and transformative nature of violent groups, the evolution of modern terrorism and the concept of convergence on the crime-terror nexus or hybridisation. Dissident republicanism is now a movement that attracts individuals into its ranks for various reasons and is used for various purposes. It has become many things to many people. It is a protest movement, a form of identity, a social network, a subculture, an expression of tradition and a form of rebellion against the established political parties that exist on both sides of the Irish border. It's also a vector for engagement in organised crime. No two dissidents or groups are alike. To understand what is called violent dissident republicanism, one must hold contradictory views of it and see it as a contradiction. Dissidents say they wish to overthrow the establishment yet engage with it. They despise organised crime groups yet cooperate with them when necessary and have merged with them. Much of this has been overlooked or ignored in the existing literature.

This study suggests that modern violent republicanism should be viewed as a complex and radical but evolving underground subculture as it allows one to make sense of aspects that may appear at first illogical to outsiders. Juergensmeyer (2017) is correct when he makes the compelling argument that terrorism is as much a product of culture as it is the result of individuals. He suggests that people can come to perceive themselves and the meaning of their actions from the responses others have to them. In other words, a person's self-image and identity can become more defined the more it is socially recognised. It is necessary to understand the violent dissidents who live in communities on both sides of the Irish border do not necessarily see themselves as a marginalised group struggling to achieve the goal of bringing about a united Ireland. In fact, some dissidents have a clear view of who they are and why they

wish to preserve their secret underground army. In essence, they feel pride in the social recognition their parent organisation provides to both themselves, their families and their extended social networks. Their individual and collective social identity is built upon being a member of a secret organisation, which can trace its lineage to bygone eras and has its own rules and traditions. Some view themselves as being superior to others because they uphold what they consider to be a historic tradition. Others see themselves as powerful actors in the social milieu. But the label also brings power. Dissidents are just as likely to be centrally involved in organised crime and racketeering as they are political activities. Their use of violence is not confined to attacks on the security forces in Northern Ireland but is more likely to be utilised against their own communities, rival organised crime gangs and others who pose a threat to them. In the contemporary world, being labelled a dissident confers a sense of power and status. The pathway into the movement in all its forms now bears striking similarities to those followed by people into organised crime and violent subcultures. At any given point of time in every country, the past has an important bearing on both the present and the future. By examining the influence of tradition, kinship and social identity on violent dissident republicanism, this thesis examines the implications of the bonds, friendships, influences, family ties and tradition in the durability and evolution of this movement in a globalised world. In doing so, it provides a far reaching study of the modern iteration of a violent tradition that has existed for centuries. Ultimately it will argue that people join and commit themselves to republican paramilitary groups for reasons which are not necessarily political but very personal and locational. Some are motivated to join the modern iteration of the IRA because of family tradition and the status it confers, but others are motivated by a sense of adventure or a sense of belonging. Others join the IRA for their own protection or to generate income. In many cases, violent dissidents and republican paramilitaries have found meaning in their lives, or what scholars like Erikson (1968) describes as a sense of coherent structure, and a stable social role to occupy.

Contributions, Aims and Objectives of this Study

The research aims of this thesis sets out to achieve the following core objectives with a view to advancing the literature.

- To explore and understand the role played by kinship, tradition and social identity in sustaining this violent movement in the modern era.
- To document if violent dissident republicanism has evolved into a factionalised movement of diverse actors involved in organised crime, extremism and other illicit activities.
- To establish if the movement has transitioned into or developed the character traits of a violent subculture in contemporary Ireland.
- To examine the threat the movement will pose in the years and decades ahead to peace and security on the island of Ireland

The role played by kinship, tradition and social identity is dominating the debate in the driving forces of political violence around the world. This thesis draws from semi-structured interviews and records it has gathered during the research phase. It also utilises information gleaned through observational study of dissidents. These shed a new light on the contemporary driving forces which shapes this violent underground and fuels its existence. It looks beyond those who proclaim to oppose the Northern Ireland Peace Process and more significantly seeks to understand what they have become. Violent dissident republicans readily acknowledge their terrorist campaigns will never achieve their stated aims of establishing a united Ireland yet they persist. It can be argued the majority of their activity does not concern itself with the running of a terrorist campaign against the security forces in Northern Ireland but rather their own organisational survival, resolving internal disputes and other issues in the communities where they live and operate. This thesis therefore looks at the unseen but practical workings of republican paramilitary groups and gangs in order to understand their future direction.

Research Questions and Thesis Structure

This thesis seeks to answer the following question: what role does kinship, tradition and social identity play in the organisation and durability of violent dissident republicanism. In order to answer this question, this study also explores and answers a subset of related questions.

- Are violent dissident republican groups the modern iteration of a militant and violent tradition?
- How are violent dissident republican groups structured and organised?

- Is the movement dedicated to the advancement of a united Ireland, the historic raison d'être of the IRA and its predecessors?
- Has the movement become hybridised as a consequence of social progress?
- How do republican ultras engage with external actors, rival organisations and state actors?
- What position do they enjoy in the dark networks that exist on the island of Ireland and further afield?

Each of the above questions are important when considering the theoretical and thematic position adopted by this thesis. They are particularly important when considering the approach of this study as they reflect the contemporary but interdisciplinary nature of this research and the importance of acknowledging the ephemeral influences that drive violent movements. They are also reflective of this study's central theme that violent dissident republicanism should no longer be considered purely as a terrorist movement or terrorist residue of the Troubles but more a unique cultural phenomenon in many ways unique to Ireland. To advance this theory, this thesis presents eight chapters which seek to answer the research questions.

Chapter 1 examines the existing literature on terrorism and the driving forces of terrorist groups. The overall goal of this section is to explore the literature on the origins of terrorism, how terrorist organisations are born and how their campaigns are sustained. It also seeks to establish the psychological profile of terrorists, their ideologies and why they remain committed to violence when political activity might have advanced their cause. But this section also highlights the flaws in the existing literature, arguing that many of its accepted concepts and theories cannot be applied to modern terrorist groups. It will lay the groundwork for a more detailed exploration of the emerging research on the roles played by kinship, tradition and social identity in terrorist organisations and violent movements. Chapter 2 seeks to expand upon the foundation laid in the literature review by exploring the new and emerging fields of academic research which investigate the complex but intertwined variables that are shaping modern terrorist organisations, violent movements and radical subcultures. A growing body of evidence and research suggests that certain types of terrorism are morphing into violent subcultures, radical movements and hybrid organisations that retain the characteristics of terrorist groups, organised crime gangs, extremists and violent movements due to a variety of societal, environmental and other factors.

Violent dissident republicans are considered to be nothing more than a historical residue of the Northern Ireland Peace Process, or the product of a split in the Provisional IRA, rather than a subculture or violent movement which has evolved and mutated into an entity that is difficult to label. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to introduce concepts and theories that challenge the conventional understandings and definition of terrorism and indeed modern paramilitarism on the island of Ireland by assessing whether existing frameworks sufficiently address its contemporary manifestations.

Chapter 3 and 4 examines the historic origins of violent Irish republicanism, its complex history and ideology from the 1700s to 1998. It explores the existence of secret societies and other violent groups in Ireland, their ideologies, rich traditions and inter-generational durability. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the republican ultras of today are but the latest iteration of a violent tradition that has undergone multiple transformations since it first emerged. It seeks to demonstrate how this violent tradition is intergenerational, reinventing itself and evolving as each generation passes. The tradition has at times been overtly political but at other times more akin to a violent subculture or secret organisation that exists barely below the surface. But it also draws attention to the existence of dark networks in Ireland in bygone years by demonstrating how violent republicans or elements of the movement have always undergone periods of convergence with criminal and other illicit actors, leading to hybridisation at certain times. Chapter 5 provides a contemporary overview of violent dissident republicanism by providing an insight into its evolution in response to policy shifts in the Provisional IRA, casting new light on the emergence of the Continuity IRA in 1986 and the Real IRA in 1997. This chapter provides an overview of the various factions, their terrorist campaigns, ideologies and their interactions with each other. Most importantly it provides an insight into their construct and day-to-day activities using case studies and in-depth collection of interviews, information and data collected from primary sources. It charts how some groups converged with criminal actors to become hybrids whilst others diverged to preserve their ideology, morphing into republican inspired violent gangs. Chapter 6 provides an insight into the underground ecosystem in which republican ultras and their paramilitary brethren inhabit. There has been little academic research into the dark networks which violent dissident groups inhabit although it shapes and defines how they operate, the types of terrorism and violence they utilise and how this influences their direction. This chapter examines the position which violent dissident groups enjoy within the

contemporary underworld of terrorist groups, criminal organisations and hostile state actors. Chapter 7 tackles the themes reflected in the core question and the framework of this study - the role played by kinship, tradition and social identity in sustaining violent dissident republicanism. It is important to note there is some overlap and correlation as they all relate to the study's framework. People join paramilitary groups for a variety of reasons. Some come from families or communities with strong social networks and a strong sense of local identity. In some cases, there is a family history of joining the IRA, which is not viewed as a terrorist organisation but a culturally historic one. The decision to join the IRA is often justified on the grounds that it's a re-enactment of what previous generations have done as part of the traditional aim of achieving Irish reunification, but also as the continuation of family tradition. For others, joining a faction of the IRA is akin to joining a criminal gang. This chapter tackles the theme of kinship and social identity among dissident republicans to understand how and why people join and remain involved in violent groups and their offshoots, even when they do support their stated objectives. It also utilises case studies of violent dissidents in the Munster region to illustrate the heterogeneous and violent nature of the movement. This chapter also looks closely at the influence of social identity on dissident republicanism. The core argument of this chapters is that republican ideology is now of secondary importance in encouraging people to join and remain inside the group. It argues that identity and the social standing conferred by membership of the IRA or a paramilitary group is now the primary driving force. Joining an illicit organisation that occasionally engages in armed activism provides status among peers, families, the community and even opponents.

Whilst violent dissident republicanism is one of several violent subcultures that exist in modern Ireland, it is not a surprise that some individuals have previously inhabited other seemingly opposing subcultures such as leftist, anti-racist, anarchist and anti-drugs vigilante groups. When attempting to understand why dissident republicanism attracts relatively few into its ranks, it is relevant to note that it currently has certain advantages compared to other radical groups and campaign groups. It is perceived and received as a threat to national security on both sides of the border. An individual who signals that he or she is part of this secret movement, or has associations with its political supporters, will not only be recognised as being against the establishment, but they will also be recognised as a security threat. It also grants access to adventure. Chapter 8 considers the findings of the previous chapters and produces conclusions in

an orderly fashion. This chapter offers some core findings relating to the topic and offers suggestions for future research.

Methodology and Design

Personal Reflexivity

I have worked as an investigative journalist for 30 years, writing about organised crime, paramilitarism, hostile state actors and political corruption. Documenting the activities and evolution of violent dissident republicanism has been a defining feature of my career since late 1997. The emergence of the Real IRA following a split in the Provisional IRA and the commencement of a bombing campaign which culminated in the Omagh bombing of August 1998 had a significant impact on me both personally and professionally. I became friends with many of the families of those who perished in the Omagh atrocity, but I also developed a deep interest in the topic having come to know many dissidents.

I have spent years researching the dissidents, their bombing campaigns, their use of improvised explosives, their structures, internal codes, ideologies and the covert operations mounted by the Irish and British security services to thwart them. I have also documented their involvement with powerful organised crime gangs, extremists and hostile state actors. I have spent countless hours in their company, speaking to them, getting to know their personal situations, attending their trials and meeting their families and extended social networks. My work also required building an understanding of how intelligence agencies use covert methods and information supplied by informers to strategically undermine them.

In 2003, I published *Black Operations: The Secret War Against the Real IRA*, a book I co-wrote with the journalist Michael O'Toole, about the Omagh bombing and the events which ultimately shaped the trajectory and evolution of the movement. It was during the research phase of writing this book that I first came to realise the dissidents who broke away from the Provisionals were not merely peace-spoilers but trying to preserve the IRA, or their secret way of life. It became clear to me that tradition, kinship and social identity were central to their way of life and by default the formation of the Real IRA. In all my dealings with violent dissidents, I came to view them as the IRA within the IRA, or the modern embodiment of violent secret societies. They were focused on preserving their version of the IRA for future generations and were not solely motivated by their opposition to the fledgling Northern Ireland Peace Process. The terms IRA, army, and movement were all used interchangeable to describe the latest product of the split in

the IRA. What struck me as it did others in the security services and the Irish government was how republican militants of all hues seemed to come together as the fledgling Real IRA commenced its first bombing campaign despite having competing ideologies. I can specifically recall meeting garda intelligence analysts responsible for the management of IRA informers saying they were astonished by the scale of interactions between the Real IRA and Continuity IRA. Garda intelligence soon discovered they were also working alongside non-aligned paramilitaries and organised crime gangs.

My professional background as an investigative journalist has afforded me extensive access to dissidents of every hue, the police officers and intelligence agents who pursue them, classified documents, court records and access to other environments that are not readily open or accessible to academics. This access influenced and shaped my initial understanding of dissident republicanism as both a political and hybrid phenomenon. To avoid any suggestion or inference that I might have allowed my journalism to confirm my research and data, I have tried to test and validate my interpretations against alternative views and the existing literature. I scoured the files and documents in my possession for evidence to either prove or disprove information provided to me during the research phase. My research into the events around the Omagh atrocity is a prime example. I built up a detailed and comprehensive picture of how the attack was planned, who was involved, who constructed the bomb, and who provided the stolen car used to transport the bomb. I interviewed various parties about what had occurred and cross-referenced such accounts with files in my possession. One interviewee had denied any role or knowledge of the attack, but I discovered their account was aimed at misleading me. The interviewee in question had been monitored meeting the bombers days before the atrocity.

During the research, I came to second-guess myself at every stage and check information with multiple contacts regardless of who was providing the information at hand. On more than one occasion, I discovered that information supplied by credible witnesses was simply wrong. For example, one retired garda who had an impeccable record had maintained the Real IRA and the Continuity IRA had amalgamated into a unified organisation in early 1998 before the Omagh bombing and had agreed to draft army orders, the rules which govern IRA conduct. I eventually disproved this tantalising piece of information.

Violent republicanism is heterogenous and therefore how dissidents deal with journalists and researchers like me varies widely. They have consistently regarded me as an outsider, albeit one who engages with them professionally. I have published articles on cases involving individuals who were wrongly accused of terrorism, but I have also written about prominent dissidents and their alleged connections to organised crime. Such criminality is regarded as a source of shame by more traditional elements within the movement, particularly those associated with ideologically orthodox, militarist strains of republicanism. These actors see themselves as inheritors of a historical lineage extending from the United Irishmen's Rebellion of 1798 and the Fenian Rising of 1867 to the Easter Rising of 1916 and the Troubles. They abhor drug dealing and crime. I always regarded them as the IRA within the IRA. They saw themselves in a similar fashion.

This dual positioning has shaped both access and disclosure: some dissidents showed themselves to be more candid because they associated me with independent journalism. Others did not. The same applies to the interviewees drawn from the security and intelligence services. At all times, I sought to clarify my role as a PhD researcher, outlining the separation between my journalistic and academic work, and setting out clear demarcations around how interview material would be used. Hence, in writing this thesis, I went to great lengths to avoid engaging in journalistic practices and instead chose to stand back and focus on academic research, albeit very insightful research. Although my previous journalism has provided me with a deep knowledge of this area, the contents of this thesis are grounded in academic research and the study of scholarly literature, records, research questions, observations and a transparent methodological framework.

The data collection and analysis followed established academic procedures rather than journalistic conventions, including formal ethical reviews, explicit sampling strategies, and a theoretically informed approach to my interpretation of events. It would be misleading to suggest that I disregarded everything I have learned through my career in journalism. Instead, I used my established contacts to secure interviews and re-read the files and court records in my possession through scholarly eyes. This approach allowed me to turn my prior experience and writing into something that contributes to and advances the existing literature on violent dissident republicanism. Some limitations presented themselves during the research phase and made me consider the wisdom of including them in my thesis. I harboured deep concerns and anxieties

about the wisdom of disclosing certain information about dissident capabilities which were not in the public domain should it upend ongoing police investigations. I had information on how specific bomb attacks were organised and the locations where explosives devices had been built but choose to omit these should it educate those involved about garda intelligence operations.

I chose to exclude material relating to surveillance tradecraft as practiced by the intelligence services on both security and national security grounds. I also choose to exclude material and information which might lead to the identification, or misidentification of informants, within dissident groups or the exposure of ongoing operations against them, organised crime gangs and hostile state actors. These decisions inevitably constrained the granularity of some accounts provided by interviewees, but they were integral to maintaining an ethically defensible practice in a very difficult field of research.

During the decades I have spent observing violent Irish republican dissidents, I have witnessed the movement transition from what was assumed to be classic peace spoilers into a complex network composed of ideologues, hybrids and organised crime gangs. While all the dissidents and factions I have encountered all pledged allegiance to the preservation of the IRA and its stated objective of a United Ireland, my research suggests this ideological framework practically serves to license violence for both political and broader criminal objectives. Put together, the evidence examined in this thesis supports the conclusion that violent dissident republicanism has evolved significantly. The movement has a sense of otherness which opposes the status quo. They say they wish to achieve a United Ireland but accept they cannot do so. The one commonality they all have is their belief in the use of violence to resolve whatever issues they have. To outsiders close to it, it has the character traits of a social network sustained by lots of things including tradition, kinship and social identity. The argument developed here stems from, and is tested against, that observation.

Research Paradigm

This study is located within an interpretivist-critical realist research paradigm, which favours interviews, the examination of documents coupled with observations to develop an insight into a chosen topic or research question. It recognises the realities of the social and political environments where dissidents exist and how their world is sustained by traditions, kinship ties and social identity that are never fully visible or understood. In the context of violent dissidents

and their supporters, this approach allows for the acknowledgement that traditions, kinship and social identities are embedded in wider historical and institutional structures, and can be accessed through the accounts, documents and journals left by participants.

The rich data collected in the research phase, the interviews, intelligence files and court transcripts are not just treated as contemporaneous accounts of certain events but also as an assessment of how violent dissidents and those familiar with them view their own behaviour and actions. It also seeks to provide evidence of the underlying social networks that continue to shape what has evolved into a violent subculture or counterculture. At all times during the research phase, there was an awareness of each participant's limitations and how their individual knowledge only stretched to the matters which they themselves were involved in. Where interviewees discussed matters which they were not directly involved in or central to but aware of, efforts were made to double check their accounts with independent third parties.

To surmise, every effort was made to capture as much information as possible to provide an insight into the roles played by tradition, kinship and social identity in the evolution and durability of violent dissident republicanism. The uses of interviews coupled with the rigorous examination of sensitive documents is aimed at providing an insight into the varying dimensions of modern violent republicanism but also into its links to organised crime and political extremism. This approach was aimed at creating a much deeper overviews of a world which is not directly observable.

Research Design and Data Sources

To address the research question, this study adopted a qualitative design centred on semi-structured interviews. As stated, this was complemented by analysis of intelligence documents, witness statements, contemporaneous interview notes, alongside primary evidential material curated by An Garda Síochána, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Director of Public Prosecutions in the Republic and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland. Together, these provided a robust and solid base for analysis.

A significant portion of the primary source material was facilitated through privileged access to documentation, intelligence reports, psychological profiles, letters and records shown to me by practitioners within the policing and intelligence communities. Furthermore, this research

incorporates an examination of legal documents, witness statements, surveillance logs and technical reports sourced from books of evidence, originally compiled by the security services for the criminal prosecution of violent dissidents, their associates and supporters and organised crime groups.

Careful attention was paid to the choice of the material cited in this thesis as there was an awareness of how the Irish, British and American security services do release disinformation as part of their efforts to thwart violent republican groups. The issue of redacted material wasn't an issue as access was granted to privileged information which was not redacted. The use of records which had been used to prosecute and convict dissidents and their associates in properly constituted courts also ensured the documents were tested against containing hearsay. This research also made use of newspaper articles, features and longreads that appeared in magazines and other publicly available information published by the Irish and British governments. It also relied on private papers and correspondence exchanged between the Irish governments and dissident groups. Use was also made of documents and reports collected whilst researching and writing my co-authored book *Black Operations.*

Fieldwork for this thesis, including interviews, document collection and observational work, was conducted between March 2022 and May 2026 focusing on events and investigations spanning from 1997 to early 2026. Interviews were conducted in Derry, Fermanagh, Louth, Dublin, Westmeath, Kildare, Limerick and Cork.

There was some informal checking of details, dates and events with some participants post interviews to ensure the credibility of the accounts provided but these were relatively minor. The reliability of various accounts was treated carefully. Additional weight was given to accounts provided by participants with first hand involvement or proximity to certain events and discussions. In cases where participants discussed specific matters which they were extant to, efforts were made to corroborate such information through comparison with intelligence records.

Participants and Sampling

To explore the research questions, semi-structured interviewees were conducted with 22 participants drawn from specific groups. Among them violent dissidents, their supporters,

victims, and members of An Garda Siochana, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the National Crime Agency.

A list of the interviewees and a brief description of their professional backgrounds is provided in the reference section. They ranged in age from 18 to 82 years of age. Two were women. Each of the interviewees were purposefully chosen because they had first-hand knowledge of dissident paramilitary structures and their support groups, enabling the research to obtain detailed information. Most of the interviews with the dissident community were arranged in secrecy to ensure security and to minimise interference in the interview process and setting. Three were organised following an approach to Saoradh, the political pressure group which supports the actions of the New IRA.

Interviewees from the intelligence and security communities were selected and directly approached because they had either led or participated in operations targeting dissident groups, their organisations, and their associates. Some also had direct experience of managing covert human intelligence sources and analysing information they provided. These "handlers and controllers" were chosen because they possessed and could provide information on what really happened inside groups like the New IRA, Real IRA and Continuity IRA, information that had already been distilled, analysed, and verified by the intelligence services often using other informers or listening devices.

Interview Organisation and Setting

All interviews were organised with the security of the participants in mind. The majority were conducted face to face at neutral locations including their private homes, bars, and hotels in order to minimise surveillance risks and ensure that conversations could not be overheard. More clandestine settings such as garages forecourts and vehicles were also used for particularly sensitive meetings with specific people. Other interviews took place as the interviewee went for a walk. Three were conducted over secure telephone lines. In the majority of cases, all the meetings were organised using the Signal app installed on a non-identifiable contact number and smartphone used for this research. This measure formed part of a broader set of security practices designed to protect participants' anonymity and to separate research communications from my professional work. An air-gapped computer was also used to write section of the thesis, which was backed-up on an external drive. I viewed such measures as necessary given the nature of my

research and my awareness of modern surveillance techniques and cyber security which I have learned during my career as an investigative journalist and open-source intelligence analyst with Bellingcat. In my opinion, to do otherwise would have been negligent.

Some participants agreed to be recorded by dictaphone or on smartphone apps, but the majority asked for the contributions to be noted down. Interviews ranged from approximately 45 minutes to six hours in one instance, with a small number of participants taking part in follow-up conversations. The interview style was casual and but always allowed participants to speak for as long as they wanted and felt comfortable. There were no time frame or limits set down once the interview started to ensure as much information as possible was obtained. As an interviewer, I remained silent throughout unless asking questions and was careful to avoid directing the interviewee or inadvertently injecting any bias. The interviews were conversational in tone.

In addition to the above, this thesis was also informed by observational fieldwork which involved attendance at republican commemorations, trials held at the Special criminal court in Dublin, far right protests across Ireland and other gatherings where dissidents were present. At such events and meetings, careful attention was paid to observing how people interacted, their language and discussions about republicanism, their community, competing dissident groups and garda/police activity against dissident groups.

Ethics, Anonymity and Data Security

All recordings, notes and transcripts were transcribed and stored on an encrypted drive, with alphanumeric codes assigned and identifying details removed. This system was designed to protect the identity of the participants and to adhere to the rigorous ethical standards necessitated by research involving sensitive populations. The data was held on an air-gapped laptop. This protocol was designed to guarantee the absolute anonymity of participants and to mitigate any potential security risks to their person. A list of the interviewees was kept on an encrypted drive, which gave the name, code assigned, a brief background of the interviewees, their contact details and other relevant information. The documents cited in the thesis were stored at two secure locations. The laptops used to write the thesis were stored in a safe. Specific documents were stored similarly when they were being examined.

Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and later checked against the recordings for accuracy, while contemporaneous notes from non-recorded interviews were expanded into detailed narrative accounts immediately after each meeting. All interview texts, documentary excerpts and fieldnotes were then compiled into the single encrypted hard drive for analysis. Detailed contextual descriptions of each participant's background are sequestered within the reference material to maintain the integrity of the blind-review process.

This system categorised interviewees according to their background or their specific proximity to dissident republicanism. A is used to indicate violent republican dissidents, their supporters and interviewees from a republican background, B denotes serving or former members of An Garda Síochána, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the National Crime Agency, C designates victims of violent dissident republicanism and influential community figures. Where specific information gleaned from the interview is used to form an opinion or is cited, the reference code of each interviewee is referenced in the text of this thesis by way of notes. These alphanumeric identifiers feature throughout the thesis and are meticulously cross-referenced via an annotated system throughout the narrative. The application of this alphanumeric coding framework ensures compliance with the institutional ethics board requirements at Dublin City University.

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts, documentary sources and fieldnotes were analysed using a theoretically informed analysis which compared interview transcripts, files and notes taken in the field. Information provided by interviewees from the ranks of the dissidents was compared and contrasted with data provided by garda and other interviewees. The evidence was also tested against the contents of intelligence documents and files.

Documents and files were thematically analysed in the same way as interview transcripts, with particular attention to how state, republican and international documents illustrated the internal workings of dissident groups, their violence, and organised crime. The purpose of this was again to search for evidence to illustrate the role played by tradition, kinship and social identity in sustaining the movement. It was also aimed at trying to identify occasions and places where the worlds of violent republican dissidents, criminals, extremists and hostile states overlapped.

For clarity, evidence of tradition was deemed to incorporate references to history, culture and inter-generational political ideologies and inter-generational militancy. Kinship and kinship ties were considered to reflect anything that resembled a social network, blood ties, family bonds, neighbours and friends in the republican community. The social identity label was used where there was evidence of participant involvement where their republicanism, reputation for violence or ability to inflict violence was expressly stated.

Existing Literature, Newspaper Reports and Historical records

The chapters of this thesis which explore the rich history of violent republicanism, vigilantism and terrorism are grounded in academic articles, both old and rare books, historical records and archival papers that illuminate the evolution of violent actors on the island of Ireland since the late eighteenth century. A wide-ranging examination of rare publications and long out-of-print volumes was necessary to situate violent dissident republicans within a longer continuum of violent organisations. These books, records and materials were identified through archival searches and bibliographic tracing, and were evaluated for provenance, contemporaneity and relevance to the development of republican violence. Certain books were acquired from specialist traders who were requested to find copies and reprints. Efforts were also made to obtain pamphlets, official government documents and other records relating to the research topic.

Limitations

As with any study of this nature, there are limitations despite the amount of material examined and the wide selection of interviewees who agreed to participate. Many dissidents, paramilitary organisations and people inside the security and intelligence apparatus chose not to participate or even assist in any way with this study. Some made themselves unavailable having originally agreed to participate whilst other refused to engage at all.

There are five violent dissident groups operating on the island of Ireland. Members of Arm na Phoblachta, a small paramilitary group which emerged in the northwest in 2017, did not participate despite approaches to gatekeepers. Factions of the Continuity IRA also declined to participate. Senior figures in Republican Sinn Féin stressed they had and never had any relationship with the IRA. This will inevitably have placed a limitation on the understanding of their current activities, history, evolution and fragmentation. Whilst this study had access to a

throve of classified records and documents, it proved difficult to obtain certain other materials or specific reports that could provide much greater insights into the relationships that exist between dissidents, hybrids, organised crime gangs and hostile states. The security services on both sides of the Irish border believe the intelligence services of hostile states are fostering contacts with republican dissidents with a view to supporting their activities or using them as proxies. The absence of access to national-security intelligence makes the investigation of such liaisons inherently difficult although not impossible.

As mentioned, the potential for exposing or inadvertently identifying an individual who had passed information to the security services, or discreetly cooperated with them, was an ever-present concern. I omitted sections of the research relating to covert surveillance to ensure this research complied with my ethical obligations. Such considerations also shaped the presentation of the findings, but also the boundaries of inquiry and the level of operational detail that could responsibly be included. These limitations were necessary to protect potentially vulnerable individuals, minimise the risk of harm, to avoid interfering with the administration of justice and ensure that the research was conducted in accordance with its ethical commitments.

Theoretical Framework

The contemporary iterations of the IRA have survived despite the Northern Ireland peace process and sustained efforts by the Irish and British governments and their security services to dismantle them. Dissident organisations are active on both sides of the border that divides Northern Ireland and the Republic. They remain a substantial threat, yet they also present a paradox: some have imposed internal restraints on their use of violence while continuing to endorse the republican cause. The modern iterations of the IRA have also become involved in organised crime, vigilantism, political and right-wing extremism, and forms of behaviour traditionally shunned by republicans and their political representatives. Such republicans are known less for a deep understanding of republicanism's rich history than for their involvement in extortion, racketeering, and other serious criminal activity. In that context they present a unique analytical puzzle.

This thesis argues that explanations offered by acclaimed scholars like Frampton (2011, 2025), Horgan (2013), Whiting (2015) and McGlinchey (2019) which cover a range of factors including ideological commitments, peace-spoiler theory, and ultra republicanism do not fully account for the persistence, recruitment, cohesion, and adaptation of republican paramilitaries. This thesis proposes that the durability and evolution of violent dissident republicanism are best understood through the overlapping influences of tradition, kinship, and social identity within a wider subcultural and social milieu. These factors are not treated as separate or competing explanations. On the contrary, each is considered to perform a unique but interrelated role in sustaining participation, fostering cohesion, forging legitimacy, and solidifying organisational commitment.

This thesis conceptualises violent dissident republicanism as a subculture or counterculture in which politics, narratives, family bonds, a sense of community, and kinship ties, local status, power and criminal opportunity intersect. Adopting this approach does not assume that these factors operate in the same way across organisations or individuals. Instead, the examination explores the conditions under which tradition, kinship, and social identity are influences that reinforce, constrain, or can transform participation in political violence and criminality. Therefore it makes a case for viewing violent dissident republicanism as a subculture or

counterculture, both of which are contested concepts among scholars. This thesis argues that tradition, kinship, and social identity are important forces sustaining the organisations, gangs, and networks collectively described as violent dissidents. It asks how these influences sustain participation, foster cohesion, and help explain organisational durability despite the flourishing democratic political landscape on the island of Ireland, economic prosperity, and the public odium attracted by dissident violence in all its forms.

The existing literature has often approached violent dissident republicanism as peace spoilers, the residual manifestation of the Northern Ireland conflict, or as a security problem defined by organisational decay and militant ideology (Evans and Tonge, 2012; Frampton, 2011; Horgan and Morrison, 2011; Tonge, 2014). More recent articles have applied alternative theoretical approaches and examined the dissident milieu using other concepts including social identity theory and internal brakes theory (Ferguson and McAuley, 2021; Finnegan, 2021; White, 2021; Taylor, 2016; McGlinchey, 2026). While these articles are helpful, they do not fully account for all aspects of contemporary republicanism as they do not assess its subcultural and countercultural characteristics and the ways in which these are shaping and influencing contemporary paramilitarism. Therefore it is important to tackle the problem using a framework that captures the complexities of the research topic.

Tradition

In this body of research, tradition is used to refer to the narratives, stories, symbols, rich histories and practices through which dissidents claim legitimacy. These all link contemporary actors to Ireland's history of rebellion, including its tradition of blood sacrifice, martyrdom and armed struggle dating from the late eighteenth century. "Republican ultras", the descriptive term used by Evans and Tonge (2012, p.61)**,** use the legacy of the 1798 Rebellion, the Fenian Rising of 1867 and the Easter Rising of 1916 to justify their violent actions and ignore the democratic wish of people in the Republic and Northern Ireland as expressed in the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

For clarity, tradition is not treated as simply an enactment of the past but as a living and contemporary social practice which has become for some adherents a way of life. This

conceptualisation is crucial as it is already accepted in the literature that cultures and traditions can sustain, and in some cases revitalise, particular forms of extremism and terrorism (Shboul, 2017, p. 1). The theoretical approach adopted in this thesis is influenced by Hobsbawm's work on invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). This provides an appropriate lens through which to examine certain strands of violent republicanism that invoke everything from the 1798 Rebellion to the Easter Rising of 1916 to justify contemporary violence. Tradition is used to justify the continued existence of dissident groups, their use of violence, but also their involvement in vigilantism, and their hybridisation with organised crime and extremist bodies. It is also used to encourage people to join and remain members.

Kinship

The theoretical argument proposed by this thesis is that kinship helps dissidents to maintain cohesion within their groups, including after people have long abandoned their ideological commitments and beliefs. There is no single agreed academic definition of kinship. Like terrorism, it is a contested concept, but it is generally understood as a culturally constituted system of socially recognised relationships, commonly organised through descent and marriage. It also encompasses other forms of relatedness and social interaction. In its simplest forms, kinship is based on the idea that people are intrinsic to one another's existence (Sahlins, 2011, p. 2). Goldfarb (2025) explains that earlier kinship research sought to identify the kinship system of each society in order to develop a systematic understanding of how people reckoned social ties. Like tradition, the role played by kinship in sustaining terrorism is well documented and accepted in the literature by scholars like Horgan (2008), Hafez (2016), Osman (2010), and della Porta (1992). It's been applied to variants of jihadist cultures in western Europe. García-Calvo and Reinares (2025) noted its influence on the radicalisation and subsequent terrorist recruitment of the nine men who participated in the 2017 jihadist attacks in Barcelona. To illustrate the role of kinship, this thesis examines family histories of violent republicanism, but also looks at their social networks, their personal backgrounds, education, and affiliation with particular dissident organisations and gangs, as well as particular strands of republican ideology.

Social Identity

Social identity theory offers an appropriate framework for examining violent dissident republicanism because it is fundamental to understanding patterns of social, cultural, and organisational interaction (Lalaouna and Sididris, 2024). This thesis is aware of the challenges of using social identity theory in an appropriate fashion given its potential for over-arching principles unless it's conceptually controlled, as noted by de Heus (2018). Hence, it is important to create a solid framework of theoretical principles and practices that must be applied throughout the thesis to avoid this trap. The literature on social identity theory can provide insight into an individual's worldview, what matters to them, and how they understand themselves in relation to others and their beliefs (Strindberg, 2020, p. 17). Through social connections, friendships are formed, loyalties develop, and solidarity is exercised. Strindberg (2020) is important to note as he suggests that social connections enable people to share experiences and opinions, develop worldviews, adopt narratives, and transform their aspirations into collective objectives (Strindberg, 2020) Although these processes can foster cohesion, they may also create or intensify divisions.

Thus, this framework seeks to build on the existing literature by conceptualising violent dissident republicanism as a sub-culture or counterculture whose adherents see themselves as outsiders to mainstream society and opposed to the status quo. Within this milieu, violence in its various forms may be permitted or legitimised for countless reasons and not just to advance the republican cause, or one of Irish unity. This approach enables a much deeper understanding of contemporary manifestations of the IRA as part of a wider subcultural and countercultural field.

The theoretical position adopted by this framework is suitable for conceptualising violent dissidents in the contemporary setting. Countercultures and subcultures do take the form of sects and criminal associations, and use various forms of violence to pursue their goals and position themselves in opposition to state policy and dominant social norms (Atajanova, 2025, p. 13).

Interplay Between Tradition and Kinship

To understand how violent dissident republicanism persists in modern Ireland, it is necessary to look beyond its stated political objectives and examine what it has become as a social and

cultural phenomenon. Viewing the conduct and actions of republican dissidents through the prisms of tradition and kinship helps explain its intergenerational character and phoenix-like ability to re-emerge when it is considered to have died out. The IRA was thought to have vanished after its failed Operation Harvest border campaign. Tonge (2012, p.221) acknowledges that anyone in the mid-1960s predicting the rebirth of the IRA followed by a major armed conflict would have struggled to find listeners. The Real IRA declared it planned to commence a new bombing campaign in January 2000 although it had declared a ceasefire in the wake of the Omagh bombing (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003, pp. 244-245).

Membership of the IRA and assorted paramilitary groups that endorse political violence is often understood, by adherents and in historical accounts written about it, as something passed down through generations or as part of an inherited militant tradition (Whelan, 2012, p. 2). In the case of republicans, this tradition draws upon a rich history of rebellion. Boucenna and Mansouri (2022) argue that groups inherit and acquire traditions from their ancestors and strive to preserve and keep them vivid. "A tradition is a token of continuity that keeps the past alive in the present and asserts its fusion with the future," they suggest. For the purposes of this thesis, republican tradition is understood as a set of beliefs, shared histories, and cultural practices that generate identity and legitimacy. The puzzle is addressed through the lens of ethnosymbolism, enabling a broader exploration of this tradition. Ethnosymbolism is conceptualised as the continuity between premodern and modern forms of social cohesion, without overlooking the changes brought about by modernity as described by (Conversi, 2007, p. 21), who writes that the "persisting features in the formation and continuity of national identities are myths, memories, values, traditions and symbols."

This approach is used alongside the subcultural perspectives advanced by scholars such as Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) and Boucenna and Mansouri (2022). In doing so, the thesis takes seriously Hobsbawm and Ranger's theory that certain traditions are "invented" practices that claim continuity with a distant past but are, in fact, relatively recent constructions (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, pp. 1–14). Its application to dissident republicanism need not be understood as a contradiction, but rather as evidence of the simultaneous invocation and adaptation of the past. Put simply, republicans present themselves as heirs to a militant tradition dating to the late eighteenth century while selectively reworking that tradition to suit present circumstances.

The following chapters explore how contemporary iterations of the IRA both claim lineage from this very old violent tradition and reinterpret it in light of the Good Friday Agreement. This framework demonstrates how ideas of martyrdom, dedication to the cause of a united Ireland, and the unfinished business associated with the Provisional IRA are passed from generation to generation within families and communities, and at commemorations and funerals. But tradition is also the vehicle used to transmit the belief that violence can be utilised to confront those who trespass on the moral code or say for example cooperate with the authorities. More recently, albeit to a lesser extent, these ideas have also been transmitted online between cadres and supporters. In this regard, the influence of tradition is not limited to symbolic dress codes, funeral rituals, language, and protests. It extends to the IRA's enduring reputation as a force to be reckoned with and to its perceived capacity to inflict lethal violence. Tradition shapes how the IRA's reputation and capacity for intimidation are understood not just by republicans themselves but those living in close proximity to them. For example, criminal acts or vigilantism may be reframed as necessary contributions to the "cause" or to the centuries-old struggle for Irish independence; extortion of drug dealers may be legitimised as a necessary evil; and a vigilante culture may be created in which violence is permitted and accepted if certain parties are targeted.

The intergenerational character of militant republicanism, however, cannot be understood through tradition alone. If tradition explains how republican narratives and symbolism are passed between generations, kinship provides the mechanism through which they are embodied, preserved, and maintained through the identities of those who carry them and through networks of family, community, and comradeship. The importance of kinship and social networks in facilitating recruitment is widely acknowledged in the literature on militant groups (Copeland, 2020), although theories differ as to why and how this occurs. A prominent theme is that individuals who decide to engage in terrorist violence often turn to kin for support, protection, and refuge (Osman, 2010, p. 13).

Accordingly, examining the role of kinship with respect to dissidents requires recognition that this hydra-like movement now incorporates a wider group of people who are not necessarily motivated by republican ideology, but also by criminal opportunism, social status, and ultimately power. In essence, this thesis shows that kinship, and the trust it engenders, can facilitate recruitment into paramilitary organisations, criminal gangs, and hybrid groups. In the context of

violent dissident republicanism, participants may remain involved not only because they believe in the cause, but also because they form part of close social networks and communities in which violent republicanism is normalised, expected, or held in high esteem. This influence is not confined to sustaining any particular ideology; it can also be used to foster a sense of belonging, protection, status, and economic opportunity (Chernov-Hwang and Schulze, 2018).

The theoretical approach adopted in this thesis also explores why people born after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement choose to involve themselves in dissident activity, despite its limited political efficacy. This framework makes it possible to understand such engagement as the product of multiple factors, rather than simply a process of radicalisation. It shows that dissidents may inherit narratives without direct experience of the Troubles or a detailed understanding of what it means to be a member of the IRA. Examining the roles of tradition and kinship helps bridge this gap and further understand the topic.

Social Identity

Social identity theory used in conjunction with tradition and kinship literature provides an appropriate framework for analysing how dissident republicans understand themselves as members of paramilitary groups, and how this understanding can shape their perceptions of their place in society, their behaviour, and their use of violence. Social identity theory is not a "theory of terrorism" (Strindberg, 2020, p. 12) but rather an examination of the relationship between the individual and the group, focusing on how group involvement affects individuals' perceptions and behaviour. This approach demands a high-level of familiarity with research subjects' families and friends, personal histories, financial circumstances, education, political views, and worldviews. As will be shown, this is necessary because social identity theory focuses on subjects' perceptions of themselves and their place in the world. This framework is also sufficiently elastic and expandable to accommodate and integrate relevant insights from anthropology, political science, psychology, criminology, critical studies, and other disciplines (Strindberg, 2020, p. 12).

In this thesis, social identity theory is used primarily to explore how dissident republicans see themselves and their associates, how they differentiate themselves from others, and how they

navigate internal disputes linked to violence and criminality. The approach is influenced principally by the work of Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen (2014), the Danish scholar who used insights from various disciplines to develop a deeper understanding of contemporary jihadist subculture in Denmark. Her treatment of the phenomenon from countercultural and subcultural perspectives provides a firm and persuasive grasp of the topic, not least because she argued that it enabled scholars to view jihadism in its immediate social context. Hemmingsen built on her earlier work, by noting how forms of jihadism had evolved in Denmark and eventually came to represent the voices of angry, misunderstood, and underappreciated young people Her work carefully considered the crossover between criminality and jihadism. It also noted how new strains of jihadism had supplanted what she called the "pious and intellectual rhetoric" of traditional Islam with a confrontational, burly, streetwise, and ridiculing rhetoric that resonated with new audiences (Hemmingsen, 2016, p. 107).

This thesis adopts a similar theoretical and conceptual approach to offer contemporary insights in violent dissident republicanism, its evolution, and its hybridisation. It argues that the combined influences of tradition, kinship, and social identity must be examined to understand aspects of violent dissident republicanism that might otherwise appear illogical when viewed solely through the lens of the crime–terror nexus. This approach is warranted given recent scholarship that supports this analytical choice. Sandberg, Tutenges, and Ilan (2024) argue that traditional, broad understandings of the activities of terrorist and criminal networks through the crime–terror nexus lack the cultural, organisational, historical, and contextual specificity necessary to understand recruitment and radicalisation in the contemporary world. They argue that a more sociological understanding of the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions of radicalisation is now required. In their study of western jihadists, they found that some young men were initially drawn towards street culture and subsequently towards violent jihadism in a search for recognition and status that they felt unable to achieve in mainstream society. Similarly, dissident groups in their various forms may offer similar opportunities for excitement, meaning, enjoyment, and group affiliation.

This thesis argues that the theoretical approach outlined here, coupled with observations of subcultural and countercultural practices among dissidents, provides an additional means of understanding their contemporary manifestations. In modern society, countercultures may form

and manifest as sects, criminal associations, or extremist organisations, often using various forms and methods of violence to pursue their goals (Atajanova, 2025, p. 13).

This thesis is acutely aware that definitions of subcultures and countercultures are, like terrorism, very much contested in the literature. Again for clarity, the terms are used here to capture particular behaviours, senses of otherness, opposition to the status quo, social networks and ideals, and the endorsement of violence. Conceptualising violent dissident republicanism as a subculture or counterculture helps explain why certain practices are condoned while others are not. The concept of boundary-making is important to mention at this juncture because social identity theory emphasises how in-groups define themselves against out-groups and how such boundaries are policed. Within the violent dissident milieu, boundaries were previously drawn between dissidents and those who supported the peace process, and between acceptable and unacceptable forms of criminality. Drug dealers were traditionally ostracised and treated as targets by republican paramilitaries, while paramilitary groups collaborated with contraband smugglers. Such divisions were maintained through cooperation and, at times, lethal attacks. Understanding these complex boundary relationships helps explain how and why internal restraints on violence operate, how hybridisation with certain forms of crime is accepted and justified or resisted, and how people are socialised and recruited. The commodification of the IRA's reputation is another issue. The IRA's name has always been used to instil fear but dissidents now use it for personal gain to make extortion demands of business owners or criminals. This thesis will show just how much hybridisation has already occurred.

The rationale for this approach is clear. Scholars such as Borum (2014) argue that radicalisation is not solely an ideological process, but also a social one. Borum suggests that a sense of belonging, affiliation, and connectedness may precede ideological commitment. It is not necessarily ideological zeal that draws an individual into the orbit of an extremist group; affinity with the group may instead draw that individual towards its ideology. As Borum (2014, pp 290-291) observes, although much discussion concerns the role of the internet, propaganda, and social media in motivating individuals to join extremist groups, most people do not join such groups as isolated individuals, but through social and family networks. This view may help explain how and why small groups of people in every county, particularly those born after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and those living south of the border, are drawn towards

violent dissident organisations and their associates. Owing to the clandestine and fluid nature of dissident republican networks, the number of individuals involved cannot be established with any certainty. But there are indicators. Horgan (2013) identified 662 people involved in dissident activity from a variety of open sources. A separate study found a significant number of dissidents were recruited in the Republic (Horgan and Gill, 2011, p.51).

Synthesis and Analytic Proposition

As outlined, this thesis proposes that the durability and evolution of violent dissident republicanism is best understood through the interaction of tradition, kinship, and social identity within a wider subcultural milieu. Tradition, kinship and social identity are not treated as separate or competing explanations. Instead, they are best described as interlinking explanations which provide a deep insight into the topic at hand. Tradition as stated above provides the historical repertoire through which dissident republicans can claim legitimacy, continuity, and purpose. It provides them with narratives of sacrifice, resistance, and the excuse to say they are continuing the fight for an unfinished struggle that situates contemporary activity within the history of Irish republican militancy. Kinship and its invisible ties grounds these narratives in the formation of social networks which rely on a sense of trust, obligation, protection, and shared experience to foster cohesion. It facilitates recruitment, provides access to existing networks, and sustains involvement during periods of organisational decay, public odium, and the waning of ideological commitment. It also helps cadres to ignore when they encounter what they regard as betrayals of traditional republican values.

Social identity also shapes how participants understand themselves as republicans, how they distinguish insiders from outsiders, and how they interpret the legitimacy of violence and criminality. The processes of boundary-making as debated allows cadres to distinguish themselves from mainstream republicans and nationalists, those who support the Northern Ireland Peace Process, and rival paramilitary organisations who they regard as lacking legitimacy. At this juncture, it is necessary to state this thesis pays attention to documenting both the past and future direction of dissident republicanism. Given the theoretical position adopted by this thesis, it purposefully documents the evolution of violent republicanism through the ages and into the contemporary era. Attention is paid to exploring the interactions between violent

dissidents and organised crime, extremists and hostile states in modern society as it contends these actors influence its evolution.

In summation, this thesis offers the proposition that violent dissident republicanism persists not solely because of ideological commitment to Irish unity, nor solely because of criminal opportunity or organisational survival. It survives because tradition, kinship, and social identity have amalgamated to produce a durable movement where affiliation provides belonging, legitimacy, status, protection, and, in some cases, criminal opportunity. This proposition goes some way to explaining the heterogeneous nature of what is termed violent dissident republicanism. Where historical narratives and kinship networks reinforce a strong republican group identity, and violence and coercion is considered a legitimate continuation of the centuries old struggle in the modern world.

The use of the framework does not argue that a fixed relationship between republican ideology and criminality exists. Instead, this thesis examines how such relationships have evolved, have come to be accepted by dissidents and how they have transformed particular organisations. As a result, this thesis investigates three overlapping questions. First, how have republican traditions been transmitted, adapted, and mobilised? Second, to what extent has the role of tradition, kinship and social identity facilitated the survival of the dissident republican movement? And third, how have these invisible entities shaped the evolution of violence republicanism in modern times? By considering these questions, the framework approaches violent dissident republicanism as a subcultural or counterculture rather than a terrorist, criminal, or peace-spoiler phenomenon. The following chapters examine this proposition through an analysis of republican histories, family and social networks, bonds, criminal activity, and the rapidly evolving nature of contemporary violent dissident republicans.

Limits of the Framework

This combined framework has limitations. Definitions of tradition, kinship, and social identity are somewhat subjective and are contested in the literature. The thesis therefore seeks to distinguish carefully between verified activity, credible attribution, informed assessment, and bias. Violent dissident republicanism is a constantly evolving movement and is not static. The

heterogeneous nature of the movement makes it impossible to document every single behaviour and turn taken by elements of the movement. This thesis is, however, able to argue through assiduous inquiry that tradition, kinship and social identity have been central to the longevity of violent dissident republicanism and will play a key role in its future.

Chapter 1 Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter reviews the existing literature on terrorism, terrorists and their organisations. It explores the literature on the psychological profiles of terrorists, their malleable ideologies, and why they remain committed to the utilisation of violence when political activity and engagement might have proved more successful in advancing their cause. Terrorism has been extensively researched by respected historians, political scientists, psychologists, anthropologists and security scholars, who have sought to make sense of the phenomenon, but novel areas of academic research are now challenging much of the accepted research, the internal dynamics of terrorist groups, their evolution, their convergence with criminal organisations and why some are more durable than others. This area of research - which includes the study of social identity, culture, convergence and what constitutes terrorism and its future - are of significant importance to this thesis as it argues that kinship, tradition and social identity have become the driving forces in the survival of violent dissident republicanism. Like similar violent movements around the world, dissidents must be viewed not just as peace spoilers but as a movement undergoing change brought about by the forces of social progress for there lies the key to understanding them. This literature review sets out to examine the accepted theory on terrorism, primarily to establish its relevance to contemporary violent republicanism before the concepts are tested and explored in the following chapters. Given the interdisciplinary nature of research on terrorism, political violence, hybridisation and the crime-terror nexus, this chapter draws on literature from across the social sciences. The aim is to conduct a thorough exploration of the relevant works while critically assessing their limitations and acknowledging how globalisation, hyper connectivity and societal change might also be producing novel types of violent movements or causing existing ones to change. Through this analysis, this work seeks to enhance our understanding of violent dissident republicanism and the dark networks where it persists. Section 1.1 explores the scholarly descriptions of terrorism and its legal definition. Section 1.2 examines the origins of terrorism and traces its evolution from pre-Christian times to the modern era. Section 1.3 and 1.4 explore the study of terrorist profiles, terrorist groups and their equally malleable ideologies, which have to date produced a wide range of academic perspectives. Section 1.5 considers the literature on the longevity of terrorist organisations while Section 1.6

investigates Rapoport's Four Waves theory and draws attention to its anomalies and oversights. Section 1.7 carefully explores the existing literature on violent dissident republicanism to establish both its strengths and weaknesses. It is followed by an orderly conclusion.

1.1 Defining Terrorism

Terrorism is a contested concept. While there are many national and regional definitions, there is no universal legal one approved by the United Nations to describe the phenomenon. An ad-hoc committee established by the UN General Assembly has tried "in vain" to reach a legal definition since 1972 (Schmid, 2012, p. 158) but failed to do so. It has since become a cliché to say that scholars have written thousands of articles and books on this topic (Crenshaw, 2014, pp. 556-567) but there is still no agreed consensus on what constitutes terrorism (Bar-On and Paradela-López, 2023, p. 744). Governments, their intelligence agencies and policing services around the world all describe it using different terms. For example, title 22 of the United States Code defines terrorism as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience." But the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the US Department of Defence both diverge from this legal description by including both people and property as potential targets. They credit terrorism with furthering social, religious, or ideological goals, in addition to political ones (Hoffman, 2006, pp. 31-32). Given the absence of any legal clarity underpinned by legislation or international law, terrorism is notoriously difficult to define, in part because the term has evolved over time, and in part because it is associated with an activity designed to be subjective. The term is also used inconsistently by observers. Therefore, one needs to accept that terrorism is a matter of perception and is thus seen differently by different observers at different points in time and history (Cronin, 2009, p. 7). It's also inconsistently used by observers. Traditionally, terrorism has been viewed by scholars as the delivery of justice, or at least someone's perception of it, asserts Cronin, who suggests it is usually, but not always, distinguished by its non-state character and the utilisation of extreme violence. Whilst there is no agreed legal or scholarly definition, terrorism has certain aspects that are fundamental, according to the accepted literature. It must be political in nature and involve the commission of an act of violence designed to precipitate political change. In essence, terrorists aim to frighten and terrorise not merely their victims, but larger segments of a society or the state, to achieve a

political goal. On occasion, terrorism is sometimes described as “the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation” (Carson and Turner, 2022, p. 90). In this regard, terrorists target individual victims but their actions also represent an onslaught against society. Hence terrorism is more correctly described as coercive, designed to manipulate the will of its victims and its larger audience through a “senselessness, wantonness, or callous indifference to human life” (Thackrah, 2004, p. 265). Moskalenko and McCauley (2020, p. 22) suggest the existing definitions of terrorism are perhaps best summarised by saying that terrorism is violence that is fundamentally designed to terrorise. Crenshaw (1985, p. 400) supports this concept by saying “the political effectiveness of terrorism is importantly determined by the psychological effects of violence on audiences.” In his acclaimed book, Inside Terrorism, Bruce Hoffman provides a praiseworthy description of the phenomenon in clearer language when he describes terrorism as the place where politics and violence intersect in the hope of delivering power.

> All terrorism involves the quest for power: power to dominate and coerce, to intimidate and control, and ultimately to effect fundamental political change. Violence, or the threat of violence, is thus the sine qua non of terrorists, who are unswervingly convinced that only through violence can their cause triumph and their long term political aims be attained. (Hoffman, 2006, pp. 254-255)

Richardson (2006) describes terrorism in more simplistic terms. It is, she says, the weapon of those who want to effect change but lack the numbers to either prevail in a democratic system, or to launch a viable military campaign. The emergence of terrorism in a given society, she argues, requires a lethal cocktail with three ingredients, a disaffected individual, an enabling group and a legitimising ideology (Richardson, 2006, p. 40).

The word terrorism is frequently used emotively to describe the actions of a small minority of people who carry out attacks on symbolic targets in a way that does not generally discriminate between combatants or non-combatants. The literature unequivocally says terrorists are driven by extreme ideology and not financial gain though this is challenged by more contemporary research by Ballina (2011) and Makarenko and Mesquita (2014) and countless others. More often than not, terrorism denotes acts of violence by non-state actors, although some scholars use it to describe the actions of states that utilise violence against their opponents (Edwards, 2011, p.

319). The Reign of Terror during the French Revolution and the Stalinist purges of Soviet Russia are examples of how states have used terrorism to kill their enemies and suppress opposition (Bergesen and Lizardo, 2004, p. 38). For this reason, terrorism should always be understood as a socio-political phenomenon utilised by both governments and non-state actors. State sponsored terrorism comes from above whilst terrorists and other non-state actors direct it from below (Campbell and Hansen, 2014, p. 161). Terrorists use violence to advance their political aims but what separates them from insurgents? The old adage states that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter," but many scholars like Ganor (2002) disagree and insist that terrorists can be distinguished from both freedom fighters or guerrillas because the latter target soldiers and seek to gain, or hold territory. Terrorists, reasons Ganor, use violence against civilians in order to attain their political goals rather than financial rewards or to hold territory. This is a contested concept, however. Conor Cruise O'Brien, refused to describe anyone resisting an authoritarian regime as a terrorist (Crenshaw, 1990, p. 13). Yassar Arafat once said the difference between a revolutionary and a terrorist lies in the reason for which one fights (Hoffman, 2006, p. 26).

In line with the ongoing discussion and debate among scholars on what constitutes terrorism, other academics like Cooper (2001), argue that the generation of fear alone may constitute an act of terrorism, irrespective of the actor utilising the violence or whether they hold territory or not. This view is of the utmost importance to this thesis as some scholars now argue that the existing definitions of terrorism are no longer appropriate as organised crime groups, extremists and violent subcultures, can behave like terrorist organisations. Their tactics, strategies, organisational frameworks and goals, can resemble those of terrorists, although they do not fit neatly into the established terms and definitions outlined in the literature. There is now a growing body of dissenting voices within the academic community who suggest the distinction between political and criminal motivated violence has become blurred. As a result, scholars like Ballina (2011) say the existing terminology and labels should now be viewed with caution as both organised crime groups, violent religious movements and extremists now interact with one another, and at times, converge into unified bodies (Makarenko, 2004, p. 130) for cultural, social and other poorly understood environmental reasons. The powerful drug cartels of Colombia and Mexico, frequently labelled as narco-terrorists by governments and law enforcement agencies,

exemplify these hybrid entities, the products of a phenomenon scholars refer to as convergence or hybridisation, which are explored in the following chapters.

1.2 The Origins of Terrorism

Terrorism is an activity that has probably characterised modern civilization from its inception (Enders and Sandler, 2012). It is an ancient phenomenon whose history can be traced back to early Christianity as have many of the words associated with it. In more modern times, the word has come to be principally associated with the rise of nationalism, anarchism, and revolutionary socialism (Crenshaw, 1981, p. 380) though in more recent years it has come to be inspired by religion but also uber-nationalist identity. The word, or concept itself, originated as a linguistic, political term in the ancient world, with varying connotations, depending on whether it was being used by a perpetrator or a victim (Fine, 2010, p. 284). The Assyrians were the first to develop Acadian expressions for the use of political and military means to inspire fear and terror in one's enemy. Puluhtu, meaning fear, fearsomeness, or to shock, was used alongside Melammu to define terror throughout Assyrian history from 1100 BC and up until 612 BC. These empires were the first to initiate state terrorism, justifying its use for the sake of controlling their empire.

The first terrorist group in the modern sense of the word appeared in the Holy Land in the time of Jesus Christ. The Sicarii, named for the daggers which were their signature weapons, are generally credited throughout the literature as being the first terrorist group as we understand them today (Horsley, 1979). They are cited by Rapoport, Richardson and Hoffman amongst others. In AD 66-77, they opposed the Roman occupation of Judaea (Bar-On and Paradela-López, 2023, p. 744). They were mentioned by Josephus Flavius, the Jewish scholar who recorded the Jewish rebellion against Rome in 70 AD. The Sicarii were not a rural phenomenon, but urban. They operated in the heart of the holy city of Jerusalem. They would mingle with the crowd, carrying their short daggers concealed under their clothing, with which they stabbed their enemies. When their victims fell, the murderers would join in the cries of indignation and, through this plausible behaviour, avoid discovery (Horsley, 1979, p. 436). In contrast to bandits, who attacked and then fled to their hideaways because their identities were known, the Sicarii, although operating in broad daylight and in public places, assassinated their victims surreptitiously. Because of this clandestine manner of operation, no one knew who the assassins were, and they could continue to lead normal public lives in the city. The murders they

committed were against fellow Jews and not Roman Legionaries as it often stated in much of the literature. The term Sicarii itself later became a synonym for the word Mercenary in Spanish (Fine, 2010, p. 271) but an abbreviation of the word, Sicario, is to this day used to describe gunmen sent from the Colombian and Mexican criminals who carry out murders, often citing Christ as being their protectors (Ballina, 2011). The word assassin is another throwback to antiquity. The etymology of this word can be traced back to a radical sect that broke away from Ismaili Shiite Islam in 1094, who between AD 1090 and 1272 terrorised the Muslim world before turning its attention on Christians from forts in Persia and Syria. Their name is derived from hashshashin, the Arabic word for hashish addicts. This sect existed for more than 150 years. During this time they killed both Muslim leaders before they turned against the Christians. The sect twice tried to kill the Muslim General Saladin, who reversed many of the gains of the First Crusade (Scaliger, 2012, p. 37). Their first Christian victim, in 1192, was the Crusader king of Jerusalem, Conrad of Montferrat, and in the same year they also made an attempt on the life of Philip August, King of France (Fine, 2010, p. 271). They were, Scaliger (2012, p. 39) writes, a veritable al-Qaeda of the Middle Ages. The most violent example in Western history of religious terrorism was the mediaeval Crusades, which began in the 11th century and led to the indiscriminate slaughter by Christians of Muslims, and vice versa. Another example of religious terrorism of a Christian persuasion was the Spanish Inquisition where non-Christians and non-believers were violently tortured and killed by elements of fundamentalist Christianity (Bar-On and Goldstein, 2005, p. 230). Another modern word which is derived from a terrorist tradition is the word thug. It originates from a seventh-century religious cult called the Thuggees that terrorised India from the 13th century to its suppression in the mid-nineteenth century by the British. Their name was derived from the Sanskrit word for “concealment”. Members of this fanatical religious group engaged in ritualistic assassinations carried out in the name of the Hindu Goddess Kali (Kuiry and Rath, 2023).

The word terror is itself derived from the Latin verb Tersere, which is the older form of the verb Tenere, meaning to dread or to be afraid. This began appearing in Latin-based European languages, such as French and Spanish, but also in English, at the beginning of the twelfth century. What most of these words shared was a representation of the point of view of the victim of terror and it was rare to see the perpetrator's perspective represented (Fine, 2010, pp. 275-277). This was to change during and after the French Revolution when the Jacobins, a radical

French revolutionary faction led by Maximilien Robespierre, organised 17,000 legal executions and about 23,000 illegal executions during what became known as the Reign of Terror (Tilly, 2004, p. 9). Robespierre and his political associates were guillotined in July 1794 after his former revolutionary comrades accused him of terrorism, the illegal use of violence by state authorities against political opponents (Crenshaw and Pimlott, 1997, p. 12). Later, Edmund Burke added the word terrorist to the English lexicon in his Reflections on the Revolution in France, which railed against the "thousands of those Hellhounds called Terrorists let loose on the people" by the Jacobins, regularly assisted by Dr. Guillotin's famous invention (Hoffman, 1998, p. 17).

The academic treatment of the Sicarii, Hashshashins and Thuggees groups in terrorist literature tends to be cursory, repetitive and lacking in depth. The writings of historians, religious scholars and anthropologists are far more illuminating and indeed contradict many of the assumptions made in the most cited terrorism literature. Articles by Kuiry and Rath (2023), for example, call into question whether the Thuggees were even a criminal cult, terrorists or a political phenomenon or the invention of a colonial power (Wagner, 2007). But what is of significance to the argument advanced by this thesis is not the history of word or even the modus operandi of these primitive terrorist groups, but rather their longevity and the role played by tradition and culture in sustaining them. The Sicarii and Assassins were intergenerational and cultural movements, each lasting more than 100 years. They became ways of life for their members, more akin to secret societies whose traditions, codes, argots and violent activities were an integral part of their existence. They existed in the dark networks of their time. Kinship was another factor which bound these groups together. Whether or not thuggee was a pan-Indian criminal cult or a violent movement is the subject of academic debate (Gordon, 1969), but they too existed for centuries. Despite the existence of these groups and their deep historic origins, most scholars trace the beginnings of modern terrorism to the founding in 1878 of Narodnaya Volya, the Russian anarchist group called People’s Will or People’s Freedom, a group credited with replacing propaganda by words with propaganda by deed (Fine, 2010, p. 279). Narodnaya Volya did not engage in a campaign of indiscriminate violence; it was organised, deliberate and methodical in targeting its victims, among them Russian officials culminating in the assassination of Tsar Alexander on March 1, 1881 (Hoffman, 1998, pp. 17-18).

Despite the existence of the earlier terrorist groups, it is generally regarded as a major factor in shaping modern-day terrorism (Enders and Sandler, 2012, pp. 19-22). To begin, the People's Will exerted clear transnational influence by exporting its tactics, adherents, and philosophy abroad, most notably to the labour movement in the United States. Their tactics were subsequently copied by anarchist and nationalist movements across Europe in the late 1800s and early 1900s. It was also the forerunner to the Russian Revolutions in 1905 and 1917 where the world saw that a well-planned terrorist campaign with a large constituency could overthrow a ruling government, a shocking revelation that influenced nationalist/separatist struggles thereafter. Whilst this might have been the case, the academic acceptance of Narodnaya Volya's role as the inspiration of modern terrorism fails to recognise the similar phenomena which have taken place for hundreds of years but have not been adequately researched.

1.3 Terrorist Profiles

Terrorist profiling remains plausible given the violence, brutality, and general callousness associated with acts of terrorism and the fact that, despite the broad socio political conditions that are thought to give rise to terrorism (Bjørgo, 2005), it is still the case that extremely few people engage in political violence. To date, the profiling of terrorists has failed to result in any definitive phenotype of the universal terrorist (Rae, 2012, p. 71) however.

The use of racial stereotypes into terrorist profiling is not only imprecise but has considerable ramifications for the individual liberty of the population being monitored. The argument for psychological profiling also falls short in its claim that a terrorist personality or personalities exist. Psychological profiling is further stifled by the apparent normalcy and sociability of many terrorists while psychological profiles that incorporate subtler but ubiquitous personality traits, such as aggression and thrill-seeking, do not provide enough specificity to be of any practical application to the countering of terrorism (Rae, 2012, p. 71). Will the puzzle ever be solved? Rae suggests it is a futile endeavour and likely to remain so considering the current research.

Unlike criminals, terrorists are fundamentally altruistic, convinced they are serving a good cause designed to achieve a greater good for a wider constituency whether real or imagined (Hoffman, 2006, p. 37) though such theories can no longer be applied to narco-terrorist groups, organised crime groups or violent movements who utilise terrorism. There are broadly three competing explanations advanced to explain involvement in terrorism: structural-level explanations, group-

level explanations and individual-level explanations (Schuurman, 2018; Crenshaw, 1981). Structural-level explanations focus on the social, political, economic and geographical environments for causation. Group-level focuses on the dynamics in facilitating involvement in terrorism whilst individual-explanations focus on the psychological factors associated with political violence (de Heus, 2018, p. 37).

Terrorists themselves, no matter what their ultimate objectives, are invariably action-oriented people operating in an action-oriented in-group. This phenomenon has been called propaganda by deed. Propaganda by deed is an act of terror, where terror is a technique employed by insurgents and states. It is this terror component which places it beyond moral bounds for most political activists. Its original theorist Carlo Pisacane thought violence should be didactic, preferably discreet, if necessary random. He argued that ideas result from deeds, not the latter from the former (Bolt, 2008, p. 48). They also actively and deliberately learn from each other. Not only ideology, but also strategy and tactics are often shaped by other terrorists groups' experience. While direct learning, in the shape of training and support, might be limited to contemporary groups, it is clear that a number of terrorists have found inspiration in older groups or even adopted models from rival or opposing organisations. The German terrorism expert Peter Waldmann was one of the first to reference this "contagion effect" when he argued that the apparent success of some groups attracted others to emulate aspects of their approach, and perhaps also their ideology (Parker and Sitter, 2016). This might be described as an integral aspect of terrorist's psychology as the Russian populist Nikolai Morozov observed in The Terrorist Struggle: "When a handful of people appears to represent the struggle of a whole nation and is triumphant over millions of enemies, then the idea of terroristic struggle will not die once it is clarified for the people and proven it can be practical." Propaganda of the deed, which is essentially the very notion that acts of terrorism are a better way to spread ideas than mere written propaganda, has always been based on the hope that terrorism would prove a contagious idea (Parker and Sitter, 2016, p. 200).

The contagion effect of terrorism and political violence is well documented in the literature, and is particularly applicable to Irish republicanism as its use of terrorism dates back to the mid 19th century. The IRA leader Michael Collins and the tactics used by the IRA inspired national liberation movements around the world. Yitzhak Shamir, the leader of Jewish terrorist group

LEHI and future Israeli Prime Minister, adopted the name “Michael” as his nom de guerre in explicit homage to Collins, the IRA’s director of intelligence. Hence, the strategic and tactical choices terrorist organisations make play an important role in their evolution as even isolated outbreaks of terrorist violence can influence the choices made by later terrorist groups. Of terrorism itself, political violence is often seen as indiscriminate or senseless although it is actually a very deliberate and planned application of violence designed to achieve certain objectives. Such acts are usually aimed at achieving acknowledgement, recognition, authority and eventually governance (Hoffman, 2006, p. 255). Obtaining publicity is another objective. It brings attention to the cause but also spreads the fear that terrorism seeks to instil.

1.4 Terrorist Organisations

The key variables for understanding all terrorist groups are the nature of the goals they seek and their relationship to the community they claim to represent (Richardson, 2006). All terrorist movements have two kinds of goals: short term organisational objectives and long-term political objectives requiring significant political change (Richardson, 2006, p. 75). Therefore, to consider a terrorist organisation, it’s necessary to take careful note of the leadership and its followers, its organisational dynamics and decision making processes. A comprehensive understanding of this complex phenomenon requires an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating knowledge from political, historical, and cultural contexts, since terrorism is a product of its own time and place Post (2006, p. 17).

Terrorist groups are themselves subnational political organisations that use violence to achieve their objectives (Philips, 2014, p. 336). They have emerged in both rich and poor countries but most often in developing countries and societies characterised by rapid modernisation. Hoffman writes that rapid socioeconomic changes are conducive to instability and tend to erode traditional forms of social control. These situations, he says, are then open to militants offering to make sense of these changes, to blame others for the dislocations and humiliations involved, and to offer a means of address. Only a tiny percentage of the population needs to be persuaded. But again, the accepted theory becomes messy when applied to violent movements, hybrid organisations and states who engage in political violence which are influenced by multiple factors including their operational environments, local cultures, finances and juxtaposition to powerful organised crime gangs (Kilcullen, 2015).

The formation of terrorist groups has been extensively explored in the literature though some scholars argue that terrorism research suffers from an absence of hard data, or as Sageman contends an "explosion of speculation with little empirical grounding." The membership, structure and political beliefs of individual terrorist groups are however important to understand when considering both their past and their future direction (Philips, 2014). The accepted wisdom suggests terrorist campaigns usually arise out of larger political movements or tendencies. Terrorist practitioners are rarely loners, disconnected from society. Rather, they believe that they are acting in the interests of some group, including oppressed religious believers, persecuted ethnic groups or workers, which makes them difficult to deter (Ross and Gurr, 1989). This theory is of significant importance when considering the historical origins of violent dissident republicans but it is also challenged by the existence of groups who utilise extreme violence for quasi-political aims. Another commonality among terrorist groups, according to conventional interpretations of the literature, is their practice of cloaking themselves in the terminology of military jargon. They consciously portray themselves as bone fide freedom fighters, if not soldiers, who though they wear no insignia or military uniform, are entitled to treatment as prisoners of war if captured and therefore should not be prosecuted as criminals in ordinary courts of law. They further argue that because they are numerically weak, have limited firepower compared to a nation state, they have no choice but to operate clandestinely (Hoffman, 2006, p. 26). Another commonality is their practice of selecting names that consciously eschew the word terrorism in any form. A terrorist will never acknowledge that he or she is a terrorist and will go to great lengths to evade and obscure any inference or connection (English, 2016; Hoffman, 2006).

1.5 How Long Do Terrorist Groups Last

One of the most widely cited statistics in terrorism studies is that 90 per cent of terrorist groups last less than a year. This figure was first advanced by the scholar David Rapoport in 1992 and has since been cited extensively. Further research has cast doubt on the reliability of the figure according to (Philips, 2019, p. 1260) who carried out a detailed analysis of the eight most expansive global data sets of terrorist organisation longevity which suggests that terrorist groups are far more durable than commonly thought. Again, this is of significant importance when considering violent dissident republicans. The application of Rapoport's theory to violent

republicanism in all its iterations does not stand up to scrutiny as the phenomenon has existed in various guises since the 1760s and even further in Irish mythology. Rapoport's theories become even more problematic and messy when the history of terrorism is considered and the emergence of hybrid organisations since the 1990s.

While prominent terrorism studies have repeated the claim that 90 per cent of terrorist groups last less than a year, it turns out that 50 per cent of terrorist groups are so short-lived (Philips, 2019, p. 1261). The data suggests ethnic groups are in fact somewhat more durable than left-wing groups. But again, this does not take into account how new and splinter groups emerge from existing movements, change their name, but maintain the same infrastructures, traditions and ideologies. The accepted literature also suggests that terrorism flourishes more in democracies than autocracies because they make it harder for dissidents to organise themselves (Eubank and Weinberg 1994; Li, 2005; Piazza, 2007). This is again contradicted by (Ballina, 2011; Dilegge et al., 2019; Enders and Su, 2007; Hutchinson and O'Malley, 2007; Killebrew, 2011) who point to failed states, criminal states and hostile states as harbingers of terrorist groups. Research is ongoing into whether cooperation with similar groups impacts on their capability and longevity of terrorist organisations but the results of initial research suggests that cooperative relationships between terrorist organisations are an important part of their survival. Alliances enable terrorist groups to gather resources they need to endure and become more effective which contributes to recruitment and other ends (Philips, 2014, p. 337). Very little consideration is given to the ability of groups to reinvent and rebrand themselves even though there is no change in their leadership, membership or objectives. In essence, the longevity of terrorist groups is dependent on many independent variables including regime type, location, population, and income per capita (Blomberg, Engel, and Sawyer, 2010). Their survival is also dependent on how states respond to them. Terrorist groups, they found, were more likely to survive as their age increases.

1.6 The Four Waves of Terrorism

Rapoport's model of the four waves of terrorism is probably one of the most cited theories in the field (Bar-On and Paradela-López, 2023, p. 744). It posited a generational historical model that classified terrorist groups in time based on widely shared ideologies and tactics that transcended individual circumstances, countries, and places (Radil and Castan Pinos, 2019, p. 312). Rapoport

asserts how the life cycle of each wave was generational in nature, usually occurring over a 40-year time period and each wave was linked to a common predominant energy or ideology. He further describes each wave as having an international character "driven by a predominant energy" that shapes the participating groups' characteristics and mutual relationships, resulting in "a cycle of activity in a given time period characterised by expansion and contraction phases." Whilst he acknowledged the existence of outliers that did not conform to his theory, Rapoport (2004) described waves as being international, or involving similar activities that occurred in a number of countries and were triggered by events of a global nature. The article itself was written after the al Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 and has since been republished and referenced in numerous volumes. The theory suggests there have been four waves of global terrorism in modern times: the first was an Anarchist Wave (1879–1920s) followed by an Anti-Colonial Wave (1919–1960s), a New Left Wave (1960s–1990s), and finally a Religious Wave (1979-today). He has since explored the possibility of a new Radical Right Wave that just started, or is commencing (Rapoport, 2021).

The First Wave, he wrote, coincided with the rise of anarchist groups, which railed against capitalism and hierarchies and challenged state and other elites through assassinations and bombings (Kaplan, 2016, p. 3). Rapoport argues that Narodnaya Volya launched the first wave of modern terrorism, an anarchist wave that spread from Russia to Western Europe, the Balkans and then Asia reaching a crescendo in the late 19th century, a period often called the Golden Age of Assassination (Rapoport, 2004, p. 52; Shughart, 2006, p. 14). The Second Wave, initiated after the Treaty of Versailles, Rapoport wrote, was characterised by a "self-determination energy" and by increasing nationalist sentiments not only in Asian and African colonies, but also in Europe, as national groups started to call for outright independence. The IRA fell into this category alongside the Front de Libération Nationale (National Liberation Front) in Algeria. The Third Wave, he suggests, was inspired by the New Left in the 1960s as a response to the US invasion of Vietnam and the Cold War. It exploited the use of international media and took advantage of increasing air transportation to implement spectacular air plane hijackings (Kaplan, 2016, pp. 7–8). The revolutionary organisations who participated in this third wave included Algeria's Army of National Liberation (ELN) and Spain's Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), which fought for the establishment of a Basque homeland, and the Red Brigades of Italy. The Fourth Wave, Rapoport wrote, began in 1979 after the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the Soviet Union's invasion of

Afghanistan. Rapoport defined this wave as being characterised by religious, anti-globalisation, and anti-hegemonic sentiments and ideologies. The Fourth Wave, he asserted, also involved terrorism organised by fringe religions including Japan's Aum Shinrikyo (Supreme Truth) and the Lord's Resistance Army of Uganda (Kaplan, 2016, p. 9). More recently, In Global Waves of Terrorism, Rapoport gave consideration to the possibility that right wing extremism, prompted by the arrival of large numbers of migrants into Europe and North America, might have instigated a fifth wave. The scholar reached no firm conclusion on this question but suggested far right terrorism and its distinctive characteristics could persist for a few more years but questioned whether it could last enough to constitute a fifth wave. The book also drew attention to the fact that unlike previous waves who were driven by young people, fewer were involved in right-wing extremism. The youngest members of far right groups were in their 30s; anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiments were much more intense and widespread in older people, adding that most violent deeds constitutes hate crimes and not acts of terrorism. Though he suggests that if the anxiety over racial concerns continues to persist, a fifth wave may commence. If this didn't happen, he posed, local terrorism would still persist.

While Rapoport's scholarly framework is ubiquitous in terrorism studies, it has not gone unchallenged. Many scholars are now questioning, refining or proposing alternatives to his Four Waves theory (Clutterbuck 2004; Sedgwick 2007; Radil and Castan Pinos, 2019) as it overlooked state-sponsored terrorism, the utilisation of terrorism by powerful and entrepreneurial organised groups and terrorist acts carried out by violent subcultures. Perhaps Kaplan (2007) sums up its deficiencies best when he suggests Rapoport simply did not account for the protean nature of some terrorist movements.

> It wonderfully maps the ocean to use Rapoport's aquatic metaphor, but it does not well account for the individual swirls and eddies that lurk beneath the surface. Movements radicalise and deradicalize, and on occasion, they turn inward. (Kaplan, 2007, p. 546).

Kaplan is not alone in reaching this conclusion. Bergesen and Lizardo (2004), Rasler and Thompson (2009) and Sedgwick (2007) have each developed their own Wave Theories. Bergesen and Lizardo (2004) suggest terrorist events seem to cluster, or to bunch, in world history, and suggest this clustering might hold the key to understanding them. They suggest the clusters seem to appear at key transition times within the world-system when the then-dominant

state is in decline though they acknowledge they do not understand why. Rapport suggests that "when a wave's energy cannot inspire new organisations, the wave disappears" is further challenged when applied to violent dissident republicans who can trace their lineage to the 1760s, predating the very existence of Marxism. More specifically he argued the Provisional IRA of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, was both Nationalist and Marxist, but he failed to recognise it was just another iteration of a tradition with a very deep history. Indeed, the literature on terrorism credits the cause of Irish nationalism with influencing the development of terrorism dating back to 1881 and 1887 when the Fenians organised a so-called "Dynamite Campaign" that saw high-profile targets in London like Tower Bridge, Scotland Yard, the Palace of Westminster, and the new Underground rail system come under attack. One bomb that detonated on the Metropolitan line injured seventy-two people, mostly third class passengers. Irish republican groups would come and go over the next 130 years. There is ample evidence to suggest that each type of terrorism has deeper historical roots than Rapoport's Wave Theory ever contemplated (Parker and Sitter, 2016, p. 198).

A more deep and accurate analysis of modern terrorism would view the emergence of the Russian anarchists as the product of evolution and not just the communications revolutions that Rapoport has discussed. Modern terrorism was turbo-charged by events which happened half a century earlier. The first was the revolution in military technology including the invention of nitro-glycerine, the Colt revolver and the horological torpedo. The second development was the invention of mass communications. The third was the emergence of novel ideas through education and working class empowerment. The 19th century brought together the means, the motive, and the opportunity for small bands of committed radicals to fight the established order but the men and women of the time were quick to use the tools which science had given them (Parker and Sitter, 2016, p. 204). The mid 19th Century saw the further evolution of terrorism, not its birth. The Four Wave theory also failed to recognise the potential for new types of terrorism to emerge in a rapidly changing society and security landscape, influenced by climate change, hyper-connectivity, the advent of new technologies, migration, and the changing world order. For example, he excluded violence perpetrated by groups opposed to abortion, radicalised people who oppose climate change and the ill-treatment of animals although the latter was once considered to be one of the biggest domestic terrorist threats in the United Kingdom and the United States (Lewis, 2005; Monaghan, 2013, p. 941) until relatively recently. The potential for

violent groups to engage in terrorism to stop climate change is rapidly emerging as a significant problem around the world. In Brazil in December 2018, the Wild Secret Society ('Sociedade Secreta Silvestre' in Portuguese) threatened to attack Jair Bolsonaro, the former Brazilian President during his inauguration (Correio Braziliense, 2018). Parker and Sitter (2016, p. 211), who are among the scholars who contest the accepted literature, perfectly sum up the reality of terrorism, its history and how it evolves.

> There are no waves of modern terrorism, there are simply numerous situations around the world where the means, motive, and opportunity to seek political change through violence have given rise to terrorist actors motivated by one or more of the four strains outlined above. Terrorist groups come in many shapes and sizes, and they evolve and mutate. Jessica Stern coined the phrase "the Protean enemy" after the shape-shifting Greek sea god featured in Homer's Odyssey to describe the challenge posed by terrorism because of the constantly changing nature of the groups involved and the changing nature of the threat itself. (Parker and Sitter, 2016, p. 211)

1.7 Violent Dissident Republican Literature

There is a myriad of academic opinions, concepts and theories on violent dissident republicanism from scholars who have tackled the topic and related subfields since the signing of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. The literature includes both historical and political analyses of the subject. Scholars have also viewed the subject through the lens of terrorism studies, peace-spoiler and internal brakes typology whilst others have used social identity theory to explain its durability (Horgan, 2013; Sanders, 2011; Morrison, 2015; Horgan and Gill, 2011; Edwards, 2011; Bean, 2012; Evans and Tonge, 2012; Bowman-Grieve and Conway, 2012; Tonge, 2014; Hearty, 2016; Gill and Morrison, 2016; Silke, 2019; McGlinchey, 2019; Reinisch, 2020; Finnegan, 2021; Vandermeersch, 2024; McGlinchey, 2026). Finnegan (2021) approached the issue using the prism of "deviant cohesion" which offered a more micro-organisational mechanism to investigate the topic. The literature has been further bolstered by accounts from journalists who wrote about the clandestine operations mounted by Irish, British and American security services to thwart dissidents (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003), state efforts to imprison their

leaders (O'Driscoll, 2019), and their pursuit through the civil courts (Dudley Edwards, 2013). While all these accounts have advanced the study of violent dissident republican, they differ widely in their treatment and approach.

The term dissident republican itself is a contested description. It is broadly used to describe republican paramilitary organisations, their political wings and supporters who opposed the signing of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Originally, their unifying feature was their unequivocal rejection of the political settlement and their belief that Sinn Féin and the Provisional IRA's participation in the talks that led to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 were fundamentally at odds with republican ideals (Horgan, 2013, p. 5). Those who left to join or form new organisations were invariably described as people who had become disillusioned with the Peace Process and what they saw as the politicisation of the Provisionals (Horgan and Morrison, 2011, p. 662). These dissenters dismissed any suggestion that they required an electoral mandate for their actions but believed their legitimacy and actions were derived from past generations and the trajectory of revolutionary Irish history (Frampton, 2025, p. 671).

Many like the founders of the Real IRA, which split from the Provisionals, believed in the absolute authority of the IRA and saw the paramilitary organisation as something steeped in history, which should always exist to maintain a military challenge to Britain (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003, p. 27). Its leader Michael McKevitt, a former IRA quartermaster general, was of the view that if Northern Ireland was regarded in republican circles as anything other than a territory occupied by Britain, the Provisional IRA had no right to even exist (Mooney and O'Toole, 2013, p. 27).

Republican dissidents have since been described invariably as former Provisionals, who can't let go, spoiler groups, vigilantes, micro-groups and traitors to Ireland (McGlinchey, 2019, p. 11). It should be noted that dissidents themselves do not identify with the term (Thomson, 2026, p. 3) and accuse the Provisionals and Sinn of being the true dissenters. The label itself was originally used to identify an individual's or group's relationship to the Good Friday Agreement. It did not automatically denote a uniform organisational type, ideology or repertoire of violence, but its use has since become so widespread that it is difficult to avoid (Vandermeersch, 2024, p. 26). As a consequence the label has become firmly ingrained in public discourse and commentary. Currie

and Taylor (2011, p. 65) were among the first scholars to acknowledge the difficulties associated with the term by drawing attention to Tonge and Murray's use of the label "republican ultra" (Murray and Tonge, 2003, p. 219), while also noting Richard English's use of "dissenters" (English, 2003, p. 313) to describe republicans who disagreed with Provisional orthodoxy regarding the Peace Process.

The rigid application of the label "dissident" also fails to acknowledge alternative forms of republicanism that reject armed struggle but are deeply critical of the Good Friday Agreement. McGlinchey (2019) believes its use has become somewhat isolated and has even marginalised alternative visions of republicanism simply because they differ from those of the Provisionals. Dissidents who were once members of the Provisional IRA or Sinn , she asserts, argue that their political positions have always remained consistent and it is the Provisionals and Sinn who have dissented. McGlinchey goes further by stating that any analysis of dissidents as simply ex-Provisionals or "Johnny-come-latelys" is inaccurate and in fact devoid of historical context (McGlinchey, 2019, p. 11). But Horgan (2013, p. 13) offers a different perspective on the label. He suggests that any change in the terminology is not only "unnecessary" and "inappropriate" but possibly misleading:

> Dissent does not convey a value judgement on the act of dissidence, any more than it does on what is being dissented. Consequently, use of the title 'dissident' does not place any value judgement on an individual or organisation but instead describes that person or group's defining characteristic. The question is not of approval or disapproval, but rather whether the act of dissent is the defining characteristic of the organisation under analysis. The answer to this must be Yes. Each of the groups under examination here have, through the act of schism or split, dissented from what is now accepted as mainstream republicanism. (Horgan, 2013, p.13)

The label dissident continues to evolve. It is now used to include both violent and the non-violent dissident groups which reject the Good Friday Agreement but also those who reject the St Andrews Agreements of 2006, view the Police Service of Northern Ireland as an illegitimate policing force, and those involved in vigilante attacks (Preston, 2026). In trials heard before the Special criminal court in Dublin, criminals and gunmen are sometimes called dissidents

(Mooney, 2023). In more recent years, the label has also been applied to newer political movements, such as Eirígí and the 1916 Societies, which have claimed to pursue novel forms of political activism to advance the cause of a united Ireland (Frampton, 2025, p. 654).

This literature review explores the relevant sections of the literature that are of interest to the research question and uses the dissident label to describe republican paramilitaries, republican gangs, and criminal groups and non-aligned actors who endorse and use terroristic violence. The label "hybrid" is also used to describe violent republican groups which have the character traits of both organised crime and republican paramilitary organisations. The imprecise use of the label is aimed at recognising the heterogeneous nature of the dissident movement and how such groups now extend beyond the recognised definitions of republican paramilitary organisations.

The literature contains a substantial body of both helpful and insightful work which have explored the rich history, ideologies, strategies, durability and terrorist threat posed by dissidents. The initial treatment of the topic contextualised violent dissidents through the prism of peace-spoilers, a militant rump of hardliners who could not be accommodated politically. Such labels were entirely predictable as splits had typified the birth of all Irish republican groups noted Horgan (2013, p. 21) though the scholar was careful to draw attention to the heterogeneous nature of the groups which he wrote varied in size, geographic locations, strategies, ideologies and goals. Tonge (2004, p. 671) also viewed the emergence of the Real IRA in 1997 as predictable, given the historical propensity of republicans to divide amid claims of betrayal and sell-outs by the leadership, but he too noticed their heterogeneity:

> The Republican movement has always been an eclectic, noncohesive body. Within its ranks have been found, in a far from exhaustive list, militant nationalists, unreconstructed militarists, romantic Fenians, Gaelic Republicans, Catholic sectarians, northern defenders, international Marxists, socialists, libertarians and liberal Protestants. (Tongue, 2004, p. 672)

There is a consensus across the literature that even by previous republican standards, dissident organisations like the Real IRA, the Continuity IRA and their political offshoots, enjoyed little support when they commenced their paramilitary campaigns in the late 1990s. This was

attributed to narratives which sought to delegitimise those who disagreed with the mainstream. They were portrayed as a recent phenomenon, or groups embarking on something new. This had happened before wrote McGlinchey, who noted how similar groups from the past were labelled at various times as “irregulars” and “anti-treatyites” (McGlinchey, 2019, p. 172).

Given Irish republicanism’s history of organisational splits giving rise to new and dangerous groups, it is both helpful and important to explore at this juncture how the Provisional IRA managed to prevent more widespread defections from their ranks. The potential for former combatants to act as spoilers during a peace process is taken for granted (Trumbore, 2018, p. 525). So why did the bulk of the Provisional IRA choose to remain loyal to the parent organisation and accept the terms of the Good Friday Agreement? Why did they support the decommissioning of weapons and abandon armed struggle, while a minority chose another route in the years that followed?

The literature offers differing observations. Tonge (2012, p. 223) suggests the threat posed by the Provisional IRA was one important factor. Frampton (2011, p. 105) has also drawn attention to this suggestion though he acknowledges it emanated from British officials who were briefed by Sinn . Another explanation offered by Morrison (2014) suggests the gradualist approach of the Provisionals during the Peace Process was crucial to maintaining organisational coherence and reducing the potential for violent splinter groups to gain support. He argues that the Provisionals’ efforts to consult and canvass their grassroots at relevant times enabled the IRA to diminish the role of the army in favour of the political path being pursued by Sinn during the Peace Process. A lack of credibility was another factor identified by Bean (2012, p. 217), who argued: “To build a movement like that of the Provisionals in the 1970s requires very different conditions to those obtaining today.”

For the most part, dissident republicanism since its emergence has been confined to the political margins. Its adherents have had to watch the metamorphosis and seemingly inexorable growth of Sinn , as the party has become an electoral force on both sides of the Irish border (Frampton, 2025, p. 654). Since 2022 Sinn have become the largest party in the Northern Irish Assembly. By comparison, the dissident groups, even when they are judged collectively, seem disorganised and devoid of substantial support. Given this dichotomy, the question which this thesis seeks to

answer is how a marginalised and small cohort of people have nevertheless endured and established dissident paramilitary groups despite sustained efforts to suppress them. Moreover it seeks to establish if they are even motivated by their stated ideologies anymore? The emergence of new dissident groupings in recent years (Frampton, 2025, p. 654) further underlines the importance of solving this puzzle.

The literature on the subject offers no single or straightforward explanation, but rather a range of overlapping theories and factual findings. Nolan (2013, p. 4) considers the endurance of dissidents predictable, arguing that "wars everywhere can take on a half-life that allows them to splutter along". In Northern Ireland's case, he argues it was always to be expected that rogue forces would seek to continue prosecuting the war, however hopeless their prospects. Tonge (2012, pp. 225–226) suggests that this phoenix-like capacity of violent republicanism might be rooted in the ability of dissidents to take refuge in purported historical parallels as a substitute for an existing mandate. He highlights their ability to point to the perceived hypocrisy of celebrations of the "good old" IRA(s), while contrasting these commemorations with contemporary condemnation of dissident violence. How and why people join such dissident groups is still a topic of ongoing research that remains unanswered. Horgan (2013, pp. 77-103) examined open-source data to build an illuminating profile of this cohort. Although the centre of violent activity took place in Northern Ireland, much of the dissident membership was located in the south. These specific areas of strength in the Republic were different from the clusters found north of the border. Horgan also found there were prominent age ranges: 14-30 year olds and 31-50 year olds. The rationale behind the engagement of the younger cohort was notably very different to their older cadres. More recently, Morrison has written that regionalism now plays a central role. "This influence can derive from both the historical and contemporary circumstances relating to the areas," he suggests (Morrison, 2024, p.4)

There is widespread agreement across the literature that dissidents are unlikely to vanish anytime soon. Even the murder of 29 people, including unborn twins, in the market town of Omagh in August 1998 did not deter them or cause them to abandon terrorism permanently. Instead, it prompted them to alter their tactics. The Real IRA called a temporary ceasefire. Rather than risk another mass-casualty incident through the use of car bombs in the years following the massacre,

they simply switched tactics, applying internal controls to their violence, as noted by Morrison: (2020, p. 158)

> They returned with a very different kind of campaign. Bombings similar to Omagh and Banbridge were not to be seen again. The leadership were not immediately willing to sanction attacks in Northern Ireland. The possibility of civilian casualties, even if not on the scale of Omagh, could be detrimental to their continued existence. They instead turned their concentration to the targeting of strategic and symbolic sites in England. There was an understanding in the leadership, and particularly with Michael McKevitt, that another Omagh would be detrimental to any possibility of organisational survival. It would have 'wiped [them] out for good.

The use of tactical ceasefires and extended lulls in activity has often created the impression the dissident campaigns might be coming to an end. For example, the dissident faction Óglaigh na hÉireann announced a ceasefire in 2018 following a process of political engagements only for its members to carry out murders and shootings in the years that followed (Young, 2022; Young 2024). The lethal attacks have been directed at suspected drug dealers and former members (Young, 2024). Horgan (2013, p. 178) has correctly observed that whenever society has begun to believe that dissidents were fading away, they have re-emerged to remind it of their continued presence.

The most important contribution on this specific issue comes from Whiting (2015, p. 85) who correctly argues that Omagh rendered indiscriminate bombings strategically counterproductive, insofar as they weakened the dissident campaign's claim to legitimacy and alienated potential followers. However, she rightly asserts the fallout from the bombing produced a change in tactics and nothing more. In the decades that followed, dissidents went on to target police officers, soldiers, and prison officers (McKee, 2024; Mooney, 2009; Mooney 2011). They focused their efforts on the production of propaganda, organising commemorations, and prisoner support. They also intensified their efforts to claim ownership of the republican tradition. In this regard, Whiting's argument made a crucial distinction between the adoption of new tactics and organisational extinction, which is particularly relevant to this thesis. For terrorist organisations to survive and be active, they require financial capital. In recent years, the involvement of

dissident republicans has become a feature of journalistic reporting by the Irish Times, the Sunday Times and other outlets and official reports published by the Irish and British governments (Independent Monitoring Commission, 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010; 2011). These have highlighted their involvement in everything from extortion and armed robbery to incidents of tiger-kidnapping.

Although dissident republicans in all their iterations have always engaged in criminal acts, the terrorism literature on the topic is limited. It is, however, crucial to understanding the trajectory of the movement. The literature on this field tends to argue that criminality is both a practical resource (Horgan, 2013), a challenge to political legitimacy (Hearty, 2016, pp. 285-286) and encompasses a terrorism-organised crime boundary (Morrison and Horgan, 2016). In an important work called *Divided We Stand,* Horgan wrote about the Real IRA and Continuity IRA's involvement in cigarette smuggling, fuel laundering, armed robbery and efforts to muscle in on drug dealing territories (Horgan, 2013, pp. 92-128). He noted how some groups in threatening drug dealers demonstrated their ability to tap into public sentiment and to draw attention to their broader objectives in a way that would be otherwise almost impossible. Mooney and O'Toole (2003) also documented the Real IRA's involvement in contraband smuggling, its liaisons with Dublin crime gangs and efforts by the Irish authorities to confiscate the proceeds of crime from prominent dissidents. But the modern iterations of the movement have begun to behave differently as disclosed in evidence during recent criminal trials heard in Irish courts (Mooney, 2023). Dissidents are now siding with powerful criminal gangs to carry out murders and acting as arbiters between feuding gangs.

The field of criminology has paid some attention to dissident criminality as part of wider studies on Ireland's social milieu. Windle (2022, pp. 140-141) outlined how dissidents had cooperated with, extorted money from, and regulated the activities of crime gangs and stated that some dissident groups had now morphed into primarily criminal groups with little remaining political motivation. There have been "skills transfers" from paramilitaries to criminals, and vice versa. Windle (2022, p. 135) however noted the deficiencies in the existing literature, describing much of the research on paramilitary involvement in organised crime as dated. Notwithstanding that terrorism is crime, dissident republican involvement in serious crime and their ventures with organised crime outfits has been overlooked in the literature although information rich in detail

has been published in media reports (The Irish Times, 2012; Mooney, 2023). Information on the nature of these complex relationships can also be found in the myriad of official reports which focus on documenting the internal workings and threats emanating from Ireland's social milieu. Though lacking in academic analysis, these provide a rich body of information.

A report published by the Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF, 2016, p.46), the partnership for combatting organised crime in Northern Ireland, outlined how republican paramilitary groups tax drug dealers and permit them to pedal drugs in their local communities. Reports published by the Independent Monitoring Commission, which monitors paramilitary ceasefires, also shine a light on the overlaps between dissident republican activity and serious criminality. These are useful as they don't support a simple conclusion that all criminal activity is either centrally directed or politically motivated. Instead they distinguish between group-sanctioned activities and criminal activity apparently conducted for individual rather than organisational benefit. These records are invaluable from the perspective of this thesis as they advance the argument that violent dissident republicanism has become hybridised and very similar to identity based gangs. Put differently, this thesis contends that criminal activity can both enrich individual members and generate revenue for the organisation.

Such concepts have been applied to other terrorist groups and violent subcultures around the world. Existing theories of crime-terror hybridisation as advanced by scholars including Makarenko (2004) and Shelley and Picarelli (2002) suggest that political commitment, organisational financing, local coercion and private enrichment may coexist within the same networks or individuals. Shelley and Picarelli (2002, p. 314) surmise this perfectly when they say organised criminals and terrorists cannot always be easily separated; they slip into each other's roles as necessary.

In the case of the dissidents, the distinction between involvement in criminal activities that generate money for the individual and the organisation cannot be resolved simply by assigning participants to either political or purely criminal categories. As Morrison (2024, p. 22) correctly says, the days when terrorism studies was dominated by political science and international relations are gone:

> We now see the growing application of psychology, sociology and other disciplines to enhance our understanding. This has recently been joined by the growing utilisation of criminology as a framework for understanding.

It would be extraneous for the purpose of this section devoted to reviewing the relevant studies to examine the entire repertoire on the topic but White's (2010) treatment of structural identity analysis is important to consider. His research found that activism, disengagement and rival organisation formation were shaped by subgroup interactions, competing identities and activists' understandings of the obligations of republicanism as it clearly demonstrates the complexity of the identities of social movement activists (White, 2010, p. 336). Understanding these influences are crucial in themselves to understanding what propels dissidents. White (2010, p. 336) suggests without hesitation that the most important insight of his study was that it demonstrated the complexity of the identities of social movement activists.

> For activists in organisations, continued activism depends upon the salience of the activist identity relative to identities associated with nonmovement personnel and on changes in the social structure. Collective identities at the organisational level help maintain activism, and collective identities at the broader level help make potential activists available for initial recruitment and for re-entry if they exit.

Considering White (2010) is crucial when contemplating what makes violent dissident republicanism in all its forms so durable. Coupled with his book *Out of the Ashes: An Oral History of the Provisional Irish Republican Movement* (2017), which treated republicanism as a social movement, White goes some way towards explaining the decision making processes used by republicans to engage and re-engage in activism. Although his work did not fully consider the backgrounds of new recruits, their social networks, the scale of financial rewards that flow from involvement in organised crime and the status afforded by membership of the IRA in the modern era, it prepared the groundwork for future research.

To conclude, scholarship on dissident republicanism has examined a wide range of issues through diverse conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Although the existing literature on dissidents is insightful and valuable, several significant gaps remain. Most scholars portray

dissident groups primarily as political products of a split from the Provisional IRA. Consequently, research has generally approached the phenomenon through the lens of terrorism studies, often overlooking its deeper cultural and historical roots, but also its criminal parts. In particular, insufficient attention has been paid to the connections between contemporary dissident republicanism and their similarities with earlier militant actors from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The rich literature on violent dissident republicanism has engaged only minimally with theories of intergenerational militancy and the transmission of political violence across generations. It is therefore possible that some characteristics of contemporary dissident republicanism reflect a longer-standing tradition of violence on the island of Ireland, rather than simply a post-Provisional IRA development. This possibility remains underexplored. Similarly, there has been little attempt to conceptualise contemporary dissident republicanism through subcultural theory. This thesis aims to fill this lacuna.

One other issue worth exploring is the rapidly evolving relationships between dissident groups and powerful organised-crime networks in the modern social milieu. Greater attention to these relationships, as explored in this thesis generates important new findings and cast dissident actions in an entirely new light. In that context this thesis argues that conceptualising dissident groups as hybrid actors, neither criminal not terrorist, engaged at different times in criminal enterprise, and occasional terrorists, offers a more nuanced understanding of the dissident phenomenon than approaches that treat them exclusively as terrorist organisations.

1.8 Conclusion

It would be impossible, for the purpose of this literature review to recite the wide body of opinions on terrorism but until recently terrorist groups were generally treated as being representative of four orientations: anarchist, left-wing, nationalist/separatist, religious, and right-wing, who have carried out violent acts at different times. The theory ties the emergence of these groups to defined periods where they came into existence. But such designations can be problematic when one considers the emergence of hybrid organisations that display multiple character traits. Terrorist groups, depending on their type, objectives and geographical location,

vary greatly in terms of their longevity, structure, and evolution. As Rapoport noted, terrorists are complex actors and inhabit multiple identities (Rapoport, 2011, p. 51). Their historic roots, ideologies, geographical location, beliefs and a variety of other factors do influence and shape their direction and activities. The literature also highlights the adaptability and rebranding of terrorist groups, particularly those that align with broader subcultural or hybrid organisational traits. This analysis provides a critical foundation for this thesis as it identifies both the strengths and the limitations of existing literature and points to emerging areas of research that offer alternative perspectives. This is the gap in the literature which this thesis hopes to address by building upon the existing frameworks, theories and concepts utilised by Hemmingsen (2014; 2016) and other scholars.

The existing scholarship on dissidents has produced substantial knowledge of their groups, their organisational development, strategic orientation, security implications, and relationship to the post-Good Friday Agreement settlement. But these approaches have not consistently integrated the social reproduction of militant republican identity with analysis of changing local, familial, and criminal contexts. Nor have they fully taken into account the historic lineage of the dissidents. This thesis sets out to address this gap by examining how tradition, kinship and social identity shape the meanings, networks, and boundaries through which dissident republicanism has been sustained and transformed.

Chapter 2 The New Underworld

Introduction

This chapter aims to build upon the foundation set out in the literature review by delving into the subfields of academic research that examine the complex and interwoven variables that influence modern terrorist organisations, violent movements, and radical subcultures. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, there is limited focus on the historical development of terrorism, the durability of violent movements, the role played by tradition, kinship and social identity in their evolution and the impact of societal and environmental conditions that bring about radical change in such organisations. To gain a deeper understanding of how these drivers may influence violent dissident republicanism, one must look beyond surface events and recognise the confluence of unseen internal and external drivers that are helping to shape and guide terrorist groups but also the dark networks and underworld environments they inhabit. This thesis argues that such factors, often subtle and complex, have played and continue to play significant roles in the evolution of violent dissident republicanism.

Violent dissidents have been generally regarded by the Irish and British governments, their intelligence services, and academics as little more than peace spoilers or remnants of the Northern Ireland Peace Process (Evans and Tonge, 2012; McClements, 2026; McCullagh, McMorrow and McCarthy, 2021). Ultimately, this research seeks to challenge the conventional understanding of this hydra-like movement by assessing whether or not the existing theories, concepts and academic frameworks sufficiently address its contemporary manifestations. In order to develop a much deeper understanding of the forces that guide contemporary violent republicanism, Chapter 2 explores areas of research that are redefining the study of terrorism before they are applied and tested in the following chapters.

Section 2.1 examines the study of the crime-terror nexus, or cooperation between modern terrorist groups, organised crime gangs and violent extremists. This area of rapidly evolving research is upending many of the accepted theories and concepts on terrorism and its relationship with organised crime. It outlines how and why terrorist groups sometimes cooperate and form alliances with criminal groups before they converge into more threatening hybrid organisations. Section 2.2 investigates the emergence of hybrid organisations, entities which display the

characteristics of terrorist groups, violent movements and organised crime groups. The scholar and military officer Robert Killebrew (2011, p. 34) describes these as a new form of criminal insurgency. Hybrid organisations, he argues, are especially dangerous as they combine elements of terrorism and organised crime to become highly adaptable and resilient to law enforcement. This convergence of political violence, criminality and occasionally religion also renders them unpredictable, as they can shift tactics and objectives based on opportunity, often operating both locally and globally. Their very existence is challenging policy-makers who struggle to understand and acknowledge the multifaceted threat they pose. Section 2.3 examines how violent actors are used by hostile states to conduct hybrid warfare or non-conventional warfare. Understanding this phenomenon is important if one is to understand the dark networks which violent dissidents inhabit in contemporary Ireland as they regularly engage with Russian and Iranian proxies.

Section 2.4 continues with the themes explored in the previous sections by examining how environment, population growth, urbanisation, hyper-connectivity and technology are creating the conditions likely to give rise to future terrorist groups. Section 2.4 also examines the types of feral cities and failed states, which enable terrorist and criminal groups to flourish. This chapter also investigates the role played by criminal states, which provide shelter and support to violent groups. Section 2.5 explores the concept of terrorism subculture, the term applied to certain groups that entertain ideological commonalities with terrorist structures and function as reservoirs for recruitment and logistical support. This section investigates the role played by kinship, tradition and social identity in violent movements, a poorly understood phenomenon which is rooted in the past but impacts on the future as it occurs in all violent organisations and contributes to their durability. By analysing the fast evolving nature of terrorism through various lenses, environmental, social, criminal, subcultural theory and convergence among others, this chapter lays the foundation for a more thorough investigation into the history and evolution of violent republican organisations from the late 18th Century to modern times in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

2.1 The Crime-Terror Nexus and Continuum

Understanding how terrorists, criminals, extremists and hostile states interact in dark networks is crucial to understanding both the past and future of modern terrorism. While the academic

treatment of political violence tends to view its practitioners as all exhibiting a defined set of values, ideologies, and organisational frameworks, the truth is that each group is unique and influenced by their own environments. This uniqueness, even among structurally and ideologically similar groups, underscores the complexity of analysing violent networks, their behaviours and ability to mutate and transform. Nowhere is this oversimplification more evident than in the prevalent assumption that terrorists and criminals operate in strictly separate spheres in underworld systems, with distinct behaviours and non-overlapping objectives (Ballina, 2011; Makarenko, 2004; Traughber, 2007). This belief, deeply ingrained in both academic research and government policy, fails to account for the substantial and often strategic intersections that exist between such actors. It also ignores the ability of terrorists, criminals, extremists and other actors to cooperate and form lasting alliances when there is a growing body of evidence to show how they share operational tactics, utilise similar networks, and even collaborate when their interests overlap.

This deeply-rooted and generally accepted notion of how organised crime groups and criminals operate is based on the understanding of crime as an essentially non-ideological and non-political phenomenon. In contrast, organisations that do seem to incorporate an ideological component, most notably terrorist groups and extremists, are classified as the antithesis of criminals and thus are theoretically precluded from actions motivated by profit and greed. This problem, which is described by scholars as the ‘profit versus ideology’ dichotomy (Ballina, 2011, p. 121), is reinforced by a misguided view of criminals as ultra-rational, profit-maximising actors operating in a market, excised from their social and cultural background. But as there is no one archetype dark network, the same rule can be applied to terrorist organisations, criminal gangs, extremist groups or violent subcultures. Their structure, composition, organisation, finances and networking abilities all differ according to their strength, environment, history, social makeup and resources. To a large extent, determining whether and to what degree they will engage with each other and use criminal activity to generate income is a matter of assessing individual personalities inside groups and cells with regard to their organisational capacity and needs. But it should be noted that the very characteristics that make organised terrorist groups functionally and organisationally well placed to engage in revenue generating crime are also shared by terrorists.

They both have a capacity to threaten and deliver violence as a means of securing external compliance and encourage corruption designed to neutralise law enforcement and produce an environment favourable to their activities. Both also demand the loyalty of members and engage in crime to provide a steady and reliable income stream in order to finance their activities. In other words, terrorists are well structured to engage in money-raising activities that rely on exactly the same characteristics they already possess for their political purpose (Hutchinson and O'Malley, 2007; Traughber, 2007). Scholars like Bar-On and Paradela-López (2023) and Campell and Hansen (2014) and Kenney (2007) also point to the striking similarities between powerful crime cartels and terrorist groups to the extent that the latter has political ends rather than being simply an individual expression of psychopathology.

The academic view of this relationship that exists between terrorism and organised crime traditionally viewed it through the prism of revenue generation. This changed radically in the 1980s when narco-terrorism became a reality through the formation of deep alliances between South American cartels and terrorist groups (Makarenko, 2004, p. 130). This term, which many scholars considered a contradiction in terms, was first coined by the Peruvian President Belaunde Terry in 1983 to describe a 1980s Colombian phenomenon – the use of terrorism by cocaine cartels to advance their drug trafficking enterprises. The Medellin cartel's recruitment of the ELN to plant car bombs in 1993 to kill politicians was an example of how the relationship became operational as opposed to financial (Makarenko, 2004, pp. 131-132). Such cartel violence was not solely criminal in nature but planned and organised to transform society, instil fear, cause chaos, sow alarmism and thwart governmental responses to the threat they posed (Bowden, 2018; Campbell and Hansen, 2014, p. 162; García Márquez, 2014). The cartels went on to organise assassinations, including those of politicians, police officers, journalists, and bombed airliners to advance their aims and spread fear. These were without question political acts. Of the period, the writer Márquez wrote that narco-terrorism was the "most virulent and cruel" of the many atrocities that had convulsed his native Colombia noting how four candidates had been assassinated before the country's 1990 presidential campaign (García Márquez, 2014, p. 128).

Although the phenomenon of narco-terrorism was primarily associated with Latin America, the term has since evolved. In contemporary policy and political discourse, narco-terrorism is now

increasingly linked to the regions of Central and Southeast Asia, and specifically the narcotics-producing regions of the so-called Golden Crescent and the Golden Triangle (Björnehed, 2004). It is also applied to criminal actions of jihadist organisations that control territory from where they organise and direct terrorist activities. For example, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan has entered into a strategic relationship with the Afghan drug mafia and Central Asian criminal groups to ensure that shipments of heroin can be safely transported between Afghanistan, the Russian Federation and the Caucasus along what is called The Northern Route. Another cited case of nexus between a criminal and terrorist group - one in which a mutual relationship has proven integral to the operations of both entities - is the infamous relationship that developed between the Albanian mafia and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) during the Kosovo conflict. After the fall of the Albanian government in 1997, the Albanian mafia secured its authority over heroin-trafficking routes through its liaisons with the KLA (Makarenko, 2004, p. 132).

Interactions between criminal gangs and terrorist groups are heterogeneous; they are all different. Whilst some terrorist groups like FARC and Al Qaeda create their own “in-house” criminal capabilities, many are joint enterprises. The reasons for such collaborations are obvious. Drug trafficking is the largest source of income for both international organised crime groups and terrorists (United Nations International Drug Control Programme [UNDCP], 1997). Although drug trafficking has been placed at the top of the hierarchy of illegal money raising activities for terrorist groups, robberies, extortion, kidnapping, and arms trading and smuggling are not far behind. Even terrorist groups that can boast state sponsorship such as Hezbollah, which is supported by Iran, must rely increasingly on criminal activity to sustain their activities and improve their operational capabilities (Hutchinson and O’Malley, 2007, p. 1095). It should be noted that organised criminal groups, who use terror tactics to fulfil their specific operational aims, in most cases have no serious interest in changing the status quo or governments, but merely securing their operational environment (Makarenko, 2004, p. 133) though there are outliers. In the 1990s, the Sicilian Mafia, the centuries old violent subculture called Cosa Nostra, used car bombings to terrorise the political elite and send a message to the Italian government to stop investigations into their activities (Dickie, 2005).

The Medellín Cartel collaborated with the ELN to kill politicians who supported the extradition of Colombian criminals to the United States (García Márquez, 2014). Hence the relationship

between terrorists and powerful organised crime syndicates should be understood in the context in which they occur. Like dark networks, no two are alike. The existence of these complex relationships and alliances between organised crime and terrorism has given rise to the theory of the crime-terror nexus, which exists on a crime–terror continuum (Makarenko, 2004, p. 30). Makarenko created a typology continuum to trace how organisational dynamics and the operational nature of both phenomena changes over time. On one end of the continuum, she placed organised crime and on the other end she placed terrorism. She created points of organisational/operational overlap among crime and terrorism on the continuum to highlight how such groups could be brought closer together.

In the middle of the continuum, Makarenko placed a point she called convergence to show where mergers between both groups and their illicit activities occur or where a single entity can exhibit criminal and terrorist characteristics simultaneously (Reyes and Dinar, 2014, p. 382). In such circumstances, the two groups have the potential to transform into a hybrid entity situated at the opposite end of the continuum from which it began. Thus, transformation or mutation occurs to such a degree that the ultimate aims and motivations of the organisation actually change.

The hybrid label is now applied to criminal organisations that display political motivations but also to terrorist groups who are equally interested in criminal profits but ultimately begin to use their ideology as a facade solely for perpetrating criminal activities. The Irish National Liberation Army is a classic example of a hybrid organisation whose evolution has blurred the line between political and criminal motivations. Originally established with the political objective of creating a socialist republic in Ireland, it has increasingly turned to criminal activities, such as drug smuggling and extortion, to sustain its membership. Its political rhetoric serves merely as a facade, with the group's primary focus veering towards criminal enterprise (Jupp and Garrod, 2019, p. 409). Such a trajectory aligns with theories that when an organisation's core motivations shift from political to criminal, it ultimately loses the defining characteristics that once distinguished it as a politically-driven entity.

Alternatively, according to the revised continuum proposed by the scholar Ballina, convergence can also be caused by a sociocultural set of catalysts that characterise terrorist groups or even the outcome of a calculated strategy by such organisations (Ballina, 2011, p. 130). This groundbreaking research concluded that clandestine groups can and have developed the capacity

to pursue multiple agendas, sometimes through the use of tactics that serve the double purpose of obtaining financial gain and projecting a symbolic dimension of power. They are, in the broadest terms, hybrid organisations: comfortably rooted in both ideology and profit, constantly shifting their strategies and tactics as they evolve.

> The continuum must be understood in a more flexible manner. In other words, hybrid organisations can, and often do, circulate throughout the spectrum at different moments of their evolution, and it also means that overlapping between different stages is possible at any given time. The possibility must be considered as well that a clandestine organisation can actually be 'born' as a hybrid one, rather than reaching this status via a displacement along a two-dimensional line. (Ballina, 2011, p. 130)

The concept of a crime-terror nexus existing on a crime-terror continuum is highly contested and not without its detractors in the academic community, who have dismissed the possibility of organised crime gangs and terrorist groups merging in a "futuristic hybrid crime–terror nightmare" (Hutchinson and O'Malley, 2007, p. 1103). These argue that terrorist groups are predominantly concerned with politics and suggest organised crime and terrorist groups compete, rather than cooperate, though they accept it may occur in certain circumstances especially in fragile states. These scholars believe parasitic cooperation can result in relationships between terrorist and criminal groups, though it is one where terrorists feed off organised crime profits and activities. They put forward the potential for terrorists to orient towards "profit" rather than politics.

> This does not amount to a convergence of organised crime and terrorism, and the distinctions between them remain crucial. (Hutchinson and O'Malley, 2007, p. 1106)

Dishman (2001) reached similar conclusions grounding his findings in the belief that drug barons and revolutionary leaders do not follow the same paths and share similar objectives. Terrorists may commit kidnappings or extort local businesses, he suggested, but their fundamental goals remain to shape or alter the political landscape in some manner, also citing how criminals selectively use violence to destroy competitors or threaten counter-narcotic authorities (Dishman, 2001, p. 45) though he recognises that terrorist groups can transform. However, this scholarship is less well equipped to explain the localised forms of crime-terror interaction evident in Ireland. Its emphasis on large-scale, transnational or organisational convergence can obscure the ways in

which groups such as the Irish National Liberation Army and elements of violent dissident republicanism use criminal activity within local networks to sustain both individual members and organisational objectives. The focus often remains on broad assumptions and intelligence assessments, rather than closely analysing certain groups' activities which would demonstrate that hybrid criminal terrorists do exist and use violence to destroy competitors. Dishman (2001), for example, suggests the Provisional IRA became successfully involved in organised crime and did not seek alliances or relationships with gangs at home or abroad or as he suggests they were "content to keep all operations in-house." This is not borne out by evidence and once again highlights the glaring issue in security studies whereby researchers accept what they are told without scrutinising it. The Provisional IRA did cooperate with criminals to conduct armed robberies, launder money and procure weapons (Mooney, 2023). The work of Ballina and Makarenko stand up to scrutiny.

2.2 Hybrid Organisations

Given the above, the study of hybrid organisations, including their construct, behaviours, dynamics, operating environments and influences, is of the utmost importance to this thesis as the phenomenon is occurring across the world. Yet the convergence of drugs, crime, and insurgency, often referred to as the perfect storm, is now widely recognised as one of the greatest security threats globally, exacerbating corruption and fuelling conflict (Reyes and Dinar, 2014). This nexus is evolving rapidly, driven by globalisation, which facilitates the illicit movement of goods and people, bringing together once-disparate groups with nefarious aims. As previously stated, the academic community initially struggled to recognise the emergence of hybrid organisations, but research on these entities has since developed significantly, with important studies by Ballina (2011), Killebrew (2011), Pollichieni and Mumford (2021), Reyes and Dinar (2014), and Zabyelina (2018). There have been some important related studies in field focused on Irish paramilitarism and crime. Woodford and Smith (2018, p. 2) explored the Provisional IRA's reliance on criminal gangs to develop expertise in illegal fund-raising, noting how they were perceived as a necessary but unpopular by-product of the greater political objective. Horgan and Taylor (2003, p. 51) explored the Provisional IRA's financial activities and noted how it had access to expertise in the non-terrorist world which helped facilitate and sustain its financial activities, contrasting sharply with loyalists. Maguire (1993) also examined how paramilitaries in

Northern Ireland evolved into formalised structures which enabled them to amass a sizable amount of money. Hourigan et al (2017) and Windle (2022) have explored organised crime in Ireland.

If anything, the existing literature on the phenomenon of hybrids, or more correctly evolution of terrorism and organised crime, demonstrates their individuality. No two are alike and appear to be influenced and shaped by a wide variety of social, cultural and environmental factors unique to the dark networks in which they operate. Among the documented cases which have occurred on the South American continent is that of Los Caballeros Templarios de Michoacán (Knights Templar), a Mexican cartel which operated between 2011 and 2015. This cartel's activities were characterised by a mixture of political and religious narco-evangelism (Chesnut, 2024). It required its members to believe in God, oppose materialism, injustice, and tyranny, and view themselves as members of a quasi-religious order, bound by strict induction rules (Lomnitz, 2019, p. 99). Reyes and Dinar (2014) have also examined the convergence of ethnic groups, narco-traffickers, insurgents, and terrorist organisations in Central Asia. They concluded that the profitability of drug trafficking, coupled with porous borders, expanding infrastructure, and improved transportation technologies, facilitated the convergence of previously separate factions operating along the Northern Route. This convergence, along with growing cooperation between various ethnic groups, led to a rapid nexus between drugs and terrorism, "growing at light speed" (Reyes and Dinar, 2014, p. 389).

Pollichieni and Mumford (2021) analysed the use of modern slavery and human trafficking by the Islamic State and Boko Haram, two terrorist groups involved in a broad range of criminal activities. The Islamic State used slavery and trafficking in four ways: to create cohesion within its ranks by distributing enslaved women to combatants; for ideological propaganda; the use of child soldiers to augment its fighting force; and to supplement its revenue (Al-Dayel et al., 2020). Research shows it sold nearly 6,000 women and children captured from Sinjar. Children aged one to nine were sold for 200,000 Iraqi dinars (approximately $170), with a $40 reduction for every subsequent decade in age. Men were usually executed whilst boys were forced to fight. In essence, it was a form of commercial terrorism. Pollichieni and Mumford (2021, p. 26) show the Islamic State institutionalised slavery to an unprecedented extent for a violent non-state actor. The group also benefited from the sexualisation of the slave market through propaganda,

amplifying its ability to convince people to join the group. This propaganda attempted to generate new recruits by featuring sex slaves within a framework of pseudo-religious justification. Such acts were neither criminal or terrorist but a combination of both. The exploitation of slavery and human trafficking by Boko Haram is another example of commercial terrorism with some peculiar characteristics. It began to kidnap people for ransom demands around 2012 in similar fashion to other jihadist groups including al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. Victims were initially used for suicide bombings but they later bought children to use as spies and soldiers. It more recently began to engage with human trafficking gangs in Nigeria as it represented a new commercial opportunity. Its involvement in such practices was originally conducted for financial and tactical opportunism but it quickly was used to gain political leverage. Proving the point that no two hybrid organisations are alike, both Islamic State and Boko Harem have evolved in separate ways as a consequence of law enforcement efforts, official policy and geography though they share similar ideologies.

2.3 Hybrid Warfare, Hostile States and Criminal States

The Prussian military strategist Carl von Clausewitz observed that war was constantly evolving, adapting to new conditions and new social realities (Clausewitz, 1976 [1832], p. 8). This insight holds true not only for scholars who study conventional warfare but also for those who research terrorism. But in contemporary discourse, it is impossible to consider modern terrorism without taking into account the role played by hostile states in dark networks as these exploit the complex alliances that exist between violent actors to engage in irregular or hybrid warfare. The alliances these state actors forge with non-state actors enables them to harness resources, operational skills, and local influence, in order to create powerful tools for destabilisation while maintaining plausible deniability. Understanding these dynamics and interplays is crucial to understanding the dark networks where violent dissidents operate as the most prevalent form of warfare is now irregular, that is, non-state actors against a state.

Hybrid warfare is itself a new conceptualisation of irregular warfare that, historically, has been the norm and even the so-called state-on-state conflicts from the Early Modern period had prominent irregular features (Beccaro, 2018, p. 209). The modern understanding of the term itself was conceived by William J. Nemeth in 2002 when discussing the wars in Chechnya but it was later popularised by the military scholar Frank G. Hoffman in 2006 (Królikowski, 2018).

The term gained traction in 2006 after Hezbollah's successes against the Israeli conventional forces in the Second Lebanese War when the U.S. Quadrennial Defence Review officially introduced the term into American strategic thinking (Fabian, 2019, p. 310).

Hybrid war is conducted by both states and a variety of non-state actors who incorporate conventional capabilities, irregular tactics like sabotage, terrorist acts, indiscriminate violence and coercion, criminal disorder and disinformation to undermine an enemy. These activities can be conducted by separate units, or even by the same unit, but are generally operationally and tactically directed and coordinated within the main battlespace to achieve synergistic effects (Hoffman, 2008, p. 8). In essence, hybrid warfare seeks to exploit vulnerable points in political ideologies and institutions, as well as taking advantage of social discontent usually caused by the widening gap between rich and poor, pressure on the middle class, the growth of populism and economic issues to undermine governments and lawful institutions. Proponents are usually less intent on seizing and holding territory, a traditional objective of a state army at war, but more focused on disrupting the ability of states to function properly (Kramer, Binnendijk and Hamilton, 2015). Another unique component of hybrid war is that opponents often appear to act without a clear strategic objective, according to Uzieblo (2017), who says a hybrid opponent is someone who constantly adapts, uses different channels and proxies. The utilisation of terrorists, criminals, extremists and hybrid groups to carry out attacks is now a common occurrence across Europe since Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Hamilton, 2024; Waterfield, 2024) and the further deterioration of relations between Iran and the international community (Keogh, 2022). Russia has for many years engaged in initiatives to undermine other societies in order to achieve its objectives. Among the activities it has directed are cyberattacks, election interference and the spread of disinformation but it has also utilised terrorist and criminal groups in Britain, Spain and Germany (Fabian, 2019). Iran through its proxies is also recognised as the most active state sponsor of terrorism, routinely offering sanctuary, resources, and guidance to terrorist groups aligned with its foreign policy interests. The prime example of the entangled connections between hybrid warfare and terrorism can best seen in the incidents which took place in advance of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The advance of Russian troops and paramilitary units into south-eastern Ukraine in 2014 transformed the local conflict into a full-scale war, in which terrorism became a vital part. In

February 2015, a bomb planted along the route of a peace march in Kharkiv killed four people. Unidentified assailants used a grenade launcher to attack the Polish consulate in Lutsk in March 2017. In June 2017, a top Ukrainian intelligence officer was murdered in a car bombing. A year after that, Alexander Zakharchenko, the prime minister of the self-declared Donetsk People's Republic, was murdered in a bombing conducted by Russian intelligence (BBC, 2018). In February 2018, two Poles threw a petrol bomb at the Society of Hungarian Culture in Uzhhorod, a city located near the Ukrainian-Slovak border. The suspects were both members of the far-right and pro-Russian Falanga party (Radio Free Europe, 2020). Their operation was allegedly orchestrated and paid for by Russian intelligence, with a view to achieving a deterioration in relations between Ukraine, Hungary and Poland. These type of incidents are of interest to this research as the Irish security services have encountered evidence to suggest Russian services are utilising republican dissidents and fringe groups to advance their objectives (Mooney, 2024).

As demonstrated, the complexity of contemporary conflict is being shaped by actors who use hybrid warfare. In parallel, some countries often referred to as criminal states, also facilitate terrorism by providing safe havens and logistical support, intertwining criminal enterprise with ideological violence. It is important to understand the distinctions and connections between hostile state-driven hybrid warfare and criminal state sponsorship of terrorism. One of the most illustrative examples of a criminal state is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which has allegedly been involved in criminal activities since the 1970s and has engaged with Irish republicans. Over the last decade, North Korea's criminal activities have reportedly intensified, partly due to a younger leadership less committed to socialist ideology and more inclined towards wealth accumulation (Makarenko, 2004, p. 139). This shift is evidenced by the establishment of Bureau 39, a government department dedicated to generating hard currency through illicit means, including drug trafficking, counterfeiting, money laundering, and piracy (Liu, 2019).

2.4 The Feral Environment

Understanding how terrorism adapts within varying political and socioeconomic environments is key to understanding the phenomenon but also anticipating the emergence and transformation of existing groups. Building on the idea that terrorism and violent groups continually evolve as a consequence of multiple factors explored in the previous sections, it is critical to investigate the

role of failed states and their weakened environments. Scholars like Kilcullen (2015) argue that a comprehensive understanding of terrorism now necessitates examining not only terrorists themselves but also the specific and localised environments where they operate and their connections to global networks. He suggests that population growth, urbanisation, littoralisation and network connectivity will produce environments that will give rise to new forms of political violence. In short, he argues the threat to public safety and national security will come not from individual actors or their ideologies but a conflation of factors and the very environment itself. In essence, urban centres or feral cities, will become the likely ground zero locations for the emergence of new threats, which don't as yet have a name. (Norton, 2003, p. 98) defines feral cities as metropolises that have a population of more than a million people in a state where the government has lost the ability to maintain the rule of law.

The academic study of how physical environments may influence and affect violent groups arises from multidisciplinary research that focuses on the emergence of megacities like Dhaka, Bangladesh, Rio de Janeiro and Säo Paulo, where large swathes of urban centres are left ungoverned and controlled by transnational organised crime, criminal factions, and cartels. Ungoverned areas are defined as sectors where the government has lost control and capacity to manage the local population and official security is challenged by non-state actors like terrorists, criminals and extremists (Dilegge et al., 2019). The emergence of such urban environments has the potential to radically transform violent movements and produce novel forms of political violence, which are no longer inspired by ethnonationalism, religion, ideology and other political beliefs but by profit (Killebrew, 2011, p 34), social identity and deep rooted cultures.

Failed states typically exhibit certain characteristics. They are plagued by internal conflict, corruption, and a weakened or non-existent central authority. Basic infrastructure is often dysfunctional, with limited access to clean water, education, and healthcare. Public institutions, including the judiciary and law enforcement, are compromised or operate ineffectively. As a result, citizens face daily threats from violence, and any economic development is severely hampered. The provision of basic services, such as drinkable water or electricity, are usually controlled by a militia that preys on the poor and marginalised members of society. In many parts

of the world's megacities, criminal elements are better armed than the armed forces of the state (Dilegge et al., 2019).

From the perspective of this thesis, one of the critical implications of failed states is their role in fostering transnational terrorism. Without a central authority to monitor borders or control territories, these regions can become safe havens for extremist groups. Somalia, for instance, has been without an effective central government for decades, allowing groups like Al-Shabaab to operate within its borders and extend its influence. Failed states also contribute to the global drug trade and human trafficking networks. For instance, the porous borders of countries like Libya and Mali allow arms and drugs to flow across regions, empowering both criminal and militant groups. The instability in these regions not only endangers local populations but also facilitates the spread of weapons, narcotics, and illicit funds across borders, destabilising neighbouring countries. Economic globalisation can also exacerbate the issues faced by failed states, as local resources are often exploited by international actors, leaving communities further impoverished.

Criminal and extremist groups frequently tap into these global networks, trading resources such as diamonds, timber, and even rare minerals on the black market to fund their operations. The proceeds from such activities bolster their capacities to wage war or resist legitimate authority, further entrenching the cycle of instability. The theory of how this may occur is not novel though the size of these habits is. In 2003, Richard J. Norton described feral cities, as "a metropolis of more than a million people in a state the government of which has lost the ability to maintain the rule of law within the city's boundaries yet remains a functioning actor in the greater international system" (Norton, 2003). He suggested militants of the future would easily blend into the local civilian population and use the city's complex and dense terrain for cover and concealment. Furthermore, the unwillingness, or perhaps the inability of governments in megacities or feral cities, to address issues such as urban poverty, youth unemployment, and social and economic marginalisation allowed criminal networks to gain ground, enabling the flow of illicit drugs, arms, and money into those already relatively deprived communities.

How might such environments assist actors like violent republicans located in different countries around the world? Strategists have long recognised that no actor in a conflict is independent of the time and place in which it occurs (Tankel, 2016, p. 300). Being based in one country does not preclude activity in another. Terrorist groups don't always domicile themselves in their

country of origin, or they can operate in multiple countries at once. The potential for failed states, or the actors that utilise them, to provide support to terrorists, criminals, extremists and hybrid organisations based elsewhere is clear (Kilcullen, 2015). Such spaces facilitate the spread of extremism and violence across borders, posing a persistent threat to regional and global stability (Killebrew, 2011). As urbanisation accelerates and more areas become difficult to govern, the risks associated with these environments is likely to increase.

2.5 Terrorism Subculture

After exploring the key concepts that are shaping and defining terrorism, we now turn our attention to viewing terrorist groups and hybrid organisations as distinct violent subcultures or lethal cultures, shaped by history, society, culture, technology, people, geography and external influences. The classification of extremist groups, whether as social movements, countercultures, or violent subcultures, already remains a subject of fierce debate among scholars (Adams and Roscigno, 2005; Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2008; della Porta, 1995; McVeigh, Myers, and Sikkink, 2004; Sageman, 2007). For groups such as violent dissident republicans, this lens of analysis is particularly underutilised. While researchers have applied subcultural theory to groups that overlap ideologically with terrorist structures (Pisoiu and Hain, 2017), the potential of subcultural theory in understanding violent dissident republicanism has not been fully explored. This perspective could reveal whether such groups function as enduring subcultures that emphasise cultural identity and organisational integrity, sometimes even over the pursuit of violent objectives.

Violent dissident republicanism, like jihadism and violent extremism, is something that attracts individuals for various reasons and is used for various purposes. It is not just a political project that justifies the use of violence; it is a social phenomenon, an identity, a subculture, a rebellion against societal norms, and an expression of power and status. Understanding it as a subculture might allow policy-makers, intelligence agencies and scholars the opportunity to make sense of aspects that may appear illogical at first. The concept of terrorism subculture suggests that violent groups may provide more than political action; they create close-knit environments in which members build strong personal connections. Prior studies on groups such as Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, the Provisional IRA, and radical movements in Italy and Germany demonstrate that personal relationships are a key factor in recruitment, as members often join through familial or

social connections. These groups, given the risks and societal isolation they entail, form exceptionally tight networks of solidarity and support, which are integral to maintaining the organisation's structure and loyalty (Abrahms, 2008, p. 100).

Studies examining jihadi subcultures further support this perspective, noting that membership confers a master status, rooted in a profound sense of religious duty (Atran, 2011) and a solidified identity. Such observations have relevance for understanding violent dissident republicans, as terrorism scholars have increasingly noted that terrorists do not necessarily pursue their organisation's political aims. Instead, many are motivated by the social bonds and identity that membership provides, suggesting that cultural preservation, rather than ideological success, can be a driving force in participation (Richardson, 2007; Hoffman, 2018). In examining extremist groups through social movement theory, Diani's (1992, p. 3) definition of social movements as "networks of informal interaction engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities" is frequently invoked. While social movement research often concentrates on peaceful groups, extensive work has also applied these theories to violent, underground movements (della Porta, 1995; Wiktorowicz, 2003). Scholars studying radical movements note that these groups frequently operate within an adversarial framework, responding to and shaping their surrounding cultural and social environments. Of the existing theories and concepts as to why people join violent groups, the most applicable to terrorist and violent groups is the 3N model which addresses the needs, narratives, and networks. It suggests that radicalisation, often stems from an individual's quest for personal significance (Kruglanski, 2014). At the most basic level, radicalisation can be defined as the process whereby people become extremists (Neumann, 2013, p. 874). This drive can be encouraged by a sense of insignificance brought on by humiliation, oppression, or alienation, prompting individuals to seek validation and meaning in groups that offer brotherhood, identity, and a sense of purpose. To cite Kruglanski et al (2022, p. 1051), the belief in one's social worth derives from a sense of measuring up to one's internalised values, which one shares with significant others, or members of the group to which one belongs.

The study of terrorism subculture, like terrorism, is still evolving but there have been some important studies conducted of jihadist groups. These have concluded that members of jihadist networks experience strong interpersonal bonds, material resources, and, more importantly, a

cohesive identity that reinforces their commitment to the group, following radicalisation. These studies concluded that the cocktail of personal significance, group identity, and cultural opposition, underscored the subcultural nature of terrorist groups. Cottee (2019) examined the appeal of western jihadism as a way of life. His superb research treated it as a subculture that stood against the capitalist ethos of consumer hedonism. Western jihadism, he found, rejected the liberal notion of sexual freedom, repudiates non-heterosexual relationships, mocked the claims of western feminism and poured cold water on democratic principles and compromise and liberalism yet jihadists embraced technologies, street argot and apparel. "Western jihadi subculture, in its rejection of the dominant order, embodies just that dissatisfaction and subterranean spirit and is thus continuous with the 'westernism' it rejects," he wrote (Cottee, 2019, pp. 774-775).

Similar findings were reached by Hemmingsen (2014) who approached jihadism as a cultic milieu, the concept introduced by Colin Campbell in 1972 to describe a social environment where unorthodox, marginal, or alternative ideas and beliefs flourish. These milieus often encompass spiritual, esoteric, or conspiratorial ideologies that exist outside mainstream society. Hemmingsen examined a "mosaic of individuals" who supported people accused of jihadi terrorism in Denmark before concluding that jihadism was best understood as a counterculture whose members all shared the same definition of what is wrong with the status quo and that society was regulated illegitimately by man-made laws and rules.

> This leads to a society in which materialism, hedonism, greed, exploitation and capitalism rule, and in which the stronger use and take advantage of the weaker. The shared definition of what is the better alternative is the establishment of a Caliphate, an Islamic state ruled by Sharia, in which everybody including those in power fear Allah so much that they are never tempted to serve their own interests. (Hemmingsen, 2014, p. 8)

Hemmingsen's research concluded that jihadists and their wide network of supporters saw themselves as being perceived and received as a threat to security. Those who signalled their role in this counterculture were recognised as being against the establishment, she wrote. But they were also seen as a security threat who should be taken seriously. The rewards were clear: it was a way to free oneself from control and to reject traditional sources of authority and attribute great authority to oneself; a means to claiming self-respect and self-acceptance; gaining strong social

bonds and becoming part of a community that emphasises kindness, sharing and respect; and, finally, the promise of access to action, adventure and influence (Hemmingsen, 2014). Violent dissidents as will be shown have similar character traits. The proposition that violent organisations can become violent subcultures that few outside the ingroup understand is not confined to the real and physical world but also the virtual one through the use of the internet and social media (O'Malley et al., 2020). Among them are incel groups, which use social media and the internet as a platform to express their feelings of marginalisation and rage (Ging, 2017). Others including (Hotez et al, 2019; Wootton et al., 2019) have similarly found evidence of a growth in online subcultures that stigmatise other aspects of the human experience, including opposition to vaccinations and scientific research broadly. None of these fit easily into the definition of terrorism yet their objectives and actions are terrorist in nature.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the evolving academic frameworks that inform the study of terrorism, focusing on the dynamics shaping violent dissident republicanism. Through an analysis of dark networks, the crime-terror nexus, hybrid organisations, and the roles of hostile states and feral environments and terrorism subculture, this chapter has illuminated the complex interplay between ideological, criminal, and environmental factors that sustain and shape violent movements. The study of dark networks highlighted their clandestine and adaptive nature, demonstrating how these covert systems facilitate the activities of terrorists and other illicit actors. The crime-terror nexus revealed the fluid boundaries between ideological and profit-driven motivations, challenging traditional distinctions between organised crime and terrorism. Hybrid organisations, which blend elements of both, exemplify how these groups exploit political and criminal opportunities to create highly resilient and multifaceted threats. The role of hostile states and hybrid warfare has been critical in understanding how state actors leverage terrorist networks to destabilise adversaries and pursue strategic objectives while maintaining plausible deniability. This section, combined with an analysis of feral environments, has revealed the profound influence of failed states, urbanisation, and ungoverned spaces on the proliferation of terrorism and organised crime. Finally, the discussion on terrorism subculture has reframed violent movements as distinct countercultures, emphasising the social bonds, identities, and traditions that sustain these groups over time. By addressing these dimensions, this chapter has

not only challenged conventional narratives but also provided a nuanced lens through which violent dissident republicanism can be examined. It has highlighted how such movements are shaped by historical, cultural, and environmental factors, evolving into entities that defy simplistic categorisation. By integrating these perspectives, this chapter provides a foundation for the deeper historical and contextual analysis in subsequent chapters, tracing the development of violent republican organisations and testing these frameworks against their contemporary manifestations. This holistic approach challenges such narratives, offering a nuanced understanding of the durability and evolution of violent dissident republicanism.

Chapter 3 A Culture of Violence

Introduction

In Violence and Politics, Feliks Gross, observed that terror can last for a long time and can even become institutionalised within a society (Gross, 1972). He formed this view having studied the origins of terrorism in Eastern Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but his views could equally be applied to the Ireland of the same period which gave rise to secret societies, revolutionary groups, and violent organisations. Republicanism, national identity, and the violence it inspires has been a feature of Irish polity for centuries. These underground movements have taken various forms including those of terrorist groups, paramilitary organisations, and revolutionary armies but also anti-drugs vigilantes and secret oathbound societies. This tradition, which at various times encapsulated ideas of self-determination, freedom of religious expression, opposition to unfair taxes and nationalism, extends directly into modern times, exerting an influence on Irish politics and nationalism to a degree probably unequalled elsewhere in Western Europe (Alter, 1982, p. 139). Indeed, Irish republicans, both past and present, trace their lineage to the oath-bound societies and quasi-paramilitary organisations that emerged in the eighteenth century, some inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution.

The aim of examining the history of violent groups and secret societies in Ireland is not to present an exhaustive historical account but to analyse their evolution, the dark networks within which they operated, and the ways in which these shaped their activities and durability. These groups operated in the dark networks of their time, influenced by their own subcultures, ideologies and geographical location. Their emergence conditioned Irish society to accept the existence of secretive violent organisations which opposed authority and saw themselves as redressers of wrongdoing. Much like the violent dissident republicans of modern Ireland, they were the radical subversives and countercultures of their day who opposed the reigning authority of the time.

The existence of these groups was not unique to Ireland. Traditions, subcultures, or permanent networks formed part of unofficial systems in Ireland and throughout Europe for centuries. Old-established and permanent pre-industrial empires all had permanent underworlds or unofficial

political systems that were poorly understood but sometimes provided alliances and resources which, under certain circumstances, turned banditry into a nucleus of effective political activity (Hobsbawm, 1969). Despite being separated by time and context, violent dissident republicans are the modern iteration of the violent groups that existed in pre-Famine Ireland, exhibiting striking similarities in their outlook, responses to societal grievances, their opposition to established authority, and their adaptability to evolving circumstances.

This chapter examines the tradition of violent organisations on the island of Ireland, focusing on their evolution and their roles as subcultures and countercultures within Irish society. By exploring the emergence and development of these groups, it seeks to understand their enduring influence on Irish polity. Section 3.1 delves into the agrarian movements of the 18th century, particularly the Whiteboys, a secretive and dangerous group that emerged across Ireland in 1760. These played a pivotal role in shaping early resistance movements through their campaigns against economic and social injustices. Section 3.2 investigates the Defender movement, which bridged agrarian violence and political revolution, influencing the Society of United Irishmen. Their secretive organisation and mobilisation strategies left an indelible mark on Irish dissent. Section 3.3 explores the Ribbon Societies, violent and conspiratorial organisations that operated across Ireland in the mid-19th century. They evolved from earlier traditions, continuing a legacy of clandestine resistance and subversion. Section 3.4 focuses on Fenianism, a potent form of violent republicanism that emerged in the late 19th century. Credited as being one of the first modern terrorist groups, the Fenians introduced a global dimension to Irish republicanism, leaving a lasting influence on revolutionary movements. It is followed by an orderly conclusion. By charting the emergence and evolution of these groups, this chapter highlights the historical roots of contemporary violent dissident republican organisations and their ideological and cultural underpinnings. This analysis offers a framework for understanding the persistence of violence and subversive traditions within Irish history.

3.1 Violent Agrarian and Oathbound Societies

To understand modern dissident republicanism, or the diverse cultic milieu it has become, one must fully understand its cultural, secretive, and violent past as the IRA has always been a secret army which at its core is a “conspiracy, covert, illicit, underground” dedicated to violence (Bowyer-Bell, 2000, p. 318). Yet few subjects of such importance in the history of Ireland during

the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries have been more neglected by scholars than its ancestors in the agrarian rebellion and oath bound societies, (Donnelly, 1978, p. 120; Hobsbawm, 1969; Patterson, 2014).

The emergence of secret underground organisations was a consequence of various ills in Irish society in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Donnelly, 1978; Patterson, 2014). Among the grievances they sought to address through the utilisation of violence was the very uneven social distribution of economic wealth between 1750 and 1815, the tragic inadequacy of growth in the decades before the great famine; the intensification of sectarianism in the northeast in the 1780s and the unwillingness of the British state to undertake social reform and their excessive use of repression (Alter, 1997; Comerford, 1998; Donnelly, 1978; Patterson, 2014). These conditions created an environment in which agrarian secret societies flourished as many things to many men: champions of economic justice, avengers of the religiously oppressed and protectors of those who defied the authority of the state and were officially regarded as criminals (Donnelly, 1978; Patterson, 2014). But in contrast to other European countries, these early groups were almost exclusively agrarian in nature (Alter, 1997, p. 140) and were thus primarily concerned with the protection of tenants, the rights of farm labourers and smallholders against arbitrary acts by landowners, and the payment of dues or the tithes for the established Protestant and Catholic Churches though this would change in time. These societies appear to have had an almost continuous existence in the counties of Limerick, Louth, Westmeath, Tipperary, Clare and Kildare from the 1760s to the late 1830s. Indeed, almost every county in Ireland produced its own underground association (Williams, 1973) known by an assortment of names including the Whiteboys, Rightboys, Oakboys, Steelboys, Threshers, Caravats, Rockites, Terry Alts and Whitefeet to name a few (Donnelly, 1978, pp.120-202).

They were all motivated by the same issues: they used violence to target landlords and magistrates who failed to abide by unwritten societal rules that stipulated that security be given to tenants and a reasonable rent paid to the landlord (Garvin 1982, p. 22; Katsuta 2003, p. 278; Pakenham, 1969, p. 35). If one applies the theories advanced by della Porta (1995) and Wiktorowicz (2003), these societies were radical movements operating within an adversarial framework, responding to and shaping their surrounding cultural and social environments. In the beginning, their tactics included agitation, intimidation, and a primitive form of political

mobilisation to further their interests (Garvin, 1982, p. 134) but they also engaged in murder, public beatings, and arson. The phenomenon of agrarian inspired violence itself was first recorded in Tipperary in November 1761 (Bartlett, Dawson and Keogh, 1998, p. 9) with the emergence of the Whiteboys, an underground organisation whose members wore white smocks over their heads, but it quickly spread northwards and developed into many distinct forms of violence and anarchy (Pakenham, 1969, p. 35).

The Whiteboys were initially a localised movement but in time it grew in sophistication and size with gatherings of up to 500 men, many armed and on horseback (Bartlett, Dawson and Keogh, 1998, p. 9). It is here we encounter the existence of secretive movements that few outside the group understood. Davitt (1970) describes these "peasant conspirators" as being so secretive that many competent observers of the time even doubted their existence. These "disturbers", as they were known, were often sworn into secret societies which operated at night under the command of mythical leaders, known variously as Captain Right, Captain Steel or Captain Rock (Katsuta, 2003, p. 278). The organisation of local secret societies of the Whiteboy-type was usually very simply structured. There was a leader, whose name was only occasionally known, and frequently a deputy leader. The bond between members, and their mutual recognition, was ensured by passwords or certain marks of identification. Only rarely did these societies have branches; contacts with analogous groups in the neighbourhood or in other parts of the country tended to be accidental and improvised (Alter, 1982, p. 147). It is important to recognise at this point the similarities between the Whiteboys and the assemblage of other groups, whose inception followed their demise. These violent groups appear to have cultivated a distinct subculture based on shared identity, loyalty, and ritual, providing their members with a sense of belonging and purpose, traits which are mirrored in modern countercultures within dark networks, where group membership is as much about identity and community as it is about achieving political or criminal goals. Their structures were also comparable to the operational secrecy and adaptability of modern groups and gangs that operate in dark networks as both rely on decentralised structures, localised cells, and covert communication to evade detection and survive in what they considered hostile environments.

Returning to the question which this thesis seeks to explore, it is important to recognise how "traditional patterns of behaviour" can be "culturally transmitted across generations with little or

no attenuation" (Donnelly, 1978, p. 123). There is ample evidence in the existing literature to show how the Whiteboys inspired the establishment of similar groups in the latter part of the eighteenth century. The Rightboys, which emerged in Cork in the late summer of 1785, are an example of this. It is generally viewed in the literature as a revival of the already well-established tradition of oathbound secret societies though scholars recognise it morphed and mutated ideologically and structurally over time. These shifts in emphasis, while often quite significant because they reflected alterations in the social composition of agrarian movements, still took place within a consistent general pattern. In all the major outbreaks of rural unrest that took place in the relevant period the agitators invariably began with one or two grievances but soon expanded the list to include many other complaints, a progression that was intimately connected with their perception of themselves as general redressors of wrongs both public and private (Donnelly, 1978, p. 124). Even a cursory examination of the existing literature proves this assertion.

Violent agrarian organisations all used the same modus operandi, again demonstrating the existence of dark networks where groups learned from each other. Violence was a nocturnal and clandestine activity superseded by, or coexisted with, open operations in the daytime. For example, the Oakboys of 1763 at one end of the cycle and the anti-tithe warriors of the early 1830s at the other end, both staged mass demonstrations in towns, but in general these were far less common than itinerant bands moving across broad stretches of countryside in daylight, with the participants taking the opportunity to recruit followers as they marched along. The violence they utilised from their inception knew no bounds. It was intense and designed to instil terror. One account provided by William Abraham, a protestant farmer of Queens County, who gave evidence in 1774 to a local justice, (Lewis, 1977, p. 7) described how he was taken from his home by force, beaten senseless and tortured. One of his captors drove long nails into his heels before they debated whether to cut his tongue out, pull his eyes out, or cut off his ears. After removing his ears, Abraham was buried up to his chin in furze. The gratuitous violence practised by the "worst characters among the labouring agricultural population" knew no bounds, eventually prompting the British to introduce the Insurrection Act to quell "outrages and disturbances" (Lewis, 1977).

The existence of these subnational groups had a profound impact on the administration of law in pre-Famine Ireland. *In Exiles of Erin* (Lees, 1979), the scholar Lynn Hollen Lees quotes from the diaries of Arthur Young and Alexis de Tocqueville, who both visited Ireland in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century respectively. The travellers observed what they described as a specific "lawlessness", which was not only reflected in the relatively high incidence of violent acts and offences against the law, but also in the degree to which the established law was held in disrespect. Both travellers wrote of how "a rival system of justice", local or indigenous, prevailed among the population (Lees, 1979, pp. 213-215). These agrarian groups enforced their own codes of conduct through intimidation, violence, and symbolic punishments, similar to how modern paramilitary groups, hybrid organisations and militias enforce their rule in contemporary ungoverned spaces. The literature on the relationship between subcultures and ideologically motivated violence inspired by cultural, political, religious, and nationalist beliefs must be considered now (O'Malley et al, 2020; Silke, 2008) as subcultures typically operate in opposition to the dominant culture, or as a rejection of its values (Quinn, Forsyth, 2011; Wolfgang, Ferracuti, 1967). In this case, the disturbances were caused by the settlement of Ireland and the exaction of tithes by the British aristocracy who attributed the turbulence of the "inferior Irish to their inherent barbarism" (Lewis, 1977, p. x). This issue has been largely overlooked in the existing literature on agrarian violence.

3.2 The Defenders and the Society of United Irishmen

While the violent campaigns organised by agrarian societies targeted landlords, violent groups located in the northeast framed their violence as a fight for national sovereignty. This shift mirrors transformations in modern terrorism, where groups often begin with regional grievances but adopt broader ideological frameworks to appeal to larger audiences. It was here that violent subnational groups converged with the political when the Defenders, a federation of Catholic groups that emerged in the Ulster borderlands in 1784, formed an alliance with the Society of United Irishmen. This fusion demonstrates a clear trajectory of violent groups evolving into violent organisations by integrating agrarian protest, political ideology, and guerrilla tactics. The alliance was an example of hybridisation, where groups with distinct goals and methods converge to form multifaceted movements.

Defenderism proper was first recorded in Armagh (Garvin, 1982, p. 142) where it became the Catholic counterpart of the Protestant Peep O'Day Boys, the ancestors of the Orange Order. The movement itself was organised through a system of lodges, whose members included artisans, pedlars, hedge-schoolmasters, labourers and in some cases the lower Catholic clergy. Its members referred to the underground organisation as “the system” often using codes and phrases known only to other members (Bartlett, 1985) to communicate and organise themselves. “Are you up” was a widely used saying to establish if an acquaintance was a member. The violence and methods used by the Defenders resembled those of the Rightboys and earlier protest movements, but they had what Bartlett, Dawson and Keogh (1998) described as a “definite political agenda”.

> Their aim was not only to remove immediate grievances, such as excessive rents and tithes, but to bring down the ascendancy and to reverse the effects of the Plantations of the seventeenth century by overthrowing the land settlement, the social hierarchy, and the established church. (Bartlett, Dawson and Keogh, 1998, p. 25)

The Whiteboys and Rightboys were conservative in that they were essentially protests against the introduction of taxes and laws imposed by the British aristocracy (Bartlett, 1985). Their replacement by groups like the Defenders was of pivotal importance as the latter were simultaneously “conservative and subversive” or a blend of the “new and the old" which made them a “most dangerous conspiracy and a direct threat to the order of Church and State” (Bartett, 1985, pp. 375-376). But they also helped spread a unique brand of radical republicanism from Ulster, which reinforced the fear of sectarianism at the hands of the loyalist classes (Patterson, 2008). If the theories advanced by Erickson (1981), Demiroz and Kapuca (2012) and Raab and Milward (2003) are considered, it's clear the Defender groups were dark networks operating within a dark network in pre-famine Ireland. They were also a primitive form of cultic milieu, if the concept offered by Campbell (1972) is applied. The alignment of the Defenders with the Society of United Irishmen, had significant consequences. It was an “open, constitutional society with a primary propagandist function, directed towards political reform” (English, 2006, p. 87) but the merger resulted in its evolution into a radical body intent on provoking a separatist rebellion.

The United Irishmen itself was founded in Belfast in 1791 and committed itself to social, economic, and political equity. Its diverse programme attracted different types of reformers, radicals, and revolutionaries, many of whom recognised that the society could also serve as a vehicle to promote their own agendas. Such agendas included the repeal of the Penal Laws, as well as the removal of the grievances about tithes, rents, leases, and other agrarian issues that had fuelled popular protest. In bringing together radical politics and popular protest, the United Irishmen thus promoted a more inclusive perception of the polity of late-eighteenth-century Ireland and helped to popularise a new and distinctive political vocabulary (Bric, 2004, p. 81; Pakenham, 1969, p. 19). In the early years, the majority of the United Irishman's leaders favoured the utilisation of moral and popular persuasion to bring about a peaceful reform of what they viewed as an unjust system. But the partial blending of the violent and conspiratorial underground Defender movement and United Irishmen institutional networks changed this dynamic. By 1795, the group had transformed into a territorial military structure with the secretary of a local club becoming the petty officer and military titles being adopted at baronial, county, provincial and national levels. It was this organisation and its restructuring that instigated the large-scale rebellion against British rule that broke out in parts of Ireland during the spring, summer and autumn of 1798; now regarded as one of the most concentrated episodes of violence in Irish history (Malcolm, 2013, pp. 151-152). Estimates of the numbers killed range from 10,000 to 100,000 but the most likely figure is around 30,000, out of a population approaching five million. More importantly, from the perspective of the argument advanced by this thesis, it also inspired future generations of violent republicans.

The 1798 rebellion itself was a complex event, in that it was fragmented and involved a variety of different groups fighting in different places at different times (Malcolm, 2013, pp. 151-152). It began in late May in the east and southeast, mainly in counties Kildare, Wicklow and Wexford, but fighting continued until the main rebel army was defeated in late June. In the north, in counties Antrim and Down, the fighting took place in early June and was brief, lasting hardly more than a week and culminating in two major rebel defeats. In the west and midlands, in Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim and Roscommon, the rebellion began with the landing of a small French army in late August in Mayo and ended in defeat in Longford a little over two weeks later.

The three main phases of the rebellion were significantly different, they all involved guerrilla-style warfare and, as well, major pitched battles between government and rebel forces numbering in the thousands. Armies on both sides were largely composed of Catholic and Protestant Irishmen, sometimes accompanied by their families, and they were often fighting their neighbours in their own towns and even streets (Malcolm, 2013, pp. 151-152). The United Irishmen organised a second rebellion in 1803 led by Robert Emmet, which failed when the conspiracy was uncovered in Dublin.

The Defenders played a short but important role in the rebellion but what is of primary concern to this research is their persistence as an underground movement long after the failed rebellions of 1798 and 1803. What remained of the rebel forces organised themselves into smaller groups and entities, which continued to offer resistance against loyalist extremists and the Crown. The new movement evolved. A hybrid United Irishmen/Defender system with an equally hybrid ideological system persisted as a form of generalised Defenderism. This phenomenon initially occurred in central Ulster and north Leinster but it eventually spread to Dublin (Garvan, 1982, p. 144). Among the new cadres were young Presbyterians who took modified versions of the Defender oath (Patterson, 2008, p. 29) because of their disillusionment with the United Irishman's middle-class leadership. In the Northeast, some Presbyterians in Antrim and Down joined the Defenders and carried out attacks on the Yeomanry. These groups engaged in acts of intimidation against anyone who cooperated with the authorities. Cadres also demonstrated undying loyalty to their brethren. They were perceived and received as a threat to the state.

The trial of David Woods in Belfast is demonstrative of the kinship and bonds that existed in these groups at the time. Woods stood accused of house burning and robbery in late 1978. During his trial he refused to offer a defence for his actions and name his co-conspirators before he was hung from a tree at Doagh, still refusing to inform (Patterson, 2008, pp. 31–32). Elsewhere in Ireland, the remnants of the United Irishmen continued to resist as semi-autonomous cells, though these bands of men might well be described as hybrid entities which existed and operated in a dark network. The authorities considered these people, drawn from the Catholic, Protestant and Presbyterian religions, to be a major source of intimidation.

Many evaded capture for years and eventually drifted towards social banditry of the kind described by the scholar Hobsbawm in his influential work Primitive Rebels and Bandits. Some

lived as rebels and radicals amongst the general population whose criminal underclass recognised them as men of violence and often helped shield them from the authorities and arrange their safe transport (Patterson, 2008; Clarke and Donnelly, 1983). They were often described as "armed banditti" across Ireland. If they existed today, they would be described as paramilitaries engaged in political violence and crime. One group known as the Babes in the Wood is illustrative of this concept. Led by James Corcoran and Joseph Cody, the group took refuge in Killoughrum Woods in Wexford after 1798 and offered protection to Catholics against the emerging white terror (Patterson, 2008, p. 147). They operated in Wexford, Carlow and Kilkenny for years and were viewed as a serious threat to the Crown. The intensity of the guerrilla war they organised should not be underestimated. In 1800, Brig General Brydges Henniker, who had been appointed to lead a counterinsurgency effort against Cody and Corcoran, wrote to Dublin to say the "outlaw banditti who, notwithstanding his best efforts to suppress them, still continued to place men's property in danger" (Patterson, 2008, p. 166). A significant factor in the group's longevity was the "ties of kinship" it enjoyed with people living in its theatre of operations.

> The strong popular support that the band received, coupled with a commonality of surnames between the rebels and members of the community in which they operated, strongly suggests such ties. (Patterson, 2008, p. 167)

The group enjoyed deep-rooted support among the local populations as it operated as a de-facto constabulary, capturing and killing people who engaged in crime whilst revenging the deaths of anyone killed by loyalist ultras. Most significantly, the government and the local authorities made a clear distinction between Cody and Corcoran and the numerous gangs which plagued the region in the aftermath of the rebellion. The distinction is most obvious in the language used to describe them. The terms "rebel and banditti" occur interchangeably in official dispatches of the time (Patterson, 2008, p. 180).

The Cody and Corcoran gang were a hybrid organisation. They were not social bandits of the type described by Hobsbawm. They were an entity bound by kinship, who occasionally engaged in crime. But they leveraged familial and community ties for recruitment, protection, and operational security. They established themselves as alternative authorities, enforcing justice or providing security in ungoverned spaces. They also employed small-scale, mobile tactics to

evade larger, organised state forces. While often accused of criminality, they distinguished themselves through political or ideological objectives, as noted by British authorities. On a micro-level, their story and transformation from a grouping within the United Irishmen into a hybrid entity that is difficult to label bears striking similarities to modern insurgent and militant groups like the anti-drugs vigilante groups which operated in Dublin between 1994 and 1997. They also resemble the dissident factions of the Real IRA in Cork, New IRA in Dublin and the Direct Action Against Drugs in Derry (Mooney, 2011). But their activities also resemble hybrid groups which spring from much larger insurgencies in modern times like the Rohingya Arakan Salvation Army of Myanmar (Bashar, 2019; Lee, 2021) and some current iterations of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Marks, 2019, p. 489).

3.3 The Ribbonmen

Traditional Irish historiography holds that the non-sectarian republican ideology of the United Irishmen disappeared in a sea of sectarian animosity in the aftermath of the failed rebellion of 1798. The impression is given in parts of the literature that the revolutionary tradition only re-emerged after the Famine year of 1847 (Garvin, 1982, p. 133). But this assessment is flawed. While the leaders of the democratic movements who supported Irish nationalism did persuade most Irish Catholics their political goals were best served by constitutional means: an older, more violent conspiratorial tradition, derived from the eighteenth century did survive to inform the development of Irish politics (Alter, 1997). Underground movements, violent subcultures and gangs which espoused political ideologies but engaged in crime, emerged from the rebellion. The existence of these entities has received scant attention from historians and scholars, but if one looks closely, it is possible to see evidence of violent subcultures in the Ribbon societies, the underground entities who were known by an assortment of names including The Patriotic Association of the Shamrock, the Northern Union, and The Irish Sons of Freedom, from the 1810s onwards (Beames, 1982, p. 128).

Ribbonism evolved from the Defender movement and had a distinct urban base (Beames, 1982, p. 129). The Ribbonmen boasted, in theory at least, an impressive organisation extending from the individual lodge, often based in a public house, through parish, county and provincial levels to a national governing board. The model for its structure was derived from the examples of the United Irishmen and the Defenders (Belchem, 1994, pp. 33-56), again suggesting the existence

of a self-replicating violent movement and tradition, highly durable and misunderstood by outsiders.

From their formation around 1810 until their demise decades later, the Ribbonmen held the attention of the government (Huggins, 2018). The scholar J. J. Lee suggests they were driven by economic concerns with "little sense of national consciousness and nothing that resembled a national organisation" (Bowman, 2019, p. 898) but yet they persisted. They shared a love of symbolism, signs, passwords and ritual, the legacy of what Hobsbawm suggests was part of the artisan-masonic family of brotherhoods (Hobsbawm, 1971, p. 166). Ribbon leaders used portentous ritual phrases, exotic regalia, millennial slogans, rituals, and references to occult and powerful authorities as a means of attaining local prestige. But they were also political. In the 1820s at least, they expected to participate in an imminent nationalist uprising (Beames, 1982, p. 136). Whilst they bore more than a passing resemblance to the secret ritual brotherhoods which were characteristic of European history between 1789 and 1848, there are important clues which suggest these groups were the continuation of a violent subculture and tradition unique to Ireland.

The journalist and historian A. M. Sullivan, writing in the 1870s, described Ribbonism as a 'Maffia' [sic] which varied its purposes from time to time and place to place, not dissimilar to the modern iterations of violent republicanism. Like dissidents, republican gangs and hybrids, this movement meant many things to many men. In Ulster, it was considered a Catholic League against Protestant Orangeism but in Munster it was focused on combating tithes, the taxes raised for the Church of Ireland. In Connaught, the Ribbonmen resisted rack-renting and in Leinster it was portrayed as an early form of trade unionism. Contemporaneous accounts of their initiation procedures into this violent secret society are also telling. The novelist William Carleton provided a first-hand account of an early Ribbon induction in 1813. He wrote of being required to take an oath on the ordinary Catholic prayer-book during his swearing in. He felt that it was personally dangerous not to join, as non-members were regarded with suspicion as potential informers and, at any rate, as deviants from local social practice (Garvin, 1982, p. 145). The oath he described taking was similar in general style to those administered by Defenders and Whiteboys and included a promise to keep the fraternal society's secrets, a declaration of allegiance to George III and a pledge to be true to "the principles of this Society, dedicated to St.

Patrick, the Holy Patron of Ireland, in all things lawful and not otherwise." He was also made to promise to attend his superior when called, to avoid fighting with his brothers, to introduce no Protestants to the society and to deal preferentially with Catholics and not to join other societies except the Masons, trade societies or the armed forces. He was also asked to swear allegiance to Ireland and presented with two pieces of ribbon, one red and one green, the green ribbon being for Ireland and friendship and the red being for revenge and blood (Garvin, 1982, p. 145).

Paramount to understanding the use of such symbols and rituals in recruitment into violent movements, gangs and hybrid organisations is how they are used to reinforce social, cultural and identity-establishing bonds within dark networks (Murer and Schwarze, 2020). They create a collective identity, bonds of kinship and a sense of cohesion. When viewed through a contemporary lens, induction into Ribbon, Whiteboys and Rightboy societies, closely resemble those used to accept cadres into organised crime fraternities and other violent entities of the modern age. New members of the IRA are made to swear allegiance to the organisation using the Green Book. Ribbonmen had a double obligation to themselves and to their fellows to remain anonymous and not to speak publicly about their aims and strategies (Fisher, 2018, pp. 65-66) unlike Orangemen and Freemasons, who could, literally, parade their membership to the public with fifes, drums, and party tunes. It also set them apart from other openly nationalist political movements like the Repealers or Young Irelanders, who organised mass meetings and had public figures to represent the group. The evidence suggests its members wished to belong to a secretive underground movement which had a conspiratorial history. The authorities of the time believed the network of 1822 was a direct descendant of the agrarian societies of the I790s (Beames, 1982). The names of its leaders, its methods of government and action were far more successfully concealed than those of any other oathbound combination among the Irish people, however. This was due, primarily, to a wise precaution against keeping books, documents, or records that would reveal information if lost or seized.

Understanding Ribbon societies as a counterculture or violent subculture provides a better understanding of the movement. Much like violent dissident republicans, they existed as an opposition to the mainstream and challengers to authority and normality. The popular image of a Ribbonman was one of the bogeyman and the movement was criminalised by the authorities of the time (Fisher, 2018, p. 54). Hence they were at times known by terms such as "night

marauders" and "deluded wretches" in newspapers and pamphlets. But they were also referred to as "banditti", "country people", and "midnight legislators". Such terminology carried connotations and a particular history that categorised Ribbonism as being agrarian, criminal, and apolitical (Fisher, 2018, p. 53). As demonstrated, the term "banditti" was used to describe the poorly understood groups that engaged in political violence.

In many ways, Ribbonism proper appears to have been in part an attempt by sections of a nascent Catholic lower-middle class and its working-class allies to put itself at the head of the kind of agrarian societies discussed by Lewis, Lee and others. Often it appears to have evolved into a local protection racket or mafia, and many local lodges carried out horrifying beatings and murders to ensure conformity. Subscriptions were often levied in terrorem from poor men living in a society which was in process of social disintegration under pressure from over-population in the decades leading up to the Great Famine. If one applies the theories and concepts discussed in Chapter 2, one could describe the Ribbon societies as a cultic milieu which existed in pre-famine Ireland. They were hybrid organisations that engaged in crime and cloaked themselves in nationalist ideology and religion. Geography also played a role in their evolution as pre-independence Ireland was a failing country in the process of social disintegration. The Ribbon societies are of significant interest to this thesis as contemporaneous accounts showed they served as precursors to the Fenian movement, the group which like the United Irishmen, all republican organisations claim to descend from (Garvan, 1982, p. 134). Such accounts also suggest its underground subversive nature was inherited from the earlier oathbound societies. Davitt and Lewis are correct when they put forward the argument that Ribbonsim was not a simple agrarian phenomenon of its day but rather the lineal descendant of Defenderism from the previous century, clearly indicating the existence of a durable and violent tradition that survived through generations.

Michael Davitt, the famous Land League leader and Fenian veteran, would later write that he saw Ribbonism as a precursor to the Fenian movement; politicised, nationwide, and blending religious, nationalist and class sentiment. In fact, he went as far as to say Ribbonism was the most powerful of all the Irish secret societies of the period and exercised considerable influence upon the subsequent upbuilding of his Fenian Brotherhood (Davitt, 1970, p. 41). He saw Ribbonism as being led by obscure but not incompetent men who succeeded to some extent in

wielding older and more local groups together and in infusing in them germs of political purpose (Garvan, 1982, p. 136). His writing also suggests he was impressed by their secrecy.

> It can be safely affirmed that the more or less uneducated Ribbonmen have shown themselves to be more skilled in the methods of secret conspiracy than the more cultured class of their countrymen who founded Fenianism. (Davitt, 1970, pp. 41-42)

The literature provides a very clear picture of Ribbonism in the 1820s and 1830s as oathbound, ramified and hierarchical societies though some scholars note that many observers of the time did not believe Ribbon lodges even existed (Garvan, 1982, p. 137). Comerford suggests they caused the authorities of the time much bewilderment (Comerford, 1998, p. 20), indicating they were a poorly understood subculture. Like their predecessors, Ribbon societies had a generally nationalist agenda, but they looked to others to take the lead. Beams (1982) puts it more succinctly when he says Ribbonism persisted in carrying forward an important symbolic grievance with Britain and the belief that Catholic Ireland was oppressed by a Protestant ascendancy. Others argue they should be viewed as the "pre-political" groups of the most rudimentary sort which for the Irish national movement were of considerable importance as noted by (Alter, 1982, p. 137):

> Not only was their tradition as organisations for the protection of tenants reflected in their heroic idealisation in the tales and ballads of folklore continued by subsequent national organisations, but by their acts of violence against social and political conditions, which were felt to be oppressive, and by demonstrating the efficacy of joint action, they also helped to mobilise the population politically. The significance of these rural movements in the shaping of a national consciousness appears to have been considerable, for they helped, in particular, to preserve a sense of group identity.

The subversive tradition of Ribbonmen shows it relied on symbols, rituals, and oaths to foster group identity and loyalty comparable to contemporary terrorist, hybrid and criminal gangs. Their hierarchical structures mirrored contemporary dark networks, balancing secrecy with coordinated action across local, regional, and national levels. Violence played a dual role: enforcing conformity and projecting power, similar to modern terrorist groups and gangs who employ intimidation and retribution to maintain dominance. But they also demonstrated the

persistence of underground movements, adapting symbols and strategies to changing contexts. This highlights how collective identity, secrecy, and violence are integral to sustaining such networks over time, offering valuable insights into the evolution of organised dissident violence.

3.4 The Fenians/The Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB)

Dark networks, that is, covert and illegal networks (Raab and Milward, 2003), are shapeshifters, constantly changing and evolving over time. Various factors lead ties to form or dissolve and actors to enter or leave the network, which in turn causes changes in the network's structure that may impact on its behaviour and ability to launch successful attacks (Everton and Cunningham, 2013). But as demonstrated, dark networks and violent movements develop individual characteristics influenced by geography, location, circumstances, people and technological and scientific developments. The next stage in the evolution of violent republicanism was Fenianism, a movement which encompassed a series of republican organisations that existed in Ireland and America dedicated to the pursuit of Irish independence from Britain. It was also associated with the early iterations of republican terrorism in its purist forms, dynamite bombing campaigns and clandestine meetings of secret cells plotting revolution in Ireland from both sides of the Atlantic (Hoffman, 2006, p. 8; Richardson, 2006, pp. 31-34). In truth, the movement can legitimately be depicted as a reaction against fundamental social, economic, and cultural change or a movement striving to find a place in a new world (Comerford, 1998, p. 9). But like the IRA of modern times, it was also a violent conspiracy.

The Fenian movement, or Irish Republican Brotherhood, was formed in Dublin in 1858 by James Stephens, a veteran of the Young Irelander rising of 1848. It was a revolutionary movement from the outset and relied heavily on Irish immigrants in the USA for financial support. Today it is considered the precursor to the IRA (Bolt, 2008, p. 54) through its infiltration of the Irish volunteers. It was a secret society that for over 60 years considered itself to be fulfilling the function of a watchdog on behalf of Irish separatist tradition (O Brion, 1976). The organisation aimed to establish a democratic Irish Republic but it was at its core a cultic milieu which endorsed political violence. In June 1886, in a message to the Irish people, it stated that it had established a "duly elected government" or "Supreme Council" which derived authority from "the Irish Republican Army and the Irish people within Ireland, and resident in England and Scotland" (O Broin, 1976, pp. 5-6). It was also the organisation which utilised the initials IRA in

its pamphlets and literature as early as 1873. Unlike the United Irishmen, it did not experience a constitutional phase but was committed to armed rebellion and violence from the moment of its inception. At all stages, the movement affirmed unconditionally that it would use every kind of violence to gain its political objective: an Irish republic independent of Britain. Each of the insurrection attempts during the lifetime of the brotherhood, the Fenian Rising of 1867 and the Dublin Easter Rising of 1916, were inspired and supported by it. Given that earlier iterations of the movement were similar to hybrid organisations or violent subcultures, Fenianism might be described as a movement that became more political though it retained the character traits of its predecessors. Like its ancestors in the agrarian societies, the United Irishmen and the Ribbon societies, it was a dark network which upheld the traditions of previous generations and replicated the hierarchical organisational patterns of French and Italian secret societies. The existence of an oath, which all its members were obliged to swear, not alone made it cohesive but conspiratorial. Violent dissidents behave the same way.

From its earliest days, the brotherhood was an underworld society. In his book the *Fenians in Context*, RV Comerford (1998) wrote that Stephens based his organisation on continental societies like the Societes des Familles, which had flourished in France in the 1830s. Though he believes Stephens eschewed this and was more drawn towards Mazzini's Young Italy movement. Stephens himself gave no name to his fledgling organisation. Instead, its members referred to it as "the project, the movement and the brotherhood" though it eventually became known as either the Irish Republican Brotherhood or sometimes the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood. Its members were generally known as Fenians.

From its inception, the brotherhood was an underground conspiracy and adopted the traditions of the violent movements which predated its existence. The literature is replete with stories of people associated with various incarnations of the brotherhood not being fully aware of its intentions or aims. For example, contemporary accounts of the brotherhood from the late 1800s by the British military commander in Ireland in 1866, Lord Strathnairn, suggest the authorities regarded the Fenian movement as something that had developed from the Whiteboys and Ribbonmen (Bowman, 2019, p. 900), again indicating the presence of an intergenerational militancy.

The underground organisation was itself structured in circles (Takagami, 1995, p. 350), which usually covered one or several counties, or a town or part of a town, and was led by a centre, or A, or colonel. An A commanded nine Bs or captains, one B commanded nine Cs or sergeants, and one C in turn commanded nine Ds or soldiers. Thus, a circle, fully structured on this pattern, would contain a total of 820 members. Comerford estimates cautiously the total membership was roughly 50,000 though contemporaries have offered the figure of 80,000 (Comerford, 1985). It is however impossible to evaluate the strength of an illegal organisation like the brotherhood as its members were sworn to secrecy, kept few written records, and operated in an especially hostile environment (Miller and Mac Suibhne, 2016, p. 31). In time, the Irish Republican Brotherhood transformed into a constitutionally organised secret society. It demanded absolute allegiance from its members, and ultimate control was held by its Supreme Council, which was partly elected and partly co-opted. When the council was not in session, power was exercised by the executive, composed of the president, the secretary and three of the council. Since Supreme Councils met only two or four times a year, the executive in practice dominated. It exercised control over its members through its organisational structure.

Conspiracy and secrecy ran through the organisation as is the republican tradition, the tell-tale indication that it was a violent subculture. Cyphers were used to communicate with others. It was known as the “business” “the organisation” whilst its leaders were “the heads of firm” or “the directors.” Its constitution was referred to as “trade rules.” Its president was “the boss.” Members were required to follow all instructions from their superiors in the society without question. Betrayal was punishable by death. There are countless stories of informers being identified and murdered. Bodies were dumped in public areas with a paper with their name and the information they had provided (O Broin, 1976, p. 9). Understanding the brotherhood, or the dark network it represented, is crucial for two reasons. It inherited the traditions and belief systems of the violent agrarian societies of the eighteenth century and carried the traditions of these underground subversive organisations forward. It should be noted that violent Ribbonism had continued to exist in parts of Ireland well into the late 1800s and such groups often cooperated in organising attacks with Fenians (O Brion, 1976, p. 27). But it also fused the ideals of violent underground movements with those of modern terrorism. Scholars like Hoffman and Richardson recognise the brotherhood for its utilisation of terrorism and propaganda by deed. The organisation was among the first to utilise terrorism to attack targets in Ireland but also Britain. In fact, its influence on

the development of modern terrorism cannot be overstated. Between 1883 and until 1887, it launched a dynamite bombing campaign on the London Underground and mainline rail stations. Its attacks on Glasgow and Liverpool prompted Scotland Yard to set up a Special Branch (Bolt, 2008, p. 50). The dynamiting of a prison in the London borough of Clerkenwell in December 1867 and the assassinations in Dublin's Phoenix Park in May 1882 were among the most spectacular acts of political violence committed in the United Kingdom during the nineteenth century, designed to instil terror in the broad population. The bomb explosion in London, intended to free imprisoned Irish nationalists, killed twelve people and injured more than a hundred. The events brought home to a shocked British public the existence of organisations within the Irish national movement, which, in the pursuit of their political objectives, were prepared to use violence and terror against people and property (Alter, 1982). Civilian casualties, whilst not actively sought, were accepted as collateral damage.

The influence of the Fenians on the practical development of terrorism cannot be overstated. Hoffman and Richardson have acknowledged they pioneered the use of time-delayed explosives, increasing their chances of evading capture. The brotherhood also established a foreign base beyond enemy reach for sustained campaigns that would have later echoes in Maoist doctrine. Such safe-havens for propaganda and fund-raising could capitalise on Irish populations and diasporas (Bolt, 2008, p. 50). Their terrorism also moved from a single event to a sustained campaign. Their insurgency operations were systematised, and they recognised the need for propaganda. They also used the language of violent state overthrow but crucially fused it with a portrait of Gaelic civilisation, and religious vocabulary and imagery. This enabled them to lock into a largely agrarian, Catholic population (Bolt, 2008, p. 50).

The first rebellion instigated by the organisation occurred in Dublin in March 1867, with smaller, uncoordinated actions occurring in Clare, Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Louth and Tipperary (Takagami, 1995, p. 342). The insurrection has been the focus of extensive research which has outlined how the organisation was ill-prepared to mount a rebellion. Plans for this rising were in a state of constant change during late 1866 and the early spring of 1867. It was originally thought that 30,000 Fenians would gather for a revolt, but it became clear that nothing like this number would be available. Ultimately, the 1867 Rising was to prove something of a debacle. A breakdown in command structures and communications meant that many thousands of Fenians

assembled, mainly at Tallaght Hill outside Dublin, waiting for orders which never came and then dispersed as they believed the rising had been called off. No major buildings in Dublin City were attacked, though police barracks at Tallaght, Dundrum, Stepaside and Glencullen in Dublin were and the policemen at Stepaside and Glencullen surrendered. But the organisation survived as an underground movement (Takagami, 1995, p. 362) which carried the tradition forward. This is of the utmost importance as it resulted in the most important act in modern Irish history: the proclamation of the Irish Republic on Easter Monday 1916.

The Irish Republican Brotherhood's role in the formation of the Irish Volunteers, an amalgamation of the brotherhood and other forces, established in response to the emergence of the Ulster Volunteers, is well documented. The inception of the Irish Volunteers itself was inspired by an article written by the academic Eoin Mac Neill, though the brotherhood's supreme council had already discussed it. Everything the Volunteers did, then and afterwards, was supervised by the brotherhood (O'Brion, 1976, p. 152), which had previously decided to embark on an insurrection before the end of World War One. Michael Collins would later say the formation of the Irish Volunteers was not merely a "knee-jerk reaction" to the Ulster Volunteers, which is often supposed, but was in fact the "old Irish Republican Brotherhood in fuller force".

Militarily, the Rising itself was a failure. Only 1,500 Irish Volunteers fought for the newly proclaimed Irish Republic, and apart from a few incidents in the countryside, the uprising was confined to Dublin. In total, 450 people were killed and 2,500 wounded. Over three thousand people were later arrested, many of them having little or no sympathy with the insurrection. Sixteen men were executed but the result was their instant canonisation. The brotherhood was among the groups which reorganised after the Rising. In fact, it began to stir within three months (O'Brion, 1976, p. 175) with an objective to establish and maintain a free and independent Ireland and train members to achieve this by force. It ceased to exist as an organisation in 1924 following the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922 but as we shall see in the coming chapters its conspiratorial tradition was passed on.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the deep historical roots of violent organisations which existed in Ireland during the relevant period, tracing their evolution from agrarian secret societies of the eighteenth century to the revolutionary and conspiratorial movements of the nineteenth century.

By examining groups such as the Whiteboys, United Irishmen, Defenders, Ribbonmen, and the Irish Republican Brotherhood, it has shown how these movements operated as dark networks - secretive, adaptable, and resilient and rooted in specific cultural, social, and political grievances. These organisations not only pursued immediate goals, such as economic justice or national sovereignty, but also established a subcultural legacy of violence and secrecy that profoundly influenced subsequent generations of Irish republicans.

One key theme is the intergenerational continuity of violent traditions. This resilience is underpinned by shared rituals, symbols, and a collective identity that provides a sense of belonging and purpose. These elements enabled groups to endure and adapt despite external repression, often morphing into new iterations. The parallels between the Ribbonmen and the Fenians, for example, highlight how these movements carried forward both organisational structures and ideological frameworks, blending agrarian grievances with nationalist aspirations. Moreover, this chapter has shown the persistence of these violent subcultures cannot be fully understood without recognising their countercultural nature. They existed in opposition to dominant political and social systems, challenging state and local authority, and reshaping societal norms. This perspective provides a lens to understand how modern violent dissident republicanism, while situated in a vastly different context, mirrors the adaptability, secrecy, and ideological commitment of its predecessors.

Chapter 4 The Evolution of the IRA

Introduction

This chapter examines violent republicanism from the Easter Rising of 1916 to the emergence of its modern iteration, violent dissident republicanism. To fully understand the evolving nature of this tradition, it is essential to situate it within the context of dark networks - clandestine, covert systems that enable and sustain illegal or subversive activities. Terrorism subcultures, which serve as the social and cultural environments in which violence and radical ideologies are normalised, must also be considered. These frameworks illustrate how violent republicanism operates as both a networked system and a deeply rooted subcultural phenomenon whilst being political. While the broader political and ideological motivations of republicanism are well-documented, this chapter argues that it is not merely a political phenomenon, but it's also a subculture shaped by familial legacies, historical narratives, and a sense of belonging that binds its adherents to a shared identity. This chapter begins with an examination of the War of Independence and the Civil War before exploring the IRA campaigns of the late twentieth century. In doing so, it pays close attention to republican ideology, culture, and tradition to illustrate how the IRA became a military caste (Smith, 1995, p. 64) committed to the use of violence. Chapter 4 also searches for clues about the impact of tradition, kinship, and social identity in the durability of the IRA in the period under review. Consequently, it examines the IRA's use of history and tradition to justify its violent actions and satisfy its own ideological needs and asks why it remained committed to guerrilla warfare and terrorism to achieve its objectives when constitutional political activity might have proved more strategic and successful.

Chapter 4 is composed of four sections. Section 4.1 explores the War of Independence and the Civil War. Section 4.2 traces the evolution of the IRA in the 1930s and 1940 whilst Section 4.3 explores the IRA's border campaign. Section 4.4 examines the terrorist campaigns of the Official IRA and the Provisional IRA until the emergence of violent dissidents in 1997. Among other things, these sections explore the cultural aspects of the IRA campaigns of the modern era, paying close attention to their involvement with organised crime gangs and support for anti-drugs vigilante groups at relevant times. By analysing key events from the Easter Rising through the Provisional IRA to modern dissident groups, the chapter identifies how kinship networks perpetuate violent traditions, passing them between generations of republicans which exist in

dark networks. It also considers how cultural elements serve to justify and amplify the continued use of violence. Finally, the chapter interrogates how this counterculture enables individuals to align their personal identity with a collective cause, rendering violent dissident republicanism a deeply rooted and persistent force in Irish society.

4.1 The War of Independence and the Civil War

The Easter Rising of 1916 by the Irish Volunteers was essentially an armed gesture by a body that came into being in response to the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) to frustrate the British government's plan to introduce Home Rule. Coogan and others argue there would have been no IRA had this not happened (Coogan, 1970, p. 3; Foster, 2023, p. 667) but this is not correct. Violent republican and secret organisations had long been in existence in Ireland and this can be traced back to 1798 (Bishop, Mallie, 1987, p. 7; Smith, 1995, p. 7) and even further.

Why did men and women from all sections of Irish society take up arms against Imperial Britain when Ireland was considered an integral part of the Empire? Much emphasis is placed on the influence of Patrick Pearse, his ideas of blood-sacrifice, nationalism and martyrdom, and the deeply religious nature of Irish society at the turn of the century, but this is too simplistic. As McGarry (2010) has pointed out, when the Rising took place, Pearse was too minor a character among the Volunteers to have had such influence on their decision to act. He correctly argues the Rising took place because Britain was taxed on the Western Front of Europe and an insurrection was a “rational, moral and historical imperative” if violent Fenianism was to retain any credibility or future (McGarry, 2010, p. 98). But there are other issues to consider. Much of the literature has overlooked how Fenianism was in a process of organisational survival and determined to make itself relevant (Comerford, 1998; O Brion, 1976; O’Leary, 1968). It operated in a cultic milieu. The insurrectionists of 1916 saw themselves as the latest iteration of a violent tradition that had existed for centuries. And like the Rebellion of 1798 and the Fenian Rising of 1867, the Rising was an act that affirmed the right of Irish people to achieve a sovereign nation through a subversive revolutionary organisation.

The second component which triggered the Rising, McGarry believes, was one of emotion, “born out of frustration, shame, and pessimism” (McGarry, 2010, p. 98), states of mind influenced by tradition, kinship and social identity (Hobsbawm, 1973). Accordingly, one must view the

Proclamation as a call to arms, not just for the men and women of 1916, but for each generation of Irish republican that followed. It took inspiration from previous generations who had fought and died to oppose British rule in Ireland but also affirmed the right of a vanguard to determine the future of Ireland as a whole or consecrated the view that an enlightened few could act on behalf of the misguided many (Frampton, 2011, p. 12).

The aftermath of the Rising and the execution of its leaders shaped the development of the movement because it served to enact the notion of sacrifice, themes still central to modern republicanism (Alonso, 2001, pp. 104–105) but it also sustained the tradition of subversive violence. Without the Rising and the British reaction to it, Irish nationalism would never have united under the banner of republicanism as it was at the time considered to be extreme and its objectives unattainable (McGarry, 2010). In other words, the Rising and Britain's response to it came to justify the use of physical force by republicans whilst simultaneously excluding the possibility of compromise, factors which gave fresh impetus and relevance to republicanism. It also transformed the IRA into a historical reality (Geraghty, 1998, p. 325) when James Connolly, the last of the leaders to face execution, signed a statement as Commandant General, Army of the Irish Republic, before he was executed by the British at Kilmainham Gaol. In many ways, the Rising was a fusion of the political with the historic violent tradition. It was for this reason that it had both a profound and rebounding effect (Filardo-Llamas, 2013, p. 1).

Predictably, the British military crushed the rebellion, but it was to have unforeseen ramifications that would drastically change the nature of the British-Irish relationship (Cremin, 2015, p. 913). In the months after its suppression, the rebels were jailed in the United Kingdom where they spent much of their time studying republican principles, guerrilla warfare, and organising protests to preserve their status as prisoners of war. When they eventually did emerge from jail, largely by the end of 1916, they did so as a committed cadre of gunmen. They had embraced the concept of guerrilla warfare and abandoned the use of conventional military formations, which on the Irish side could never match the forces of the British (Smith, 1995). Violent republicanism did not evolve by turning its back on conventional warfare, as is widely suggested in the literature (English, 2003; Smith, 1995), but returned to its traditional roots - assassinations, bombings, torture, the execution of informers, arson, and intimidation. These tactics had been utilised by the Fenians (Hoffman, 2006, pp. 8-9; Smith, 1995, p. 33) the previous century when

"Skirmishers" bombed targets which reflected "an uncommon understanding of contemporary terrorism." The Whiteboys, the United Irishmen, the Defenders and the Ribbonmen had used similar tactics and violence (Fisher, 2023). And like their predecessors, the republicans of 1916 were enabled by a culture of silence which enveloped their activities in the urban communities and rural towns where they operated (Clark, 2016). The expression of this type of violence, it should be noted, was not solely based in tradition but also learned experience. It was not driven solely by intellectual debates about British colonialism, but by hard practical experience.

> They looked back to the failure of Daniel O'Connell's efforts, in the years between 1823 and 1843, to repeal the 1801 Act of Union, and later to the blighted hopes and eventual demise of the Home Rule Movement in the early twentieth century, as manifestations of the futility of the constitutional path. On the other hand, violence, even on a small scale, had been seen to yield results and act as an engine for political change. (Smith, 1995, p. 15)

The fusion of radical politics and underground violent movements often arise from a combination of ideological, sociopolitical, and cultural factors. The merger between politics and violence might be best understood as a dynamic process wherein political ideology provided the framework for understanding grievances and setting objectives, while clandestine violence served as the method for achieving those goals in environments where conventional means were perceived as ineffective or unavailable. In any event, the remnants of the IRA declared war on Britain on January 21, 1919, when the new, illegal Irish parliament, Dáil Éireann, proclaimed an independent Irish Republic (Bowyer-Bell, 1970, p. 19).

The first Dáil was a one-party assembly populated by 73 Sinn TDs but it's important to understand the armed insurgents retained their subversive nature, acted unilaterally, and did not always take directions from the political. The republican movement would have two components, an underground armed wing, and a political wing, formally separate but often led by the same people (Finn, 2019, p. 3). The IRA saw itself as the dominant of the two.

The first shots of any conflict usually obtain a special symbolism although they may be random and uncoordinated (Larkin, 2014, p. 237). This was the case for the opening salvo of the Anglo-Irish War when eight Volunteers shot dead two members of the Royal Irish Constabulary to steal arms and gelignite from a quarry at Soloheadbeg in Tipperary on January 21, 1919. The victims

were Irish, but their membership of the police had left them in a dangerous position as they were considered by many to be a force of occupation and legitimate targets (Hopkinson, 2002, p. 25; Larkin, 2014, p. 238). Soon, the IRA began carrying out low-level attacks, often targeting remote RIC outposts in hit-and-run style attacks while the Dáil attempted to set up courts and other types of civil infrastructure. The IRA of the time had a nominal command structure but was essentially a decentralised underground army, in which units for the most part organised, armed and planned their own operations, with limited direction from its general headquarters staff in Dublin (Bielenberga and O Ruairc, 2021, pp. 620-621). The smallest units operated at company level in their own locality, and a series of these made up a battalion, which in turn made up a brigade operating at a county level. In 1919, there were about 100,000 volunteers. Most had limited roles, but a core group of between 3,000 to 5,000 of these (White, 2017, p. 19) made up the IRA's flying columns, the elite cadre of gunmen who dedicated themselves to life on the run (Cremin, 2015, p. 916) acting as the backbone of the IRA.

The insurgency against the British was itself a quintessentially Clausewitzian struggle, however. The IRA's enemy was not the military might of Britain but rather its reaction to the ongoing insurgency which swept across Ireland. The IRA fought its guerrilla war in such a way that the British would defeat themselves. In essence, every act of violence it orchestrated was designed to contribute to the political and psychological demoralisation of the enemy (Smith, 1995, pp. 35-36). By January 1920, the violence had escalated with predictable results (Hart, 1998, p. 72). The RIC became an intimidated force unable to function properly. Retirements from the service soared while recruitment stopped, forcing the British to close remote and rural outposts. From their hideouts in the mountains, flying columns took advantage of the withdrawals, escalated their violence and organised arson attacks, which culminated in a nationwide series of fire-bombings on April 5, the anniversary of the Easter Rising (Cremin, 2015, pp. 915-920). In the months that followed, the IRA intensified its efforts to kill its enemies, its gunmen often using shotguns and pistols to shoot people dead (Hart, 1998, p. 73).

The IRA's subversive tactics - assassination in the cities and ambushes in the country - proved successful despite it having poor access to proper arms (Bowyer-Bell, 1970, p. 23; Cremin, 2015, p. 929). The republican insurgents showed themselves to be ruthless in their endeavours. In 1920, for example, the IRA killed 176 Royal Irish Constabulary officers and 54 British soldiers

but suffered only 43 casualties (Lyons, 1971, p. 417). In total, 2,346 people were killed between 1917 and 1921 (O Corrain and O'Halpin, 2020, p. 544). Of these, 919 were civilians, 491 were Irish Volunteers/IRA, 523 were police and 413 were British Army. The Volunteers/IRA were responsible for 1,002, the British military and Royal Irish Constabulary killed 1,096, civilians killed 72 while responsibility for 176 has yet to be determined (O Corrain and O'Halpin, 2020, p. 544). Over time, the insurgency developed a certain dynamic of ruthlessness and became retaliatory in nature (Clarke, 2014) which served to make parts of Ireland further ungovernable. In response, the British deployed an auxiliary division of ex-British soldiers, known as the Black and Tans, to support the Royal Irish Constabulary, further exacerbating the problem.

There are clues in the literature which reveal the unseen role played by tradition, kinship and social identity in the violence though it's rarely recognised. The IRA gunmen who fought in the War of Independence did not just reach back into the annals of republican history to replicate the tactics used by the Fenian dynamiters to bomb England the previous century. They also adopted names like the Galty Boys, the Hardy Boys, the Wren Boys and the Green Boys, just like the agrarian agitators of the late 1700s and the early secret societies of the 1800s (Hart, 1998, p. 183). One notable feature of this time is how the general population came to refer to the IRA as "the Boys", a word whose etymology in the context of violent republicanism can be traced back to Whiteboys and their brethren in the Rightboys. Hart (1998) asserts that this was deeply symbolic as it gave legitimacy, historical and traditional context to the IRA's actions.

> Where the Wren Boys acted in the name of the Wran (the King) and the Biddy Boys in the name of St Brigid, and agrarian factions acted in the name of 'evicted tenants' or the 'Committee', the Volunteers acted in the name of the Republic, or referred to the existence of 'mysterious orders.' (Hart, 1998, p. 183)

Social identity within violent republicanism is shaped by its dual existence as a dark network and a terrorism subculture. As a dark network, the movement operates clandestinely, fostering a sense of exclusivity and solidarity among its members. Simultaneously, the subcultural dimension provides a shared narrative and moral framework, allowing individuals to see themselves as part of a historic and heroic struggle. This interplay between covert operations and subcultural identity not only sustained recruitment but also deepened commitment among republicans, creating a resilient foundation for the movement's survival. The existence of a very deep-rooted

tradition that existed in republican families is apparent though its influence is only recognised by a handful of scholars like Smith (1995) and Hart (1998). The IRA guerrillas of the 1920s were children of the 1890s (Hart, 1998, pp. 171-175), whose radical politics was often influenced by their parents, especially their mothers, family tradition, and a cyclical and teleological view of history that viewed it as a continuous advance towards a liberated Ireland as a predetermined goal (Smith, 1995, p. 277).

Contemporaneous reports of the day show how IRA volunteers often referred to their own lineage, family traditions and subversive republican culture in interviews, writings and public statements or by maintaining silence. This is most clearly illustrated by an Irish Times report published on April 8, 1919, which recorded the trial of a volunteer called Billy Pilkington in Sligo. When the defendant's mother entered the court as he stood trial, she addressed her son in the dock and asked if he had sought bail. When he replied "no", she said, "Good. If you did, I would not let you in the house again," (Irish Times, 1919). The republican tradition of refusing to recognise a court is an old one that has survived through generations (Lutz et al., 2002).

Tradition, kinship and social identity did not just impact on the republican families whose sons and daughters joined the IRA but also the communities where they were born, lived and went on active service. A culture of silence enveloped their activities, and locals would never discuss or pass information about "the Boys". This tradition dated back to the 1700s when communities would not betray members of the White Boys or Ribbonmen out of fear of both attack and ostracization in the community (Dickson, 1960; Donnelly, 2009) but it became even more entrenched during the War of Independence. Bowyer-Bell describes this culture of silence eloquently in his seminal work The Secret Army (1970).

> No one would testify, no one would talk, no one ever saw anything. All the Irish natives looked alike; the quiet and loyal were indistinguishable from the terrorists. (Bowyer-Bell, 1970, p. 21)

Such subversive traditions continue to exist to the present day in the dark networks where dissidents operate. The use of non-jury courts along with special legislation to allow police to give evidence of opinion about IRA membership rather than relying on witness evidence is testament to the resilience of this tradition. The IRA succeeded by staying in the field, undefeated; and provoking reprisals by the crown forces which antagonised the wider Irish

population and created a crisis of conscience for liberal British politicians (Gray, 2007). This was the apex of republican strategy where the British position in Ireland became morally indefensible, or as Smith (1995, p. 36) suggests, republicans could hope the prospect of a long and costly war, might give way to the conditions where Britain might re-evaluate its interests in Ireland. The firmest indication of the effectiveness of this strategy occurred when Britain sought and agreed a truce on July 11, 1921, followed by the Anglo-Irish Treaty on December 6. Predictably, the ratification of the Treaty on January 7, 1922 provided the opportunity for subversive republicanism, its rejection of realpolitik, and its deep-rooted traditions to assert itself once again as the agreement's terms were highly divisive. Not only did it compromise on the demand for a sovereign Irish republic, but it also required the insurgents to accept dominion status within the British Commonwealth and the partition of Ireland. The IRA's reaction to the ratification of the Treaty by the Dáil in January 1922 was entirely predictable; it split the movement (English, 2003, p. 34).

The anti-Treaty IRA regarded the terms of the agreement with dismay, suspicion, and bitter hostility (Smith, 1995, p. 41) hence it caused a fracture within the IRA whose divisional commandants called for an army convention where the organisation could make its own decision on the issue (Lewis, 2014, p. 304). Why did this happen? Under its original constitution, the IRA was governed by a national executive elected by an annual convention. In 1919, it had sworn allegiance to Dáil Éireann, allowing its GHQ staff to answer to the Minister of Defence to achieve a Republic. But since the Treaty disestablished the Irish Republic, the majority of volunteers believed they were no longer obliged to follow the orders of the government and sought a convention to determine policy. An examination of the movement's ideology, strategy, and utilisation of violence in the period leading up to the Civil War is essential to consider at this stage, as it is here that we encounter the very real influence of tradition, kinship and social identity on the direction and organisational survival of the IRA. The years between 1916 and 1921 had fortified the belief amongst republicans in the use of violence as the primary means of achieving Irish independence but also resolving issues. Smith (1995, p. 53) correctly says the success of the IRA's campaign in the Anglo-Irish war in dislodging the British presence from most of Ireland served to authenticate Pearse's view that Ireland could ultimately attain as much freedom as she wanted using violence.

The Easter Rising, he correctly argued, solidified republican strategic culture, reinforcing the conviction that the actions of a nationalist elite standing in line as the successor of past republican generations could enthuse the bulk of Irish people. More importantly, it validated the traditional republican view that violence was the primary and only means by which it could advance its cause. For that section of the movement calling itself the IRA, which opposed the Treaty and would go on to fight a civil war, the period between the Rising and 1921, had left it "dogmatic, inflexible and unable to detect the limits of its own capacity to achieve its objectives" with its chosen methods (Smith, 1995, p. 54). But the movement's survival was also propelled by a culture which focused on the use of violence. A more balanced appraisal of the period suggests the IRA did not defeat the British but rather exploited the little understood tactics of urban terror and rural disorder, which eventually caused the British to seek a truce.

The cohort of republicans, who remained committed to violence, began to assert themselves on both sides of the new border, months before the start of the Civil War. What is also of primary concern to this research was their ideological commitment to violence and willingness to disregard the views of the public. For example, sections of the IRA's leadership in Dublin continued to organise and train volunteers, smuggle weapons into Ireland from Germany and run summer camps (Bowyer-Bell, 1970, p. 31). IRA units also continued to operate a campaign of violence despite the truce, often disappearing people who they suspected of collusion or passing information to the British (Bielenberga and Ó Ruairc, 2021). An incident which occurred in the town of Macroom in Cork, whereby two police constables were kidnapped and flogged with strands of wire until they almost died, is illustrative of this. In the north, anti-Treaty republicans torched big houses, furniture stores and motor works belonging to loyalists in Belfast as well as flax mills in rural Ulster in carefully planned operations that peaked between March and June 1922. In fact, both pro- and anti-Treaty factions made preparations for a renewed campaign in Northern Ireland with weapons and camps established along the border, in part to try to prevent a split (Lewis, 2014, pp. 305-307). An Ulster Council responsible for IRA operations in Northern Ireland was established by Michael Collins. In February of that year, it planned and implemented a series of kidnapping raids in Counties Tyrone and Fermanagh in retaliation for the arrest of IRA officers in Northern Ireland. These operations came to a halt that March when the Northern Ireland government and the Provisional government in Dublin negotiated a settlement to improve

relations and alleviate the plight of the beleaguered northern nationalist minority (Lewis, 2014, p. 307).

There are differing views on whether this Ulster campaign was an attempt by the pragmatic pro-Treaty side to avert a split but the inevitable occurred when on March 26 an army convention was held in Dublin and the IRA divided. Bowyer-Bell (1970, p. 33) and Lewis (2014, p. 320) suggest it was an effort to hold the organisation together. Hopkinson (p. 85, 1988) suggests it was an escalation of the war in the north, however. The Provisional Government had banned the convention, but defiant IRA officers gathered nonetheless, drawing representatives from 52 of 73 brigades, including the majority of the most formidable units (Bowyer-Bell, 1970, pp. 33-32). The convention predictably reaffirmed the organisation's loyalty to the Republic and repudiated their fealty to Dáil Éireann and the Provisional Government. If one examines the events through the lens of terrorism subculture, hybridisation and counterculture, the Rising and the subsequent anti-Treaty IRA activities can be understood as embodying a subculture, an underground tradition, counterculture or belief system that challenged both British rule and the emerging Irish Free State's constitutional politics. But it also challenged authority. This culture did not simply reject the dominant political order but actively sought to position itself as an alternative vision of Irish sovereignty. The anti-Treaty IRA's stance against compromise, it might be argued, positioned it as a countercultural force. It rejected the pragmatism of constitutional politics in favour of a purist vision of republicanism, perpetuating a militant ethos that was inherently oppositional, representing a violent tradition.

In the weeks that followed, the pro-Treaty units who remained loyal to the leadership were absorbed into the rapidly developing National Army. The anti-Treaty units aligned themselves to a newly elected army executive and took control of the Four Courts in Dublin (English, 2003, p. 34). There was some cooperation between both sides in support of operations in the north, possibly in the hope that a common cause might avert civil war, but these proved ultimately futile (Lewis, 2014). Those who opposed the Treaty were the traditional republicans of their day, who would not accept the "stepping stone" argument advanced by Collins (Smith, 1995, pp. 40-47). But the convention also showed most veteran guerrillas were still committed to the cause and of those who refused to fight on, many decided to remain neutral rather than pledge allegiance to the National Army (Hart, 1998). They argued the pro-Treaty opponent's newfound

adherence to political discourse and the views of the majority were inconsistent with the republican struggle of 1916 to 1921 (English, 2003, p. 34). In truth, many saw themselves as a vanguard protecting the rights of the Irish nation, or as English writes, a movement that led rather than followed.

What is of most interest to this research is the cohort of republicans, who were apolitical. To these, the IRA had nothing to do with politics (Hart, 1998, p. 114). Violent republicanism was a subversive tradition which allowed them to rid the country of their enemies; it conferred both power, social identity and social status and allowed them to settle old scores using violence. Violence was not only a necessary tool but the defining characteristic of their culture and ensured that the Rising's symbolic power, particularly the martyrdom of its leaders, continued to legitimise violence for subsequent generations. It also challenged not only British rule but also the emerging political norms of the Irish Free State. This dual identity, as both a terrorism subculture, violent tradition and counterculture, propelled the movement's survival, ensuring it remained "dogmatic, inflexible, and unable to detect the limits of its own capacity" (Smith, 1995, p. 54). This interplay of subcultural identity and countercultural opposition created a durable foundation for violent republicanism that persisted long after the Rising.

The Civil War began on June 22, 1922. It was a complex conflict in which anti-British hostility, sectarian enmity and local competition over land were bitterly entangled with the war over the Treaty. It also saw the IRA relinquish any form of political control. Initially, the anti-Treaty IRA held the advantage (Lynch, 2015, p. 117) outnumbering the pro-Treaty side by 2:1. In the beginning, the vast majority of those who fought against the new government and the National Army had remained committed to violence though it would be incorrect to label them all as hardliners. Some were pragmatic and knew the IRA could not defeat the British but believed a better agreement could have been reached. Others like Eamon de Valera believed the IRA "should go another round in the race" (Smith, 1995, pp. 47-42), possibly to draw Britain back into Ireland.

A more balanced approach is to view the Civil War as a reaction to the ratification of the Treaty by traditional republicans and pragmatism by the pro-Treaty side. The treaty meant different things to different men though the subversive and underground contribution of violent republicanism is omnipresent. As Smith (1995) says, public opinion and the potential success or

otherwise of the IRA's non-conventional warfare was irrelevant. Its loyalty was to the Republican vision and not the Irish people; it was an expression of private morality rather than public opinion. The one constant factor in traditional republican thinking was the absolutist commitment to republican ideology and the utility of violence (Smith, 1995, p. 219). But it was also a war about national legitimacy, about which side could define themselves as most Irish (Kissane, 2020, p. 116).

At the time, there were around 15,000 IRA members with access to less than 7,000 rifles. Many of the most experienced gunmen were still using antiquated shotguns or revolvers but lacked artillery or heavy weapons of any kind. Initially, the Provisional Government had access to even fewer weapons, but it did have Britain supporting its actions. What triggered the war? The conflict was caused by the failure to find a workable compromise between the pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty factions. The British had also become exasperated by the continued presence of an IRA garrison in Dublin, who it was believed was sponsoring and supplying weapons for attacks taking place in Northern Ireland. The situation was also exacerbated by the assassination of Sir Henry Wilson, a military adviser to the Northern government. Wilson was shot dead in London on June 22 by two members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, which had continued to exist in the shadows (Jeffery, 2006, pp. 284-286; Lynch 2015, pp. 117-119; McGreevy, 2022, p.115). This act had prompted the British to plan an attack on the Four Courts the following day although it was postponed due to fears of repeating the mistakes of 1916. Finally, in the early hours of June 28, the National Army began an artillery bombardment of the Four Courts, commencing a week-long battle for control of Dublin, which the pro-Treaty side won.

The Civil War bore little to no resemblance to the Anglo-Irish War. It was one of misjudgements, revenge, bitterness, savagery, hatred and executions that saw leaders on both sides killed. For the IRA, it was one of missteps and miscalculations. To begin, it was a distinctly southern conflict as the security forces in Northern Ireland had been suppressing the IRA's activities following partition. After the IRA's defeat in Dublin in early July, it retreated south, where it tried to defend fixed positions behind an invisible line that ran from Limerick in the west to Waterford in the southeast (Kissane, 2020, p. 167). Tactically, this proved disastrous as it left the capital in the hands of the Provisional government, allowing it to present itself as the lawful government (Blake, 1986, p. 36) dealing with a militant rump. With Dublin as its epicentre, the new

government projected power to every region of the new state. In July and August, the National Army made further advances by landing troops in Clew Bay in Mayo, Fenit and Tarbert in Kerry, and Youghal and Passage West in Cork, establishing entry points behind the Limerick-Waterford line. This separated IRA brigades in the southwest, west, and northwest. By August 19, the IRA ordered all units to organise themselves into "active service units" and adopt guerrilla tactics to try to stop their advance. The Irregulars, as the IRA became known, also engaged in a different type of guerrilla warfare which did not have the same dynamics as the Anglo-Irish War. Ambushing parties kept a safe distance; there were few firefights and more sniper attacks on the National Army (Hart, 1998, p. 119). The fighting saw the killing of leaders on both sides, such as Collins, who was shot dead in August 1922 in Cork, and Liam Lynch, the IRA chief of staff (English, 2003, p. 36; Shannon, 2023). But it was also a conflict driven by personal animosities.

The existing literature is replete with references to torture and savagery (Coogan, 1970, p. 40), fratricidal violence (Townshend, 2014, p. 451) and terror (Coogan and Morrison, 1998, p. 4). To the National Army, republican killings were considered an atrocity, no matter how justified any action might have seemed, says Coogan (1970, p. 41) who wrote of men being chained to mines and blown to pieces. But the Free State also bloodied its hands. Days after the assassination of Collins in August 1922, three teenagers were taken out of a lorry in Clondalkin in Dublin and shot dead by the government's intelligence services. Some kidnappings, shootings and arson attacks might also be described as stubborn clinging to old vendettas (Hart, 1998, p. 121).

Did the IRA engage in violence for violence's sake or was something else driving it? Scholars like Smith (1995) believe the Civil War illustrated the inability of the IRA to appraise critically the utility of its own violence in the context of achieving its own aims. In summation, Smith says the IRA's campaign appeared to be governed, not with reference to what was realistically attainable through violence, but by ideological imperatives which suggested that the true Republic could only be achieved through the immediate resort to arms with hardly any thought to the consequences, chances of success, or of more effective alternatives (Smith, 1995, p. 53). There were other factors in the IRA's defeat. Britain eventually supplied 27,400 rifles, 6,606 revolvers, and 246 Lewis guns to the provisional government (Hopkinson, 1988, p. 125) to fight the insurgents. The IRA also alienated the public. Its guerrilla tactics upturned the economic life of the country by destroying roads, bridges, and railway lines (Kissane, 2021, p. 168; Smith,

1995, p. 53). The anti-Treaty side also wanted to sue for peace. The National Army had captured men like Tom Derrig but it was the death of Chief of Staff Liam Lynch that most hastened the end.

Many of the senior officers in the anti-Treaty faction had favoured a negotiated peace, or any peace, and it had only been Lynch and a handful of his officers that had kept them fighting (Enright, 2022, p. 70). Documents setting out the anti-Treaty Executive proposals for a ceasefire were also found on the body of Austin Stack. The terms were published by the Free State government which further undermined the insurgents. The inevitable happened on May 24, 1923, after the IRA held a convention where it gave an order to a ceasefire and dump arms.

The conflict has been extensively researched but the role played by tradition, kinship and social identity in the violence has been mostly overlooked with the notable exception of Hart, Bowyer-Bell and Clark. Most scholars like Smith have chosen to view and interpret the actions of the IRA through the prism of politics and military strategy and ignore the invisible driving forces in the survival of the movement though it's arguable that tradition and culture became its lifeblood both during and after the Civil War when it began to transition back into an underground movement. In other words, the need to survive and go on fighting became self-perpetuating and served to maintain the ideology of the IRA and keep the foot-soldiers on board and occupied. It also ensured the IRA was not seen as an emasculated organisation. This is illustrated by the testimonies of people who were forced to flee Ireland because of their past associations to Britain. Evidence of this is seen in Clark (2014) who outlined the type of persecution, violence and social ostracism suffered by many including former police constables and their families after the Civil War. The victims were often too fearful to report acts of intimidation by republicans should it result in further attacks, choosing to remain silent often for years. Victims of such violence had to face what he describes as the “unpalatable truth” that former friends and neighbours now condoned attacks against them (Clark, 2014, p. 106).

In Limerick, Tipperary and Waterford, rumour and suggestion played an important role in creating an intimidating atmosphere “more subtle and invidious than cruder forms of violence” in which Protestants and British Loyalists were targeted (Clark, 2014, p. 151). In the republican heartlands of Munster, there existed a violent undercurrent that became explicit if certain codes - regarding land ownership, religion and political allegiance were transgressed, actions which bear

striking similarities to the secret agrarian groups of the 1700s and 1800s. Clark says it was certainly the intention of the perpetrators to clear out the old enemy from the community. Sectarianism also surfaced in campaigns of intimidation: letters in circulation during the Civil War, including some issued on behalf of the IRA, made specific threats against the Protestant community. Boycotts were enforced on denominational lines, weakening Protestants' commercial hold on an area, particularly in urban communities, where the non-Catholic population and influence was strong. It should be noted that violence and intimidation was also directed at "staters" who accepted the Treaty and took the oath of allegiance to the Crown. One curious aspect to such acts was the practice of maiming farm animals in bitter personal conflicts over trespass and class rivalries within farming, a tactic previously used by the Whiteboys.

Rape and gang rape by soldiers was also used as a weapon. Connolly (2021) has explored the heinous crime of rape and sexual assault by elements of the National Army and the IRA. She documented cases of rape/gang rape involving soldiers in North Mayo, North Tipperary, Westmeath and Armagh - a not insignificant number of known cases given the scale and short duration of the conflict and the stigma associated with such violence.

To understand the IRA after the Civil War, one must hold contradictory views of it. On one hand, it was not a secret army but rather an army defeated in the field whose members were known to the victorious government. On the other hand, it represented the continuation of an old and violent tradition, a successor to the Whiteboys, the United Irishmen, the Ribbonmen and the Fenians. The traditionalists, who drew their inspiration from previous generations, believed in the utilisation of violence, intimidation, and terror to resolve their grievances. The IRA might have been defeated but instead of surrendering and disbanding they buried their weapons and waited for a suitable time to resume the struggle. It went further underground when its leadership met in July 1923 and voted to sever its connection with the Irish Republican Brotherhood (Coogan, 1970, p. 42), which was dissolved in 1924 (O Brion, 1976, p. 222). The IRA had considered creating its own brotherhood but decided against it. A group of National Army officers had done likewise but their conspiracy was uncovered. The brotherhood itself never officially disbanded but withered on the vine, according to Sean Mac Eoin, a member of its last Supreme Council (O Brion, 1976, p. 221). Its funds lay in a bank account held by trustees until

1964 when they were donated to the Wolfe Tone Memorial Fund and used to pay for the erection of a statue of Tone at the north-eastern corner of St Stephens Green.

In time, the IRA drafted a new constitution which promised to guard, honour, and maintain the independence of the Irish Republic, which retained the conspiratorial nature of the movement. In essence, the violent tradition returned to the shadows, still fully armed and committed to its cause. What had taken place in May 1923 was a ceasefire, but not an unambiguous end to hostilities. Or as Horgan (1997, p. 7) correctly states: no ceasefire is irreversible for as long as any of the protagonists retain their weapons. The members of the IRA, still loyal to an increasingly "phantasmagorical concept of the State," were told to conceal their weapons rather than surrender them on the grounds they might be needed again (Horgan, 1997, p. 11). One might say the movement transitioned to survive, becoming a violent and more subversive organisation that operated out of sight once more. It carried out armed raids, attacked and sometimes killed policemen who investigated them too closely, and intimidated prison warders, court witnesses and jurors. Much like the violent dissidents of today, it engaged in sporadic acts of violence and crime when necessary. To a large extent, these were spontaneous and uncoordinated measures and were often defensive in intent, designed to prevent the movement being destroyed by the authorities of the day. The IRA did still contain some very able activists and was able to exude considerable vibrancy during the post-revolutionary years (Bowyer-Bell, 1970; English, 2000) but it did not wage a campaign to bring down the Cumann na Gael government or the political system, much though it hated both. Instead, it was an underground movement in survival mode (Horgan, 1997, p. 11).

4.2 The IRA in the 1930s and 1940s

Defeat in the Civil War did not bring about an end to the IRA or its violent tradition. Instead, it marked the beginning of a process whereby it evolved, recommitting itself to the use of violence while embracing the concept of ideological absolutism, which insisted it could never relinquish or surrender its principals (Smith, 1995). This ideological rigidity, deeply embedded in the republican tradition, underscores the IRA's dual identity as both a terrorism subculture and a countercultural force. Its transformation during this period exemplifies the characteristics of a dark network, where decentralisation, secrecy, and the ability to evade detection allowed the movement to adapt and survive despite external pressures. As the IRA drifted away from Sinn in

1925 (Oppenheimer, 2009, p. 23) and later Fianna Fáil, it transitioned back into a clandestine and decentralised group that allowed it to evade state repression and sustain its operations. Of these, the IRA's split from Sinn was arguably the most significant development in this period as it cut the IRA off from political influences, resulting in its transformation into a more militant but subversive organisation (Oppenheimer, 2009, pp. 54-55; Smith, 1995, p. 49) led by Sean Russell, who became Chief of Staff in 1938. This network structure enabled the IRA to maintain its activities as a violent subculture, distinct from mainstream political and social movements, and deeply rooted in its own traditions and values. It was, in part at least, a counterculture.

The organisation used the period after the instruction to dump arms to reorganise, maintain structures and consolidate its relationship with Clan na Gael in the United States. Of this period, Bowyer-Bell (1970) says the "scattered remains" of the defeated army were integrated into a "large, covert, revolutionary underground force" still dedicated to a second round (Bowyer-Bell, 1970, pp. 65-66). "It was a power in the land, a threat to those who deny the Republic," wrote the scholar, who described Russell and his comrades as "men who had chosen invisible service in an invisible army for an invisible Republic" (Bowyer-Bell, 1970, p. 66). This isolation, it might be argued, reinforced its reliance on underground structures and secretive practices characteristic of dark networks. By rejecting mainstream political channels and recommitting to violent resistance, the IRA effectively became the epitome of a counterculture, opposing not only the British state but also the constitutional nationalism embodied by Sinn and Fianna Fáil. The interplay between its dark network infrastructure and countercultural ethos ensured the movement's survival, allowing it to act as a repository for the republican tradition and a platform for the next iteration of its struggle. What must also be understood in the context of this research was the phoenix-like ability of physical force republicanism to re-emerge, demonstrating yet again the existence of a violent continuum. The IRA's strength had peaked at over I00,000 in 1918, dropped to 70,000 after the July I92I truce. By early I92I, at the height of the guerrilla war against Britain, and again in early I922, after the IRA split over the Anglo-Irish treaty, a third or more of these men left. When the IRA began fighting a second war against the Irish Free State - it lost around 90 per cent of their pre-treaty strength (Hart, 1998, p. 209). A rump was all that remained by the 1930s though it continued to carry out attacks. In March and April of 1936, the IRA killed a garda and a Royal Navy Vice Admiral, prompting the Free State government to declare it an illegal organisation. These murders are now seen as a prelude to a bombing

campaign against Britain called the S Plan which commenced in January 1939. The S Plan, short for Sabotage Plan, was initially resisted by elements of the IRA, who suspected it might achieve nothing like the "dynamiters campaign" of the 1880s (Bowyer-Bell, 1970, p. 145) but Russell's argument eventually won through.

The campaign itself was devised by Seamus O'Donovan, a veteran of the Anglo-Irish War who had served under Collins. The violence was terrorist in nature but designed to avoid public bloodshed by focusing on targets the British public would neither see nor hear but would impact on their everyday lives (Craig, 2010, p. 311). O'Donovan himself had worked with Ireland's Electricity Supply Board (ESB), employment which gave him an insight into how sabotage could potentially cause havoc. Its ideological premise was simple: it was driven by the deeply flawed concept that Northern Ireland could be reunited with the south if public opinion in England could be changed to support reunification (Craig, 2010, p. 313). The object of the campaign, when it started, was to inconvenience ordinary people while at the same time dazzling them with a parallel propaganda campaign (Craig, 2010; p. 313). It was also timed to coincide with the possible outbreak of World War 2 and take advantage of the perceived weakness of Neville Chamberlain. At the time, Britain had just returned the Treaty ports of Cobh, Berehaven and Lough Swilly to the Irish military. Russel's plans came to fruition on January 12, 1939, when the IRA delivered a written ultimatum to the British government that warned it to withdraw its forces in four days or it would reserve the right of appropriate action without further notice (Smith, 1995, p. 63). The threat was also relayed to the Stormont government, Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler (West, 1999, p. 12). There is little to show how the disparate bombing campaign involved any strategic planning aimed at changing the status of Northern Ireland (Smith, 1995, p. 63) but it did once again demonstrate the IRA's overriding commitment to violence, which this research argues is a central component of the movement's violent tradition. Furthermore, Russell's actions also suggest he wished to recreate the stand taken by the leaders of the Easter Rising.

The S Plan was undertaken with the full understanding that Britain was preparing for war with Germany (West, 1999, p. 12) as had been the case in 1916. Symbolically, the threat issued to Downing Street also referred to the 1916 Proclamation and the 1919 Declaration of Independence, once again demonstrating how the IRA used history to justify its actions. Smith

(1995, p. 63) describes this as a graphic illustration of the IRA's "paucity of strategic planning induced by the lack of internal political guidance."

The threat issued by the IRA received scant attention when it was delivered to Lord Halifax but that changed four days later when London, Liverpool, Manchester, and Birmingham were bombed (English, 2003, p. 61). The new campaign quickly ran into difficulties when the British authorities identified and arrested the leaders of the IRA units involved and seized a copy of the S Plan. This forced the IRA to change tactics as the Home Office informed all the public utility companies to upgrade their security. There were 150 bombing incidents in the first year - equating to a bomb in or around a major British city every other second day (Craig, 2010, p. 310). In August, the violence reached a new plateau when 5 people were killed and dozens injured when a device exploded outside a shop in Coventry. It was a crime that led to the introduction of the Prevention of Violence Act 1939, which permitted the deportation of IRA suspects. The Irish government enacted similar legislation in January 1940, when the Emergency Powers Act was passed by the Dáil allowing for the internment of republicans. In fact, between 1939 and 1945, the Fianna Fáil government executed six IRA men whilst three others died on hunger strike. A further 1,000 were interned or charged using the Offences Against the State Act 1939 much to the outrage of republicans who initially tried to escape before using hunger-strikes to resist (Bowyer-Bell, 1970, pp. 170-171).

Why did de Valera's government take such measures to confront the IRA whilst enhancing cooperation with the British? The literature on the subject is limited but Smith (1995, p. 63) suggests he viewed the IRA as a threat to Ireland's stated position of neutrality. The National Army had just 12,500 men, two small boats and a fleet of obsolete planes. If Germany were to attack, Ireland was incapable of defending itself. He argues that de Valera viewed any sort of provocation as a threat to national security and moved to neutralise the IRA as the government was keenly aware of the IRA-German contacts which had taken place in 1916 (Bowyer-Bell, 1970, p. 163). More importantly, de Valera was aware of the ebbing vitality of the IRA and knew the organisation had the capability to re-emerge. The campaign ended in early 1940 when two bombs exploded in Oxford Street, injuring more than 20 people.

Returning to the topic which this chapter seeks to explore, it's clear that the period was of the utmost importance in the development of violent republicanism for a multiplicity of reasons. It

demonstrated that violent Irish republicanism had not gone away and had remained focused on pushing Britain towards a full political and military withdrawal from Ireland. The S Plan also showed Britain the IRA still saw itself as the legitimate government and army of Ireland but also the inheritors of the Fenian tradition. Ultimately it might be argued that it exposed the dominant culture that existed in the IRA. The use of violence was not a tool to be used to achieve political objectives but something to satisfy the ideological needs of the republican tradition (Smith, 1995, p. 64). This assessment of the IRA makes perfect sense, if one views violent republicanism, or components of it, as a violent tradition. But the campaign was also an example of the Fenian activist tradition that had periodically bubbled to the surface since 1798 (Craig, 2010, p. 135). The bombing campaign not only perpetuated the violent tradition but also fostered a profound subculture characterised by religious and conspiratorial ideologies and tightly bound oaths which few outsiders understood. For example, there was a resurgence of supposed Catholic Oaths among Irish emigres in Britain. One contemporary note of a Hibernian Oath was typically worded:

> I will wade knee-deep in Orangemen's Blood, and do as King James did. I will think it no sin to kill and massacre a Protestant whenever the opportunity serves. (Craig, 2010, p. 316)

Hence the IRA bombing campaign should be seen not as a serious attempt to advance the nationalist cause, though parts of O'Donovan's S Plan were grounded on achieving political objectives, but as a sign of the movement reverting to type, as a vehicle for preserving the doctrinal purity of the republican vision. The bombing campaign underscored that a militaristic caste was exactly what the IRA had become. The truth was that the S Plan exposed the dominant influences that drove the IRA and influenced its thinking. Violence was not a means to achieving a political outcome, but an impulse grounded in an ideological needs of the republican tradition (Smith, 1995, p. 64). In many respects the republican tradition, and the kinship and social identity IRA membership engendered, had little meaning without the use of violence. It was a tradition, a subculture whose leaders and members were devoted to the use of violence which they justified on historic grounds. A statement issued by the IRA's Adjutant General through An Phoblacht in January 1933 is reflective of this poorly understood belief system which the author described in almost religious terms as "sacred."

> Sovereignty and Unity of the Irish nation are inalienable and non-judiciable, and the Irish Republican Army cannot relinquish these fundamental principles, which are a sacred trust. (An Phoblacht, 1933)

4.3 The Border Campaign 1956 to 1962

The aftermath of the Second World War offered little to the IRA, which had transitioned into a violent subculture. Its bombing campaign had proved fruitless (English, 2003, p. 71). Yet the violent tradition survived despite the efforts of the authorities to destroy it. The question is why? The consensus among most scholars is that after World War 2, the IRA might well have been given its last rites (Flynn, 2009, p. 3) but this interpretation is too simple if one considers the durability of violent republicanism, or the emergence of independent groups. These represented a cultic milieu. Most scholars like Coogan, English and to a lesser extent Bowyer-Bell consider this period of the IRA's history as one of decline but they overlook the roles played by tradition, kinship and social identity in the survival of the movement along with what Selth describes as the "peculiar mix of political, religious, economic and social factors" found in Northern Ireland "that have no parallel elsewhere" (Selth, 1991, p. 310). Scholarly research has also paid little or no attention to the emergence of unaligned and dissident groups who utilised violence for political ends and propaganda in 1950s Ireland though they bear striking similarities to the violent republican dissidents of today and the subversive groups of the 1700s and 1800s. Bowyer-Bell (1970, English (2003) and Flynn (2009) have paid some attention to these groups but there has been no in-depth exploration of the phenomenon or why it occurred.

The groups went by an assortment of names though some used no names at all. Some emerged in the border region, but others sprung to life in places like Dublin (Bowyer-Bell, 1970, p. 256). Saor Uladh was formed in 1954 in Tyrone by Liam Kelly of Pomeroy after he broke away from the mainstream republican movement. Loachra Uladh was another group formed by Brendan Boyle, a republican from Tyrone, who ran a bombing campaign until he was killed in July 1955 whilst planting a device in Stormont (Bowyer-Bell, 1979, p. 255). Like the IRA units of the 1920s who adopted the names of the violent agrarian groups of the 1700s and 1800s, these entities reached back into the annals of republican history in search of traditional names to give themselves legitimacy. They called themselves the Irish Republican Brotherhood, Arm na Saoirse and the Irish National Brotherhood, again confirming a commitment to a physical force

tradition that still existed barely submerged in Irish society (Bowyer-Bell, 1970, p. 256). Hence to understand the IRA of the time, one must understand it was the largest of numerous paramilitary organisations and subversive groups competing for members, resources, and attention. There was not one single republican organisation, but many driven by inward pressures to initiate armed hostilities (Smith, 1995, p. 66) against the British or those who they perceived to be their enemies, but the movement was also evolving.

By 1947, it had undergone a root and branch reform. It was now free from informers, criminals, communists and dedicated to physical force (Flynn, 2009, p. 16). This reorganisation was reflective of the IRA's reliance on a dark network model. Operating as a decentralised and clandestine organisation, the IRA leveraged secrecy and compartmentalisation to minimise exposure to state infiltration while ensuring operational continuity. These dark networks provided not only structural resilience but also a platform to perpetuate the movement's violent objectives without interference from mainstream political systems. More importantly, it again pledged itself to overthrow the British imposed political institutions in Northern Ireland (Bowyer-Bell, 2000) and sought to avoid direct conflict with the Free State. This radical change in policy happened following a convention in 1948 through the announcement of General Army Order No 8, which forbade IRA volunteers from taking action against the 26 county forces (Frampton, 2021, p. 156; White, 2017, pp. 31-36). While this was a shift in policy, it was also a recommitment to ideological absolutism though it had historical antecedents (Smith, 1995, p. 66). The strategy of focusing solely on Northern Ireland was first raised by Tom Barry during the latter part of the Anglo-Irish War in June 1921. In 1934, Joseph McGarity of Clan na Gael in America had also suggested the IRA should devote its efforts to challenging the British forces in Northern Ireland (Smith, 1995, pp. 66-67). The IRA had once drawn up plans to commence a campaign in the mid-1930s, but these were shelved in 1936 after it was compromised by the security services. Hence this switch from creating a 32 County Republic to retaking the six countries came as the more politically attuned in the organisation began to consider the different political systems that existed on both sides of the border. There were other factors too. The reforms carried out by de Valera had taken the steam out of the republican movement in the south (Smith, 1995, p. 67). The abolition of the Oath of Allegiance, the 1937 constitution and the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1938, which saw the return of Treaty ports to Irish control, had

resolved many issues. Hence the decision to focus its activities on Northern Ireland was a natural one.

The actual planning for the campaign which became known as Operation Harvest began in 1950 (Bowyer-Bell, 1970, p. 316; Smith, 1995, p. 67). Between 1951 and 1955, the IRA raided the ammunition stores of military barracks in Northern Ireland and Britain. Republicanism was also helped by the declaration of the Free State as a Republic in 1948 and the reactivation of Sinn as the IRA's political wing in the mid 1950s. In the Westminster elections of May 1955, the party received 152,310 votes, almost the entire nationalist vote, and won two seats for abstentionist candidates (Flynn, 2009, p. 40). Sinn and its brothers in the IRA hailed the vote as a landmark in its campaign to organise all Irishmen into one united people to end British rule (United Irishman, 1955) but the gunmen saw the result as support for the resumption of a new campaign (Flynn, 2009, p. 41). For its part, Sinn supported the new campaign (Flynn, 2009, p. 159), viewing it as an opportunity to build support or what they called an anti-vote.

Operation Harvest commenced on December 11, 1956. The driving force came from south of the border and focused on the use of guerrilla warfare, which according to the new Chief of Staff Seán Cronin, was the only feasible option (Bowyer-Bell, 1970, p. 283). From the perspective of this review, it should be noted that Cronin wrote that no nation had a "greater tradition of guerrilla warfare than Ireland" and that "a small nation fighting for freedom can only hope to defeat an oppressor or occupying power by means of guerrilla warfare" (IRA, 1956). Cronin's beliefs were firmly rooted in the conspiratorial republican tradition. The opening chapter of his book was entitled Our Tradition. In his writings, he outlined the historic roots of violent republicanism before he dealt with resources, strength, and strategy (Edwards and Hadjiathanasiou, 2021, p. 648). The handbook itself goes some way to revealing Cronin's tactics and longing to re-enact the past. He did not want to strike a "large blow" but "many little ones" to drain the enemy's manpower and resources, lead the resistance on behalf of the Irish people and break down the enemy's administration. Though his beliefs on guerrilla warfare were "long on Maoist theory but short on realistic advice" (Smith, 1995, p. 66) they did reach back into the annals of republicanism and tradition. He wanted to recreate the IRA's modus operandi of the 1920s with south based "flying columns" attacking targets in Northern Ireland (Fynn, 2009, p.

49) though he decided against attacks in Belfast should it provoke an anti-Catholic response from loyalist paramilitaries (Rekawek, 2016, p. 443).

The campaign initially involved 150 volunteers, but the numbers increased to 1,000 who were sustained in the field by supplies which never materialised and accommodation by local people (Hanley, Millar, 2009, pp. 14-16; Rekawek, 2016, p. 444). In time, it became nothing more than sporadic violence and consequently it petered out by February 1962 with the army council blaming its defeat on "the attitude of the general public whose minds had been deliberately distracted from the supreme issue facing the Irish people – the unity and freedom of Ireland" (Smith, 1995, p. 72). In the five years it lasted, 18 people were killed.

The scholarly assessment of the campaign tends to view the IRA of the time as "Soldiers of Folly" on the grounds that Operation Harvest accomplished nothing and diverted the republican movement away from political activities, which might have advanced its cause. The IRA campaign had been inspired by its experiences of 1919 to 1921 and hoped to emulate them but had not considered its unpopularity in Ireland (Rekawek, 2016, p. 446) but the role played by tradition, kinship, and social identity in keeping the organisation alive is clear. The deeply ingrained tradition of physical force mixed with the IRA's sense of ideological absolutism is omnipresent and shines through. The republican movement could have attempted, through political work and agitation, to change this state of affairs and mobilise people in favour of nationalist demands, but chose not to (Rekawek, 2016, p. 446). Instead, it fought on, lasting for lasting sake, to keep the tradition alive.

One of the constant criticisms of terrorism research is the relative scarcity of field interviews. This has contributed to a perceived stagnation of academia's understanding of terrorist motivations. This criticism is applicable in this case as there has been little research into the period though some accounts by volunteers provide important clues about the role played by tradition, kinship, and social identity in sustaining the IRA. Among them a memoir written by Michael Ryan, who wrote of his involvement in Operation Harvest and the IRA, which appointed him to its intelligence department to collect information on republican groups who operated independently. Ryan's memoir is one of the few first-hand accounts which provides an insight into the republican tradition of the time, the kinship it engendered, and the social status conferred by IRA membership. It is particularly illuminating as it offers a rare first-hand glimpse

into the Republican tradition of the era, showcasing the profound sense of camaraderie it fostered and the social standing associated with IRA membership. Ryan vividly describes rituals such as being "blessed with holy water" upon entering safe houses and receiving aid from individuals steeped in the Republican tradition during his service in Antrim, Armagh, and Fermanagh (Ryan and Yeates, 2018). He discussed fighting alongside men whose fathers had fought in the War of Independence. Their resolve, he notes, was bolstered by a shared commitment to upholding the ideals of their forebears.

“They had kept the faith and so must we,” he wrote, wondering if the men of 1848 and 1867 had ever experienced the hardships his unit suffered in the wilds of Antrim, Tyrone and Fermanagh. He also wrote of the men who fought in 1916 and the War of Independence. (Ryan and Yeates, 2018, p. 113)

There is widespread consensus within the terrorism studies literature that joining a terrorist group is a process of becoming part of a network with a wide band of supporters, who might offer small but valuable measures of assistance: houses of worship; individuals who might donate money; and those who sympathise with the group’s goals and work for them in their own illicit ways (Huang, 2018, p. 884). This theoretical approach can be applied to Ryan, whose experience of violent republicanism suggests he became part of a subculture or counterculture, drawn into its ranks by the kinship he experienced and the social identity it conferred on him. The young Ryan was given miraculous medals by women in the safehouses where he took shelter. His unit would often enter a home as families were kneeling to say the rosary. Like the Whiteboys of 1762, the Ribbonmen of the 1830s and the Fenians of 1860s, his unit was not referred to by name but simply as the Boys. He wrote about being permitted to freely enter farmhouses to take shelter without even having to ask. Ryan quoted a bachelor farmer who lived alone in an isolated rundown cottage in Leitrim as saying:

> I’ll not hear a word said against ye.’ Then he made a fist of his right hand and, slapping it into the palm of his other hand, said, ‘By God, lads, ye’re welcome to come here whenever ye want. No IRA man ’ll ever be turned away from that door. God knows I haven’t much, and you know that, but the door’ll always be open and there’ll always be an IRA. (Ryan and Yeates, 2018, p. 323)

The IRA's ability to draw on community support and its members' profound sense of mission are indicative of a cultic milieu, the socio-cultural environment where countercultural ideologies, conspiracy narratives, and symbolic acts of resistance thrive. The rituals, oaths, and shared stories of struggle reflect the hallmarks of a cultic milieu, providing not only moral justification but also an almost sacred sense of purpose for its actions. Those who provided shelter would have their children sing for Ryan and his comrades as the campaign came to an end. One girl sang what Ryan described as a "beautiful and haunting rendering" of Róisín Dubh. "It was her way of acknowledging the sacrifices that had been made by the IRA men and mourning the end of an era," wrote Ryan. (Ryan and Yeates, 2018, p. 313)

The relevance of the above regarding the roots of republicanism should not be dismissed lightly. Ryan believed his efforts, suffering, and sacrifices would not be in vain and result in the creation of a unified Republic. This belief exemplifies the IRA's role as a subculture rooted in the broader republican tradition. Its members' actions were not solely political but deeply cultural, drawing on historical narratives and collective memory to legitimise their cause and sustain their identity. These dynamics reinforced the IRA's ability to persist despite political or operational setbacks. In short, his observations shed some light on the values and expectations espoused by the IRA of the time. It also illustrates the role played by tradition, kinship, and social identity in this violent continuum. In Ryan's case at least, his decision to join the IRA was driven not by politics, but by a sense of family tradition, nationalism, social identity, an interest in Irish history and a sense of adventure. "I had developed an intense interest in Ireland's struggle for freedom and a deep sense of regret I had not been born early enough to participate," wrote Ryan of the 1916 Rising after reading Michael Doheny's The Felon's Track, a memoir about life on the run after the aborted rising of 1848 (Ryan and Yeates, 2018, p. 48-49).

"The summer of 1954 was the first real indication for me that the IRA was still in existence, a discovery that felt almost like a prayer had been answered," wrote Ryan, who came from a deprived and dysfunctional family who lived in Dublin's inner city. Ryan's pathway into the IRA was typical. His sense of republicanism was influenced by his parents and the books he read but he was inspired by his environment and community. The streets close to his home in Ballybough and Seville Place were steeped in history and locals often mentioned how republican figures must have walked the same streets. This process of recruitment illustrates how the IRA

functioned as a dark network, relying on informal social ties, secretive communication, and shared ideological narratives to attract and retain members. By embedding itself within local communities, the IRA blurred the lines between the visible and invisible, making it difficult for authorities to dismantle its operational framework.

“I often thought sadly of the Young Irelander John Mitchel and how he must have passed along Seville Place on his way to the North Wall and deportation to Van Dieman’s Land,” wrote Ryan, who often stared at the bullet marks left by the British military on local buildings. This awareness of the past encouraged him to read The United Irishman newspaper, which advertised the location of republican meetings which offered a route to IRA membership. A month after he attended his Sinn meeting and asked how he could join the IRA, he was approached as he walked home. Weeks later, he began his training in the Sally Gap in the Wicklow Mountains. It is both foolish and incorrect to dismiss Operation Harvest as folly. Despite its failure, the border campaign did two things. It preserved the IRA and established an important pattern: from then onwards, the violent struggle for Irish reunification would be fought on British territory.

4.4 The Official and Provisional IRA

The IRA leadership was left dispirited at the end of the border campaign though it remained intact with a membership of approximately 1,000 volunteers (Hanley, 2013, p. 674). The task of rebuilding the organisation fell to Cathal Goulding, a veteran who became Chief of Staff in 1962 (Smith, 1995, p. 72). As previously stated, violent movements and the dark networks they inhabit, are shapeshifters. They continuously evolve and morph to survive in changing physical and political environments. They are influenced by internal and external factors. At this juncture, the movement began to drift towards Marxism under Goulding’s command as elements of the leadership believed they could exploit social unrest to become a dynamic political force. Of the change in tactics and direction, many scholars have argued the transition represented a separation from classic republicanism, but this is overstated as the IRA was never formally tied to any political ideology (Bowyer-Bell, 1970; Smith, 1995; White, 2017). The IRA had always meant different things to different men. This flexibility in identity aligns with the concept of a cultic milieu, wherein diverse ideological streams coexist within a network of belief systems, allowing the IRA to draw from both Marxist and nationalist traditions without a singular ideological commitment.

The IRA was also far from militarily dead (English, 2003, p. 84) and had in fact drawn up preliminary plans for a new campaign. In 1965, the authorities in Northern Ireland had come to believe it was planning yet another assault, possibly to appease its traditionalist element. An IRA document seized by gardai in 1966 confirmed as much. The document itself is noteworthy as it specifically uses the word terror. It also is reminiscent of the Fenians in terms of its tone, ideology, and aspirations.

> The military objective would be to engage in terror tactics only. Assuming that terror is our weapon, we must create an organisation capable of seeing it through.

There is a general view expressed in the literature, and indeed contemporary culture, of how the IRA had become a spent force until the emergence of a civil rights movement in Northern Ireland was met with violent force, spurring the formation of the Provisionals in 1969. But scholars like Bowyer-Bell (1970) English (2003) and Hanley (2013) suggest the truth is more complex.

The civil rights movement in the United States had profoundly altered race relations around the world and was manifesting itself in Northern Ireland by offering the minority Catholic population a means to express its perceptions of prejudice and discrimination in jobs and social housing (Mumford, 2011, p. 634). Its left-leaning appeal was attractive to elements of the republican movement who harnessed the discourse to reinforce their own proclamations of inherent political injustice. As a consequence, the civil rights agenda intertwined a wider social movement for change with a justificatory vehicle for renewed IRA violence (Mumford, 2011, p. 634). But what is less clear is whether the IRA's interest in the movement was conspiratorial or opportunistic. English (2003, p. 108) asserts the IRA did influence the formation of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement by advocating for its creation to undermine the Northern Ireland State and through its maintenance of a perceived threat.

> In helping to prompt political turbulence in Northern Ireland, the 1960s IRA unleashed a conflict with battlelines different from those they had anticipated, and a struggle they could not direct. Not for the first time in revolutionary history, Frankensteninian intellectuals had helped create a monster beyond their control. (English, 2013, p. 93)

Others like (Hanley, 2013, p. 672) believe there is a simpler explanation for what transpired. He argues that support for civil rights and armed rebellion were not mutually exclusive. For

example, in May 1967 and January 1968, the IRA bombed British Army recruiting offices under the direction of Liam McMillen, a leading member of the IRA who was also a figure in the civil rights movement (Hanley, 2013, p. 672). Regardless, the outbreak of sectarian violence across Northern Ireland in early 1969 and the internal debate amongst republicans over how to respond had profound implications for the movement, which split in 1969. The rift itself was caused by a proposal to end the traditional policy of abstentionism to allow republican candidates to take their seats. The IRA leadership of the time claimed this was necessary to stop the movement's opponents from capitalising on its agitationary activities. When an extraordinary army convention was called in December 1969 agreeing to the lifting of electoral participation and the creation of a national liberation front, it was too much for traditional republicans, who promptly established the Provisional IRA, leading to two IRAs (White, 2017, pp. 67-70).

The split itself was a movement-defining moment (English; 2003, p. 107; Morrison, 2017, p. 586). Of the split, English (2003, p. 107) says the schism involved the interweaving of three strands: legitimacy, ideology, and militarism. The parent organisation led by Goulding became known as the Official IRA whilst the breakaway faction became known as the Provisionals. It is easy to see the split as simply the product of the vote on abstentionism or a progressive versus traditionalist view. A more careful examination of the literature by Smith (1995) suggests there were three groups who had been hostile to Goulding, among them traditionalists. He argues that these would have broken away from Goulding regardless of what happened in Northern Ireland. For these, he argues that the policy of abstentionism was a betrayal of the republican tradition (Smith, 1995, p. 84) and its commitment to ideological absolutism which endorsed violence. The second type were Northern republicans who were not focused on traditional values but protecting their communities. The third group were those like Gerry Adams, young people who fundamentally disagreed with the Official IRA's version of events unfolding in Northern Ireland and demanded action. Regardless, few saw what was to come. Indeed, Tonge (2012, p. 221) acknowledges that anyone in the mid-1960s predicting the rebirth of the IRA followed by a major armed conflict would have struggled to find listeners. Horgan (2013, p. 9) even notes how the fledgling organisation was initially considered to be "amateurish, and clumsy" in its attempts to organise violence but went on to kill almost 2,000 people in the years that followed. The literature on the violent organisations and subcultures that existed across Ireland in the previous two centuries must now be considered. The Official IRA did not disband when the Provisionals

emerged but professed to view the armed struggle they practised as complementary to their own economic, cultural, and political resistance. Instead, the two IRAs existed side by side until the parent organisation announced a ceasefire in 1972 (Rekawek, 2013, p. 690).

The Officials had continued to utilise terrorism when it murdered the unionist politician Senator Jack Barnhill in December 1971, followed by the attempted murder of John Taylor in February 1972 (English, 2003, p. 175). It also killed seven people when it bombed the headquarters of the Parachute Regiment in Aldershot, among them five women and a Catholic priest in retaliation for Bloody Sunday, when 13 people were murdered in Derry in January 1972 by the British Army (White, 2017, p. 87). In fact, the Official IRA continued to organise attacks until May 1972 when it shot dead William Best, an off duty British Army soldier when he was on leave. Only then did it announce a ceasefire on May 29, 1972, though it went on to lead a "phantomesque existence" in the decades that followed. It morphed from "a serious potential force" numbering hundreds of men into "a very small group of gunmen and a small group of much older godfathers who operated as a sort of secret brotherhood" (Rekawek, 2011, p. 32). Put more simply, it returned to the shadows, transitioning into an illicit but secretive conspiracy. The organisation continued to exist into the 1990s. Its members collected intelligence on the Provisional IRA but it also engaged in racketeering and money laundering (The Sunday Times, 2016). By the definitions set out by Makarenko, the Official movement transitioned into a hybrid entity, which engaged in crime. The US authorities say the Official IRA, whose existence was continually monitored by gardai for decades, was involved in a conspiracy to circulate high-quality fake $100 bills, known as superdollars, throughout western Europe in the 1990s (The Sunday Times, 2016). It also murdered drug dealers in Northern Ireland. This demonstrates the durability of secret subversive groups which gravitate around physical force republicanism calling themselves the IRA but it also shows how they evolve and transition into poorly understood violent entities difficult to label.

To say the outbreak of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland had profound consequences cannot be overstated. The civil disturbances swelled the ranks of the Provisional IRA and its political wing Provisional Sinn (White, 2010, p. 345). The vast majority of those who joined were members of the minority nationalist community in Northern Ireland, who were living in local communities with strong social networks and a strong sense of local identity (Bosi and Ó

Dochartaigh, 2018). This convergence of personal and collective grievances represented a countercultural response, positioning the Provisional IRA as an oppositional force not only to British rule but to the existing socio-political structures perceived as oppressive. These areas also had a tradition and history where force was used for defensive purposes. Hence many of its new members did not come from traditional republican backgrounds but were composed of people who regarded a united Ireland as an appropriate endpoint of the process of ending oppression. They equated the Provisional IRA's armed campaign with their struggle to reclaim dignity for themselves and rejected what they felt to be the long-subordinate position of their own community (Bosi and Ó Dochartaigh, 2018, p. 43). In other words, they fused the need to reclaim a sense of honour and pride for the nationalist community in Northern Ireland to a wider political objective, that of Irish reunification. Their numbers were further bolstered by a smaller cohort of young people in the Republic, who identified with Northern nationalists, but were not themselves victims of repression (Bowyer-Bell, 1970, pp. 224-226). These were radicalised by what they viewed as oppression by Britain, which they viewed as a colonial power.

But traditional republicans did play a role in the outbreak of violence though the denial of equal rights to Catholics in Northern Ireland was not their primary motivation; theirs was Irish sovereignty, the survival of the IRA and the establishment of a united Ireland, an important distinction (McGlinchey, 2019, p. 75). Scholars like (Whiting, 2015, p. 12) say it is important to remember the IRA's image as a defender of Catholics should not be interpreted as a "severance from republican tradition" and thus argue the emergence of the birth of the Provisionals was both situational (Smith, 1995, p. 95) and ideological (Whiting, 2015, p. 12) but also evolutionary (English, 2003, p. 109).

What is of primary concern to this thesis is the role played by tradition, kinship and social identity in the new organisation and its theatre of operations. The evidence for this is overwhelming. Historically, there was stronger support in the North for the Home Rule movement than for militant republicanism (Bosi and Ó Dochartaigh, 2018, p. 39) but there also existed a distinctive tradition of physical force derived in part from a long history of agrarian violence with strong sectarian dimensions in Ulster (Kee, 1976; Dickson, 1960). There was also a history of violent street confrontations at the boundaries between segregated communities in Belfast and Derry, beginning in the 1830s (Bosi and Ó Dochartaigh, 2018, p. 39). Hence the

existence and influence of this tradition of rebellion and agitation is clear, but the forces of kinship and social identity were also at play. While there is no clear-cut profile that permits the identification of people who engage in terrorism or violent groups (della Porta 1992; Viterna 2006), for a cohort of those who joined the republican movement before 1969, their pathway to joining the Provisionals IRA was rooted in their homes (Bosi, 2012, p. 349). Their families and social networks were key vehicles for entry to the IRA demonstrating the role of tradition. The existing research suggests many of these volunteers joined the Provisionals after the split with the Official IRA as they perceived it to be more capable of continuing the traditional struggle of fighting to free Ireland from British imperialism. For those who joined after 1969 and had previously been involved in other political activities, it began with the belief that the armed struggle of the Provisionals was the only and best form of action.

Frampton (2022) pays some attention to the role played by these forces in the decision by many young people to join the Provisionals. Whilst he notes how the prospect of excitement and the desire for recognition by peers were important factors, he suggests many who joined the Provisional IRA did so mainly because of a commitment to their community. Their decision was also driven by discrimination and part of an enacted identity rather than an alignment to the traditional Republican aim of achieving Irish reunification or what the IRA leader Ruairí Ó Brádaigh would later call údarás an staire, the "mandate of history" (Frampton, 2022, p. 143). But this research makes the error of overlooking the very existence of the IRA, whose history, structure and tradition of ideological absolutism, gave direction to the new organisation that might otherwise have become one of the many short-lived revolutionary groups that emerged in Europe.

Regardless of the individual decision-making process, the role played by tradition in the organisation was apparent from the moment of its inception. The Provisionals sought to situate themselves within a clear historical tradition, tracing their lineage back to the IRA who fought the War of Independence. The first statement issued by the Provisional Army Council on December 28, 1969, declared its "allegiance to the 32-County Irish Republic, proclaimed at Easter 1916, established by the first Dáil Éireann in 1919, overthrown by force of arms in 1922 and suppressed to this day by the existing British-imposed six-county and 26-county partition state" (Smith, 1995, p. 83). The authority of the Second Dáil, they said, was passed to the IRA

Army Council in 1938 by those “faithful” members who refused to accept the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty and the partition of Ireland (Frampton, 2022, p. 142). The first army council also sought to give itself further legitimacy by securing the blessing of Tom Maguire, the sole surviving member of the Second Dáil.

This ideological commitment to violence, justified by Irish history, was accompanied by a rudimentary understanding of the relationship between violence and politics (Page and Smith, 2000, pp. 79-104) which bore striking similarities to the anti-Treaty IRA of yesteryear. The reliance on violent traditions as a form of legitimacy underscores the movement's self-perception as the inheritors of a historical struggle, reinforcing their actions as necessary continuations of past rebellions rather than isolated acts of terror. The Provisional’s strict adherence to the IRA’s tradition of ideological absolutism became apparent once again after its leadership entered into talks with the British in 1972 in the mistaken belief London would surrender or issue a commitment to leave Northern Ireland. When the talks failed, it resulted in the Bloody Friday and Claudy bombings in which more than a dozen people were killed. Page and Smith (2000) describe this view as representative of the “romantic” republican tradition which viewed violence as essential for the expulsion of the British from Ireland.

The Provisional IRA ran a sustained and prolonged terror campaign in Northern Ireland, unparalleled in Western Europe since World War II (Schmidt, 2010, p. 10). The Provisionals became one of the best equipped, and most experienced and ruthless terrorist organisations in the world. It conducted thousands of attacks resulting in the death or injury of thousands, civilian, military, police, and paramilitaries on all sides including their own (Finnegan, 2019, pp. 351-352). Essentially it sought to render Northern Ireland ungovernable through a campaign of violence. The Provisionals were organised into loose territorial brigades made up of thousands of members, who carried out sniper attacks, shootings, bombings, and arson (White and White, 1991). It was responsible for almost half of all fatalities, killing over 1,700 people (McKittrick et al. 1999, pp. 1,475) who died in the Troubles. The campaign it waged was unprecedented in Irish history.

The IRA was able to strike at the heart of the British political establishment, targeting Margaret Thatcher and her Tory cabinet at Brighton in 1984 and mortar bombing Downing Street in 1991 (Hanley, 2023, pp. 51-52). It killed diplomats, politicians, and judges, as well as hundreds of

soldiers and policemen, including gardai. It was responsible for over 100 deaths and over 2,000 injuries in Britain alone (Hanley, 2023, pp. 51-52). During the early 1990s, its bombs devastated the commercial centre of London (McGladdery, 2006, pp. 226–229). The IRA also carried out attacks in mainland Europe and smuggled weapons from North America, the Middle East and North Africa. It also gave rise to violent anti-drugs organisations that intimidated, targeted and murdered criminals on both sides of the border in activities like those of the Whiteboys and Ribbonmen. For many of its members, its terrorism was a response to state violence. For others, murdering drug dealers in Dublin was their duty (Mooney, 2013, pp. 110-120). Sections of it also engaged in criminal activity including extortion, fuel smuggling and armed robbery, often in conjunction with organised crime gangs in Ireland, Britain, Europe and the United States.

“People sometimes had no other choice but to defend themselves,” wrote Patrick Magee, who planted the Brighton bomb (Magee, 2021, p. 137). His views are reflective of the republicans who joined the IRA in response to their own personal grievances. On the other hand, the traditionalists saw the organisation as continuing a historic fight against British occupation and were never interested in civil rights (McGlinchey, 2019, pp. 69–88), which helps explain what subsequently transpired when the movement accepted that armed struggle alone would not be enough to force Britain from Ireland. This process began around 1980 when Sinn engaged in political activism around a prison dispute in which republican prisoners demanded the right to be treated as political, as opposed to criminal inmates (Moloney, 2002, pp. 189-190). When their demands were not met, the IRA prisoners went on hunger strike. The first hunger strike ended but a fresh strike began in 1981, providing the opportunity for Sinn Féin to become more involved in electoral politics but ultimately resulted in the self-inflicted death of ten prisoners though it radicalised nationalist politics in a way not seen since the British executed the leaders of 1916 (Moloney, 2002, pp. 214-215).

Providing an exhaustive history of the Provisionals journey towards constitutional politics and the decommissioning of their weapons would be extraneous for the purpose of this research. But it is necessary to examine the influence of tradition, kinship, and social identity on two specific events as they gave rise to violent dissident republicanism. The first occurred in 1986 when traditionalists led by O Bradaigh declared that the IRA could not “ride two horses at the same time” when the movement voted to end its policy on abstentionism (English, 2003, p. 251). The

traditionalists argued that the politicisation of the IRA would lead to the subordination of the armed struggle to political control. They also secured the support of Tom Maguire, the sole survivor of the second Dáil, who issued a statement to say he did not recognise the legitimacy of any army council that would enter Leinster House. When the Continuity IRA, a new breakaway movement, emerged, Maguire recognised them as the true inheritors of the republican flame - a flame he helped pass to the IRA in 1938 (English, 2003, p. 253). The second split happened in 1997 when the Provisionals voted to endorse solely democratic means at an extraordinary army convention held in Donegal in October 1997 (Moloney, 2002; Mooney, O'Toole, 2003). The breakaway faction was led by Michael McKevitt, the IRA's quartermaster general, who had opposed two IRA ceasefires announced in 1994 and 1997 designed to encourage support for Sinn Féin. McKevitt, the IRA's executive, and some of its most able departments resigned when the organisation voted to adopt the Mitchell Principles and sought a dispensation to ignore the IRA's own constitution, if required. Those who resigned, described as the IRA within the IRA, went on to establish the Real IRA, giving rise to a new violent movement (Mooney, O'Toole, 2003).

4.5 Conclusion

The study of the IRA in the twentieth century reveals an illicit organisation that is driven by a myriad of factors including republican ideology, culture and organisational survival. Despite the rich array of academic perspectives on its history, strategy, and tactics, much of the literature underrepresents the significance of tradition, kinship, and social identity in shaping the IRA's evolution but also its resilience. The IRA's ability to endure through decades of political upheaval, state suppression, internal divisions and societal change is deeply rooted in these cultural and social underpinnings, which have provided both a framework for action and a source of collective identity. While scholars such as Smith, English, and Bowyer-Bell have highlighted elements of tradition and ideology in sustaining the IRA, broader recognition of these factors as constitutive of a subcultural phenomenon remains limited. This oversight neglects the degree to which the IRA has functioned not only as a political, military and terrorist entity but also as a living repository of violent republican heritage - a tradition enriched and preserved through familial legacies, communal loyalties, and historical narratives inside a dark network that is itself continually evolving.

The concept of violent subculture, underpinned by dark networks, counterculture belief systems and ideological absolutism, is critical to understanding the IRA's persistence. This subcultural dimension has allowed the IRA to secretly operate in the margins of society, drawing on the solidarity of close-knit communities in both urban and rural communities and the moral authority conferred by historical grievances. By situating the IRA within this broader sociocultural framework, as opposed to simply viewing it as a terrorist group, this chapter demonstrates that violent republicanism is not simply a terrorist movement or even a response to political conditions, or an expression of uber-nationalism, but also an enduring tradition sustained by its ability to adapt, regenerate, and retain relevance across generations.

This thesis does not argue that traditional violent republicanism should be viewed solely as a subculture or counterculture but viewing it through this lens does help explain aspects of the movement that appear illogical to outsiders. As republicans themselves say, you must one of them to understand them. As this thesis progresses to document the modern iterations of this violent movement, it is crucial to understand the myriad of internal and external influences that shape modern terrorist groups, violent subcultures, hybrid organisations and organised crime gangs, and the dark networks they inhabit as outlined in Chapter 2. Violent dissident republicanism may once have been considered peace spoilers or a residue of the Northern Ireland Peace Process, but as will be demonstrated, it has now evolved into a subculture sustained by a cultic milieu whose thinking is shaped by the interplay of domestic and international politics, technological advancements, societal change, criminality, geographic factors, immigration dynamics, and financial systems.

Chapter 5 The New Republicans

Introduction

This chapter investigates the emergence of violent dissident republicans in 1986 and follows their evolution to the final months of 2025, paying close attention to the role played by kinship, tradition and social identity in their direction. This research seeks to document how this violent movement has undergone radical change and transitioned into a violent subculture, where vigilantism, criminality and radical ideologies are normalised, accepted and perpetuated. In essence it argues that violent dissident republicans should no longer be viewed as ultras who simply refuse to end their war against the British occupation of Northern Ireland but rather a collective of traditional republicans, hybrids, gangs, extremists, vigilantes and criminals who endorse violence for both political, vigilante and criminal ends. The question is how did this happen and why?

To answer these questions, one must first understand that violent republicanism does not exist in a vacuum. It is shaped by its environment. The Whiteboys, United Irishmen, Ribbonmen, Fenians and the IRA in all its eras were influenced by the social progress of their time. Violent dissidents are no different. Social progress, societal change, domestic and geo-politics, globalisation, countercultures and the ever-changing dynamics of the dark networks and social milieus they inhabit have transformed them in startling ways, paradoxically strengthening and weakening them at the same time.

Chapter 5 advances the argument that collectively violent dissidents are hybrids in every sense of the word: a blend of the very old and the new. Much of this section draws on information gleaned from interviews with dissidents and their families, their victims, serious criminals, police and intelligence officers and classified documents to reveal the inner workings of this complex movement. Where such information is used, the primary sources are noted.

Chapter 5 offers seven sections which explore parts of the movement, whose components blur the boundaries between political violence, criminality, and subcultural identity. Section 5.1 explores the inception of dissident paramilitary groups and their offshoots, whose initial establishment followed the familiar pattern of ultra-factions breaking away from a parent organisation to continue their campaign of violence. It documents the schisms which led to their

formation, their competing ideologies, amalgamations and efforts to gain recognition as the true IRA but it also provides insights into their structures and internal dynamics. Attention is also paid to the groups that have spontaneously appeared only to vanish in Northern Ireland. This section sets out how these violent groups exist alongside a number of armed, but dormant IRA entities, outlining how these residual and shadow networks survive, thus demonstrating a durability built around a sense of tradition, kinship and social identity.

Section 5.2 explores the construct and command structure of dissident groups, focusing on the internal decision-making processes that shape their day-to-day existence. These groups once sought to replicate the command structure of the Provisional IRA but most have transitioned into decentralised entities, like identity based gang networks. This section examines their use of titles, initiation rituals and other methods to foster in-group harmony, security and cohesion. Section 5.3 addresses the issue of recruitment into dissident groups through family, friends and acquaintances. It explores how violent dissidents use initiation rituals to induct newcomers into their groups which helps foster in-group cohesion and camaraderie and bolster a sense of social identity. Section 5.4 explores the use of violence by dissidents from their emergence in 1986. It documents their use of both conventional and improvised weapons, how weapons are acquired, attacks are planned, organised, and executed, shedding light on the strategic and tactical dimensions of their paramilitary operations. It pays particular attention to how dissident violence has transitioned from classical terrorism involving the use of car bombs and mortars to more hybridised forms of violence that blur the boundaries between ideological militancy, vigilantism and organised crime. It is remarkable that violent dissident republicanism has managed to persist across the island of Ireland in defiance of the public odium it provokes. Hence Section 5.5 examines dissidents online while Section 5.6 charts the Irish and British governments' efforts to disband dissident groups through anti-terrorist legislation and political engagement. It also sets out how their security services confront dissident groups, examining the strategies employed to counter their influence and activities. This includes the recruitment of agents inside groups, the use of intermediaries to engage or negotiate with them, the deployment of inducements to undermine loyalty within their ranks, and the extensive use of surveillance to monitor and disrupt their operations. The section also considers the broader societal responses and their impact on the effectiveness of state efforts.

Section 5.7 explores the ideology of violent dissidents, who use Irish history and the sacrifices of previous generations to justify their violence. Ideology is used to promote a sense of kinship among adherents, who may hold no republican beliefs and be ignorant of Irish history, yet find in the movement a sense of belonging, status and purpose. The sections are followed by an orderly conclusion that evaluates the findings of the research and provides a cohesive summary of the key themes discussed.

5.1 The History and Evolution of Violent Dissident Republicanism

The emergence of peace spoilers and their propensity to engage in political violence has been extensively explored in the literature (Asal et al., 2011; Darby and McGinty, 2000; Hogan and Walker, 1989). Peace spoilers are a common feature of peace initiatives, developing in response to perceived compromises and supposed capitulations by their leaderships (Morrison, 2017, pp. 222-223) but as outlined in the previous chapters, the dissident republican groups of today are better understood as a violent subculture, albeit one built around a tradition that has existed in Ireland since the late 18th century.

There are five dissident republican organisations operating on the island of Ireland: the Continuity IRA, Real IRA, Óglaigh na hÉireann, New IRA and Arm na Phoblachta. The Continuity IRA and Óglaigh na hÉireann are internally fragmented and broken into rival factions but others like New IRA and Arm na Phoblachta are unified and led by a leadership. The groups vary in strength and ability. The activities of small groups like Arm na Phoblachta and Real IRA are confined to defined geographical locations but others like New IRA are national organisations. [1] In addition to the violent dissidents, two historically significant paramilitary organisations - the Provisional IRA and possibly the Official IRA - continue to exist although they remain dormant. The Provisionals continue to meet and gather intelligence and hold weapons. It still retains its vast arsenal of weapons although these have been put verifiably beyond use in underground facilities situated in the border region of the Irish Republic. [2] The IRA did not destroy its weapons in accordance with its own constitution but sealed them in underground storage facilities. [3]

In addition to the active dissident and dormant republican groups, there are armed factions and paramilitary organisations that engage in illicit and criminal activity. One such family group is based in the South Armagh-Louth border region and is led by Liam Campbell, a former

Provisional and Real IRA leader. Other non-aligned republican groups exist in the midlands and border region. [4] There exist other entities that fall under the republican paramilitary umbrella and are actively involved in criminal activity though not terrorism as they officially support the Northern Irish Peace Process. The Irish National Liberation Army, which is on ceasefire, has morphed into a hybrid as described by Makarenko (2004), blending residual paramilitary structures with organised crime. It has split into two factions: the parent group and the New Irish National Liberation Army, both involved in organised crime.

Dissident groups now inhabit a complex ecosystem in which their individual motivations, strategies, and levels of visibility vary widely, underscoring why they should no longer be described as a terrorist movement but rather a collective of actors with differing aims, capabilities, behaviours and objectives. Their evolution from peace-spoilers to a mixture of factions, hybrids, gangs, extremists, left-wing agitators, secret societies and criminals has been shaped by factors such as the backgrounds of individual members, their personal histories and social networks, and their political beliefs. Therefore, understanding them requires not just an examination of their history and stated objectives, but an insight into how a combination of social progress, policing operations and organisational survival has transformed them into a hydra-like movement that few outside their ranks understand.

5.1.1 The Continuity Army Council of the IRA

The Continuity IRA, the armed wing of Republican Sinn Féin, was the first dissident group to emerge from the ranks of the Provisionals in late 1986. The political context which led to its formation has been extensively explored by scholars including Bowyer-Bell (2020, pp. 68-70), Frampton (2011, pp. 73-74), Moloney (2002, pp. 289), Horgan (2013, pp. 22-27), White (2017, pp. 222-239) and more recently McGlinchey (2019, pp. 19-24), who describes them as the first republican ultras. The cause of the schism itself was ideological: the Provisionals and Sinn Féin's decision to abandon their longstanding policy of abstentionism from Dáil Éireann. Frampton (2011, pp. 47-85) argues that abstentionism, for many republicans, was more than a tactic, it was a defining feature of their identity. The decision to drop abstentionism resulted in the formation of Republican Sinn Féin and what became known as the Continuity IRA, though Horgan correctly suggests other issues might also have played a role (Horgan, 2013, pp. 22-27). He has described these as "north versus south" or alternatively the "old guard versus young guard."

The breakaway group sought to obtain legitimacy from Tom Maguire, the sole surviving member of the last all-Ireland Dáil who issued a statement declaring the group to be the true IRA and discounting the claims of the Provisionals (Frampton; 2011, p. 74; Horgan, 2013, p. 25). This was a deliberate attempt to directly associate the new organisation with Óglaigh na hÉireann, or the true IRA (Whiting, 2015, p. 146).

The Continuity IRA itself was formed in late 1986. It was modelled on the IRA with an executive and army council appointed to run its paramilitary campaign, demonstrating the role of tradition. Its leadership put an undue effort on intelligence collection and vetting new members, who were not sworn in, but asked to make a declaration of commitment to the IRA as per its 1921 rules, in strict adherence to tradition. [5] The group armed itself gradually and did not steal weapons from the Provisionals should it provoke attacks or a feud. Instead, it bought guns but also acquired weapons from arms dumps dating back to the War of Independence, which had been lost by the IRA but maintained by republican families. Testimony from a founding member highlights this method of procurement:

> Getting our hands on weapons was a challenge. When we left, one man approached us to say he had a dump on his farm going back to the Tan War. There were rifles and shorts (handguns). The stocks of the rifles were rotten and destroyed but there were about five shorts that had been greased up. They were working perfectly. [6]

Weapons and ammunition were also bought from Provisionals, who had access to surplus arms. A quantity of AK47s - possibly five rifles and magazines - were purchased for £500 by a member of the army council. The group received funding to buy more through supporters in the United States. The Continuity IRA remained operationally inactive until 1994 when garda intelligence concluded it was planning to commence a terrorist campaign in response to the Provisionals ceasefire of August 1994. [7] Notably, the garda began arresting people aligned to Republican Sinn Féin throughout 1995. Among them were five men and a woman caught in possession of a sawn-off shotgun, a revolver, five shotgun cartridges and two rounds of ammunition in Tallaght on the outskirts of Dublin in May 1995 (The Irish Times, 1996). A large bomb was found at Etra in Carrickmacross, Monaghan, in November of the same year (The Irish Times, 1997). The group’s first documented attack took place in July 1996 when it bombed the Killyhevin hotel in Fermanagh (O'Halloran, 1996).

The term Continuity is now a label used to describe several paramilitary factions and gangs which ostensibly oppose the British presence in Northern Ireland but only one remains politically aligned with Republican Sinn Féin. [8] Its drift towards factionalism and serious crime began in 2003 when elements of the organisation abandoned their opposition to rival groups. In 1998, Continuity IRA members in the border region began cooperating with the newly formed Real IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army to carry out attacks without approval from the leadership. [9] The alliance culminated in the bombing of Omagh in Tyrone on August 15, 1998, the single biggest loss of life in the troubles. [10] At the time, both the Real IRA and Continuity IRA were engaged in a process to potentially unify (Mooney, O'Toole, 2003) but this collapsed due to the public outrage caused by the deaths of 29 people and unborn twin girls at Omagh. The public odium which followed the atrocity caused its leadership to become deeply cautious about its utilisation of terrorism. The Real IRA also applied internal brakes to its activities (Morrison, 2020). The possibility of civilian casualties, even if not on the scale of Omagh, posed a severe threat to their continued existence - a prospect that created significant internal friction. Thus began the deconstruction of Continuity IRA, which slowly morphed into a decentralised group involved in both crime and terrorism.

By 2004, the Independent Monitoring Commission was reporting that it was recruiting and training new members, improving its capacity to use explosives and weapons, though it noted how it was not coherently organised and suffered from internal feuding. New factions emerged from its ranks but some vanished. Among them Saor Uladh (IMC, 2011, p. 10), Saoirse na hÉireann (IMC, 2006, p. 16), a group called Óglaigh na hÉireann whose members engaged in serious crime (IMC, 2009, p. 10).

5.1.2 The Real IRA and New IRA

The New IRA is the largest of the dissident groups that oppose the Northern Ireland Peace Process. It's an amalgamation of three groups - Real IRA, Republican Action Against Drugs and independent republicans - which unified between 2010 and 2011. The Real IRA itself emerged from the ranks of Provisionals in October 1997 following a dispute over its decision to accept the principles of consent as part of the Peace Process (Moloney, 2002, pp. 444-454; Mooney and O'Toole, 2003, pp. 25-28; Horgan, 2013, pp. 31-33). The group initially called itself Óglaigh na hÉireann, the term used by all iterations of the IRA, but quickly became known as the Reals to

distinguish itself from the Provisionals (Horgan, 2013, p. 33). Its political wing was the 32 County Sovereignty Committee. On its inception, Real IRA organised a bombing campaign in conjunction with the Continuity faction and sections of the Irish National Liberation Army which had two objectives. The first was to collapse the fledgling Peace Process whilst the second was to enable the leadership of the new organisation to seize control of the Provisionals and its weapons (Nally Report, 2003). In doing so, it sought to establish itself as the true inheritor of the republican tradition (Currie and Taylor, 2011, p. 104; Mooney and O'Toole, 2003, pp. 43-49).

The organisation commenced a bombing campaign against towns across Northern Ireland in early 1998 which culminated in the Omagh bombing. The public outrage which followed prompted the Real IRA to announce a temporary ceasefire (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003, pp. 171-181) as it alone had claimed responsibility for the attack. This was quickly followed by a full ceasefire on September 8 (Morrison, 2020, pp. 157- 158) though it regrouped in 2000. It launched a second bombing campaign in Britain, but this soon too petered out.

Going forward, the Real IRA engaged in a process of organisational survival by applying internal brakes to its violent campaign (Morrison, 2020, p. 161). The tactic of using car bombs in Northern Ireland was only occasionally revisited should it undermine public support or increase the backlash by the legislature and security services (Morrison, 2015, p. 161). But this was only part of the reason. Informers coupled with enhanced investigation techniques and the advent of technology usually enabled the authorities to catch the bombers quick fast (Tendler, 2003). Across Europe, states and their intelligence services were exploiting new technologies which allowed them to penetrate terrorist groups, compromising their operations and making it impossible for them to organise anything but short and limited campaigns (Hegghammer, 2021). But such social progress coupled with the imprisonment of important personnel between 2003 and 2006 facilitated a shift in internal power dynamics, allowing individuals with weak or no ideological commitment and overtly criminal intentions to join and assume control, causing a drift away from traditional republicanism. The new members permitted recruits to "swear in" friends causing the group to morph into a hybrid [11] which ultimately caused it to rupture and transition into a geographically fragmented and decentralised group. [12] The internal frictions led to factionalism, leaving it lacking cohesion (Horgan, 2013, p. 178; Morrison, 2015, p. 196; Currie and Taylor, 2011, pp. 107-108).

A split itself occurred in 2006 with the breakaway faction calling itself Óglaigh na hÉireann, leaving the original entity mired in criminality. Alan Ryan, its leader in Dublin, became known for extorting money from drug dealers and criminal gangs. [13] Those who refused to pay were murdered. It is impossible to overstate how this group's drift towards organised crime and drug dealers, who it used to act as enforcers, represented a seismic shift given the Provisional's stated opposition to the drugs trade. Why did this happen? The founding members of Real IRA had little understanding of the lifestyles led by its younger recruits. As one interviewee said: "You would never have put these people in the same room." [14]

Following an internal purge to root out criminals, the New IRA came into existence in late 2010, demonstrating yet again how invisible forces like tradition, kinship and social identity help preserve and influence the movement. The potential for any form of unification by dissident factions had been dismissed by scholars because it hadn't occurred previously yet it's exactly what happened. The conception of the New IRA, Morrison wrote, had its foundation in the need to legitimise dissident violence, and to present a more united voice for people to trust and support (Morrison, 2017, p. 558). The New IRA's aim was to appeal to a wider population and to put forward a united republican movement in opposition not only to British occupation, but also to Sinn Féin and the Peace Process (Morrison, 2015, p. 196). However, the overriding reason was not political but rather the need to disassociate the modern IRA from organised crime and racketeering. In the public's mind, the Real IRA had become synonymous with extortion (BBC, 2012), racketeering and gangland killings (Lally, 2011) which had given rise to further splits. The Real IRA in Cork had broken away from the movement to form an autonomous group, which still calls itself the Real IRA. Another group loyal to the deposed leader Liam Campell also emerged from its ranks. The New IRA is now the largest dissident paramilitary organisation operating on the island of Ireland, adhering to the traditions of the IRA [15] with an elected army council and executive, but it's now beginning to fracture and become factionalised. The amalgamation of the Real IRA, anti-drugs vigilantes and independent republicans only delayed its transition into a decentralised and factionalised entity, which is quasi-political but vigilante and illicit in nature.

5.1.3 Óglaigh na hÉireann

As stated earlier, Óglaigh na hÉireann emerged from an intra-organisational dispute in the Real IRA around 2006 (Morrison, 2015, p. 187) but its existence only became public around 2009. Its core membership consisted of dissidents who remained loyal to the original Real IRA leadership but opposed the new one led by Campbell, which it accused of transforming the organisation into an organised crime gang. These dissidents were soon joined by Provisionals who opposed the decommissioning of IRA weapons. The Republican Network for Unity acted as its political wing.

Óglaigh na hÉireann was initially led by Seamus McGrane, a dissident from Dromiskin in Louth who had served as the chairman of Provisional's army executive. It commenced its terrorist campaign in 2010 when it placed a bomb under a police officer's car in Belfast, inflicting horrific injuries. The group earned a reputation for using both improvised explosive devices and conventional weapons. More recently, its members have produced FGC-9s, a type of 3D printed gun, at paramilitary displays in Belfast (Mooney, 2022). The group declared a ceasefire in 2018 following engagement with community leaders in Northern Ireland but then transitioned into a vigilante style group, killing eight people involved in drug trafficking across Northern Ireland. In 2024, it announced it had replaced the leadership, which had endorsed its earlier ceasefire and severed its connections with its political wing the Republican Network for Unity.

5.1.4 Arm na Phoblachta

Arm na Phoblachta is composed of former members of paramilitary organisations, including the Continuity IRA and Óglaigh na hÉireann. It emerged in 2017 and has since established a limited but notable presence in areas such as Derry, Armagh and Belfast. Arm na Phoblachta's operational capacity was first demonstrated in November 2017, when it claimed responsibility for placing an explosively formed projectile in the Poleglass of west Belfast. This incident underscored the group's interest in acquiring and deploying technically sophisticated weaponry more commonly associated with more well-established dissident organisations. It has since morphed into a vigilante style group. In February 2018, it was implicated in the killing of Raymond Johnston, a drug dealer from Antrim (ITVX, 2018). The attack marked a significant escalation in its activities, representing the first direct attribution of a murder to the group.

5.2 The Construct of Violent Dissident Republican Organisations

Tradition, kinship and social identity have consistently shaped the direction of dissident republicanism since 1986. They have influenced the evolution of the movement, its ideologies and splits, but also the underworld which they inhabit. Evidence of this can be seen from the groups as they tried to recreate the command structure of the Provisionals and its use of military ranks and titles. Adhering to tradition, some also adopted the IRA's constitution, which promised to guard and honour and uphold the sovereignty of the Republic of Ireland and to support the establishment of an Irish socialist republic based on the 1916 Proclamation. Following their inception, the Continuity and Real IRA also attempted to copy the Provisional's cellular-based structure, ensuring both operational and non-operational efficiency though on a much smaller level. It would be extraneous to provide an exhaustive analysis of the Provisional's command structure, but it is necessary to offer an overview to demonstrate the influence of tradition.

The Provisionals operated a hierarchical yet compartmentalised structure to enhance its operational security and effectiveness following a reorganisation in the late 1970s (Horgan and Taylor, 1997). The organisation was guided by an army executive, a body elected by delegates at conventions, but its day-to-day running was overseen by an army council, which directed its general headquarters staff and departments including operations, quartermaster, intelligence, propaganda and training sections. These worked across two geographical commands.

Northern command oversaw terrorist activities in Northern Ireland and the five counties which straddle the border between the Republic and Northern Ireland. It was made up of brigades, each with active service units of around four volunteers and an officer commanding, known as an OC. Southern command operated as a logistical base, maintaining safehouses, training camps, bomb factories, arms storage, and funding. Though less operationally significant, it played a critical support role, often supplying personnel and resources to Northern Command (Horgan and Taylor, 1997).

IRA active service units, which carried a myriad of activities, were small, specialised, and semi-autonomous cells who carried out bombings or gun attacks. These operated within their local areas, but some were deployed in Britain and Europe. The group was structured to ensure it remained highly effective under a centralised command. In attempting to recreate the Provisional's structure, the dissidents ignored their own operational strengths, the political

realities of the time, and crucially social progress and advances in technology, putting them on a path to what they ultimately became: for the most part decentralised entities. How and why did this happen? The campaigns run by loyalist and republican paramilitaries in Northern Ireland had effectively collapsed in the 1990s under the weight of state countermeasures (Hegghammer, 2021). The same happened to the dissidents in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In the case of the Real IRA, the security services stopped most of their attacks in the first eight months of 1998 until they bombed Omagh, prompting them to switch tactics.

The founding members of the Real IRA - Michael McKevitt, Seamus McGrane and Liam Campbell - were all imprisoned allowing less experienced and ideologically committed republicans to assume control. When the New IRA and factions of the Continuity IRA attempted to hold army council meetings, they were inevitably compromised with delegates arrested, charged and convicted (Brady, 2017; Mooney, 2020). The dissidents discovered it was now very difficult to group plan attacks. Like all terrorists operating within Western democracies, they became small-scale operations that veered into criminality and extremism - surviving largely because their attacks caused few casualties and thus did not draw significant attention from the state. Hence the violent dissident groups of today are decentralised entities not by choice but of necessity. Although some groups and republican gangs have retained the titles and the names of the IRA's command structure for reputational as opposed to operational reasons, most groups and gangs operate autonomously. Except for the New IRA, most are led by people involved in criminality.

To understand the command structures of a violent organisation like a republican paramilitary group, one must understand what drives its leadership and followers, its inter-organisational dynamics and decision-making processes. A comprehensive understanding of this complex phenomenon requires an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating knowledge from political, historical, and cultural contexts, since terrorism is a product of its own time and place (Hoffman, 2006; Richardson, 2007). To begin, the founding members of both the Real IRA and Continuity IRA were for the most part known IRA volunteers who had limited involvement in politics, reflecting their wish to be recognised as IRA volunteers. The breakaway factions provided them with vehicles for enacting that identity in the face of major changes in the wider political context of the Northern Ireland Peace Process, like what has already been documented in the

Provisionals by (Bosi and Ó Dochartaigh, 2018; Einwohner, 2003). Joining the dissidents was the enactment of a republican identity that was traditional, subversive and historic, but not overtly political. None believed their organisations could deliver the IRA's stated objective of achieving a unified Ireland but they wished to preserve and be part of the IRA.

But other factors like social progress were at play. The evolution of the Real IRA from the date of its inception to its transformation into the New IRA illustrates this. As stated above, by 2012, the majority of the Real IRA's leadership had been imprisoned or had left the organisation to be replaced by people drawn from both urban and rural communities, whose actions were sometimes but not always directed by influential republicans, who did not wish to risk arrest or imprisonment.

A good example of this was Peter Butterly, a farmer from Tougher in Louth, made Real IRA chief of staff by Liam Campbell. Butterly was given limited training, put in charge of fundraising and operations for Northern Ireland despite having no prior involvement in violent republicanism. He and his wife Eithne had permitted McKevitt, McGrane and Campbell to live at their home after the Omagh bombing but Butterly was never a volunteer. Yet years later, he was sworn-into the Real IRA at an ad hoc ceremony held in his sitting room when he placed his hand on the Dirty War by Martin Dillon, which contained a copy of the Green Book. Under Butterly's tenure, the Real IRA was run as a fragmented and decentralised paramilitary group solely focused on generating funds through extortion. Members were given IRA titles but they did not operate under any real command. Butterly would not meet members in Dublin for security reasons. The type of violence utilised became varied.

In the Republic, Real IRA gangs became synonymous with killing drug dealers who refused to pay extortion demands and killing its own members for transgressions. In Northern Ireland, the group organised a limited terrorist campaign which targeted members of the police, military and prison service, but became focused on crime. The profile of its victims killed during his tenure illustrates this. The Real IRA murdered a succession of criminals in Dublin along with its own members who it accused of drug dealing. For example, in 2010, the Real IRA shot a volunteer called Kieran Doherty from Donegal. [16] Doherty's murder followed the discovery of a cannabis grow house in a property owned by Seamus McGreevy, a long-standing dissident from Louth. McGreevy was not involved in the drugs trade but died by suicide after his property was

raided (Lally, 2010). Real IRA member Peter Butterly was murdered in 2012 (O'Riordan, 2019). Aidan O'Driscoll, another dissident, was murdered in Cork in 2016 by Real IRA members, including a teenager (O'Riordan, 2019). None of the killings were politically motivated.

The decision-making processes and command structure of dissident groups, gangs, and factions now vary considerably: no two are exactly alike. Most have no real command structure but organise shootings, beating and attacks on perceived enemies in an opportunistic way. [17]

The New IRA has a nominal centralised command but rarely meets for security reasons. Attacks are still authorised by its army council, which assigns specific tasks to members involved in an operation, but such gatherings are rare. [18] Smaller groups like Óglaigh na hÉireann and Arm na Phoblachta do not have defined leaderships but are run like organised crime gangs. They engage in violence acts to project power, engage in crime, perform paramilitary policing roles and occasionally carry out terrorist type attacks but there is no strategy behind it.

5.3 Recruitment, Induction, Membership and Public Support

Studies of people who become radicalised and recruited into terroristic activism show there is no consistent profile that characterises them (Bjørgo, 2015, p. 30) but it is generally accepted there are three or four types, each characterised by different backgrounds and motivations. Among them ideological activists, fellow travellers, socially frustrated actors and adventurers. All can be found in dissident groups, but their ranks are also filled with criminals, reflecting their hybrid nature. There are no accurate figures on the number of people who have joined, or support dissident republican groups. Horgan's 2013 study identified 662 people involved in dissident activity from a variety of open sources. Of the 662, 283 were involved in political dissent. Of the study group, Horgan found two prominent age ranges; 14 to 30-year olds and 31 to 50-year olds, a trend which deserves close attention (Horgan, 2013, p. 99) as the younger age cohort had no adult experience of the Troubles and were born after the IRA's 1994 ceasefire. A separate study found a significant number of dissidents were recruited in the Republic (Horgan and Gill, 2011, p. 51). The average age of these dissidents was 35-years old. Whilst the above studies present an insight into dissidents at the time, the figures were collected from open-source material. They did not include information on dissident republicans who had no criminal records, had never been arrested and did not openly engage in any political activity of which there were many (Garda Síochána, 1999). The study acknowledged as much (Horgan, 2013, p. 72). Garda intelligence

documents made available for this research show those who held senior positions in both the Real IRA and Continuity IRA often had no criminal records, had never been arrested, and did not openly engage in any political activity, yet they were actively involved in violent republicanism (An Garda Síochána, 1998). One intelligence report on the Real IRA's quartermaster for Munster at the time noted how he had survived for 20 years without a conviction despite controlling vast quantities of weapons (An Garda Síochána, 1998). Other garda intelligence documents provide the names of dozens of suspects. So how do people join? There is no single pathway. Youth organisations are a potential entry point for young people into violent dissident groups (Frampton 2011, pp. 77-78) but this topic remains under-researched.

There is, at this juncture, a need to consider not just how people join dissident paramilitary groups but also why to consider the role played by tradition, kinship and social identity. There is an established body of literature which examines why people engage in political violence (Crenshaw 1981; Sageman, 2004: Cronin, 2009; Della Porta, 2014; Crenshaw, 2014; Horgan, 2014). An extensive body of literature on recruitment into republican paramilitary organisations during the Northern Ireland conflict also exists but the area is under-researched in the context of republican ultras (Bjørgo, 2005; Bosi, 2012). But past research shows the importance of collective identity, perceived threats, community grievance, and family issues in fuelling initial engagement (Reinisch, 2020, p. 706) but these are no longer as relevant.

In the context of what drives people to pledge their allegiance to republican ultra groups, Morrison (2017) raises an important question; why do people engage in dissident violence and not engage in mainstream republicanism? In short, Morrison urges a clear respect for the heterogeneity of individuals who engage in terrorism. His research suggests that violent dissidents are influenced by other individuals, who were not necessarily republicans themselves. In each of the major splits from 1969 to 1997 one of the most effective strategies was the use of well-respected influential individuals to legitimise the position taken by a group or specific sub-group. Although this traditional route into ultra-republican organisations may still be an issue, it can no longer be regarded as universally applicable as dissident groups now function less as terrorist organisations but more as networked violent groups built around an ideology. As such there is no longer a standard pathway into them.

Involvement in social groups is frequently a gradual process possibly taking years; and joining a dissident group is no exception. Some interviewees cited a combination of “tradition and Irish history” and “the Provos leaving unfinished business in their wake” but seemed ignorant of republican history when questioned. Others said they could not envisage not being a member of the IRA, or a republican. Members and recruits interviewed pledged their allegiance to each other, the movement and a very general form of republican ideology. The investigation into the Omagh bombing produced evidence, which in hindsight, indicated the power of tradition, kinship and social identity on the movement. It showed dissidents had no real interest in their chosen branches of republicanism and its politics but were wedded to a belief system built around tradition, kinship and social identity but also violence. In 1998, the members of the Real IRA and Continuity IRA began to help each other and cooperate despite their leadership's wishes, suggesting friendships, bonds and beliefs were overriding loyalty towards any organisation. Evidence of this was outlined in admissions made by Colm Murphy, a member of the Continuity IRA, who provided mobile phones to the Real IRA to use in the bombing (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003, p. 274). Whilst under arrest, Murphy was asked why he had loaned mobile phones.

> “Why did you do that?”
>
> “I couldn’t refuse him, it was only a loan of phones for a day or so.”
>
> “Why couldn’t you refuse.”
>
> “Because of my republican beliefs,” said Murphy.

In a later interview, Murphy made similar statements, illustrating his loyalty to the cause and republicans as opposed to his own organisation.

> “You have said that you are a member of the Continuity Army Council and there you are helping members of the Real IRA.”
>
> “I am a republican. They knew if they asked me for help, I would give it.”

A faction of the Continuity IRA also sheltered Seamus Daly, one of the men later held civilly responsible for the atrocity, on the basis he was a republican and in need of help. [19] Indeed the majority of those interviewed said the specific strands of republican belief, ideology and political expression are now irrelevant. What is important is being a sworn member of the IRA, as it

legitimises and justifies individual actions, and helps preserve the tradition. To dissidents, it affirms their place within their communities and the dark network they inhabit, at times offering kinship through the network, which confers a form of status and belonging like violent subcultures, counter-cultures and street gangs. This change is perhaps best illustrated through an examination of how recruits now join. The process of joining the IRA was traditionally organised by older republicans, who spent time vetting candidates before they were sworn into the organisation, usually by placing their hand on a copy of the IRA Green Book. This act was highly symbolic and was a continuation of a tradition which could be traced back to the Whiteboys, United Irishmen, Ribbonmen and the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the IRA during the 20th century. Depending on the group, the induction processes used to recruit ultras are now less formal, organised by local IRA groups and do not involve senior leadership. Anyone can join.

The transition from structured initiation rituals to ad hoc affairs appears to have occurred in 1998 when Real IRA volunteers began "swearing in" friends without senior figures being present or vetting them. New recruits were appointed to senior positions in the organisation, a break with tradition that created more security risks.

> One thing I did notice, especially in the Real IRA, was that younger people were given bigger positions and responsibilities than traditionally in the Provisional IRA. They were given the ability to swear people into the organisation at quite a young age and quite a low-level within the organisation to attract new members, friends of their own, so that happened especially around the Dundalk area. They needed the numbers. [20]

The recruitment and swearing-in of new members is now a casual affair, if practiced at all. Different groups "swear in" new members in different ways. Among the locations used for "swearing-in" ceremonies are kitchens, sitting rooms, bedrooms, outdoor sheds and even caravans.

Garda surveillance units have monitored "swearing-in" events in a diverse range of locations using surveillance devices covertly planted by the Garda National Surveillance Unit under the 2009 Surveillance Act. To illustrate how these events have become ad hoc almost comical affairs, B2 provided a detailed outline of how three recruits were "sworn-in" inside a mobile home in

Drogheda in Louth by Kevin Brainy, the former officer commanding of the New IRA in Dublin. Brainy is now leader of republican prisoners in Portlaoise Prison.

> They stood up, were given the Green Book, and asked to swear allegiance to the IRA, and they were sworn in as members of the IRA. One of those present wouldn't do it, but two would do it. The ones who joined took it seriously until they got caught (Arrested and convicted for Butterly's murder). Once they're signed up, they're under army orders. They're in an army now. The man who wouldn't join was providing houses for them; he was doing bits and pieces for them. He was bored, but he had no allegiance to the IRA. He went to a few marches, and he met up with them. I think after a while, he discovered that these were fucking idiots, but he got on with them, but said, this is not for me (when asked to join). [21]

In the contemporary iterations of the IRA, there is no longer a single type of recruit or formal recruitment process. Recruitment is no longer solely driven by ideology, political beliefs or a radicalisation process, but rather a multiplicity of factors including social acquaintances, relationships, friendships and geography similar to organised crime gangs, where family and kinship ties may drive recruitment, especially when recruits are individuals with a shared ethnic, country, or neighbourhood backgrounds.

In essence, republican gangs and their affiliates now resemble violent social networks which have a malleable ideology. The group at the local level is presented as a protector which serves both the individual and the wider group and its loose ideology. All activities are legitimised once they are committed in the name of the IRA or the specific organisation, and on condition the volunteer does not personally benefit from them, at least not openly. Extorting money from drug dealers, for example, is excused as legitimate on the basis those being targeted are criminals and the money is for "the cause."

Social identity and the status conferred by IRA membership is another driving force with suspects arrested under Section 30 of the Offences Against the State Act openly expressing their hope to be charged with IRA membership and be held on remand on the republican wing of Portlaoise Prison. [22] Regionalism is another crucial factor driving recruitment. Geography is yet another element as terrorist groups can invariably find it easier to recruit in one area more than another (Oots, 1986, p. 54). In Derry and other parts of Northern Ireland, where ultra groups

pose a persistent threat to the security services, some dissident republicans said they had joined the movement as they were, like their fathers and grandfathers before them, traditional republicans willing to fight to achieve Irish unification. Others cited their dissatisfaction with the Northern Ireland Peace Process but their opposition appeared to be driven not by national reunification but opposition to constitutional politics. Others said they would always be part of the IRA.

In Dublin, Limerick, Cork, interviewees invariably described other motivations for joining IRA dissidents, however. Some said they were opposed to drug dealing and criminality in their communities, others spoke of being part of a group, others opposed the status-quo of Irish life. A significant cohort described themselves as members of the IRA though unaligned to any organisation.

> We are independent republicans. We are against drugs and crime," was the response when asked to outline their specific strain of republican ideology, south of the border. [23]

There is no accurate information on the level of public support for violent dissident republicans. The topic is still under-researched. But an indication of support for dissidents was collected in 2010 as part of a general election survey in Northern Ireland by Tonge. It found that 14% of those identifying as nationalists claimed sympathy for the reason behind dissident violence (BBC, 2010; McGlinchey, 2019, p.6). To summarise, they found there was a cohort who remained impervious to pleas to abandon residual sympathy for the violence with which Irish republicanism has often been historically associated (Evans and Tonge, 2012, p. 76).

> There exist a modestly sized group of people, reduced considerably from the main era of conflict in the late 20th century, still not reconciled to the partition of Ireland, unsupportive of the political and policing institutions of Northern Ireland, and sympathetic to dissident organisations. (Evans and Tonge, 2012, p. 76)

While such research provides an insight into the thinking of people living in Northern Ireland as the outworkings of the Northern Ireland Peace Process took shape, they are no longer applicable as dissident groups have transitioned from peace spoilers to hybrids, vigilantes, and gangs.

"They are just gangs now wrapped in a flag. People are afraid of them. The people in charge now are nothing like McKevitt and McGrane. Some hold republican beliefs but most of them don't.

The republican families around here all know this," said A6, whose father was a senior figure in the Provisional IRA and later married a dissident.

Dick Kerr, a former deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), who sat on the Independent Monitoring Commission, perhaps summed it up succinctly when he described the standing of dissidents in the communities where they exist. "Even if they are not actively supported by the community, they are not opposed by them. Communities respect them," said Kerr (Mooney, 2011).

5.4 Dissident Violence

Republican ultras lack the terrorist capability of the Provisionals (Edwards, 2011, p. 324; Horgan, 2013, p. 8; Morrison, 2017, p. 152) but they are still highly dangerous. They have utilized car bombs, shootings, landmine strikes, and improvised explosive devices along with co-ordinated protests and illegal patrols of republican areas (Edwards, 2011, p. 325; Morrison, 2020, p. 160). At times, ultras have also demonstrated a rising sophistication in strategy and expertise (McDonald, 2015; Morrison, 2017, p. 591). One of the most comprehensive insights into dissident violence was provided by the International Centre for the Study of Terrorism at Pennsylvania State University in the United States led by Horgan (2013). It gathered and analysed data on dissident activity between 1994 and 2011, recording 1,244 individual events. Of these, 899 were violent, 194 were considered non-violent and 151 involved threats of violence. The study sub-categorised dissident violence into three distinct waves, which concluded as the New IRA came into existence.

The first wave of dissident paramilitary activity occurred between August 1994 and August 15, 1998 (Horgan, 2013, pp. 47-72). It found that 54 events took place. There was a steady rise in dissident activity, but this increased substantially in 1997 when the Real IRA emerged. The data shows the number of events rose from 9 in 1997 to 39 in 1998. Only 9 of the 54 events took place outside Northern Ireland. Eight occurred in the Republic and one in Britain where explosives were seized from three Real IRA members in London. The Continuity IRA did not engage in any terrorist activity until the Provisionals declared its first ceasefire in August 1994.

The second wave covered the period August 16, 1998, to January 27, 2007. During this period, dissident activity was highly sporadic, but 283 events were recorded as having taken place

(Horgan, 2013, pp. 52-55). In the aftermath of the Omagh bombing, there was an immediate decline in dissident republican terrorism, explained by the Real IRA's decision to announce a ceasefire, but it rose sharply in 2000 when the same organisation recommenced its activities (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003, pp. 253-269; Morrison, 2020, p. 152). Morrison's work on the Real IRA's efforts to survive post-Omagh is important to mention at this point. Bombings like Omagh were not to be seen again (Morrison, 2020, pp. 152-166) as the dissidents applied internal brakes on the level of violence they were willing to use. The Real IRA instead turned their concentration to attacking strategic and symbolic sites in England including the headquarters of MI6 to demonstrate to their enemies that they could attack secure targets (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003, pp. 259-260; Morrison, 2020, p. 158).

The third wave examined by Horgan's study saw dissidents switch tactics and engage in a deliberate campaign of targeting security forces personnel as part of a strategic sea-change. This third wave covered the period from January 28, 2007 to July 8, 2011 (Horgan, 2013, pp. 55-70). It recorded 239 acts of violence. This period saw the dissidents attempt to kill police officers in close-proximity killings. This third wave concluded with the murders of two soldiers and a policeman in Armagh in March 2009 (Horgan, 2013, p. 59; Mooney, 2009). Horgan notes that apportioning responsibility for terrorist attacks was difficult during this period but noted that Real IRA activity increased every year during the period (Horgan, 2013, p. 57).

Reports published by the Independent Monitoring Commission, which surveyed paramilitary activity for the British and Irish governments from 2004 to 2010, reached similar conclusions. Its 2009 report said dissident republican activity had been consistently more serious than at any time since it had started to report in April 2004 (IMC, 2009, p. 6). Its warnings were followed in September 2010 by the raising of the threat level in Britain from "moderate to substantial" by the British government, meaning that an attack was considered a strong possibility (Kearney, 2010; McDonald, 2010). The ongoing threat level in Northern Ireland is still categorised as severe. Numbers only tell part of the story, however.

In 2017, Morrison identified how the Real IRA had begun to utilise a variety and combination of tactics and strategies similar to those used by the Provisional IRA though with notable differences (Morrison, 2017, pp. 592-593). The timing of these changes occurred as the New

IRA came into existence (Mooney, 2009). The emerging organisation had begun to copy the tactics used by the Provisionals of the 1970s (Morrison, 2017, pp. 592-593).

> Their aim was to reach into the past, to a time when they believed that the paramilitary republican campaign was more effective and popular than it was at the end of the twentieth century. They were copying to be different. (Morrison, 2017, pp. 592-593)

The dissidents initially focused their campaign on Catholic members of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and members of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, using under-car bombs and automatic weapons (Morrison, 2017, pp. 595-596). These attacks coincided with the less publicised hunger strikes and no-wash protests occurring within Maghaberry Prison in Armagh where dissident prisoners were held. The actions of these prisoners, Morrison added, suggested they too were seeking to emulate the strategic success of the Provisional IRA and Irish National Liberation Army prisoner protests of the 1970s and 1980s though it gained little or no public sympathy (Morrison, 2017, 595-596). The New IRA's arrival also saw the return of the proxy/letter parcel bomb. Between 2010 and 2015 there were seven high profile cases of attempted proxy bombings. The utility of letter/parcel bombs against high-profile targets was again not an innovation but one taken from the past (Morrison, 2017, p. 594). None of these specific attacks resulted in fatalities for either the proxy bomber, or the target they were ordered to drive to, but Morrison noted that they did generate significant publicity (Morrison, 2017, pp. 594-595). This is exemplified by the substantial coverage generated (Dodd and Siddique, 2019; Dearden, 2019).

The use of this tactic by the New IRA is comparable with the modus operandi of the Provisionals in bygone years though there were noticeable differences; the New IRA did not justify the selection of proxies by accusing them of being collaborators or informers (Morrison, 2017, pp. 594-595). Instead, the people they forced to carry the bombs were citizens, working within the republican areas of Northern Ireland. The proxies were merely being used as a tool of the attack (Morrison, 2017, pp. 593-594). This again indicates parallels between the Provisional IRA's campaign of the 1970s and the modern-day campaign of the New IRA.

Expanding on Horgan's wave theory, the emergence of the New IRA and the fractures occurring in the other groups signalled the advent of a fourth wave of dissident violence that was notably different, reflecting a deeper transformation within the movement. While the existing literature

points to a shift towards a policing role within republican communities (Edwards, 2011, p. 21) towards the end of the third wave, this interpretation fails to fully capture the complexity of what was occurring. Rather than assuming the functions of community policing, the groups were transitioning into factions, gangs and hybrids creating a violent subculture - one that intermittently required them to employ violence as a means of asserting control and maintaining relevance. It was not just about paramilitary policing but controlling territory and projecting power. A clear illustration of this can be seen in the profile of victims.

The IRA was founded on the principle of a free Irish state and reunification with the Republic of Ireland but it also served to defend and police the Catholic neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland through punishment squads. The Provisional IRA was perhaps viewed by some members of the local community (and most certainly themselves) as the Northern Catholics' protector against repressive British rule and Protestant Unionists (Clarke and Lee, 2008, p. 390).

Dissidents have targeted people believed to be, or at least portrayed as, criminals and anti-social elements within republican communities (Morrison, 2017, p. 596) since their emergence. The true scale of their violence is best seen through the analysis of their victims, however. To date, dissidents, IRA-criminal hybrids and republican gangs have killed 84 people and unborn twins (Cain; Mooney, 2011; Mooney, 2016; The Irish Times, 2010). Of these victims, just two were British Army soldiers, killed outside Massereene Barracks in Antrim in 2009 (Mooney and Clarke, 2009). Two more were members of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Constable Stephen Carroll, killed in Craigavon in 2009, and Constable Ronan Kerr, killed in Omagh in 2011 (Mooney, 2023). Another two victims were Northern Ireland Prison Service Officers. David Black was killed near Lurgan in 2012, and Adrian Ismay, succumbed to injuries from a bomb planted under his van in Belfast in 2016 (O'Neill and Mooney, 2018). David Caldwell, a civilian contractor was killed by an improvised booby-trap explosive device at a military training camp near Derry in August 2022, an attack for which responsibility was claimed by the Real IRA (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003, pp. 209-301). Garda Tony Golden was killed in 2015, but his death occurred in Omeath, Louth (Mooney, 2018).

The majority of the remaining victims were either dissidents themselves, alleged drug dealers or criminals (Cain; The Irish Times, 2010). Dissidents have also been killed in revenge-type killings

(Reynolds, 2019) or died by suicide (BBC, 2015). But murders and killings by dissidents and their associates only tell part of the story.

From April 10, 1998, to February 14, 2023, there were 1,196 paramilitary style attacks carried out by dissident republicans identified by the police in Northern Ireland. This includes 1,196 republican attacks and 2,064 loyalist incidents. Republican paramilitaries were responsible for 638 shootings and 558 assaults (Morrison, 2024, p. 10). Morrison's research emphasised that paramilitary style attacks by loyalists and republicans in Northern Ireland were locally clustered within distinct communities in Greater Belfast and Derry. Of these, Morrison noted how young men were disproportionately targeted: 1 in every 81 aged 15–19, 1 in 73 aged 20–24, and 1 in 103 aged 25–29. When his figures were applied to Belfast and Derry, the rate rose to 1 in 22 for 15–19-year-olds, 1 in 24 for 20–24 year olds, and 1 in 31 for 25–29 year olds. The data shows dissidents now target people they accuse of involvement in anti-social behaviour like drug dealing but their motives are not necessarily connected to their role as protectors of their community. [24] Like organised crime gangs, they now kill, main and threaten their rivals in the community for a variety of reasons. As the profile of victims show, members of the police, prison service and the British army represent only a small percentage of their victims but provide the movement with a degree of legitimacy, providing opportunity to recruit new members and project power.

An examination of the dissident attacks shows that no two are identical. The types of improvised devices constructed, deployed and utilised by dissidents vary widely and their lethality is dependent on the IRA group involved, the type of attack and the resources available to the specific group. Groups aligned with the Continuity, Óglaigh na hÉireann and Arm na Phoblachta operate autonomously and opportunistically, gathering intelligence on targets and planning attacks through a set of diverse and improvised methods. They rely on local supporters to provide logistical help and collect information on potential victims using traditional targeting methods and online information. The New IRA uses similar opportunistic targeting processes. The security services believe sanction from the organisation's leadership is still required for operations to proceed however. [25] Operations are carried out by mixtures of members who live near the targets but also people from the Republic. An example of this concerns the New IRA

which allegedly sent two Dublin men along with an Armagh man to place an undercar bomb under a police officers' car in Eglinton in Derry in 2015 (Cassidy, 2019).

An insight into the process used by the New IRA to target and kill people can be gleaned from analysis of evidence presented in the trial of Christopher Robinson convicted for murdering Adrain Ismay, a prison officer who died 11 days after a bomb exploded under his van as he drove over a ramp close to his Belfast home in March 2016. The investigation into Ismay's death focused on the movements of a Citroen C3 captured on CCTV driving past his house. The vehicle was seen turning, driving back and stopping on the night the bomb was attached to the victim's vehicle. The Police Service of Northern Ireland later identified the C3 as belonging to Gemma Robinson, the killer's sister-in-law. Swabs taken from inside the car confirmed RDX Semtex was present on the rear floor and seat. Robinson was arrested and his Skoda and mobile phone seized for forensic examination. The suspect's internet history showed Robison was known to his victim. They had worked together as volunteers for St John's Ambulance Service. Ismay had helped process Robinson's application to join. Ismay also volunteered for the Community Rescue Service (CRS), a fact known to Robinson. When interviewed in hospital before his death, Ismay said he had seen Robinson two years earlier.

The investigation established that Robinson had actively begun targeting Ismay many months before he died, after meeting him years earlier and learning of his profession. Robinson had Googled CRS on his mobile phone to find an address for the group before making a request to say he was interested in joining but did not pursue his application. On January 7, two months before the bomb attack, Robinson performed Google searches on his phone for both organisations and checked Ismay's profile on the CRS website. This search showed Ismay's photograph and other information about him. Weeks later, on January 28, Robinson again used his mobile phone to search the opening times of a Tesco supermarket located close to where Ismay lived.

The browser history of Robinson's phone also showed searches for Irish republican prisoners and militant Irish republicanism. Robinson had visited websites discussing the magnetic qualities of aluminium possibly to ensure the device attached to Ismay's van by magnets wouldn't fall off. The phone showed he also purchased a pair of self-defence gloves, five balaclavas and a mask on

Amazon. The police concluded that Robinson identified his victim and was then provided with an explosive to kill him.

The details on how the bomb attack was planned demonstrate both the methodical and creative approach taken by the New IRA to collecting information on targets but also show little understanding of the digital forensics, police investigation procedures and situational awareness, indicating yet again how such groups have limited manpower and tradecraft. This may explain why some dissident groups and republican gangs are collaborating with criminals to carry out more intimate, up close and personal attacks, relying on personal and local knowledge.

The investigation into the alleged attempted killing of John Caldwell, a detective chief inspector with the Police Service of Northern Ireland, concluded his shooting in 2023 was potentially motivated by personal grudge. The New IRA claimed responsibility for the attack which took place as he watched his young son play football. Police allege the shooting also involved an organised crime group from the protestant community (O'Neill, 2023). The breakdown of the traditional recruitment and radicalisation has caused a more diverse and fragmented landscape, where tactical choices reflect the varying skills, resources and motivations of individual cells rather than a unified strategy. However, the portrait of dissident violence and offending becomes even more varied through an analysis of violence committed by dissidents, who have inter-changeable membership of organised crime gangs and violent organisations.

The case of Gerard Mackin, a dissident who emerged from the ranks of the Continuity IRA in Belfast, is a case in point. In 2007, he was accused of murdering two fellow IRA members, Edward Burns and Joe Jones, who had attempted to establish a breakaway faction (BBC, 2011). Mackin was tried in Dublin under the Criminal Law Jurisdiction Act, but the case eventually collapsed. He next aligned himself with the Kinahan organised crime group during its violent feud with the Hutch gang, moving away from dissident republicanism and becoming deeply involved in organised crime (Reynolds, 2023). His criminal activity included serious crime and money laundering. He was eventually arrested in Spain and extradited back to Ireland, where he was imprisoned.

5.5 Violent Dissident Republicans Online

Dissident republicans have a vibrant online presence where they post information about and discuss the political aspects of the movement. They debate, exchange ideas and share information on websites, online communities and on messaging groups. The internet offers terrorist groups an unprecedented level of direct control over the content of their message. It also extends their ability to shape how different target audiences perceive them and to manipulate not only their own image, but also the image of their enemies (Conway, 2006, p. 284). Unlike other terrorist movements, exhortations to violence online are relatively rare (Bowman-Grieve, Conway, 2012) although they are common among jihadists and other groups. Bowman-Grieve and Conway suggest dissidents may be aware of contravening platform rules or being prosecuted. Therefore, much of the online debate and discussion tends to be focused on politics, welfare issues or sharing details of attending commemorations.

Dissident groups operate several websites, but these generally do not allow visitors to engage with each other. Such dialogue takes place in virtual communities which allow for exchanges of information (Bowman-Grieve, 2010). In more recent years, dissidents have begun to use online platforms to share information about recruitment efforts by intelligence services. In some cases they share messages sent by intelligence services to try dissuade them from engaging in terrorism, or supporting violent republicanism. Saoradh has shared such recordings online and through messaging apps. Such recordings usually give warnings to the recipients about the dangers of associating with “bad people” responsible for deaths in their community.

> These people have done bad things. Who are your friends? You are associating with some bad people. As in, you go out with them at night, you’re with them at protests and parades. I mean people that are responsible for killing people, for hurting people and causing harm to your community. (Mooney, 2022)

Gabriel Weimann (2004) identifies eight major ways in which terrorists use the Internet. Among them psychological warfare, publicity and propaganda, data mining, fund raising, recruitment and mobilization, networking, information sharing and planning and coordination. Like other violent groups, dissidents engage in some but not all the above but certainly share information

and propaganda online. Justifications for terrorist activity is also shared alongside their stated goals and tactics. Whether such discussions and the dissemination of propaganda serve as a recruitment tool is unclear.

5.6 State Response to the Dissidents: Policing and Political Engagement

Violent dissidents represent only a tiny fraction of the population on the island of Ireland. As stated, they are only capable of mounting a low-level terrorist campaign but the threat they pose is still considered significant by the policing and intelligence services in Ireland, Northern Ireland and Britain. In Northern Ireland, the threat level is classified as substantial, having been lowered from severe (McKee, 2024). An Garda Síochána does not publish threat assessments. The Irish and British governments have sought to confront dissident violence using two methods: policing and political engagement. In the Republic, responsibility for investigating and confronting dissidents rests with the various branches of An Garda Síochána, which is a dual policing and national security service. Its Security and Intelligence Department, which acts as the central point of contact for both international law enforcement and intelligence agencies, collects intelligence on dissidents and mounts operations to thwart their activities. The Garda National Crime and Security Intelligence Service is a sub-division of Security and Intelligence and oversees the collection and analysis of intelligence from both technical, online and human sources. It is tasked with identifying threats to the Irish state and is divided into two sections, one responsible for terrorism and one for organised crime. The Special Detective Unit, known as Special Branch, is the operational arm of Security and Intelligence, responsible for the investigation and prosecution of paramilitary and other serious offences but it too collects intelligence from informers, otherwise known as covert human intelligence sources, CHISs. The National Surveillance Unit, another arm of security and intelligence, supports investigations into dissidents by conducting covert and technical surveillance on them. Ireland's Military Intelligence Service, previously known as J2, also collects intelligence on violent dissidents through surveillance primarily to identify republicans who try to enlist in the Defence Forces for the purpose of receiving training in the use of weapons, explosives and tactics. The Defence Forces bomb disposal units also make-safe explosive devices and improvised weapons constructed by republican paramilitaries as an aid to the civilian power.

In Northern Ireland and Britain, responsibility for collecting intelligence on dissidents is the responsibility of MI5, the British Security Service. It oversees the recruitment and handling of agents inside republican paramilitary groups and conducts surveillance on them both in Ireland, Northern Ireland and around the world. In Northern Ireland, their operations are assisted by specialist surveillance and signals teams drawn from the British Army (Harnett, 2016). The Police Service of Northern Ireland through its informer handling units and paramilitary crime task force are also responsible for collecting information on dissidents and investigating their activities. Both uniform and detective branches in An Garda Síochána and the Police Service of Northern Ireland also prosecute dissidents for ordinary crime and terrorist related offences in both jury and non-jury courts.

Security agencies worldwide also collect intelligence on dissidents, viewing them as a security concern. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the United States (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003; O'Driscoll, 2019) jointly ran the operation which resulted in the imprisonment of Michael McKevitt, the founder of the Real IRA, in conjunction with MI5 and An Garda Síochána. Intelligence services in Lithuania, Holland, Spain, Georgia and France have all run investigations into weapons smuggling ventures by dissidents (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003; Mooney, 2006).

Dissidents also pose a threat to some foreign governments. Israel's foreign intelligence service Mossad monitors republican dissidents as they support Hezbollah and pose a real threat to Israeli diplomatic staff posted to Ireland. In 2024, the New IRA discussed attacking the Israeli embassy and its staff in Dublin to support Hamas following the ground invasion of Gaza, marking a significant departure from its stated policy of not organising attacks on political targets in the Republic. [26]

It may not be obvious to the ordinary citizen just how powerful modern intelligence services have become but dissidents are continually subjected to a full spectrum of assaults by the Irish and British states. The Irish, Northern Irish and British policing and intelligence services utilise both standard and novel techniques of information collection about possible terrorist activity, hardening targets and being ready to respond in the event of an attack. Their mobile phones and internet use are continuously monitored to extract information. Tracking devices are placed in their cars. Their phone calls, texts and emails are surveyed. Expenditure on their bank accounts are accessed. They are also stopped frequently by detectives and their cars searched. An

Garda Síochána and MI5 have agreed protocols, which allow officers to enter the Republic and Northern Ireland when necessary.

Nothing is what it seems. The security services also use strategic disinformation campaigns to confuse dissident groups. The recruitment of informers and covert technical surveillance, two standard methods used by security agencies to disrupt violent and organised crime groups, is by far the most productive. [27] Interviewees suggest it's proven to be the most effective.

The elicitation of such intelligence is broken down into three key components. The first is to try and secure the interviewee's engagement, to assist with recruiting the interviewee as a CHIS and to maintain the relationship. Second, with engagement obtained, the interviewer's role is to elicit detailed and reliable information. The third and final stage is to assess the integrity of the information obtained, which is undertaken through a process of assurance, corroboration and validation, all which make up part of what is known as the provenance (Nunan et al., 2020, p. 512). Both An Garda Síochána and MI5 have from the start recruited informers from within dissident groups, their families and wider social networks (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003; Mooney, 2009; Mooney, 2022). Paddy Dixon, a Dublin car thief who supplied stolen cars to the Real IRA in the months before Omagh, helped the gardai to intercept a series of bombs (Mooney, 2009) thus preserving the Peace Process.

MI5 have used well-placed informers not just for intelligence but to guide and influence the political direction of dissidents by encouraging them to question their own legitimacy and violent campaigns. Dave Rupert, an American agent who worked for the Federal Bureau of Investigation/MI5 moved from the Continuity IRA to the Real IRA whilst working for MI5. It is impossible with any certainty to state how compromised dissident groups are but up to 50% of the membership of dissident gangs may be compromised though other sources suggest the figure is much lower. [28] The use of registered and at times unregistered informants is not without its problems, however. [29] An Garda Síochána, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and MI5 have encountered significant difficulties. Adrian Mackin, a dissident who shot dead a garda responding to a domestic incident in Louth in October 2015, was at the time providing information to An Garda Síochána. His connections to the force was investigated by the Garda Ombudsman.

Both An Garda Síochána, the police in Northern Ireland and MI5 use strategic incapacitation and coercion techniques to disrupt dissident networks. MI5 makes unsolicited contacts with dissidents and their network of associates using a range of methods, including blind approaches at airports, traffic checkpoints, and communicating with them through unsolicited phone calls or online platforms. These approaches are often carefully calibrated to test a person's willingness to engage, signal surveillance awareness, or initiate covert dialogue. At other times, they appear aimed at sowing dissent. Both members of Saoradh, a political group aligned to the New IRA and young people with tenuous links to the group, have received unsolicited calls urging them not to associate with "bad people" who support violence. [30] Dissidents have made recordings of such approaches and uploaded them to social media platforms. Direct approaches have also been made to dissidents whilst they are traveling from abroad by MI5 (Mooney, 2022). Videos of some approaches in Spain, the Canary Islands and continental Europe indicate they are organised in conjunction with local police officers or intelligence agents, who intervene if those making the approaches are pursued.

An Garda Síochána and MI5 also engage in clandestine operations aimed at disrupting the lives of dissidents and sowing mistrust in their ranks, replicating the tactics used to upend the Provisionals. Banks are requested to close the personal accounts of dissidents to disrupt their daily lives and those of their families. Alleged dissidents and their families receive unsolicited gifts of cash, including Amazon gift cards and telephone credit. [31]

Political engagement is another tool which the governments have used to encourage the disbandment of dissident groups. The Irish and British governments have attempted to politically engage with dissidents and their political representatives through the auspices of community leaders, intermediaries, civil servants and politicians since 1998. The first known engagement occurred in the wake of the 1998 Omagh bombing when Dr Martin Mansergh, a special advisor to Bertie Ahern, held meetings with McKevitt and McGrane, the founding members of the Real IRA. After the Omagh bombing, Mansergh held two meetings in Clonard monastery in Dundalk, Louth (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003), placed under observation by An Garda Síochána. The purpose of the meetings was to seek the Real IRA's disbandment. Contacts were also initiated with the Continuity IRA but no subsequent meetings took place. The approaches were coordinated with An Garda Síochána which strategically withdrew overt surveillance on the Real

IRA to enable its leadership to meet to agree on a tactical ceasefire while the contacts were underway (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003, p. 187).

The British government has engaged in similar endeavours using intermediaries from trade unions and community organisations with mixed success. Óglaigh na hÉireann announced a ceasefire in 2018 following engagements with Peter Bunting, a veteran trade union activist (Gorman, 2018). MI5 has also attempted to initiate dialogue with dissidents. The New IRA has said a British intelligence agent purporting to represent the Red Cross made approaches (Mooney, 2019). Despite the use of such counter-terrorism tactics, their overall effect has shown itself to be both successful and unsuccessful. Whilst they have degraded dissident groups, led to the imprisonment of dissidents, they have still not eradicated the movement because it has become more diffuse, and identity based rather than politically motivated.

The role played by tradition, kinship and social identity in preserving the violent movement from the state efforts to disband it are multiple. Violent republicanism exists in the dark networks of the modern era. In these networks, recruitment and radicalisation are robust if not often immune to efforts to dissuade people from getting involved. Kinship with one's family and friends also serves as a deterrent to informing or considering the futility of violence. Betraying the cause can lead to ostracization from family, friends and the wider network. Networks built around kinship, tradition and social networks are durable even if their leaderships are dismantled.

5.7 Malleable Ideology

The term dissident is commonly used to describe the violent groups which oppose the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, but this definition is no longer appropriate as they can no longer be described as simply terrorist organisations. The label dissident is also ambiguous as it denies or acknowledges republicanism as a heterogeneous entity (Whiting, 2015, p. 3). It suggests there is little sense of competing schools of thought on the topic (de Heus, 2018, p. 47). Ostensibly violent dissidents once collectively maintained they were fighting to force a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland to ensure the complete reunification of the island of Ireland (Currie and Taylor, 2011, pp. 167-168; Horgan, 2013, p. 5; Morrison, 2015, pp. 8-9). They accused the Provisionals and Sinn Féin of collaborating with the British state particularly through their endorsement of the Northern Ireland Peace Process and the acceptance of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. They said they were part of a historic lineage that has kept the faith but are

now the sworn enemies of the Provisionals who they call traitors who have forsworn the aspiration of a united Ireland (Currie and Taylor, 2011, pp. 170-171). These dissidents, or their political representatives, have always suggested their mandate to engage in violence was based upon historical claims of legitimacy (Horgan, 2013; Morrison, 2015; McGlinchey, 2019).

For the more traditional elements, their mandate went beyond the remit of constitutional political representation and was based upon historical claims of legitimacy, drawn from the right to oppose British rule in Ireland amid loyalty to previous generations (Whiting, 2015, p. 96). But even this warrants further exploration as most republican groups argue they are not dissidents at all, and that the label has been imposed on them from the mainstream or the media, though they have come to accept it (de Heus, 2018, p. 82). They have begrudgingly accepted the imposed identification and have sought to provide it with a positive connotation in order to reassert the positive group identification (de Heus, 2018, p. 83). As stated, this thesis argues the terminology is no longer applicable to the current iterations of violent republicanism for a variety of reasons. Ireland has seen the emergence of republican groups, gangs and hybrids that don't have any standalone political beliefs that separate them from each other. Violent dissidents have no real interest in advancing their aims through terrorism or politics but now constitute what can be described as a collective form of violent groupings. They express general republican beliefs but have no firm political strategy like those of Provisional IRA [32] as they have evolved into hybrids, gangs, vigilantes and pressure groups sustained by a notional allegiance to republican ideology. The New IRA has gone so far as to concede it cannot achieve its aims using violence but does not wish to engage in any political negotiations. "There is no point in talks. Our view is that it would be selling the project short. The British have tried to talk to us," its army council has said (Mooney, 2019).

Dissident republican groups now represent a unique type of fluid republican ideology. They are no longer solely concerned with their stated aim of achieving a 32-county republic through the use of force or even preserving the IRA. They have no single ideology but are governed by an ever-evolving set of beliefs with violence at its core, not dissimilar to gangs or extremist networks.

> Some of them are looking for a cause. They are aligning themselves with lots of causes, trying to show their relevance. The IRA never carried out attacks in the Republic but they

> have considered attacking specific targets in Dublin. They are also killing criminals in feuds. They really are searching for issues they can get behind and support. They don't know where they are going anymore. [33]

Dissident ideology is hence diverse and influenced by a multiplicity of factors including age, social class and sexuality. Some dissidents like sections of the New IRA see themselves as the modern iteration of the IRA or part of an organisation that acts as guardians of a historic tradition. Others see themselves as the radical left whilst others see themselves as vigilantes. The ideology or belief system, or lack of, embraced by each individual, group or subgroup is determined on factors including location, social circumstances, leadership and policing response. In Derry and Tyrone, the New IRA is principally involved in preserving the organisation, acquiring arms and money, organising attacks on the Police Service of Northern Ireland where possible and carrying out punishment attacks. In Dublin, the same organisation is involved in collecting intelligence, providing logistical support to the organisation in Northern Ireland, and liaising with and monitoring other republican and leftwing groups. They survey organised crime gangs but also plot attacks on their enemies which range from criminals, right wing extremists and foreign governments like Israel. In Belfast, Óglaigh na hÉireann on the other hand is solely involved in murdering people involved in the city's drug trade. This group is not engaged in actively targeting the police and does not engage in terrorism. The Continuity IRA is a hybrid but occasionally engages in terrorism as a method of projecting its own power and presence. In essence, the use of violence is now at the core of dissident ideology rather than an expression of it. Violence itself, not its use, is the ideology.

An example of this can be seen by their approach to the problem posed by the use and sale of illegal drugs to Irish society as told by A5, a former member of the Provisionals and member of the Real IRA. [34] Throughout much of its existence, the Provisionals engaged in the vigilante style killings of people it accused of drug dealing in the Republic and Northern Ireland (Hanley, 2022, pp. 90-112). It forbade its own members from using illegal drugs and it did not involve itself in drug trafficking to generate funds should it damage Sinn Féin 's electoral prospects. The Real IRA broke away from this tradition in the early part of the last decade when its leadership began "taxing" Dublin's drug dealers to raise funds.

Having left the Real IRA after the Omagh bombing, A5 continued to involve themselves in dissident republican groups and contribute to policy documents, including one which discussed the republican movement's response to the drugs crisis. This explored the provision of treatment and counselling services and was circulated to republican groupings with a view to agreeing a formal policy.

> The IRA got involved in killing drug dealers because the Concerned Parents Against Drugs (CPAD) came along and asked us to kill drug dealers. They were a real movement with radical ideas and concerns about addicts. I spent time discussing the drugs issue with counsellors and even met Peter McVerry.

The policy document in question examined the root causes of drug use, exploring it as a societal and health issue. For Republicans and other concerned groups, it recommended examining the Portuguese model of decriminalisation as it was "proof that alternative mindsets can yield significant results." A report was later circulated to the political representatives of dissident groups with the intention of launching and adopting its recommendations, but this was cancelled due to lack of interest.

> They weren't interested in addressing the drug issue. Some people just want to get together to shoot drug dealers. You have to be involved to understand it.

5.8 Conclusion

Building on the theme that violent dissident republicanism has evolved into a violent subculture, whose existence is justified by tradition, sustained by kinship and built around a sense of social identity, the evidence produced in Chapter 5 can only lead to one conclusion. Violent dissident republicanism has transitioned from a peace-spoiler movement into violent subculture. It is a hydra, a multiheaded creature, guided by a historic tradition which grows new heads when one is cut off. At its core, dissident groups, gangs and hybrids now resemble secretive social networks bound by friendship, family, the dynamics of small group networks and opposition to what they describe as the status-quo. [35] The use of violence, or its threatened use, is as much part of the movement's ideology and identity as is the core values of violent republicanism.

The IRA is not alone in producing violent subcultures, who have sprung from larger terrorist groups but whose evolution is poorly understood by scholars. Terrorist movements like Al Qaeda

have given rise to similar subcultures across the world, challenging the ‘‘conventional wisdoms’’ about terrorism (Cottee, 2011, p 732; Sageman, 2004). Such conventional wisdoms, suggests Sageman, are singularly ill-suited for making sense of the emergence of the global jihad which emerged in 2001: a movement not born out of economic despair or religious indoctrination, but rather out of group ties, social networks and the physics of small group dynamics. As suggested by the numerous interviewees from dissident groups and law enforcement, many dissidents have little understanding of republican history or the IRA, instead they are friends of friends, social acquaintances from specific communities [36] similar to jihadist and other subcultures that have emerged across Europe.

Hence to understand dissident groups, gangs and hybrids in all their forms, one must grasp the subculture’s set of beliefs, values, codes, tastes and ways of thinking. The evidence shows they are the modern iteration of the violent groups which preceded them, but they are not the same as they exist in a different era. Expanding on the argument that violent dissident republicanism is now a poorly understood subculture, Chapter 6 will explore its place in the globalised underworld and how individual dissident groups interact with each other, organised crime groups and hostile states, further shaping and moulding it.

Chapter 6 The Irish Underworld

Introduction

Violent dissident republicanism does not exist in a vacuum. The transformation of the movement into an assortment of violent actors has been influenced by dissidents, their personal beliefs, their histories, and the social networks and communities they inhabit. But its evolution is also shaped by the entities that make up Ireland's social milieu: organised crime gangs, extremists, terrorists and hostile states. Hence the metamorphosis of the dissidents has not occurred in isolation but rather as part of a wider transformation of the Irish underworld.

Political violence is no longer the raison d'être of violent dissidents but only constitutes one dimension of a broader spectrum of their illicit activities. Violent dissidents engage with criminals, spies and other actors for a multiplicity of reasons which have little to do with the stated objectives of the IRA. Instead, they are rooted in the very existence and survival of their own subculture. To provide an insight into these complex relationships and how they are helping to shape and sustain violent republicanism, Chapter 6 offers six sections. Section 6.1 provides an overview of the dark and shadow networks which exist in modern Ireland, paying special attention to the convergence of terrorism, organised crime, hostile state activity and extremism. The structure of Ireland's cultic milieu today bears little resemblance to the latter years of the last century, when the Continuity IRA and the Real IRA commenced their campaigns. This section offers an insight into that largely unseen world.

Section 6.2 examines the relationship between dissidents and the powerful organised crime networks that operate on both sides of the Irish border, identifying what distinguishes such liaisons from purely criminal enterprises. This section explores the changing nature of this complex relationship. Section 6.3 explores how dissidents engage with other dissident groups, hybrids and paramilitaries. The view of violent dissident republicanism as a fragmented movement divided by rival interpretations of ideology as advanced in the literature is now a thing of the past. The subculture is a networked entity, more akin to the world inhabited by Mafias, the violent entities that are hierarchical, possess codes of conduct, and have established histories and subcultures (Varese, 2017, p. 48). Paradoxically, it argues that dissidents, though fragmented, are connected through kinship, tradition and social identity. They know each other,

socialise together and pay respects to the dead of other groups. Section 6.4 explores their rapidly evolving relationships with hostile states and their intelligence services. For both parties, such relationships are no longer driven by shared ideologies or world views but mutual opportunism. Building on this theme, Section 6.5 examines the links between dissidents and international terrorist organisations whose actions are often sponsored and supported by hostile actors. Section 6.6 examines the interactions between dissidents and the far right. Like their ancestors in the agrarian groups of the 1700s and 1800s, some violent dissidents see themselves as redressers of wrongdoing and protectors of the marginalized communities. Some have taken it upon themselves to organise counter-protests against the far right, occasionally disrupting their meetings and attacking their members. But demonstrating yet again the heterogeneous nature of the subculture, some have become immersed in ultra-nationalist groups which cloak themselves in republican imagery. Section 6.6 is followed by an orderly conclusion.

6.1 Ireland's Dark Networks

This section examines the configuration of Ireland's contemporary underworld as an interlocking network of criminal, paramilitary, extremist, and state-linked actors. Building on the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 5, it explores how the eco-system that sustains violent dissident republicanism overlaps with, and is shaped by transnational criminal, extremist and malign political forces. Violent republican groups and their predecessors have long been a feature of Ireland's criminal and violent social milieu, the term used by scholars to describe the segregated, autonomous, and stable environment that allows professional crime to exist (McIntosh, 1975, p. 20). However, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, their place in this world is rapidly changing, evolving in tandem with social progress, new and emerging types of crime, immigration, predatory technologies, migration, globalisation and the breakdown of the international rules-based order. Opportunism and a quest for political relevancy is another factor.

Violent dissidents in all their iterations are now just one of many actors who inhabit this social milieu, which includes both domestic and international organised crime gangs, terrorist organisations, paramilitaries, hybrids, political extremists, anti-immigration networks, and the intelligence services of hostile states. Each illicit actor operates with distinct interests and agendas, which sometimes overlap with those of others. The size and scale of illicit activity, be it criminal, terrorist or state-sponsored, on the island of Ireland is almost impossible to determine

due to its secret nature. The topic is under-researched. In the Irish context, the literature is devoid of any research into the interaction and relationship between criminals, terrorists, extremists and hostile states. What little is known about the social milieu is gleaned from official sources that often provide conflicting assessments, indicating a dearth of accurate information. For example, in Northern Ireland, the Annual Report and Threat Assessment 2022-2023 published by the Department of Justice said there were 55 organised crime groups involved in a variety of illegal activities such as money laundering, fraud, human trafficking and drug dealing (OCTF, 2024). An Garda Síochána does not publish threat assessments but a report by Europol identified 820 criminal networks identified within the 27 member states. Approximately 20 of them were Irish based (O'Keeffe, 2024).

The size and scale of the activity and the number of people involved is impossible to quantify with any level of accuracy. Information presented by the Irish justice minister to the cabinet in 2025 seeking approval to enhance the 1996 Proceeds of Crime Act estimated that organised crime was worth €1.7 billion per annum, equating to .3 per cent of Ireland's GDP (Mooney, 2025). Some, but not all, of the state's organised crime groups have emerged from families, who sometimes engage in inter-gang feuding (Hourigan et al., 2017; Windle, 2022, pp. 136-139), but these are now just one component of a more diverse ecosystem. The same connectivity and movement of people that drives immigration, investment and trade also enables the flow of drugs, contraband, weapons and terrorism (Kilcullen, 2015, p. 34). Since 2000, Ireland has witnessed the arrival of gangs from Nigeria, South Africa, Turkey, Brazil, Russia, Lithuania, Ukraine, China and Albania. Some have developed areas of specialism. For example, Black Axe, the group which originates in Nigeria, has built a substantial presence in the Republic where its members recruit students to allow them to access their bank accounts to launder the proceeds of frauds worldwide (Lally, 2023).

Some Irish organised crime groups have expanded in both size and sophistication to an extent that would have seemed unimaginable at the turn of the century. These direct and control vast wealth and form part of much larger international networks, who have truly global reach. Some are so big they represent a threat to democracies due to the sheer scale of their operations, their ability to corrupt officials and instigate violence. An example is the Kinahan organised crime group, which originated in Dublin but now has operations around the globe. It was designated as

a significant transnational criminal organisation by the United States in 2022 when its Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) imposed sanctions on its leadership (Mooney, 2022; U.S. Department of the Treasury 2022). The designation followed the discovery that it was engaged in money laundering for Hezbollah and assisting Iran in the assassination of its enemies in Europe. It has also been linked to the trade in Russian crude oil and the operation of Iran's shadow fleet of oil tankers (Barth, Donelly, Plunkett, Mooney, 2026).

The presence and influence of paramilitary groups make the Irish underworld unique. The New IRA and Continuity IRA and Arm na Phoblacht might still be considered ethno-national terrorists by scholars but the vast majority of their activities involve vigilantism, killing criminals and each other, or extorting money from crime groups. The Real IRA and Óglaigh na hÉireann do the same. Paradoxically they sometimes act as mediators between feuding gangs and enforce ceasefires. Others like the Irish National Liberation Army have evolved into true hybrids if the Makerenko (2004) test is applied. It is heavily involved in drug trafficking, extortion and other types of crime (Murray, 2025) whilst purporting to uphold republican ideals. Hence, the presence of paramilitaries is both a hindrance and an enabler to criminals.

In the Republic and Northern Ireland, conflicts between organised crime gangs are significantly complicated by interweaving links to paramilitary groups. At times, they have engaged in mutually beneficial arrangements while in other instances, paramilitaries have sought to extort money and killed criminals to maintain ties to local communities (Hourigan et al., 2017). Gangs have also emerged from the ranks of paramilitary groups. The picture has become even more complex in recent years with the emergence of the far right and violent anti-immigration groups who engage in serious crime including arson (Mooney, 2024) while purporting to uphold nationalist and republican principles to legitimise themselves. These emerged during the pandemic when Covid restrictions breathed life into anti-government extremism. An Garda Síochána now considers them to pose a more serious threat than jihadist and dissident groups given their ability to attract support from people from all walks of life, who are often recruited on social media platforms. Dozens of arson attacks have already taken place across Ireland (Mooney, 2024). Planned rioting has also occurred. Therefore, to understand Ireland's dark network of illicit actors, it's important to understand it is now a multifaceted entity which incorporates more than Dublin criminals and the IRA. Take for example international terrorist

groups like Islamic and Al Qaeda, who have small support bases in the state, primarily involved in raising funds to support their terrorism among the Muslim diaspora (Lonergan, 2018). Some within the Muslim community act as recruiters for jihadists, organising and facilitating travel to fight in countries such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan (O'Faolain, 2018). People suspected of involvement in Islamic terrorism have also been offered sanctuary by secretive networks of supporters across Ireland (O'Faolain, 2018). Irish citizens, who have converted to Islam, have also joined groups like Islamic State, Al Qaeda and Al Nusra, and attempted to carry out terrorist attacks in the Middle East. Some have even died in suicide bombings (Keena, 2016). One has been repatriated from Syria and later charged and convicted in Irish courts (Mooney, 2019). Hostile states and their intelligence services are now a constant fixture in Ireland. Russian intelligence collects information and runs operations in the Republic and Northern Ireland (An Garda Síochána, 2016; An Garda Síochána, 2018: Mooney, 2024). China's intelligence services do the same.

Ireland's illicit social milieu also incorporates a virtual dimension of malign actors who engage in a cacophony of illicit activities. Cybercrime and cyber-enabled crime in all its guises are a rapidly growing issue, not fully understood by law enforcement, but it is intensifying the downward trajectory of traditional crime incidence (Caneppele and Aebi, 2017). Why? The internet provides a large pool of victims and new opportunities to both commit crime and to evade detection and prosecution (Reep-van den Bergh and Junger, 2018).

In essence, the internet allows criminals, extremists, terrorists and hostile intelligence services the ability to reach a greater number of victims but also connect. In more recent years, the skills required to organise cybercrimes have decreased (Sood and Enbody, 2012). Malware is sold to unskilled individuals, making it cheaper and more convenient for people to commit cybercrime.

In this growth area, people based in Ireland have become involved in running ransomware organisations and illicit trading platforms on the dark web, the section of the internet not publicly accessible without using specialist software. Gary Davis, a 27-year old from Wicklow, is one such criminal. He was extradited to the United States where he later pleaded guilty to conspiring to distribute illegal drugs while acting as an administrator for Silk Road, a platform used by criminals to buy and sell drugs, weapons, malware and other contraband (Thomas, 2019). He helped run the operation from a bedroom in his mother's home.

Intelligence officers from Russia, China and Iran are not just active on the ground in cities across Ireland but also in the virtual realm. Russia, Iran, China and North Korea, the rogue nation known as the Soprano state, are an ever-present fixture in Ireland's cyber domain. Russian intelligence has reconnoitred Ireland's critical infrastructure (Bridge, 2017). To fully understand why violent dissident republicanism has evolved into a violent subculture, it is necessary to grasp the world its adherents now inhabit, its illicit nature, its ebbs and flows, and the ways in which tradition, kinship, and social identity have sustained the movement within an underworld that is rapidly changing. The Irish underworld is now part of a broader, hybrid environment in which criminal enterprise, ideological extremism, and foreign interference intersect and co-evolve. Violent dissident republicans and the IRA before them, once stood at the apex of this world, regarded as a potent and dangerous force. Now they are a waning power. This may help explain the movement's shift from its traditional ideological and organisational posture to a more secretive and less politically driven underground movement, characterised by distinctive traits, belief systems, networks, and rules that resist easy definition or comprehension.

6.2 Organised Crime

Violent Irish republicans and their predecessors have always had a complex relationship with criminals and the commission of criminal acts. But the relationship between Irish republicans and organised crime is neither linear, pre-determined nor easily categorised. It is a uniquely Irish configuration which has now changed beyond all recognition. Modern organised crime itself means different things to different men. It can be used in a purposively vague manner to include anything from solitary thieves to groups performing quasi-state functions. While this ambiguity makes it an unsuitable scientific category, it does usefully denote a broad field of academic study (von Lampe, 2016). The academic and legal description of an organised crime group suggests they seek to monopolise or regulate the production and distribution of a given commodity or service. In Ireland, the term is not actually defined in law but the Criminal Justice Act 2006 (Section 70) defines a "criminal organisation" as a structured and established group composed of three or more persons acting in concert and whose main purpose or activity is the commission or facilitation of one or more serious offences in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit (Windle, 2022, p. 134). But describing violent dissident republicans and their predecessors as crime gangs is deeply flawed as some are more akin to Mafias, which are

more complex cultural entities. Mafias differ from organised crime groups as they try to regulate local areas or populations, are usually hierarchical, possess codes of conduct, and have established histories and subcultures (Varese, 2017, p. 48). The banditti of Carlow in the 1700s, the Provos of south Armagh of the 1990s, the Real IRA of the 2000s, and the New IRA of this decade all have the character traits of mafias. Though many aspects of dissident republicanism are unique to the economic and social conditions of Ireland and its specific history, there are also several commonalities between it and similar entities. Terrorist organisations around the world do, when convenient, procure the services of crime gangs to further their political goals and raise funds (Picarelli, 2006; Viano, 2020). Dissidents have behaved the same way as their predecessors but the nature of their relationship with organised crime has radically changed. In modern Ireland, criminals no longer fear the modern iterations of the IRA, which Hanley (2022, p. 109) suggests represents a marked difference from the heyday of the Provisionals when "no criminal gang, no matter how ruthless, would have risked an outright conflict" with the IRA. Organised crime gangs now outgun violent republicans.

How did the dynamics change and what impact did it have on the evolution of the dissidents? Like their parent organisation, the early dissidents all utilized the services of criminals to advance their aims. The Real IRA used a band of criminals in west Dublin and Dundalk in Louth to provide stolen cars for use in its first bombing campaign (An Garda Síochána, 1998; Mooney and O'Toole, 2003). Between 2006 and 2007, a faction led by Liam Campbell attempted to acquire firearms and explosives, including, automatic rifles, sniper guns, projectors, detonators, timers and TNT explosives from suppliers in Lithuania using Robert Jardine, a British cigarette smuggler (O'Faolain, 2022). It is worth noting that Campbell organised terrorist attacks whilst engaging in cross-border smuggling (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003), placing his operation on the crime-terror nexus.

The shift in power appears to have coincided with significant events in the evolution of the dissidents which occurred as the leadership of the Real IRA was imprisoned between 2001 and 2009, allowing a younger but less traditional grouping to take control. Those who assumed control of the new factions were younger but crucially not ideologically opposed to drugs. They had grown up in the rave culture of the 1990s. Some came from criminal backgrounds. Unlike their predecessors, this new leadership did not hold principled objections to the drugs trade.

Rather, they identified it as a lucrative source of revenue, either by taxing existing drug dealers or by becoming directly involved in distribution themselves. To grasp how this marked a seismic shift from the traditional role of republicans who historically imposed their own form of vigilante justice on drug dealers, it is necessary to examine their recent history. This reveals both their evolution and, crucially, the ways in which their relationship with organised crime converged.

Historically, militant republicanism has always committed a considerable amount of its energy and resources to vigilante activities. It was part of the tradition and social identity of republicans. The Whiteboys, the Defenders, the Ribbonmen, the Fenians and the IRA liked to be seen as defenders of their community who dispensed brutal forms of vigilante justice and death on those judged to be thieves, rapists, drug dealers or indeed anyone who transgressed social norms. The Whiteboys, who defended the rights of landless peasants across Ireland in the 1700s, were the vigilantes of their time. The Babes in the Wood gang led by Joseph Cody and James Corcoran, the former United Irishmen who protected the Catholics of Carlow, Kilkenny and Wexford between 1798 and 1804, were too an integral part of the pre-famine underworld. The Babes made "midnight robbers" and the loyalist Yeomen atone for their crimes and their predations on Catholics by torturing and killing them (Patterson, 2008, pp. 178-181). This commitment to vigilantism was present in the last century with Sinn Féin 's establishment and administration of an informal justice system during the 1919-21 War of Independence. Much later, the stated aim of Provisional's vigilantism was to protect the communities they claimed to represent (Irish Republican Army Statement, October 13, 2013). The first people shot dead by the Provisionals in west Belfast at the start of the Troubles were not police officers or soldiers, but rather two men with reputations for being gangsters (Silke, 1999, p. 55). The last person murdered by Provisionals before its 1994 ceasefire was not a British soldier but Martin Cahill, the gangland figure known as the General who the Dublin IRA accused of colluding with loyalist paramilitaries (McKittrick, 2008). This belief system of vigilante justice led to the formation of ostensibly autonomous paramilitary organisations with the sole purpose of targeting drug dealers. Among them Direct Action Against Drugs, which was active between 1995 and 2001, and the Concerned Parents Against Drugs active in the 1990s. They considered killing drug dealers to be morally justified.

The relationship between violent dissidents and criminals initially mirrored that of the Provisional movement, shaped by notions of social morality, hypocrisy, and self-enrichment. But over time, it generated internal tensions and schisms within dissident organisations, developments that appear illogical to outsiders as dissidents like the IRA had always collaborated with criminals. An example of the contradictory dynamics of the relationship is illustrated in the events surrounding the 2002 split within the Real IRA following a claim made by Michael McKevitt, the group's founder, from his prison cell in Portlaoise Prison accusing the Campbell leadership of involvement in smuggling and crime (Horgan, 2013, p. 127). McKevitt had recruited Campbell from the ranks of the Provisional IRA after he was stood down for involvement in smuggling and racketeering yet had earlier accepted Campbell's decision to join the Real IRA (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003).

This case is a vivid example of how republicans can hold rival views simultaneously, which is common in subcultures who tolerate behaviours that appear illogical to outsiders as they operate according to their own moral codes and internal logic. Outlaw motorcycle clubs like the Hells Angels, for example, simultaneously condemn betrayal and certain forms of violence within the group, while actively engaging in illegal activities such as drug trafficking and weapons offences (Barker, 2010; Wolf and Harper, 1993). Such contradictions are tolerated because subcultures prioritise loyalty, identity, and internal cohesion over conformity to broader societal norms. In the subculture of violent dissident republicanism, its adherents issue threats against smugglers and criminals and sometimes kill them but consider it entirely acceptable to have them among their ranks. The interactions between violent dissidents and organised crime groups have recently become more complex, however, occasionally involving dissidents acting as guarantors or facilitators between criminal organisations. This development further highlights how the movement has evolved and has adopted Soprano-like characteristics. Such interactions are by their nature complex and messy as vividly illustrated by evidence presented to the Special Criminal Court, which heard the trial of Gerard Hutch, the Dublin criminal charged but later acquitted for the 2016 murder of David Byrne, a criminal linked to the Kinahan transnational crime group. Byrne's murder ignited a feud which resulted in the deaths of 18 people (Mooney, 2023). Before mounting the attack, the Hutch gang sent Jonathan Dowdall, a former Sinn Féin councillor, to secure assistance from various factions of the IRA. From January 2015 to February 2016, Dowdall travelled to Derry, Armagh, and Donegal in pursuit of this objective. His efforts

ultimately brought him into contact with Kevin Murray, a dissident from Strabane in Derry, then aligned with the Irish National Liberation Army. Murray had previously been involved with the vigilante group Republican Action Against Drugs but he was also a registered informant working with the Gardaí in Donegal, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and British intelligence agency MI5. He had been deregistered due to his ongoing participation in organising activities, rather than simply possessing knowledge of criminal acts (Mooney, 2023). At the time, Murray was suffering from motor neuron disease and agreed to participate in the planned attack without wearing a facemask, a tactical decision intended to mislead the victim's gang into attributing responsibility to dissident republicans. The weapons used in the attack – AK-47 assault rifles – would be passed to a dissident group to make it appear the IRA was responsible. The gang also arranged for a faction of the Continuity IRA in Armagh to claim responsibility for the attack as if it was a vigilante act. The attack failed in its objectives as its primary target escaped but it ignited a feud. The Continuity IRA did claim responsibility (Moriarty, 2016) before it was dismissed (McDonald, 2016). The Hutch crime group later approached the New IRA in Derry believing only it could enforce a truce between the two gangs in return for the assault rifles used in the attack. The evidence presented in court showed Dowdall and Hutch met the Continuity IRA in Lisburn after the attack before driving onwards to Strabane where they met elements of the New IRA, who told Hutch it would not get involved but would take the weapons and whatever money was on offer (Mooney, 2023). The New IRA, a violent group founded by anti-drugs vigilantes under the pretext of establishing a unified IRA, were willing to accept weapons and financial support from a criminal gang if these were made available.

The case illustrates how factions of both dissident and mainstream republicanism engage with organised crime networks by supplying personnel, operational expertise, and legitimacy derived from the IRA's reputation. But it shows they can abandon their political ideals if and when opportunity arises. The example also shows the commodification of the IRA's reputation which is a form of symbolic power, representing the capacity to intimidate and exert lethal force. It also exemplifies how in this violent subculture, republican participants do not identify as criminals, despite being embedded within clandestine networks. They have a flexible commitment to republican ideology: their real commitment is to the use of violence to advance their own political, strategic, and personal objectives.

This mirrors a broader phenomenon observable in violent movements around the world in the modern era. Jihadist organisations, including Islamic State, Al Qaeda, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab, engage in kidnapping, extortion, smuggling, and other illicit activities that contradict Islamic law, which prohibits theft, extortion, and the targeting of innocents (Papale and Castelli, 2025). Violent dissidents, who claim to uphold the historic principles of the IRA and engage in vigilantism to protect their own communities, do form relationships with organised crime groups but for their own symbiotic, if not co-parasitic, agendas.

6.3 Interactions with Paramilitary Organisations

Rivalries, factionalism and splits have not just shaped modern Irish republicanism but have led to some of the most significant and influential events in Irish history (Horgan, 2013, pp. 21-46; Morrison, 2015, pp. 105-148). The Provisional IRA was the product of a split from its parent organisation over the interweaving of three strands: legitimacy, ideology and militarism (English, 2003). The violent dissident groups which emerged in the 1980s and late 1990s all emerged from splits, fractures and divisions within the Provisionals until the inception of the New IRA, which was an amalgamation of factions that unified into a single terrorist force. Until its formation, the academic approach to dissident republicanism had been to view the emergence of new groups as a cyclical phenomenon. A split in one group gave rise to another, but this approach overlooked the signals which indicated the movement might be evolving and how cadres and their organisations interacted and cooperated. It also overlooked the specifics. Paramilitaries from across the ideological spectrum have always liaised.

In the context of violent dissidents, there has always been movement and cooperation between factions. The Real IRA's bombing campaign of early 1998 was organised in collaboration with the Continuity IRA and disparate elements of the Irish National Liberation Army, using logistical services provided by criminals (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003). These alliances were initially interpreted as being rooted in the need for dissident groups to demonstrate their ability to mount attacks and assume control of the Provisionals. The timing of the attacks themselves also coincided with important events in the Northern Ireland Peace Process and showed a similar pattern to other peace-spoilers around the world. The purpose of such violence was typically not to achieve immediate military gains but rather to exacerbate doubts among actors on the targeted side regarding whether moderate opposition groups could be trusted to implement an agreement

and refrain from reneging on it later (Kydd and Walter, 2002, p. 264). When applied to Irish republicans, however, this framework does not fully account for the longstanding and close relationships that existed between militants, their families, and wider supporter networks. As suggested in statements attributed to Colm Murphy, the Continuity IRA dissident who assisted the Real IRA in the 1998 Omagh bombing, loyalty was often directed toward personal relationships within the republican movement rather than toward a particular organisational structure.

The relationships and interactions which take place between dissident republican groups, criminal gangs, and hybrids are now demonstrably distinct and fluid. They are heterogeneous. Adherents demonstrate allegiance not to the traditional political tenets of republican ideology, but to an ideology of violence itself and to each other. This belief system is sustained through shared narratives of resistance, identity, and defiance, rather than coherent political objectives, rational or strategies. Consequently, the nature and quality of interactions among violent dissidents, republican gangs, and their affiliated organisations are shaped less by formal ideological alignment and more by individual circumstances, locations and localised social dynamics. Factors such as personal history, education, community environment, and interpersonal influences play decisive roles in determining such association patterns and behavioural outcomes.

Interactions between violent dissidents in different groups occur for a range of reasons, including expulsions from organisations, shifts in allegiance and personal movements driven by employment, family, or relationship considerations. A particularly illustrative case is that of Michael Barr, a dissident from Derry. A sworn member of the Real IRA from Derry who supported vigilante attacks, Barr relocated to Dublin in pursuit of employment opportunities. Upon his arrival, he established associations with both criminal networks and dissidents in the capital. He was murdered at the Sunset House public house in Dublin's north inner city in April 2016 in retaliation for his alleged involvement in the Regency Hotel attack, which was organised by the Hutch gang, a major importer of illegal drugs. Following his death, the New IRA accorded him a republican funeral (RTE News, 2016), illustrating how subcultural recognition validates individual commitment to the community's codes of behaviour, even posthumously.

This case exemplifies the fluid and overlapping boundaries between ideological dissidence and organised criminality. It also underscores how personal trajectories and localised social connections frequently override traditional doctrinal or organisational loyalties in the subculture, producing hybrid actors who navigate multiple, and sometimes conflicting, worlds. Another defining feature of the contemporary subculture is the presence of influential individuals who operate independently of formal organisational structures. This again indicates how involvement in the dissident subculture, or sections of it, no longer has anything to do with politics, republicanism or individual organisations. These actors, while identifying as republicans, demonstrate no explicit allegiance to any paramilitary organisation yet move freely between them all. Their status and influence often derived from personal reputations, historical involvement in the IRA, and their capacity to act as powerful intermediaries between otherwise disconnected factions or individuals.

An illustrative example is provided by A6, who described her experience following the death of her husband during an internal dispute. In the aftermath of the killing, she was approached by one such influential republican who offered to act as a conduit between her and the New IRA. This individual proposed arranging a republican funeral for her husband, despite him having been killed by republicans, and to facilitate the return of weapons and the punishment of those responsible, using a known criminal intermediary. According to A6, several of those involved in the death were loosely associated with the New IRA but were more commonly regarded as criminals. [1] As A6 explained:

> "I trusted the person sent to me and I have trust issues. He wouldn't be in any group. He'd be more of a middleman for people, if you know what I mean? He wouldn't be aligned to them, but he would know everybody—he would be a Republican but he's not aligned to anyone."
>
> "Is he involved in crime or?"
>
> "No, no. Totally anti-drugs."

This account points to the existence of unseen codes and unwritten rules within the subculture. Despite lacking formal organisational affiliation, individuals like those described by A6 facilitate communication, negotiation, and, at times, acts of retributive violence between actors across

different factions. Their authority derives less from institutional position than from accumulated personal trust and reputation within the movement. In this sense, they resemble brokers observed in other clandestine or criminalised networks, where informal authority can rival or even supersede organisational hierarchy. Their existence highlights the fragmented yet socially interconnected nature of the subculture, in which personal standing and long-standing relationships outweigh formal membership, rank, or ideological coherence. Their influence is grounded in reputation and personal networks rather than organisational hierarchy, highlighting a fluid, relational form of authority central to the subculture. The subculture's internal rules, belief system and moral codes allow such interactions to take place as long as the facilitators are deemed to be republican.

While violent dissidents often perceive members of rival organisations as competitors, they simultaneously recognise them as individuals who share a similar worldview, set of values, and ideological commitment. Paradoxically, therefore, dissidents may regard those aligned to opposing groups as both adversaries and allies, an apparent contradiction that can be difficult for outsiders to comprehend though this phenomenon is common in subcultures. Cohen and Short (1958) argue that subcultures frequently emerge and cohere through conflict over scarce resources, leading to the development of shared norms, identities, and boundaries. Similarly, Herbert (1998) suggests that subcultures can form around common roles, values, or experiences, which help to structure participants' behaviour and reinforce group identity. In this sense, individuals who identify with or become part of a subcultural milieu consciously organise their conduct, language, and affiliations in ways that express and reproduce their belief systems. Consequently, subcultural actors often define themselves not only by shared internal values but also through opposition to those they perceive as external to their moral or ideological community like the police. Such processes of boundary maintenance are central to understanding the complex mixture of both rivalry and solidarity that characterises interactions within and between dissident republican organisations.

The presence of this belief system, now common within violent republicanism, is particularly visible in commemorative practices such as dissident funerals, where expressions of allegiance often transcend organisational boundaries. This dynamic was evident at the 2019 burial of Seamus McGrane, a founding member of the Real IRA and later associated with Óglaigh na

hÉireann. The funeral was attended by both aligned and non-aligned dissident republicans, reflecting the cross-factional respect afforded to longstanding militants. In a statement reported by Republican News, Óglaigh na hÉireann described McGrane as “a founding member and its first Chief of Staff,” while also characterising him more broadly as “a steadfast Óglach of the Irish Republican Movement” (Irish Republican News, 2019). Such framing illustrates how allegiance to the wider republican struggle can supersede formal organisational affiliation.

The use of the word movement as opposed to specific organisation is important to note. Many dissident groups attended McGrane’s funeral and celebrated in the heavy policing presence organised around it by An Garda Síochána (Irish Republican News, 2019). Such statements are more than propaganda; they codify subcultural norms. The names and titles adopted by dissident groups, are in essence, only names, nominal distinctions that mask a shared lineage and culture. Much like Dublin GAA and Kerry GAA, these groups may appear distinct, but they are in reality expressions of the same game: variations within a single, enduring tradition. As with other subcultures, attendance patterns, speeches, and rituals signal loyalty, reinforce communal identity, and communicate reputational power, demonstrating the role of tradition, kinship and social identity in sustaining what is a new type of violent dissident republicanism.

6.4 Interactions with Hostile States

Violent republicanism has historically sought external support to advance its political, military, and ideological objectives, spanning from the United Irishmen’s rebellion of 1798 to contemporary violent dissident groups. Foreign governments and their intelligence services have at times provided funding, weapons, and ideological reinforcement. The effectiveness of such support has varied and always been determined by the intentions of republicans themselves. This section examines the rapidly evolving relationship between violent dissidents and the intelligence services of hostile states, with particular emphasis on Russia and Iran. It serves as a foundation for Section 6.6, which focuses specifically on Iran’s role as a state sponsor of militant organisations and draws comparisons with Russian approaches to exploiting extremist subcultures as instruments of hybrid warfare. At present, there is no evidence to indicate direct engagement between China and violent dissident republicans, although Chinese intelligence activity has been reported in Ireland (Mooney, 2025). Similarly, North Korea has no known intelligence presence in Ireland, though historical connections existed with the Official IRA,

which reportedly received counterfeit US dollars from Pyongyang during the 1990s (Mooney, 2016). To understand the potential relationship between dissident republicans and hostile states, it is necessary to consider how these actors may perceive violent republicanism: namely, as a potential proxy or disruptive instrument within broader campaigns of hybrid warfare directed against Europe.

Historically, the IRA was regarded by Russia and Iran as an ethnonationalist terrorist organisation whose principal enemy was Britain. Undermining democratic institutions in Ireland was never a priority, as the state's neutrality placed it outside the direct conflict, even though its security posture was broadly aligned with those of Britain and the West. The threat has now changed as Ireland has become more assertive in expressing its opposition to Russia coupled with the breakdown of the international rules-based order. China and Russia have explicitly stated their intent to subvert what they regard as America's hyperpower's global hegemony (Clarke, 2024, p. 46). Iran and North Korea are pursuing comparable aims. Russia has gone as far as openly threatening Ireland for supporting Ukraine (O'Donoghue and Mooney, 2025). Consequently, Ireland is now attracting more interest from the Kremlin which is seeking to exploit geopolitical fault lines and internal divisions.

There is substantial evidence to show Russia is actively engaging with dissident factions. Such interactions differ significantly from earlier episodes when Moscow's involvement with Irish republicans was sporadic and symbolic. The Bolsheviks supported the Irish struggle for independence but appeals for arms in the 1920s were rebuffed due to scepticism about the IRA's military structures and self-styled hierarchy (Barron, 1974). Similarly, requests for weapons to support Operation Harvest in 1959 were rejected for the same reasons (Bower Bell, 2000, p. 189).

Accounts of Soviet support to the Provisionals in the 1970s are inconsistent, but three incidents are commonly cited in literature. In October 1971, Dutch security services intercepted a shipment of Czech-manufactured weapons believed to have originated from the KGB (Barron, 1974). In 1972, the KGB reportedly supplied arms to the Official IRA following a request conveyed through Irish Communist Party leader Michael O'Riordan. The shipment, comprising 70 automatic rifles, two machine guns, ten Walther pistols, and 41,600 rounds of ammunition, was sealed in waterproof wrapping and dumped at sea by the Soviet intelligence vessel Reduktor

off Donegal for later recovery (Andrew and Mitrokhin, 2000). The third case occurred in March 1973, when the LÉ Deirdre intercepted the Claudia, a Cypriot-registered vessel carrying five tonnes of weapons and ammunition from Libya. Barron (1974) suggests KGB involvement in this operation.

To fully comprehend the nature of the current relationship, it is essential to examine the Russian intelligence services involved, including their strategic objectives, tradecraft, and the extent to which these align with those of violent actors. Russia has maintained a permanent intelligence presence in Ireland since the opening of its diplomatic mission on Dublin's Orwell Road in 1973. The services active on Irish soil since then are the Main Directorate of the General Staff (GU), still commonly referred to as the GRU (Mooney, 2018). The SVR, Russia's foreign intelligence service, is also deployed in Ireland (Mooney, 2018). Intelligence officers from both agencies have been posted to Dublin under diplomatic cover. In parallel, Russia has also sent "illegals" deep-cover agents engaged in long-term, non-diplomatic missions who live under false names (Mooney, 2022; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011). Collectively, these personnel are tasked with gathering intelligence on Ireland's political establishment, economic landscape, aviation sector, and scientific research.

In the aftermath of Brexit, Russian hybrid activity in Ireland and Northern Ireland intensified, as the Kremlin sought to exploit tensions and structural vulnerabilities along the British-Irish border through dissident republican and criminal networks. In one notable case, Russian actors are suspected of using dissidents to fabricate an attack on a police helicopter near Newtownmountbutler in Fermanagh in January 2021 (Barnes, 2024). Although no such attack occurred, the report exacerbated loyalist anxieties, illustrating how dissidents could be used to leverage local grievances and existing social tensions to achieve strategic objectives without engaging in direct kinetic action. From the dissidents perspective, the incident created the impression in the wider community that the Continuity IRA could mount an attack reminiscent of Provisional IRA.

Since the Kremlin launched its full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022, sabotage, assassinations and bombing operations linked to Russian services across Europe have increased substantially with incidents recorded in 15 countries (Soldatov and Borogan, 2025) though Ireland was not among them. Instead, Russia has used dissidents to engage in other hybrid activities, which promote

them as traditional leftwing insurgents, influencing their evolution by re-enforcing their sense of being outsiders opposed to the status quo, Nato and American interests. In 2022, Russian actors orchestrated anti-Ukraine protests in Dublin, mobilising dissident networks that the Kremlin subsequently exploited for propaganda through state-controlled media. One demonstration on O'Connell Street included Russian nationalists, members of the Irish Republican Socialist Party, and unaffiliated republican activists (Mooney, 2022). Yury Filatov, the Russian ambassador to Ireland, participated in the same broadcast, which formed part of a broader Russian influence campaign. Comparable efforts involving republican organisations have also been identified internationally.

Russia has also courted dissident republicans using more classic types of political warfare or active measures by inviting them to conferences held abroad. In 2023, US authorities charged Aleksandr Viktorovich Ionov, founder of the Anti-Globalisation Movement of Russia, with advancing the objectives of Russian intelligence by cultivating relationships with fringe political movements in Ireland, the UK, Spain, and the United States (Mooney, 2022). Republican Sinn Féin and the Irish Republican Socialist Party participated in the conferences where they met representatives from Donbas and expressed solidarity with anti-NATO groups and separatists. Dissidents have also set up and lent their support to pro-Russian organisations. Dissidents are also being used to reinforce Russian narratives. Dissidents have spoken at events organised by the Council of Russian Compatriots in Ireland, a body supported by the Russian embassy (McGreevy, 2025). The Russian embassy has publicly shared images of dissidents visiting its diplomats (Cumiskey, 2024).

These examples illustrate how Russian services have leveraged existing social networks, ideological affinities, and political identities within the cultic and social milieu to conduct hybrid influence operations to advance its strategic objectives without direct engagement. The organisational structure of dissident republicanism, characterised by its fluid, fragmented, and transactional relationships with criminal and extremist networks, presents new opportunities for collaboration. Russia's engagement with such groups is not solely directed at undermining the British presence in Northern Ireland but exploiting vulnerabilities within the Republic. These vulnerabilities are shaped by the state's geographic position on Europe's western frontier, its

advanced technology sector, its role as a central node in global data and undersea communications infrastructure, and its proximity to Britain.

Russian is engaged in kinetic attacks across Europe which show recurring links to organised crime, extremists but also pre-radicalised, violence-prone individuals who are part of violent subcultures (Rekawek et al., 2025, p. 26). If used for malign purposes, violent groups offer plausible deniability and usually have extensive training. Dissidents and criminals already possess the structures, contacts, and methods needed to coerce, corrupt or pressure adversaries making them "well suited" to conduct under-the-radar hybrid activities on behalf of a state (Rekawek et al., 2025, p. 26). The false flag attack organised by the Continuity IRA in Fermanagh was an example of this.

Russian services have already demonstrated how extremist subcultures can be manipulated as force multipliers, where ideological appeal and financial incentives are combined to mobilise individuals willing to commit violence. In the Irish context, they have demonstrated their ability to use dissidents for propaganda. But there is a growing body of evidence to show dissidents do wish to take advantage of Russian aggression towards Ireland, Britain and the European Union, for more practical reasons. Remand hearings in Northern Ireland have revealed the New IRA has discussed procuring arms and explosives from Russia. This is illustrative of the co-parasitic relationship that is evolving.

Intelligence derived from eavesdropping planted by MI5, the British security service, on a New IRA army council meeting held at rented properties in Omagh in Tyrone in 2022 indicated the group discussed securing funding from Russia and possibly taking action at US flights landing in Shannon (O'Neill, 2022). Similarly, senior members of Saoradh's national executive have travelled to countries within Russia's sphere of influence to engage with radical organisations (AIF, 2025). From the tsars through the Bolsheviks, Russia is accustomed to a style of warfare that embraces the irregular and the criminal, to play as powerful a role as possible with only limited resources. The use of violent republican dissidents as proxies to conduct asymmetric warfare is almost a certainty in the coming years as a culture of "total war" still informs Russian doctrinal thinking (Galeotti, 2016, pp. 296-297).

6.5 International Terrorist Groups

Irish republican paramilitary organisations have long maintained transnational links with ideologically and culturally aligned groups in France, Spain (Cullen, 2022), and Palestine (Morrison, 2016). This exemplifies a historical pattern encompassing shared training, operational techniques, and political ideologies. Such cooperation reflects a longstanding strategy by republicans of leveraging external expertise to enhance operational capacity while maintaining ideological legitimacy. Operational cooperation of this kind among dissidents has been documented since their inception. In 2000, the Real IRA procured arms in Amsterdam, which were subsequently smuggled to Basque separatists in Brittany and concealed in northern France. French authorities intervened, leading to the arrest and prosecution of both the French and Irish individuals involved (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003). The Continuity IRA and Real IRA acquired arms from organised crime gangs in the Balkans around the same period. In more recent years, dissidents have drifted towards groups sponsored by hostile states, including Iran, which has adapted the Russian model of recruiting criminal networks and violent subcultures to advance its interests (Barth et al., 2024; Mooney, 2023, Mooney, 2024; Rekawek et al., 2025). The Kinahan organised crime gang have played a facilitative role in the assassination of the Iranian dissidents, illustrating the intersection of organised crime and political violence (Caesar, 2025; Mooney, 2024).

Iran's engagement with dissidents is now occurring both directly, through diplomatic channels, and indirectly via proxy actors such as Hezbollah and other Palestinian terrorist groups. Intelligence from Dennis McFadden, an MI5 operative embedded in dissident circles for over two decades, disclosed in court trials, indicates that the New IRA established contact with Hezbollah around 2017, culminating in travel to Lebanon in 2018 (O'Neill, 2022). Saoradh, the New IRA's political wing, has publicly supported Iran and the Palestinian cause through demonstrations, online propaganda, and diplomatic outreach to the Iranian embassy in Dublin. Further evidence of connections to Palestinian networks emerged in 2020 when Issam Hijjawi Bassalat, a British ophthalmologist, was detained by MI5 for his alleged attendance at a New IRA "army council" gathering (O'Neill, 2022).

While these cases illustrate how dissidents are adopting the strategies and tactics of their republican past (Morrison, 2016, p. 599), they also reveal something else. The New IRA's

liaisons with Hezbollah, a hybrid organisation now involved in both terrorism and serious organised crime, and endorsements of Putin's Russia are indicative of both change and strategic pragmatism.

The documented outreach between the New IRA and Hezbollah, the 2018 travel to Lebanon, Saoradh's public demonstrations in support of Iran, and endorsements of Putin's Russia all expose a growing willingness among dissidents to overlook profound ideological contradictions. By ignoring Iran's record of human rights violations and gender oppression, as well as Putin's authoritarian criminality, they demonstrate their engagement is driven less by principle than by expediency. What emerges, instead, is a dissident movement that appears to have recalibrated its international orientation, forging alliances not on shared ideology but on shared utility. Whether this represents strategic opportunism or a deeper ideological drift remains open to interpretation. In either case, the dissidents' moral and ideological erosion marks a transformation from republican conviction to transactional opportunism, exposing the contradictions at the heart of their political identity. Crucially, it also underscores how dissidents now function as components within broader dark networks, irrespective of their professed political objectives. This reflects a shift from the alliances of old that once characterised republican internationalism towards a more transactional model of cooperation driven by strategic utility.

6.6 Far Right Extremists

Ireland is witnessing the highest levels of far-right mobilisation and demonstrations since the 1930s. Extremists have staged violent demonstrations (McRedmond, 2025), engaged in riots, carried out arson attacks on proposed migrant accommodation centres (McCarron, 2024), and issued death threats to politicians (Burne, 2025; Mannion, 2025). In 2024, the garda increased the threat level posed by extremists from moderate to substantial, meaning an attack was likely following an upsurge in threats to kill members of the government (Mooney, 2024). The movement's large size and potential to destabilise institutions became apparent to most Irish people in November 2024 when rioting broke out in Dublin city over the stabbing of a child by a migrant of Afghan origin (Corr, 2024). The damage to the city's infrastructure cost tens of millions.

Drawing inspiration from similar movements across the European Union and the United States, the far right in Ireland has attracted individuals from a diverse array of backgrounds united by

their espousal of anti-immigrant, anti-government, welfare chauvinism and anti-establishment sentiments. These have adopted the guise of ultra-nationalists: utilising language, chants, slogans, symbols, and imagery reminiscent of the IRA and republicanism of old. Their supporters wave the Irish national flag and the Fenian flag at rowdy protests. Their slogans include “Erin go Bragh”, meaning “Ireland until the end of time”, the slogan of the United Irishmen. The parallels between the current movement and past revolutionary movements, such as the Fenian movement of the late 1800s and the Whiteboys of the 1700s, are striking as they say they are motivated by a desire to challenge the perceived injustices of their communities and assert their vision of national identity, albeit supercharged by their use of social media. And like the violent agrarian groups of the 1700 and republican vigilantes, they see themselves as redressers of wrongdoing, people who are defending the rights of their fellow-countrymen, communities and neighbours. As previously noted, they represent a greater threat to peace and security in the Republic than the IRA, primarily because they can radicalise men and women from all social backgrounds.

Their political message seeks to feed off historic injustices perpetrated on Irish Catholics, similar to those used by dissidents. In Ireland, they seek legitimacy by adapting the “Great Replacement” trope with the words “New Plantation”, a message that has resonance for Irish people whose ancestors were colonised by the British through the plantation of Ulster with Scottish Presbyterians. But whereas the Whiteboys of the 1700s sought to protect tenant farmers from rack renting and the IRA ultimately wanted to end British rule over Ireland, today’s ultra-nationalists appear to be motivated by a combination of nostalgia, hatred, extremism, xenophobia, and disillusionment with the status quo. In tandem and demonstrating the heterogeneous nature of the modern social milieu, Northern Ireland has also experienced coordinated mobilisation between far-right and loyalist actors (Manzi, 2025). Anti-immigration protesters from the Republic have converged with loyalist paramilitaries from the Ulster Defence Association in south Belfast and east Antrim (Mooney, 2024; Simpson, 2024). The Union and Irish national flags have been displayed at demonstrations in Belfast signalling previously unimaginable ideological alignments across what were once traditional divisions.

The influence of republicanism, or its imagery of the movement, is noteworthy. Some extremist groups have even attempted to adopt the mantle of republican organisations by borrowing their names, or Irish names. For example, the sovereign citizen movement calls itself the Irish

Republican Brotherhood to advance its claims that citizens are not subject to State laws (Gallagher, 2025). It has established a shadow government and underground courts system. It even claims it controls the Irish military.

In tandem with the emergence of far right political and quasi-political organisations, Ireland has also seen the arrival of far-right militias who copy the IRA's paramilitary dress code. Clann Éireann, the military wing of the far-right movement An Sciath Náisiúnta, announced its existence in a video filmed at Béal na Bláth in Cork where Michael Collins was killed during the Civil War. Its members wore black combat uniforms, sunglasses and berets in a video posted on YouTube (Mooney, 2024). Another is Comhaltas na nGaedheal, which is part of the growing international network of so-called "active clubs" which endorse Nazi ideology (Gallagher, 2024). Its members also wear faux military uniforms. Other groups like Sinne Na Daoine have established themselves as "watchdogs" or "community safety patrols" and share information about alleged criminal offending by migrants. The Irish People's Party have carried out similar patrols in Donegal since November 2023, acts that were once the sole preserve of republican paramilitaries and vigilantes.

The Irish far right is not a unitary actor. It is made up of shifting, short-lived alliances of individuals and groups with malleable loyalties and divergent interests. It's not unified but like violent dissidents fragmented, but they adhere to a racist and conspiratorial ideology. Groups split and divide on a continual basis, but they ultimately see themselves as belonging to a radical right-wing movement, which adorns itself in republican symbolism. In this regard, they are very similar in construct to dissidents.

Most dissident organisations and their political allies say they steadfastly oppose the far right though some individuals have become involved in the nascent movement. Dissidents and their supporters in leftist anti-fascist groups have attacked, intimidated and disrupted meetings of far-right political parties. The 2022 Ard Fheis of the National Party was disrupted by men armed with hammers and other weapons (Campbell, 2022). But there is a growing body of information to suggest pathways and allegiances are now beginning to form in certain locations. The Irish National Liberation Army and the Irish Republican Socialist Party are examples of this. The Irish Republican Socialist Party has publicly voiced support for anti-immigration protests against the opening of accommodation centres for Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers in Dublin (IRSP,

2025) whilst the Irish National Liberation Army has threatened to kill extremists using the cover name Republican Action Group. It has posted images of masked men with guns to online forums with accompanying threats to kill anti-immigration campaigners, framing the interventions as a form of community protection (Mooney and Hegarty, 2025). The literature is devoid of research on the specific topic but what publicly available information exists suggests some paramilitaries and dissidents may drift towards the far right as it presents dual opportunities: a platform to make their presence visible within the community sphere, and a fertile ground for recruitment and the renewal of their ranks.

Given their malleable ideologies, or lack of them, it remains unclear whether violent dissidents will align themselves with the far right or exploit the prevailing social environment to radicalise a new generation intent on taking direct action against extremists. But this uncertainty underscores how the core ideologies of violent dissident republicanism have shifted in response to social change and the emergence of new actors in the social milieu. Dissidents do not appear to be abandoning their republican identity, which remains central to their social identity, but are instead joining and supporting newly radicalised networks, because they inhabit the same overlapping world and are a mirror image of themselves but more powerful.

6.7 Conclusion

Ireland's social milieu is rapidly changing and evolving. In this new landscape, violent dissident republicanism occupies an increasingly marginal yet durable space in the underworld landscape. Once driven by a coherent ideology and a clearly defined objective to preserve the IRA and reunify the Republic and Northern Ireland, it has become fragmented and ideologically adrift. It no longer commands the legitimacy or strategic direction once associated with the Provisional IRA, nor does it operate as a credible political project. Instead, it has evolved into a violent subculture in the social milieu; one that survives less through ideology than through inertia, criminal opportunity, and localised loyalties. Violence is now the ideology not an expression of it.

This metamorphosis has bound the remnants of the movement to dark networks which stretch across the country and around the world. Where earlier generations of republicans drew inspiration from republicanism proper and the hopes of national reunification, the violent dissidents of the modern era have hybridised in order to survive in line with societal change.

Their activities, ranging from kneecappings, extortion and occasional attacks on police and prison officers in Northern Ireland, reflect a type of violence which has no political purpose. They are no longer terrorists as defined in the literature and much of their violence does not constitute terrorism in any sense of the word. Instead, they are a violent movement undergoing change. The symbolic reputation of the IRA is being eroded by the more powerful forces of organised crime: the far right has out radicalised them in the ideological and community space, while external actors like Russia seek to manipulate their grievances for their own ends.

What remains is a violent subculture of people bound together by social ties, families, communities, and a residual belief system that still venerates the republican tradition, even as it recognises that the IRA no longer represents a viable vehicle for national unity. In this sense, violent dissident republicanism persists as a force in the underworld but one of many. Its durability as a violent movement in the modern era is illustrative not to the strength of the republican cause, but to the Darwinian nature of violent movements who morph and evolve to survive as they always have done.

Chapter 7 The Dissident Subculture

Introduction

The concluding chapter of this paper explores the central question. What role has kinship, tradition and social identity played in the evolution of violent dissident republicanism as a subculture. This thesis argues that these invisible influences have helped transform this movement into a networked subculture where violence and not the various interpretations of republicanism have become the defining driving force. In this context, contemporary dissident republicanism can be understood as emerging from of social and ideological milieu in which inherited historical narratives are combined with a diverse set of political beliefs and practices that legitimise both terrorist and criminal activity. The movement therefore represents a complex mixture of historical continuity and organisational adaptation, producing a form of violent subculture that remains poorly understood within existing scholarship. What role does tradition, kinship and social identity play in all of this? These pull factors, which offer things like collective identity, credibility, protection, social status and power, are not dissimilar to those that drive participation in identity-based criminal gangs, hybrids and other violent subcultures. But they have made it the highly durable and adaptive hydra-like entity it has become. It has many heads, each capable of acting both violently and unilaterally in the name of the IRA.

To advance this argument, Chapter 7 offers five sections. Section 7.1 examines the role of tradition in attracting individuals to violent dissident groups despite the odium it provokes. Section 7.2 focuses on the function of kinship in sustaining dissident groups, hybrids, republican gangs and wider networks that exist in the social milieu. It also investigates the interrelated dynamics of social identity, with particular emphasis on the status and power that accompanies membership of the IRA. Section 7.3 examines the role of social identity while Section 7.4 provides three case studies to both illustrate the heterogeneous nature of the movement. These are representative of the traditional strand of dissident republicanism, hybridised violent dissident republicanism and the outwardly criminal. Section 7.5 synthesises these themes by examining how tradition, kinship, and social identity together have helped sustain this violent movement. It also explains how these have contributed to the long-term durability of violent dissident republicanism. How have these influences helped shape its transformation into a

subculture, steeped in history, violence, vigilantism and otherness. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key findings.

7.1 Tradition

There is an assumption across much of the literature which suggests that armed dissident republicanism is a historically determined residue and an inevitable product of conflict resolution (Bean, 2012, p. 210). This is paradoxically both correct and incorrect. Violent dissident republicanism is indeed the latest iteration of a very old tradition but as shown it has become hybridised and evolved as a consequence of social progress. For some, as noted by Bean (2012), it is still an "ideology rooted in the language of sacred soil and the cult of the dead which make it impervious to political reality, the results of a ballot box or even the death of its own supporters." But to others, it's nothing more than a vehicle to engage in extremism, vigilantism, power-projection and crime in the contemporary social milieu. Such activities as demonstrated in early chapters of this thesis were common to the Whiteboys, elements of the United Irishmen, the Ribbonmen, Fenians and the IRA of old. What role does tradition play in the evolving movement? The IRA and its predecessors were born in the shadows. In all its iterations and eras, it has believed in the use of physical force and violence. It has vindicated its actions by relating them to the events of the past (Smith, 1995, p. 70) and the sacrifices of previous generations coupled with a need to deliver justice. In other words, violence has always been an integral component of republican tradition. It has helped sustain the ideological identity of the movement over a very long time and has now become self-perpetuating. What do violent dissident republicans do if they are not engaged in violence.

The founders of the Continuity IRA broke away from the Provisionals over its recognition of the Dáil and the need to oppose the Irish Free State in 1986, but it was also rooted in the need to demonstrate the ability to engage in violence (Frampton, 2011, p. 47). It was only when the Provisionals called their 1996 ceasefire that the Continuity IRA moved to demonstrate its ability to murder and bomb its enemies. This belief system undoubtedly provided the rationale for Michael McKevitt and his band of dissidents to break away from the Provisional IRA in 1997 (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003, pp. 30-53). These dissidents could not envisage the disbandment of the IRA without a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland. McKevitt, at the time the IRA quartermaster general, saw the Provisional IRA as an underground organisation, steeped in

history, which should always exist and maintain a military challenge to Britain (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003, pp. 27-28). A common heritage sustained his obsession with being part of an "underground movement" that upheld fundamental republican values and beliefs. The belief system overrode everything else including political reality. The founders of the Real IRA said they could not accept the Mitchell Principles, a series of rules which required the Provisionals to commit themselves to supporting constitutional politics (Mooney and O'Toole, 2003, pp. 23-250). They argued that acceptance of the principles breached the IRA's own constitution which forbade the destruction of weapons short of a United Ireland. In essence, these dissidents could not contemplate being part of a movement which chose politics over violence. Thus, they repeated the republican tradition of a post-ceasefire split over the utility of armed struggle. Or as Rekawek (2013, p. 693) says ceasefire decisions from armed and clandestine organisations do not always receive a warm reception from members or supporters as armed struggle in many cases constitutes their sole raison d'eˆtre.

Hence the very formation of this new violent movement itself was illustrative of traditional republican behaviour, paradoxically providing a trusted mechanism for organisational survival. Over the decades, the IRA in all its eras had embraced an assortment of low intensity war techniques, ranging from anti-colonial guerilla warfare in the early twentieth century, terrorist bombings of Britain in the late 1930s, rural insurgent war in the border campaign through to the social revolutionary strategy of the 1960s and the largely urban guerilla war of the 1970s ending with the Troubles (Smith, 1995, pp. 220-221). But at each juncture in its existence, the violent republican tradition reformulated its use of force rather than reassess its ability to achieve its political objectives using force. Low in numbers and written off as diehards, the dissidents of the mid-1980s and late-1990s upheld that tradition.

Violent republicanism can be very inward looking (Smith, 1995, p. 220) but the continuation of an armed struggle, regardless of whether it was just symbolic, has at every stage attracted a new generation of people. In the closing years of the last century, the traditionalists were drawn away from the Provisionals and Sinn Féin, who had abandoned violence, thus demonstrating how tradition contributes to its ability to rejuvenate. What role has tradition played in sustaining these dissidents? The evidence ascertained from interviewees like Subject B1 suggests it was central.

> There were people who we hadn't heard about in donkey's years joining up, or their children joined up. They would have been children of former republicans. We only realised who many of them were after investigations and discovered, 'this person is a son of a person who was of interest many, many years ago, and had done certain activities on behalf of the IRA or Republican movement. For some, they said, 'I'm an Irishman first', that would be the attitude of some of them, just doing their father's bidding, a family affair. Someone in the family might say 'I struggled for the organisation, I struggled for the country, you can do a bit, you're old enough now. But a lot of them, in all fairness, a lot of them had ideology. The younger people had an ideology. 'I'm an Irishman first, and I definitely want to see a united Ireland, and I don't care if it's by physical force or otherwise.' It was both traditional, but at the same time, social identity with their peers. Their peers are the people who may have sworn them in, that they trained with. And a lot of these people who trained as young people remained committed to the cause over the years, even though they may have been arrested and separated and they drifted for a while, a lot of them would come back, you'd be surprised. [1]

The role played by tradition in sustaining the IRA was and is omnipresent among republican interviewees who said they could not envisage a time when the IRA would no longer exist or contemplate not being a member of the republican movement. [2] This was a defining feature of their identity but also reflected their belief in tradition. One had supported the Provisionals' endorsement of Sinn Féin 's political strategy during the Northern Ireland Peace Process before joining the New IRA following years of dissatisfaction and listening to promises there would be no decommissioning of IRA weapons. [3]

To this end, many interviewees spoke of the republican tradition as a way of life or state of existence in the modern world where participants lived by a set of rules, beliefs, ever changing allegiances and hierarchies. National reunification was something they supported and endorsed but the preservation of the IRA tradition through participation and membership of the movement was more important.

But the role of tradition runs deeper than just carrying forward the republican flame or joining an organisation. The ability to inflict violence has always been a defining feature of the republican tradition. Until recently, republican paramilitaries all accessed themselves and other republican organisations not on the level of support they attracted or their political aspirations but, on their ability, to inflict violence. The Police Service of Northern Ireland, An Garda Síochána and the British Intelligence Service do likewise.

But violent dissident republicanism is not just a product of a split in the Provisional IRA and its commitment to the Northern Ireland Peace Process but also social progress. Dissidents are inherently different to the Provisionals. As documented, the dissident movement isn't a unified organisation with a clearly stated ideology, but a heterogeneous one composed of republican gangs, extremists, vigilantes and criminals. To gain a deeper understanding of the role played by tradition in its durability over the past three decades it is crucial to consider the nature of the violence itself. Dissident violence has evolved from classic terrorism outlined by scholars like Horgan in his waves theory to incorporate less politically motivated incidents, gangland feuds and vigilante style attacks.

What role, if any, has tradition played in the evolution of the movement into republican hybrids, which strongly resemble mafias, organised crime gangs and street gangs. The evidence shows aspects of tradition had a profound influence. The hybrids, republican gangs and criminals that emerged from the ranks of the Continuity IRA and the Real IRA developed their own rules, norms, and codes built around the traditional construct of the IRA. All have used historical conventions, IRA customs, and initiation rituals to recruit new members and create cohesion among cadres who were often involved in crime and nothing else. [4] The ritual of swearing in

recruits by asking them to place their hand on a copy of the IRA Green Book and pledge their allegiance to the IRA, like the initiation rituals used by Italian mafias (Dickie, 2004; Merlino, 2013), emphasise the idea of solidarity and inclusion between members, while defining the internal hierarchy and roles. It is precisely from such acts that paramilitary groups and mafia clans derive their strength.

On the island of Ireland, dissidents ask recruits to place their hands on the IRA Green Book and swear an oath. Recruits into Costra Nostra pierce a finger and drip the blood over a sacred image of a saint, usually Our Lady of the Annunciation (Merlino, 2013, p. 3). Such ceremonies have been shown to create an egalitarian bond of solidarity and a spirit of unity but also marks hierarchical boundaries within the structure of the organisation. In identity-based gangs and street gangs, initiation rituals also provide members with social capital (Portes 1998, p. 6; Field 2008, p. 14). IRA initiations do likewise for dissident groups but also hybrids and gangs. How else does tradition play a role in sustaining violent republicanism in the modern age? Dissidents in all their forms have embraced IRA rituals. Dissidents murdered in gangland feuds are given paramilitary funerals with accompanying colour parties in compliance with republican tradition. Shots are fired over coffins as symbolic gestures to recognise the martyrdom of the slain volunteer as if they had died on active service (Gleeson, 2016; Lally, 2016). Others have tricolours draped over their coffins.

The secretive and conspiratorial nature of violent republicanism has been repurposed for the modern age. IRA tattoos were rarely used by republicans who try not to advertise their membership of the illegal organisation, but illustrating their hybrid nature, and much like Russian Vory or Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), some dissidents now wear republican tattoos. The courts in Dublin were told of one case where a Real IRA member had a tattoo of men dressed in camouflage wearing balaclavas and holding guns with the words Óglaigh na hÉireann inked across his chest (Reynolds, 2019). It should also be noted that some aspects of republican tradition have been abandoned. When some dissidents are charged before non-jury courts, they choose to recognise the courts, agree to distance themselves from the IRA, or plead guilty to IRA membership in return for more lenient sentences (BBC, 2021; BBC, 2022; McDermott, 2022).

Tradition also plays a role in how society has reacted to them. Victims of violent crime still view dissidents, hybrids, republican gangs and their criminal iterations in the same way they viewed

the IRA of old; they fear them (Hart, 2009). Although the type of violence utilised by dissidents is overwhelmingly criminal rather than political in nature, the use of the IRA's name and reputation is used to deter victims from alerting An Garda Síochána or Police Service of Northern Ireland to their activities.

Violent dissidents have and do utilize the fear of IRA violence and reprisals to their advantage in ways that most organised crime groups cannot as the IRA's reputation precedes them. Witnesses have shown themselves unwilling to report crimes, refused to make statements (The Irish Times, 2012), insisted on their identities not being disclosed in open court, and avoided negative engagements with criminals who call themselves the IRA.

The case of David Dodrill, a senior member of the Real IRA convicted for membership by the Special Criminal Court in Dublin is illustrative of this. Dodrill forced his victim, a chip shop from Dublin, to hand over about €164,000 and pay him €2,000 a week from 2010 to 2011. The victim was then ordered to hand over the lease of a premises in west Dublin but could buy it back two years later for €300,000, a practice often associated with mafias.

"We are the IRA," the victim was told. "He (Dodrill) said he was the Real IRA and he would come for me and my family in the night" (The Irish Times, 2012). The issuance of such threats is reminiscent of the very old iterations of the violent movement.

The Continuity IRA have also utilised the IRA's reputation and the long-standing tradition where victims never report its activities to the authorities for similar purposes. The conviction of Martin Kelly and Billy Clare for IRA membership in 2002 illustrates this point. Both were convicted for IRA membership following testimony from David Mooney, the owner of a Dublin lap-dancing club who was subjected to extortion demands (The Irish Times, 2003). Mooney entered the witness protection programme such was the fear the IRA instilled.

The influence of the IRA's reputation to instil fear is well established in the literature (Hart, 2009; Mooney and O'Toole, 2003). The cases involving dissidents are not dissimilar, but the context is. While all terrorist organisations need funding to purchase weapons, supplies and to cover other expenses (Freeman, 2011, p. 461-475; Zabyelina, 2019, p. 501), the funds raised by

these dissidents was for self-enrichment. [5] This contrasts with most terrorist groups who want to benefit from building a positive reputation where their audience is bound by a common identity (Tokdemir and Akcinaroglu, 2016, p. 356).

Exploring the role played by tradition in the durability of violent dissident republicanism, it is clear from the cited cases that Irish society still fears the IRA. People are still reluctant to talk about the IRA as they were too afraid to talk about the Whiteboys or the IRA of old. They are all organisations that instil fear. A culture of silence has always enveloped the movement allowing it to advance its aims. The White Boys managed to stop the authorities in administering punishments and silenced those who had information (Dungan, 2024, p. 224) and the IRA in Cork terrorised some of the local population by threatening to label them as spies or informers which could result in their deaths or vendettas being waged against their families (Hart, 1998, pp. 288-299). The Dodrill case and others like it illustrate how this tradition of silence has continued on and enabled dissidents and hybrids to survive and thrive.

7.2 Kinship

What role, if any, does kinship play in the durability of contemporary violent dissident republicanism? To answer this question, one must first recognise how radicalised people and their supporters view their organisation in terms of blood relationships, ties of affinity, and shared allegiance to systems of belief (Ismail, 2007). One must also understand their view of history and its potential future. Terrorist groups around the world including jihadists have used everything from friendships, sibling relationships to arranged marriages for recruitment and for further engagement in their causes. Kinship makes defection or informing tantamount to betraying one's own family. It also binds movements and people together. Kinship between republicans is omni-present despite the conflicts that arose between factions of the IRA in bygone years as documented by (Bowyer Bell, 2013; Coogan, 1970; Cronin, 1981; Hart, 2003; White, 2017). The same bonds are present among violent dissidents, which resemble the structure of hybrids and street gangs as outlined by Bolden (2014, p. 739) who found that relationship dynamics can be more complex than previously considered.

The campaign waged by dissidents is often compared to the Provisional's campaign at the height of the Troubles, but this is a mistake. Their inability to wage anything but a simmering campaign fails to grasp the evolution of the movement into a subculture and how its actions are influenced and sustained by tradition, kinship and social identity. Splinter groups often engage in less violence than their parent organisations because they are less capable of doing so (Robinson and Malone, 2023, p. 425). Their propensity to use violence is shaped by their capacity. Dissident republican activity involves the full gamut of practices that serve no obvious organisational benefit but do serve the individual and the network, which is bound by tradition, kinship and social identity. The same picture has been observed in jihadist subcultures (Hegghammer, 2017, p. 199).

In the underworld, gang loyalties are not all powerful and do not trump everything else, especially the decision-making process about who members choose to associate with. In fact, kinship is a defining feature of some gangs as it increases compliance and reduces the risk of defections from an organisation. It operates as a form of hostage-taking: if a member feels disgruntled with the organisation and wishes to defect, they will put their entire family at risk. The organisation will easily be able to punish immediate relatives, who in effect become hostages of the organisation. In other words, kinship provides cheaper information about the identity and whereabouts of the members' relatives. Yet violent dissidents rarely engage in such behaviour. Nor do they like Mafias reinforce their internal loyalty by exchanging evidence of their misdeeds, an act that commits them to mutual silence (Gambetta, 2009, p. 66). Terrorist attacks carried out by dissident republicans are instead organised on a need-to-know basis to counter penetration by the intelligence services. Hence to understand the role played by kinship in the durability of violent dissident republicanism, one must see how the movement is deeply heterogenous and hybridized but is in essence a social network. As stated, violent dissident republican groups share similarities with certain types of gangs. The nature of their relationships is in fact counterintuitive to much of what's believed about dissidents and their adherence to rival strains of republican ideology. Like street gangs and hybrids, being part of a supposedly rival group including mainstream republican parties does not create automatic rivalries or opposition. As shown by the case of Colm Murphy's involvement with the bombing of Omagh in 1998 or the respect afforded to Seamus McGrane on his death by the New IRA, violent republicans and dissidents mix with each other, socialise together and pay homage to their republican dead

regardless of the organisational allegiance. Hybrid in nature, the movement survives and persists as it is highly adaptable. In most cases, republicans are afforded respect. A dissident may be loyal to an organisation they join but might also be loyal to the movement in all its forms. Dissident groups, like criminal gangs and hybrids, are stand-alone and unregulated organisations, but in reality, networks of people. Some are bound to each other and their organisations whilst others have floating allegiances to the movement and ideology. This is evidenced by events in court where cadres often plead guilty to IRA membership and join rival dissident factions in the prison system or they seek to serve their sentence in the general prison population as opposed to joining a republican wing, which enjoys special privileges.

The case of David Dodrill, a Real IRA member responsible for running extortion rackets in Dublin, is a prime example. He entered the general prison population shortly after pleading guilty to IRA membership. His case and others suggest that individual motivations, criminal involvement, and personal networks may be more significant in shaping behaviour than formal organisational affiliation. It's foolhardy to focus on the organisation or their stated affiliation as opposed to the individual.

There are similar cases of accused persons pleading guilty to IRA membership but not serving their sentences of the republican wings of prisoners. Of the four men convicted in connection with the murder of Peter Butterly, only two Kevin Braney and Eddie McGrath are serving their sentences on the Republican landing of Portlaoise Prison (Irpwa) as IRA prisoners. Kelly lives amongst republicans but does not fall under any command structure. Dean Evans entered the general prison population (The Irish Times, 2018). Another man involved in the murder, David Cullen, turned State witness, and his murder charge was dropped (O'Riordan, 2019).

In the contemporary dissident landscape, an ever-growing cohort of people convicted for IRA membership and paramilitary offences, chose to serve their sentences in the general prison population, some even before they stand trial, choosing to distance themselves from the IRA to obtain bail. [6]

> There always was an element of people who walked away. The Provos were so big that it wasn't really noticeable. You always had people that went to jail and said, 'oh, that's me, I'm finished, I'm doing anything I can to get out. Now it's very noticeable because they are so small. [7]

The evidence suggests that disassociation from dissident republicanism, hybrids or republican gangs can occur at any time. There are multiple reasons why people leave or distance themselves from paramilitary groups and their supporters. Some leave because they were arrested and prosecuted (BBC, 2022). Others leave because of family related pressures.

7.3 Social Identity

There have been numerous attempts to explain terrorism from a variety of social and behavioural science perspectives (Arena and Arrigo, 2005, p. 485). Much of the literature uses the psychological approach, which typically views the motivations for militant extremist behaviour as a product of a person's psyche. Indeed, there is a view among scholars of political violence, policymakers and indeed the public that individuals who engage in armed activism are in search of a collective identity, meaning, community and a place to belong, so as to cope with the significant frustration of life and to fill voids in their lives. But as Horgan has correctly noted, such assumptions are deeply flawed and reach assumptions (Horgan, 2008, p. 80).

> Involvement in terrorism is a complex process of accommodation and assimilation across incrementally experienced stages. Potential and actual terrorists move between and within roles, although these migration and promotion processes remain poorly understood. Some individuals become involved more quickly than others, but a consistent quality across all terrorist movements is the gradual sense of progression. (Horgan, 2008, p. 92)

In bygone years, people joined the IRA for multiple reasons. Bolsi and O'Dochartaigh (2017, p. 36) suggest many people joined the IRA in the 1970s not for its persuasive actions but as a vehicle to take action. It was to align themselves with republican ideology. These authors

correctly draw attention to the fact that people who grew up in republican families were discouraged from joining the IRA. Although it's often represented as a communal act, it was an individual one which often took place in communities which sympathised with the IRA (Bolsi and O'Dochartaigh, 2017, p. 42). Is this the case for violent dissidents?

It's foolhardy to compare and judge the actions of every dissident with those of the Provisional IRA. Instead, it's better to consider why people join dissident groups, how they move between and within roles. If the concepts advanced by Horgan (2008) are considered, it's important to understand how someone's journey into the movement remains positive for the follower and how that reflects their social identity considering the process of violent radicalisation and its meaning to the individual. The information collected in the research phase offered a variety of explanations and led to the conclusion there was no one single reason why people join violent dissident groups but many which are dependent on social networks, location of the faction, the participant's age and their history. The nature of the type of group joined also varies by its geographical location. The activities of the New IRA in Derry are illustrative of the ever-evolving nature of violent dissident republicanism and the role played by social identity in its transformation.

> They (Real IRA) were originally made up of people disillusioned with Sinn Féin and the Peace Process for whatever reason, be it policing, be it whatever. They were Republicans and they had their disagreement with Sinn Féin. They reminded me a lot of Provos in 1972. But a lot of the ideologically driven people left after they merged with Republican Action Against Drugs (RAAD). They (RAAD) had no problems with the state. Their thing was drug dealers. And then they began to take on the police for their own reasons. They eclipsed the old guard of what would have been the Real IRA very quickly. They became the dominant force within the Real IRA. They were not terribly politically sophisticated, but sort of having a go for the sake of it. They would say, 'the Brits are here, so therefore we have a right to fight them.' [8]

The security services on both sides of the border consider the New IRA in Derry the last ideologically driven group capable of engaging in terrorism until 2020. [9] The group was deemed responsible for bomb attacks, murders and attempted murders using both improvised explosives and firearms. But it has now morphed into a counterculture. Subject C1 described the group as a combination of the old and new. He suggests the majority of the young people who got involved did so because they don't know how not to get involved in anti-social behaviour.

> They can start a riot. I'll give them that. When they want to start a riot, they can start a riot but that's about as far as it goes.

He pointed to the events which preceded the shooting of Lyra McKee, a writer who was accidentally shot watching a riot in Derry in 2018. The riot took place in the context of engagement with the producers of a television programme commissioned by MTV (McCambridge, 2024).

> They were falling over themselves to talk to this British reporter (Reggie Yates). I remember, I said to one of the top men, I said, 'what the hell was that about? You're talking to a British reporter? Where's your caution?' He said that shouldn't have happened. They're now using the footage as evidence against them. Watching these so-called Republicans fall over themselves to get on an MTV documentary. [10]
>
> The older generation are just getting disillusioned. The younger generation, who are in for the crack even though they can't get a job, they can't go anywhere, they can't go on holiday because they're getting stopped at airports. Then they get one of them anti-terrorism orders, which means for 10 years they can do nothing without telling the cops, and can't even go to Buncrana. I think the people who walked away (from the Provisionals) have asked themselves deep down, where are we going? We're going

> nowhere. Some of the ones that you know, some of the ones that have walked away, like we're committed Republicans and they've been through a lot.

To understand the role played by social identity in sustaining violent republicanism, and why the evolution of the New IRA in Derry into a localised violent actor, C1 sums up perfectly what has happened.

> They have no real political thought in their head. It's just, you know, fight the Brits. And they're not even fighting the Brits now, because there's no Brits to fight. And they don't even fight the cops. I think for some of them, it's tied up with this idea, you know, 'I'm a Republican, I have to be in something to be a Republican. I think some of them feel that if I'm a Republican, I have to be in some sort of movement. [11]

This comment goes some way to explaining the role played by social identity in the evolution of violent dissident republicanism. The more enlightened literature suggests that people join clandestine violent groups (Borum, 2014; Horgan, 2003) for not one single reason but many. Their pathways involve exo, macro, meso, and micro level factors, combining the influence of intra-individual processes, community, and societal context along with global ideological forces (Ferguson and McAuley, 2021; Schmid, 2013). These scholars correctly argue that it's the sense of belonging, affiliation, and connectedness that begins the journey that leads to ideology, in other words, it is not simply ideological zeal which drives the individual into the arms of an extremist group, but the affinity with the group that drives the individual to the ideology. It's a social process rather than pure radicalisation.

But modern violent dissident republicanism counts hybrids, republican gangs and criminals among their number. These factions are not radicalised terrorists but hybrids and criminals who are components of a diverse violent subculture which refers to itself as the IRA or dissident republican movement. Their expressed identity, regardless of whether it supplies members with a sense of self-worth, status, money, excitement or otherness, or power, is labelled as dissident republican.

How does social identity in this modern subculture contribute to its durability? The answer is simple: in every conceivable way. The use of the term republican, the IRA and dissident permits, justifies and explains the use of violence. It's viewed as a reenactment of the past. It also shields cadres from being labelled as criminals or organised crime gangs, which distinguishes them in the minds of the intelligence services and the public.

This internal change is visible in both the behaviour, public posture and construct of violent dissident groups unconstrained by traditional republicanism. The movement and its cadres are like other actors in Ireland's social milieu influenced by social progress and organisational survival. This changing dynamics of violent dissidents and how they are influenced by social identity and everything it entails can be seen in almost every arena. From the engagement with MTV to collaborating with organised crime groups to carry out quazi-political actions of terrorism is omni-present. The interviewee C1 points to the alleged attempted killing of John Caldwell, a detective chief inspector, who was attacked as he watched his son play a football match outside Omagh, Tyrone. The Police Service of Northern Ireland alleged the attack was organised by the New IRA in conjunction with an organised crime group from the loyalist community (Morris, 2023; O'Neill, 2023).

> It was just so bizarre. What about the hunger strikes? What about the whole fight against crime? What about the whole argument that 'we are not criminals; we're political prisoners' and all the rest? And then you go and use a gang of criminals and you're just feeding straight into that, that you're just a gang of criminals. I think it illustrates their weakness. It's not pure republicanism. [12]

7.4 Case Studies

How have tradition, kinship, and social identity contributed to the long-term durability of violent dissident republicanism and helped shape its transformation into a subculture, steeped in history, violence, vigilantism and otherness? Research into these aspects of modern terrorism and the

entities that exist on the crime-terror nexus are continuing to uncover new information and help scholars gain a deeper understanding of the rapidly changing landscape. The complex dynamics of what's occurring inside the world of violence dissident republicanism is paradoxically unique to the island of Ireland but also universal. The phenomenon is being witnessed across the world, among Muslim jihadists (Conti, 2017; Ilan and Sandberg, 2019; Reyes and Dinar, 2014; Sharipova and Beissembayev, 2021) and ring-wing extremists (Cottee, 2020; Larsen and Jensen, 2023; Pisoiu, 2014).

The connections between criminality and extremist political violence are of course not restricted to jihadism. Irish republicans and loyalist paramilitaries have been involved in practices that are more typical of criminal gangs for a long time (Ilan and Sandberg, 2019, p. 291) but there is a growing awareness of how certain politically violent organisations might be better categorised as more criminal gang due to their behaviour (Pyrooz and Densley, 2018; Reid and Valasik, 2018).

To advance the argument that violent dissident republicans should not be considered as solely politically motivated actors or radicalised people, this section sets out to show the heterogeneity of the movement. While the organisational cohesion in most groups has weakened and become more diverse, many actors remain bound by two central commonalities: an adherence to republican ideological claims and a continued belief in the use of violence for multiple purposes: political, self-identification, power projection, vigilantism and criminal purposes. But this thesis further contends that this transformation cannot be understood solely at the organisational or strategic level but rather through shifts in the individual profiles of violent dissidents, societal change, social progress and the evolving nature of Ireland's social milieu. Among the additional influencing factors that have brought about this change are the backgrounds, personal histories, kinship ties and tradition. These have all played significant roles in reshaping the movement's appearance, structure, strategy, internal dynamics and evolution into hybrids, republican gangs and organised crime groups. To advance this argument, the study presents three case studies that illustrate how personal trajectories intersect with broader patterns of organisational evolution.

The following are based on garda intelligence reporting, interviews, newspaper reports and court-related material; operational details, locations, dates and personal relationships have been withheld or generalised to protect identity.

7.4.1 Case Study: Bravo

Personal History

Bravo is a pseudonym for a republican activist from a rural part of Ireland. They grew up in a family environment in which republican identity and historical narratives of political violence were prominent. Their early political socialisation was shaped by family connections to republicanism and by stories of earlier anti-state violence. They later worked in land-based employment and became self-employed.

Bravo's pathway into the Provisional IRA is consistent with literature that emphasises inherited traditions, communal loyalties and collective identity in processes of political mobilisation (Bosi and Ó Dochartaigh, 2018, p. 37; Tajfel, 1978). Their case illustrates how collective identity is neither biologically predetermined nor fixed by culture or social structure; rather, it develops through changing perceptions of political possibility, longer-term historical conditions, strategic considerations and immediate events (Snow, 2001, p. 200).

According to garda intelligence reports, Bravo joined the Provisional IRA during the early years of the Northern Ireland Troubles and subsequently occupied a senior logistical role for an extended period. Although they were reportedly associated with the organisation from an early stage and was arrested on several occasions, intelligence reports did not directly link them to particular acts of violence. Reports described them as disciplined, security-conscious and reluctant to discuss organisational matters while in custody. They were also alleged to have been involved in the acquisition, movement and storage of weaponry, although these allegations were not tested through conviction.

Involvement in dissident republicanism

Bravo's trajectory changed during the Peace Process. As the Provisional republican movement shifted towards negotiation and later endorsed the Good Friday Agreement, they became increasingly opposed to its strategic direction. Their departure from the Provisional movement in the late 1990s appears to have been grounded in ideological opposition to political compromise, particularly the continued constitutional status of Northern Ireland.

They subsequently became associated with the Real IRA and was reportedly involved at a senior level during its early formation. They were said to have criticised the Omagh bombing of 1998, although they did not publicly condemn those responsible. Later intelligence reports suggested that their visible association with dissident activity diminished. However, assessments also noted their operational caution, making definitive conclusions about subsequent involvement difficult.

Analysis

Bravo's trajectory illustrates the potential intergenerational transmission of republican identity and militant tradition. Their political development appears to have been shaped by familial socialisation, historical memory and events occurring during the conflict. Their later dissidence was rooted primarily in opposition to political accommodation rather than personal ambition or apparent criminal opportunity. The case may therefore be understood as a transitional archetype: an individual characterised by ideological orthodoxy, organisational discipline and resistance to strategic moderation. It demonstrates how dissidence may emerge from a perception that a movement has departed from its foundational constitutional and ideological objectives.

7.4.2 Case Study: Lima

Personal History

Lima is an individual with a family background in militant republicanism. They completed post-secondary education and undertook third-level study. A family member had a long history of involvement in republican paramilitarism, including association with a dissident republican organisation. This family member had convictions in both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland and was later removed from the organisation amid allegations of criminal involvement. Lima was exposed to republican political culture from an early age and became involved in youth and adult republican organisations during adolescence. Their social and personal networks were primarily composed of individuals with republican connections. This sustained familial and social immersion contributed to a political socialisation process in which violent republicanism was normalised and embedded within everyday relationships.

Involvement in dissident activity

For a substantial period, Lima was reportedly involved in supporting and facilitating a dissident republican organisation. Their background and activities brought them to the attention of gardai, who subsequently recruited them as a covert human intelligence source. Intelligence assessments indicated that Lima provided information regarded as useful, although their reliability and personal stability were questioned. Lima's registration as a covert source ended after their involvement in a criminal incident connected to an internal dispute. Following conviction, Lima continued to identify with the dissident republican organisation.

Analysis

Lima's trajectory illustrates a hybrid and internally contradictory form of involvement in violent dissident republicanism. It combines familial political socialisation, sustained organisational embedding, covert engagement with state agencies and participation in lethal violence. The case complicates any rigid separation of ideological militancy from criminality. Lima's association with a dissident group does not establish that the incident was organisationally authorised or politically motivated but demonstrates how political identity, personal loyalties, criminal networks may overlap.

It also highlights the fragility of loyalty structures. Early immersion in a militant family and social environment can sustain organisational attachment, yet cooperation with state agencies like the gardai shows that such attachments may coexist with pragmatic, coercive or unstable relationships. The case therefore supports an analysis of dissident republicanism as a heterogeneous field in which ideology, identity, criminal enterprise and personal conflict can intersect without being reducible to one another

7.4.3 Case Study: Mike

Personal History

Mike is a pseudonym for a former dissident republican activist whose trajectory illustrates the overlap between paramilitary affiliation and organised crime. They initially emerged from a dissident republican organisation in Northern Ireland and was later associated with a second republican paramilitary group. Mike was charged in connection with serious offences. The prosecution did not proceed to conviction.

Mike subsequently became associated with another paramilitary organisation according to publicly available material. They later established a small splinter group, which operated in a different part of Ireland. Journalistic reporting and intelligence suggest that this group, or individuals associated with it, developed connections with an organised-crime network during a wider criminal dispute. Mike was publicly linked to offences including money laundering and other forms of serious criminality. They were arrested and later imprisoned.

Analysis

Mike's case illustrates a possible process in which paramilitary identity becomes increasingly subordinated to economic gain, personal status and criminal opportunity. However, the case should not be used to imply that dissident republicanism as a whole is reduced to organised crime. Rather, it demonstrates how fragmentation, weak internal control and splintering can create opportunities for particular actors to repurpose paramilitary networks, reputations and capabilities for criminal enterprise. Their movement between dissident groups, unsuccessful leadership ambitions and the formation of a splinter faction suggest that organisational instability may enable entrepreneurial forms of militancy. In this account, the relevant issue is not simply an ideological departure from republicanism, but the conversion of political credentials, organisational knowledge and coercive capacity into resources useful for criminal activity.

In contrast to Bravo, whose account is framed around ideological continuity, and Lima, whose trajectory combines familial socialisation, organisational attachment and covert state cooperation, Mike represents a criminalised hybrid trajectory. Their case supports an actor-centred approach to post-conflict militancy: individuals associated with dissident republican

organisations may occupy different positions along a spectrum encompassing ideological commitment, organisational loyalty, personal ambition and profit-oriented criminality.

7.5 Comparative Analysis: From Ideological Continuity to Criminal Hybridisation

Bravo	Lima	Mike
Ideological Purist	Embedded Insider Turned Informer	Hybrid Entrepreneur
Rural Traditionalist	Urban, family networked embedded	Transnational Crime Linked
Organisational Continuity	Moral Rupture	Ideological Abandonment

Figure 1: From Ideological Continuity to Criminal Hybridisation

The cases demonstrate that violent dissident republicanism no longer represents a singular ideological project but rather a fragmented ecosystem of actors whose motivations range from ideological orthodoxy to criminal opportunism. The erosion of organisational cohesion has not produced ideological extinction but mutation or hybridisation. Bravo equals that of the Troubles generation; Lima represents a transitional generation while Mike is reflective of a post-conflict criminalised generation.

7.6 Conclusion

The central themes which this thesis seeks to explore concerns the role played by tradition, kinship and social identity in the evolution of violent dissident republicanism. To begin, the consensus in much of the literature has been to view violent dissident republicans as peace spoilers who wish to keep the republican flame alive and to provide an alternative to the

Provisionals and Sinn Féin. This may well have been a correct assessment in 1986 when the Continuity IRA emerged from the Provisionals, and even later in 1997 when the Real IRA was born. But to understand the modern violent dissident republicanism, or the violent groups which call themselves republicans, one must have a much deeper understanding of their history, lineage, ideological failures but also the modern world and the social milieu they inhabit. Social progress, societal change, encrypted communications, the arrival and spread of social media and globalisation have radically altered this movement in ways yet to be fully understood. Social progress, and all that comes with it, has also changed the profile of people who become dissidents, or affiliate themselves to the movement through their public statements and violent actions. The evidence collected from interviewees, the contents of intelligence reports and the study of publicly available records shows that tradition, kinship and social identity have played a defining role in sustaining the movement but altering its evolution into a hybridised subculture. Transgenerational militancy has enabled the movement to resist state efforts to disband it.

The influence of tradition, kinship and social identity is clear. Collectively they have become its lifeblood, enabling it to adapt, mutate and survive. Tradition provides dissident organisations with the ability to attract new cadres from republican families but also the general population. The concept of following in the footsteps of past generations allows people to justify their own involvement despite the odium it attracts. Tradition provides an entry route for people to justify their involvement in violent organisations and gangs that engage in both terrorism and criminality. As demonstrated in the earlier chapters of this thesis, dissident activities include a long list of both terrorist, criminal and vigilante activity. Kidnappings, murder, explosives, extortion and other weapon offenses, theft and destruction of public and private property, are now all crimes committed in the name of a United Ireland. Tradition provides a veneer to engage in everything.

The influence of kinship, as demonstrated in the proceeding chapters, has been omni-present in violent groups, republican organisations and helped them survive for centuries. It has helped foster cohesion, loyalty within underground societies, groups and gangs. The evidence shows it has played a similar role in sustaining the very formation and existence of dissidents since their emergence. An example of this was the emergence of the Real IRA. The majority of the group's founding members came from the same geographical region, knew each other and were bound

together by friendship, family ties and social circles. Many came from the Quartermaster and Engineering departments of the Provisional IRA.

Social identity theory, as initially conceived, never addressed extremist activities understood as political violence or terrorism. It was formulated to help explain what spurs political activism, leading to hypotheses aimed at mapping out conditions that often lead individuals to identify with a group committed to political and social change (Kfir, 2017, p. 773). But it now recognises that all people are members of much larger social networks and form relationships based on ties that range from the biological to the social. Violent groups, like dissidents, are known to be exclusive, as those who do not meet the standards set by the members cannot join the group (Kfir, 2017, p. 775). They project power and in the case of dissidents the ability to inflict violence and terror that separates them from the rest of society, which becomes an integral element of the person's life, thus explaining why people stay with the organisation, often describing it as their life. Assigning them the label of terrorists or even criminals is messy. Della Porta and La Free (2012) suggest a good deal of seemingly politically or ideologically motivated violence is often perpetrated by people who have not been radicalised. In the case of people often labelled as violent dissidents, this is particularly true. They are quazi-terrorists, vigilantes, hybrids, republicans and criminals sustained by tradition, kinship and social identity, operating in the modern social milieu.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

Introduction

"The consensus we have come to is that unfortunately you will always have some type of IRA while you have a British presence in Northern Ireland," wrote Pat Byrne, the former garda commissioner (Irish Times, 2000). Byrne's views were at the time shared by many republicans who had long argued that whilst there is a British presence in Ireland, there would always be a republican movement willing to use force to oppose it. His views were paradoxically both right and wrong. There will always be an IRA, violent group or secretive movement which calls itself republican regardless of whether the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland unifies or not. The thesis has sought to advance the scholarly study of violent dissident republicanism by exploring the role played by tradition, kinship and social identity in its evolution and durability. In doing so, it examined its deep history, its phoenix-like ability to morph and survive, dissident ideologies and their belief in the use of violence. The research paid particular attention to the day-to-day activities of dissidents, examining their activities in all their guises as opposed to simply studying their politics, terroristic and violent activities to provide a deeper understanding of what the movement has become. It also sought to explore the impact of the secret and clandestine operations mounted by the intelligence services to disrupt their activities. To surmise the research, Chapter 8 offers findings and conclusions which relate to the central question. Section 8.1 offers a series of core findings. Section 8.2 then examines the empirical findings of the study whilst Section 8.3 makes recommendations for future research.

8.1 Core Findings

This thesis offers a number of core findings which challenge the dominant view of violent dissident republicans as classic peace spoilers who reject the Provisional IRA's decision to end its armed campaign, decommission its weapons, and endorse Sinn Féin's constitutional strategy. While certain aspects of this analysis do hold true, this thesis rejects the assumption that dissident activity is a movement solely characterised by opposition to the Provisional IRA's decision to support the Sinn Féin political strategy, or by a desire to bring about a 32-county socialist republic.

The first core finding is that violent dissident republicans should be simultaneously understood as peace spoilers but also the modern embodiment of a historically embedded belief system characterised by militancy, secrecy, otherness, and violence. While they fulfil many criteria associated with spoiler behaviour in post-conflict environments, reducing them solely to that category obscures the deeper cultural and historical currents that sustains them. The dissidents of 1986 and 1998 were not merely reacting to the IRA and Sinn Féin 's slow drift towards constitutional politics; they were also struggling to preserve and reproduce a transgenerational tradition of militancy. Their very existence and violent activities can be situated on the continuum of secretive and clandestine organisations that have existed on the island of Ireland since the late eighteenth century to oppose the British. Their history reflects the endurance of this transgenerational violent tradition rather than the emergence of an isolated post-Agreement aberration. If accepted, this approach moves beyond depicting dissidents as simple organisational remnants engaged in a struggle for relevance and instead situates them within a longer lineage of Irish republican militancy. The second core finding concerns the roles played by tradition, kinship and social identity in the durability and evolution of the movement. The powerful forces of tradition, kinship and social identity function as mechanisms of continuity and legitimising participation across generations. In the modern era, affiliation to violent groups or radical political groups is frequently shaped by family connections, local geography, peer networks, beliefs and social networks.

The fragmentation of dissident paramilitary groups into factionalised entities with loose organisational structures is reflective of significant transformation from classic peace spoilers into a violent networked subculture. Allegiance to specific groups is no longer determined primarily by strict interpretations of republican ideology. Instead, recruitment and retention are strongly influenced by social dynamics.

While formal initiation rituals like swearing an oath on the IRA Green Book do have symbolic importance, the underlying motivations for participation are often rooted in the preservation of familial tradition, expressions of social identity, personal protection, status acquisition, or ingroup belonging. In some cases, political expression and criminal opportunity intersect within the same social networks. These findings suggest that violent dissident republicanism persists not

only because of ideological conviction or opposition to the Northern Ireland Peace Process but because it is embedded within families, networks of friends and society.

Violent organisations have consistently appeared on the island of Ireland in varying forms, at different historical junctures, and under diverse ideological banners, since the 1700s. At times they have presented themselves as defenders of communities, vigilantes, agitators, social revolutionaries, radicals influenced by the ideals of the French Revolution, and insurgents resisting British authority. The contemporary dissident movement represents another phase in this recurring pattern. But its current manifestation differs greatly in important ways.

The movement has undergone significant transformation in order to survive within a modern, post-conflict and globalised environment. This thesis found it has evolved into a diffuse social network composed of individuals, gangs, paramilitary factions, and fringe political groupings who variously identify as republicans. These actors often operate under loose or nominal command structures and pursue diverse motivations. For the most part, they are not driven by republican ideology but a variety of other reasons. For some republicans, Irish unification remains a substantive political objective but for others, it functions symbolically, sometimes serving to differentiate their activities from organised crime. They are dissidents, criminals, radicals, vigilantes and agitators.

Violent organisations provide alternative worlds in which norms and values are entirely and deliberately at odds with general society (Lee, 2022, p 12). They should not be considered as simple pathways to terrorism as they also provide access to outlets for social relationships; political expression, feelings of belonging and distinctiveness. In the context of violent dissidents, they also allow for tradition and social belonging which preserves the movement but allows for its adaptation.

To develop a deeper understanding of violent dissident republicanism in the modern era, it is helpful to think of it as a movement in a process of change. This view allows for the presentation of the third core finding. This thesis found ample evidence to show dissidents are more accurately conceptualised as participants in a distinct subculture rather than as a coherent insurgent movement with unified or even general strategic direction. In this subculture, violence is not a political instrument but a marker of identity, belonging, and status. For some adherents, commitment appears tied as much to the concept of violence itself as to any clearly articulated

political programme that seeks to remove the British presence from Northern Ireland. To understand the movement's transition from splinter group into a networked subculture, one must understand the time and context of the transformation and how it has occurred alongside broader societal shifts: globalisation, technological advancement, hyperconnectivity, and the evolution of organised crime networks. Just as organised crime, technology, communications and society have undergone profound transformation over the past three decades, violent dissident republicanism has been forced to adapt to these changing structural conditions in the social milieu where it exists. The movement has paradoxically evolved and regressed into a violent subculture, which at times is political, at times, criminal. Hence the movement can no longer be treated as a residue of the Troubles, but more a reconfigured manifestation of an old belief system shaped by modern social, economic, and technological realities.

8.2 Empirical Findings

Violent dissident republicanism currently comprises a fragmented but interconnected set of individuals, organisations, and networks operating across the island of Ireland. Evidence gathered during this research indicates that at least five recognised paramilitary organisations remain active, collectively divided into approximately twenty-six identifiable factions. In addition to these dissident groupings, the Provisional IRA continues to exist in residual organisational form and retains access to arms. The Provisional IRA is widely regarded as organisationally dormant and aligned with Sinn Féin's political strategy. However, multiple sources suggest that the organisation continues to retain access to significant weapons stockpiles concealed in arms dumps located within the Republic of Ireland, particularly in areas close to the border.

This research also identified evidence suggesting that the Official IRA persists in some form within the border region, although its current structure and operational capacity remain unclear. Meanwhile, the Irish National Liberation Army appears to have evolved into a hybrid organisation combining elements of republican ideology and socialist rhetoric while also maintaining involvement in organised criminal activity.

The intensity and nature of violent campaigns conducted by dissident republican groups has altered significantly since their emergence. Unlike earlier phases characterised by large-scale operations such as car bombings and mortar attacks aimed at undermining public confidence in

policing and political institutions, contemporary activity tends to consist of smaller-scale and more opportunistic attacks, particularly targeting police officers and prison service personnel. In addition, several groups continue to engage in vigilante-style violence and internal feuding. Dissident republican actors now operate within a more complex security environment and constitute only one among scores sources of violent activity within the region. Among them domestic and international organised crime groups, loyalist paramilitary groups, extremist organisations, violent subcultures and hostile states. Demonstrating the heterogeneous nature of the movement, some organisations adhere to specific trains of republican ideology, but others appear to lack any form of political conviction. They regard Sinn Féin as indistinguishable from other mainstream political parties. Hence their political activity is localised, attracts limited attention and is token. They are no longer focused on criticising Sinn Féin over its endorsement of policing and embracement of the Northern Ireland Peace Process. Instead, they oppose the status quo.

8.3 Further Research

Further academic research is required to understand how violent dissident republican groups will evolve in the social milieu. The movement may become more diverse and fragmented or new factions may emerge. It may also become more involved in organised crime, which would have clear implications for policing. Some dissidents may also gravitate towards right wing extremist organisations. More research is needed to examine their potential for ideological or tactical convergence with extremist milieus. There is a need to explore whether dissidents may gravitate towards, cooperate with, or adopt elements from right-wing extremist organisations. Understanding these possible trajectories would contribute to a clearer assessment of the long-term security implications posed by dissident republican networks.

The most immediate threat they pose is associated with state exploitation and their potential use as instruments of hybrid warfare. Dissidents could potentially be used to undermine security on both sides of the border by hostile actors. They could be utilised as proxies for intelligence collection, attacks, assassinations, logistics and more broadly to undermine peace and security in Northern Ireland. Perhaps the greatest threat would be their potential use to mount attacks in the United Kingdom by Britain’s enemies. More research is needed to explore this potential. Dissidents themselves are unable to conduct an effective terrorist campaign but if assisted by an

external or more experienced malign actor, they could engage in a more effective one. Given the rapidly evolving security landscape in Ireland, Britain and Europe, such research should be given urgent priority.

Chronological Record of Fatalities attributed to Violent Dissident Republicans, Hybrids and Republican Gangs (1998–2024)

Note: While establishing definitive attribution for paramilitary-style killings is often methodologically challenging, responsibility for the murders compiled in this list is attributed to various dissident republican paramilitaries, hybrids, republican gangs and the Irish National Liberation Army.

1998

Date: 15 August 1998

Victims: James Barker, Fernando Blasco Baselga, Geraldine Breslin, Deborah-Ann Cartwright, Gareth Conway, Breda Devine, Oran Doherty, Aiden Gallagher, Esther Gibson, Mary Grimes, Olive Hawkes, Julia Hughes, Brenda Logue, Ann McCombe, Brian McCrory, Samantha McFarland, Sean McGrath, Sean McLoughlin, Jolene Marlow, Avril Monaghan (along with her unborn twins), Maura Monaghan, Alan Radford, Rocio Abad Ramos, Elizabeth Rush, Veda Short, Philomena Skelton, Fred White, Bryan White, and Lorraine Wilson.

Details: The victims and two unborn twins were killed in a mass-casualty car bomb attack executed by the Real IRA in Omagh, Tyrone (CAIN, n.d.).

2000

Date: 13 October 2000

Victim: Joseph O'Connor

Details: Real IRA member was shot dead in West Belfast during an incident attributed to an internal factional dispute or a feud with the IRA (CAIN, n.d.).

2001

Date: 7 June 2001

Victim: Kieran Flynn

Details: Shot dead when he went to answer a knock at the door of his home at Thorndale Estate in Dublin Hill on Cork's northside. (The Irish Times, 2010)

2002

Date: 21 February 2002

Victim: Matthew Burns

Details: He was shot dead while sitting in a car in Castlewellan, Down, with claims indicating that Republican paramilitaries were responsible for the killing (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 17 April 2002

Victim: Barney McDonald

Details: Shot dead while sitting in his stationary car outside a snooker club at Donaghmore, near Dungannon, Tyrone, by violent dissident republican actors (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 1 August 2002

Victim: David Caldwell

Details: Civilian contractor killed by an improvised booby-trap explosive device at a military training camp near Derry, an attack for which responsibility was claimed by the Real IRA (CAIN, n.d.).

2003

Date: May 2003

Victim: Gareth O'Connor

Details: He disappeared in South Armagh before his remains were recovered from Carlingford Lough in June 2005, an act attributed to active dissident republican elements in the border region (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 1 August 2003

Victim: Danny McGurk

Details: He was shot dead in West Belfast during a localised dispute involving dissident republican elements (CAIN, n.d.).

2004

Date: 3 June 2004

Victim: Kevin McAlorum

Details: Shot dead outside Oakwood Integrated Primary School in Derriaghy, near Belfast, in an attack where the Irish National Liberation Army may have been involved (CAIN, n.d.).

2005

Date: 7 November 2005

Victim: Martin Conlon

Details: He was abducted from a house outside Armagh before being shot three times and his body dumped at Farnaloy Road near Keady, South Armagh, by violent dissidents (CAIN, n.d.).

2006

Date: 04 April 2006

Victim: Denis Donaldson

Details: The former senior Sinn Féin official exposed as an informant was shot dead at a remote cottage in Donegal, an attack for which responsibility was later claimed by the Real IRA (CAIN, n.d.).

2007

Date: 1 March 2007

Victim: Edward Burns

Details: Shot dead in West Belfast in a killing linked to an internal dispute and structural split within dissident republican factions (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 1 March 2007

Victim: Joe Jones

Details: He was assaulted and killed in North Belfast in an incident directly linked to the same internal dissident republican factional realignment as Edward Burns (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 3 June 2007

Victim: Bryan McGlynn

Details: He was shot dead at his home in Fountain Hill, Waterside, Derry, by the Irish National Liberation Army (CAIN, n.d.).

2008

Date: 12 February 2008

Victim: Andrew Burns

Details: Shot dead near Castlefin, Donegal, in an attack attributed to internal disciplinary actions by the Real IRA or elements associated with Óglaigh na hÉireann (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 24 June 2008

Victim: Emmett Shiels

Details: He was shot and mortally wounded by masked men at Bligh's Lane, Creggan, Derry, with speculation pointing to the potential involvement of republican paramilitaries (CAIN, n.d.).

2009

Date: 11 February 2009

Victim: Jim McConnell

Details: He was shot dead in his home in Prehen, Derry, by suspected dissident republicans in a potentially drug-related incident (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 7 March 2009

Victims: Sapper Patrick Azimkar and Sapper Mark Quinsey

Details: These two British Army soldiers were shot dead outside Massereene Barracks in Antrim town in an attack claimed by the Real IRA (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 9 March 2009

Victim: Constable Stephen Carroll

Details: This police officer was shot dead by the Continuity Irish Republican Army while responding to a call in Craigavon, Armagh (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 23 October 2009

Victim: Jason Egan

Details: Victim was locking up a newsagent’s shop run by his family in Mulhuddart in Dublin when a gunman approached him and fired a number of shots from a handgun. Claimed by the Real IRA (The Irish Times, 2012).

2010

Date: 20 January 2010

Victim: Gerard ‘Topper’ Staunton

Details: Shot dead in Cork City in a strike linked to dissident republican vigilante actions or criminal-paramilitary friction (RTÉ News, 2016)

Date: 24 February 2010

Victim: Kieran Doherty

Details: This Real IRA member was shot dead near Derry due to internal disciplinary action or factional disputes within the local command (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 9 July 2010

Victim: Colm ‘Collie’ Owens

Details: He was shot dead at commercial premises in Dublin in a killing linked to the Real IRA (The Irish Times, 2010).

Date: 12 September 2010

Victim: Sean Winters

Details: He was shot dead in North Dublin due to ongoing structural and personal disputes involving Dublin-based dissident republicans (The Irish Times, 2010).

2011

Date: 02 April 2011

Victim: Constable Ronan Kerr

Details: Police officer was killed by an under-car booby-trap improvised explosive device outside his residence in Omagh, Tyrone, by a coalition of independent dissident republicans (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 15 July 2011

Victim: Michael ‘Micka’ Kelly

Details: He was shot dead in Dublin during a violent extortion dispute between organised crime networks and the Dublin brigade of the Real IRA (The Irish Times, 2010)

2012

Date: 9 February 2012

Victim: Andrew Allen

Details: He was shot dead at his residence in Buncrana, Donegal, in an attack claimed by the vigilante front group Republican Action Against Drugs (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 3 September 2012

Victim: Danny McKay

Details: He was shot dead at his home on the outskirts of north Belfast by violent dissidents (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 1 November 2012

Victim: David Black

Details: This Northern Ireland Prison Service officer was shot dead in an ambush near Lurgan, Armagh, by the newly amalgamated "New IRA" (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 4 December 2012

Victim: Eamon Kelly

Details: This veteran criminal figure was shot dead in Dublin due to ongoing retaliatory disputes with the Dublin faction of the Real IRA (CAIN, n.d.).

2013

Date: 6 March 2013

Victim: Peter Butterly

Details: He was shot dead outside a hotel in Gormanstown, Louth, due to an internal split and power struggle within the New IRA framework (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 13 March 2013

Victim: Kieran McManus

Details: He was shot dead outside a pizza shop in West Belfast in an attack for which the Continuity IRA claimed responsibility (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: October 2013

Victim: Kevin Kearney

Details: He was found shot dead in a lake in Alexandra Park, North Belfast, in an action claimed by the newly formed New IRA (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 10 October 2013

Victim: Barry McCrory

Details: He was shot dead in a flat on Shipquay Street, Derry, by suspected dissident republicans (CAIN, n.d.).

2014

Date: 28 March 2014

Victim: Declan Smith

Details: This former close associate of Alan Ryan was shot dead outside a crèche in Dublin following subsequent internal Real IRA fractures (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 18 April 2014

Victim: Tommy Crossan

Details: This former prominent Continuity IRA commander was shot dead at a fuel depot in West Belfast during a long-running internal factional feud (CAIN, n.d.).

2015

Date: 5 May 2015

Victim: Gerard ‘Jock’ Davison

Details: Former Provisional IRA commander was shot dead in Belfast during a localised dispute involving dissident republican actors (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 11 October 2015

Victim: Garda Tony Golden

Details: An Garda Síochána officer was shot dead while responding to a domestic disturbance in Omeath, Louth, by a dissident republican (CAIN, n.d.).

2016

Date: 7 January 2016

Victim: Conor McKee

Details: He died after being shot in the legs at his parents' home in north Belfast, with sources attributing the murder to the New IRA or an INLA splinter group (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 5 February 2016

Victim: David Byrne

Details: Member of the Kinahan organised crime group was shot dead by a gang composed of criminals and a republican dissident. (Mooney, 2023).

Date: 25 April 2016

Victim: Michael Barr

Details: The member of the New IRA was shot dead by an organised crime group with support from paramilitaries in Dublin as part of the Hutch Kinahan feud. (Mooney, 2023).

Date: 4 March 2016

Victim: Adrian Ismay

Details: The Northern Ireland Prison Service officer succumbed to injuries from an under-car booby-trap bomb in Belfast that was claimed by the New IRA (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 16 April 2016

Victim: Michael McGibbon

Details: He was shot three times in the leg and died in north Belfast during a "punishment" shooting executed by the New IRA (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 9 May 2016

Victim: Dan Murray

Details: He was lured by a hoax call and shot dead in west Belfast after previously surviving a facial shooting by the Republican paramilitary group Action Against Drugs (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 7 December 2016

Victim: Aidan O’Driscoll

Details: This former senior Real IRA figure was shot dead in Cork due to internal structural splits and localised leadership rivalries (CAIN, n.d.).

2018

Date: 13 February 2018

Victim: Raymond Johnston

Details: He was shot dead at his residence in West Belfast in a killing linked to localised vigilantism or criminal disputes involving dissident paramilitary actors (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 4 December 2018

Victim: Jim Donegan

Details: He was shot dead outside a school in Belfast due to criminal-paramilitary conflicts involving elements of dissident republican organisations (CAIN, n.d.).

2019

Date: 18 April 2019

Victim: Lyra McKee

Details: This journalist was shot and killed while documenting rioting in Derry by the New IRA, who stated she was hit inadvertently during firing directed at police (CAIN, n.d.).

2020

Date: 27 June 2020

Victim: Warren Crossan

Details: He was shot dead in West Belfast in a targeted attack linked to multi-layered criminal and paramilitary feuds involving dissident republicans (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 29 June 2020

Victim: Kieran Wylie

Details: Victim was shot dead at his residence in West Belfast in an attack attributed to localised dissident republican disciplinary action or a feud (CAIN, n.d.).

2021

Date: 7 March 2021

Victim: Danny McClean

Details: He was shot dead in North Belfast due to internal structural disputes and criminal friction within localised dissident networks (CAIN, n.d.).

Date: 18 December 2021

Victim: Mark Hall

Details: Victim was shot dead at his family residence in West Belfast over ongoing personal and factional criminal disputes involving dissident republican elements (CAIN, n.d.).

2022

Date: 2 October 2022

Victim: Sean Fox

Details: Victim was shot dead inside a sports club in West Belfast due to internal fractures or criminal rivalries involving localised dissident republican actors (CAIN, n.d.).

2024

Date: 9 January 2024

Victim: Kevin Conway

Details: Victim was shot dead in West Belfast while on bail in an attack attributed to localised dissident republican or criminal-paramilitary elements (CAIN, n.d.).

Primary and Secondary Sources

Interviewees

Subject A1: Dissident Republican.

Subject A2: Dissident Republican Supporter.

Subject A3: Dissident Republican Supporter.

Subject A4: Dissident Republican.

Subject A5: Former member of the Provisional IRA and the Real IRA.

Subject A6: Spouse of dissident republican.

Subject A7: Former member of the Provisional IRA.

Subject A8: Unaligned dissident republican.

Subject A9: Associate of murdered dissident.

Subject A10: Dissident Republican.

Subject A11: Former member of the Official IRA.

Subject B1: Retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

Subject B2: Retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

Subject B3: Retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

Subject B4: Retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

Subject B5: Retired officer who served in the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Subject B6: Retired detective who served with the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the National Crime Agency.

Subject B7: Retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

Subject B8: Retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

Subject B9: Retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

Subject B10: Garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

Subject C1: Republican/Observer based in Derry.

Notes: Chapter 5

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[1] Interview with Subject B10, garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[2] Interview with Subject A7, former member of the Provisional IRA.

[3] Interview with Subject A7, former member of the Provisional IRA; A10, dissident republican.

[4] Interview with Subject A8, unaligned dissident; A 10, dissident republican.

[5] Interview with Subject A4, dissident republican.

[6] Interview with Subject A4, dissident republican.

[7] Interview with Subject B1, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[8] Interview with Subject B1, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[9] Interview with Subjects B1, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles; B2, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles; B3, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[10] Internal Garda Briefing Report

[11] Interview with Subject B1, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[12] Interview with Subject A6, spouse of dissident republican; B1, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles; B2, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles; B3, retired who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[13] Interview with Subject B2, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[14] Interview with Subject A6, spouse of dissident republican.

[15] Interview with Subject B2, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[16] Interview with Subject A6, spouse of dissident republican.

[17] Interview with Subject B2, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles; B3, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles; B4, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[18] Interview with Subject B9, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[19] Interview with Subject A4, dissident republican.

[20] Interview with Subject B1, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[21] Interview with Subject B2, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[22] Interview with Subject B3, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[23] Interview with Subject A8, unaligned dissident.

[24] Interview with Subject A8, unaligned dissident; A9, associate of republican dissident.

[25] Interview with Subject B2, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[26] Interview with Subject B3, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[27] Interview with Subject B2, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles; B3 retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[28] Interview with Subject B2, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles; B3 retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[29] Interview with Subject B2, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles; B3, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles; B4, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[30] Interview with Subject A2, dissident republican supporter; A3, dissident republican supporter.

[31] Interview with Subject A10, dissident republican.

[32] Interview with Subject B1, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles; B2, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles; B3, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[33] Interview with Subject B4, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[34] Interview with Subject A5, former member of the Provisional IRA who joined the Real IRA.

[35] Interview with Subject A10, dissident republican.

[36] Interview with Subject A4, dissident republican; A6, spouse of dissident republican; A10, dissident republican; B1, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles; B2, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles; B3, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles; B4, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

Notes: Chapter 6

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[1] Subject A6: Spouse of dissident republican.

Notes: Chapter 7

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[1] Interview with Subject B1, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[2] Interview with Subject A1, dissident republican.

[3] Interview with Subject A10, dissident republican.

[4] Interview with Subject B1, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[5] Interview with Subject B1, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[6] Interview with Subject C1: republican/observer based in Derry.

[7] Interview with Subject C1: republican/observer based in Derry.

[8] Interview with Subject C1: republican/observer based in Derry.

[9] Interview with Subject B1, retired garda who served in anti-terrorist roles.

[10] Interview with Subject C1, republican/observer based in Derry.

[11] Interview with Subject C1, republican/observer based in Derry.

[12] Interview with Subject C1, republican based in Derry.

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