

Changing Direction

The Irish Republican Movement's Decision to End Abstention

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Abstract

From the beginning, the Irish Republican Movement (IRM) had upheld a commitment to abstaining from taking elected seats in what were viewed as illegitimate government institutions. This commitment, coupled with the use of armed conflict to achieve their stated goals, can be viewed as founding pillars to their strategy for ousting the British from Ireland. In 1986, the abstention policy was abandoned amidst a decades-long war with the British known as the Troubles. This thesis explores the following questions: why did the IRM end abstention during the Troubles and what role did this period of time have in that decision? It is concluded that this decision was the means to realign the IRM's biographical narrative with the movement's practices and therefore maintain its ontological security, or stable sense of self. A number of critical events during the Troubles brought this tension between identity and practice into stark contrast. It is argued this tension was alleviated by the ending of the abstention policy and participation in established political processes.

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Introduction

With deep roots that evolved through many years of Irish history, the Irish Republican Movement (IRM)^{1, 2} is based on a revolutionary ideology that believes in the use of physical force to gain Irish independence from the British and form a thirty-two country republic³. The unending quest for sovereignty has coloured much of Ireland's past, from the 1916 Easter Uprising to the Troubles⁴ that permeated Northern Ireland from 1968 until the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. This extensive history has produced deep-seated traditions and a rigid dogmatism that has been useful for ensuring the continuity of the IRM but has also created structures and obstacles to change which were necessary to address pressing issues. The inability to accept political participation as a means for supporting the IRM's struggle in the early years of the Troubles, for example, damaged the morale of IRM members at a time when the support of those who sympathized with (and were willing to participate in), the cause was direly needed.

One of the most important aspects of the IRM, in terms of guiding and motivating members, was abstention: the practice of not taking elected seats in what were considered

¹ Republicanism is distinguished from nationalism by adherent's commitment to physical force. Nationalists believe that Ireland should merge into one country through peaceful means, while republicans support the armed struggle in achieving their ends.

² For the purpose of this thesis, the IRM refers to the legacy of the 1916 Easter Uprising in terms of the rise of the IRA and Sinn Fein as the embodiment of the IRM as well as the principles that guide that mutually constituted relationship. In the aftermath of the Rising, the relationship between Sinn Fein (a political movement), and the IRA (an Irish paramilitary) developed and this relationship shapes much of the history discussed in this thesis. There have been numerous splits within and between the IRA and Sinn Fein since that time which occurred over the contestation of the founding principles established during and in the aftermath of the Rising (i.e. the use of armed struggle and abstention to force Britain from Ireland and establish an independent Republic). This thesis traces and discusses only the history of the IRM members and leaders that remained tied to the principles established during the 1916 Rising.

³ As this thesis explains later, after the implementation of the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty, independence from the British was only in reference to Northern Ireland.

⁴ The Troubles were a 30 year violent conflict in which the IRM had dedicated themselves to ending British rule in Northern Ireland and uniting Northern Ireland with the independent Republic of Ireland. The conflict was characterized by a history of political as well as sectarian and ethnic cleavages between Catholics/Protestants and Irish nationalists/British loyalists. The history of these divides will be further discussed in Chapter One and the causes and nature of the Troubles will be addressed in Chapter's Two and Four.

‘foreign’ and illegitimate parliaments. Abstention became a fundamental aspect of the IRM after the 1916 Easter Rising. In the eyes of the IRM, the Proclamation read by the leaders of the Rising established the “Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State”⁵ (Coogan 54). What was gained through the War of Independence that followed this declaration fell far short of the Republic envisioned by the leaders of 1916. Ireland was partitioned and Northern Ireland remained tied to Britain while the Southern parliament took a series of steps toward sovereignty and officially gained independence in 1949. In a demonstration of their allegiance to the Republic of 1916, the IRM refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of any government institution created by the British and committed themselves to abstaining from participation in the Leinster House (Dublin), Stormont (Northern Ireland) and Westminster (United Kingdom) parliaments (Feeney 125-6). Thus in Ireland, abstention became a core principle of the IRM’s ideology. However, in a landmark decision in 1986, the IRM ended the abstention policy and voted in favour of entering Leinster House in Dublin⁶. What is more, this fundamental policy was abandoned in the midst of the Troubles—one of the most important periods in the history of the IRM and the struggle to oust the British in Northern Ireland. This thesis is therefore guided by the following questions: why did the IRM decide to end abstention at this time? What role did

⁵In this paper, the Republic refers to the Republic that was proclaimed by the leaders of the 1916 Easter Uprising and encompassed all of Ireland. For the IRM, the Republic was inaugurated with the 1918 Westminster election, when Sinn Fein candidates abstained from taking the seats they had won and instead formed the Dail. The Republic was never recognized as a sovereign state, but the IRM read their electoral victory as a vote of support for their cause. All modern IRM members and leaders claim allegiance to the Republic. This is why the IRA and Sinn Fein consider themselves an all-Ireland movement regardless of partition and the eventual establishment of the Republic of Ireland (an independent state formed among the 26 counties in 1949 that evolved from the Anglo-Irish Treaty).

⁶ In practice, the IRM was an all-Ireland movement, though it gradually became a predominantly Northern movement throughout the Troubles. For them, the fact that southern Ireland eventually became the independent Republic of Ireland did not make either the governing institution (Leinster House) or the partition of Ireland any more legitimate. They were committed to the Republic of 1916, which was an all-Ireland Republic. Therefore, they continued to operate as an all-Ireland movement wherein abstaining from seats in Stormont in Northern Ireland, Leinster House in Dublin and Westminster in Britain were all of equal importance. In 1986, they only ended the abstention policy in regard to Leinster House.

the Troubles play in that decision? In order to explore these questions, it is important to set abstention in its historical context. This will clarify both how central abstention was to the IRM, as well as how and why the policy was abandoned in 1986.

The centrality of abstention to the IRM is evidenced through the various splits in the movement's history that occurred over whether to take up their elected members' seats. The IRM was divided over the issue of ending abstention in 1921, 1926 and 1969. On one side were the ideologues who stood for the Republic as proclaimed in 1916. This group emphasized maintaining continuity with the traditions of the IRM, especially the commitment to the armed struggle and the eschewing of political activity in terms of abstaining from participation in formal political institutions such as elections. On the other side were those members who were willing to question the rigid dogmatism of abstention; members who believed that formally participating in politics could achieve more for the IRM than the application or threat of physical force. Through the numerous splits in the IRM, those who advocated for participating in politics were unable to maintain their claims of representing the 'true' IRM. Their actions created dissonance in regards to the symbols, myths and narratives of the IRM. It was not until 1986 that the IRM ended abstention in Leinster House in Dublin and were able to stake a claim on these symbols, myths and narratives which are central to the IRM.

In September 1985 the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), the military element of the IRM, removed the constitutional ban on discussing or advocating the taking of seats. Following this announcement, at the 1986 *ard fheis*⁷ the Provisional Sinn Fein (PSF), the political wing of the IRM, passed a resolution to end the policy of abstention. Given the centrality of abstention to the IRM, the decision to take up seats in 1986 is a fascinating one. Not

⁷ The annual Sinn Fein party conference.

only did the IRM manage to pass the proposal to end abstention in the seventeenth year of an armed campaign against the British, but for the first time in its history, the motion was passed without causing a major split in its ranks (Feeney 330-33). In this context, two questions arise: why did the IRM abandon what was seen as a central tenet of the movement; and, how were they able to achieve such a drastic change of their manifesto? Considering that abstention had caused such difficulties for the IRM on a number of occasions in the past, this shift signifies an important institutional change.

This thesis takes up the questions of why and how the IRM ended the abstention policy and decided to take up seats in the Dublin parliament. The timing of this change is instrumental as it provides insight into how and why abstention was abandoned. The decision to end abstention took place in the midst of the Troubles. The Troubles had an irrevocable effect on the political and social landscape in which the IRM operated. Those members who were fiercely committed to the armed struggle were also suspicious of participating in politics; it was not until 1986 that their anxieties were sufficiently calmed by the IRM leadership. The political strategy that was able to emerge as a result of this development was still focused on the sovereignty issue, but it also provided a legitimate platform through which the IRM's goals could be expressed and engaged in dialogue. The IRM's decision to formally participate in politics was a necessary precursor to the peace negotiations that resulted in the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. The Good Friday Agreement was the first major political development in the Northern Ireland peace process in the 1990s and its success depended heavily on participation in existing political institutions and subduing traditional inclinations toward armed conflict. This thesis argues that the acceptance of politics as legitimate aspect of the IRM's identity was aided by the context in which it took place (i.e. during the Troubles). Therefore, as this thesis concludes, understanding

the context in which the decision to end abstention took place generates insight applicable to conflict resolution.

Methodology

This thesis will employ a case study methodology, focusing on the decision by the IRM to formally participate in politics. In contrast to quantitative research, which examines a few variables across a large number of cases, the case study approach offers a qualitative investigation of the complex interaction of many factors in a few cases (Thomas 512). According to Gary Thomas, case studies are

an analysis of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame—an object—within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates (513).

Thomas argues the case study is comprised of two elements: the subject of the study, which refers to the instance of some phenomenon, and the object of the study which is the phenomenon itself, or the analytical or theoretical frame (Thomas 513). For the purposes of this thesis, the subject is the IRM's decision to end abstention and the object is the impact of identity/ontological security on that decision. This differentiation between the subject and object is critical because it allows social scientists to explain not only the “what” questions but the “why” questions as well (Thomas 513). For example, what happened to the IRM during the Troubles will be explored but, just as importantly, the thesis seeks to demonstrate why this happened. A case study allows the inquirer to demonstrate that something has to be explained (the object) as well as to advance an explanation for that phenomenon (the analysis of the circumstances of a subject) (Thomas 513).

Importantly, a case study is not seen as a method in and of itself. A case study defines what is to be studied, and may incorporate other methods in order to study the case (Thomas 512). In the case of this thesis, discourse analysis is utilized; the process of deconstructing an event or outcome into a series of observations which produces an explanation. This thesis deconstructs the process by which the position of abstention taken by Sein Fein in 1905 to participating in formal politics ended with the taking up of seats in Leinster House during the Troubles. Each of these observations represents a critical event that changed the context in which the IRM operated, in turn shaping the way in which IRM members saw themselves and their goals. Making sense of this process is achieved through the theoretical framework of ontological security. Ontological security refers to security of self-identity and involves experiencing oneself as a whole, continuous person through time⁸. Ontological security is premised on the notion that individuals need to feel secure in their identities in order to realize a sense of agency, requiring continuity within and between their actions as well as the way they think of themselves. This concept will be more thoroughly explained in the next section of this chapter. Discourse analysis assists in explaining how actors are concerned with ontological security as it uncovers the biographical narrative of a group and also demonstrates “how a discourse’s effects constitute certain type of action” (Steele 11). As will be discussed subsequently, the biographical narrative of a group must be consistent with the group’s self-concepts because agency requires a stable environment. Actors create meaning for their actions in order to demonstrate this balance and to legitimize changes in self-concepts. This is accomplished in the biographical narrative, wherein groups justify a policy or action by explaining what the policy or action means in relation to their self-identity. In order to determine how the timing of ending abstention relates to the timing of

⁸ This concept will be explained in more detail in the following section.

the Troubles, Chapter Four analyzes the discourse used by high-ranking and influential IRM members before, during, and after the motion was passed. This analysis uncovers how the IRM created meaning for such a substantial change in their routines and, also, how they viewed and acted on threats to their self-concepts.

Theoretical Framework

This thesis posits that the period known as the Troubles played an instrumental role in the decision to end abstention and to take up seats in legislative assemblies. However, understanding this connection requires an analysis of abstention, the Troubles and the decision to end abstention. To analyze this relationship, this thesis employs the theoretical model of ontological security as understood by Jennifer Mitzen and Brent J. Steele. This theoretical framework builds on the assumptions of traditional security studies in order to address matters that the rational actor model has difficulty attending to. Traditional security studies often derive their assumptions from schools such as realism and liberalism which posit that rational behaviour is based on calculations of physical security and economic prosperity. Ontological security argues that this only explains some aspects of behaviour. This theory suggests that much of the actions of both individuals and groups are based on maintaining their ontological security—that is, these actions satisfy the self-identity needs of the individual or group. Collectives seek to maintain a consistent self-identity because identity is viewed as a narrative through which agency is made possible. In her article, *Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma*, Mitzen addresses the role of agency in ontological security which is worth quoting at length:

Ontological security refers to the need to experience oneself as a whole, continuous person in time—as being rather than constantly changing—in

order to realize a sense of agency. Individuals need to feel secure in who they are, as identities or selves. Some, deep forms of uncertainty threaten this identity security. The reason is that agency requires a stable and cognitive environment. Where an actor has no idea what to expect, she cannot systematically relate ends to means, and it becomes unclear how to pursue her ends. Since ends are constitutive of identity, in turn, deep uncertainty renders the actor's identity insecure. Individuals are therefore motivated to create cognitive and behavioural certainty, which they do by establishing routines" (342).

Mitzen goes on to explain that, for theorists of ontological security, self-identity is formed and sustained through social relationships. Therefore, actors achieve consistency and, by extension, agency, by "routinizing their relations with significant others" (Mitzen 342). Steele expands on this concept, noting that "these routines can be disrupted when a [group] realizes that its narrative actions no longer reflect or are reflected by how it sees itself" (Steele 3). When these moments of crisis cause a change in self-identity, a group will attempt to "re-establish routines that can, once again, consistently maintain self-identity" (Steele 3). However, the connection between new routines and the identity of a collective must be made explicit, because, according to Anthony F. Lang, "only in the telling of the event does it acquire meaning, the meaning that makes such events politically relevant" (Steele 10). This final point requires a deeper understanding of the two foundational features of ontological security.

Ontological security is composed of two mutually constitutive elements that are important for the purposes of this thesis: self-concepts and the biographical narrative. Self-concepts simply refer to how a group sees itself and the actions it pursues. All of these self-concepts culminate in the biographical narrative, which is the "story or stories by means of which self-identity is reflexively understood, both by the [group] concerned and by others" (Steele 10). The biographical narrative links the implications of an action with a description or understanding of a state of "self" (Steele 10). Importantly, self-concepts do not generally occupy

a conscious space—they are not something that is routinely thought about, until they are disrupted or challenged. As previously mentioned, this challenge is usually preceded by a crisis. When a crisis leads to a change in self-concepts, the biographical narrative must be re-imagined in order to connect new routines to self-identity. The biographical narrative allows actors to “create meanings for their actions to be logically consistent with their identities. This means that [groups] must explain, justify, and/or ‘argue’ what a policy would mean about their sense of self-identity” (Steele 11).

The analytical lens offered by ontological security helps make sense of the connection between abstention, ending abstention and the Troubles. For the purposes of this thesis, the Troubles are considered a crisis that challenged the self-concepts of the IRM. It is argued that events throughout the period caused the IRM to reflect on their success in terms of their role as the principal group still fighting for Irish sovereignty. Through these moments, it became apparent that the self-concepts of the IRM increasingly lacked resonance with its biographical narrative. That is, the military self-concept represented by the IRA and the armed struggle was no longer seen as the most important avenue for securing the unification of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland⁹. The solution to the ontological *insecurity* generated by this imbalance was to re-establish the connection between self-concepts and biographical narrative. In this case, the decision to end abstention and enlarge the importance of the political self-concept represents the change in action that the IRM embraced. However, in order to accomplish this transformation, the IRM had to justify the decision through its biographical narrative. By applying discourse analysis to various speeches, policy documents, IRM newspapers, autobiographies and interviews, the thesis illustrates how the leadership was able to reimagine

⁹ In 1949, the Republic of Ireland was established encompassing the twenty-six counties of the South.

their self-concepts in order to legitimize the abandonment of abstention. This explains not only why, but how, the IRM ended abstention in 1986.

Implications of Study

This study has two important implications: it seeks, in the context of Ireland's recent history, an alternative explanation as to what drove social action in that state and, through this explanation, generate insight into the study of such deep rooted conflicts. First, as previously noted, the thesis builds on the work of Mitzen and Steele. These authors offer an explanation for behaviour that builds on that of traditional security studies, which assume that rational behaviour is based primarily on securing physical integrity or economic prosperity. On the other hand, Mitzen and Steele also equate action to the identity needs of collectives. Such an approach overcomes the dilemma of why some actors behave in a way that would be considered irrational in traditional security studies. These studies give primacy to the physical integrity of an actor, and it is therefore difficult to explain why some actors pursue actions that threaten their physical security.

In the case of the IRM, the commitment to the physical force tradition, and to the violent armed campaign of 1968-98, does not equate with a rational concern for one's survival. The IRM very much recognized that the power to change the political status of Ireland ultimately rested in the hands of British politicians, because the ill-equipped and moderately sized IRM was taking on the behemoth that was the British Army. The armed campaign was never expected to force the British to surrender, but to force the British to the negotiating table through a sustained military campaign that generated not only fear, but economic and political consequences for the British trying to maintain control (Smith 97-125). The fact that this strategy posed a very high

risk to the physical security of members was well-known and accepted. The PIRA's 1977 *Green Book* set forth the history, aims and methodology of the movement, and made it clear to all new recruits that

potential volunteers must realise that the threat of capture and of long jail sentences are a very real danger and a shadow which hangs over every volunteer...Again all people wishing to join the Army must fully realise that when life is being taken, that very well could mean their own. If you go out to shoot soldiers or police you must fully realize that they can shoot you. Life in an underground army is extremely harsh and hard, cruel and disillusioning at times. So before any person decides to join the Army he should think seriously about the whole thing (2-3).

The violence, destruction and death that engulfed Northern Ireland during the Troubles would have been enough to convince any recruit or aspiring member that joining the cause meant putting one's life on the line, and this official document all but confirms those beliefs. However, throughout the period of the Troubles, the IRM enjoyed a fair degree of support in terms of both membership and assistance from the communities they were obliged to protect. The threat to their physical security did not deter members and supporters from participating, and therefore, the behaviour of the IRM is not easily understood by the rational actor model proposed by traditional security studies. In this context, this thesis proposes that ontological security is better equipped to explain the actions of the IRM.

The second proposition of the thesis is that understanding conflict in terms of ontological security generates insight applicable to conflict resolution. This inference is an extension of the first proposition: the privileging of rational decision making based on physical security and economic prosperity. These traditional methods of understanding the conflict between the IRM and the British have difficulty explaining the behaviour of the former as far as their commitment to physical force is concerned. Ontological security offers insights that are more adept for

drawing conclusions regarding such “irrational” behaviour. Ontological security determines that, “where conflict persists and comes to fulfill identity needs, breaking free can generate ontological insecurity, which states seek to avoid” (Mitzen 343). In this context, the violent conflict with the British during the Troubles fulfilled the self-identity needs of the IRM, despite the fact that it put their physical security at risk. Approaching this conflict from an ontological security standpoint, it becomes clear that physical security and economic prosperity did not motivate the IRM. Therefore, as Mitzen argues, “inter-state routines must be attended to in attempts to end recurrent conflict” (343). The research implication is that understanding the impact of *identity* on behaviour helps address the problem of bringing an end to conflicts. In this case, the Troubles caused a crisis for the self-identity of the IRM because a number of events forced them to reflect on the connection between their self-concepts and their biographical narrative. When it became obvious that the military self-concept could not alone fulfill the narrative goal of uniting Ireland, the IRM changed their routines by increasing the importance of their political self-concept. This change was a necessary precursor to the ability of the IRM to engage in peace negotiations just a few years later.

Chapter Outline

This thesis proceeds through five chapters. Chapter one provides a brief history of the IRM and its traditions, with a particular focus on the issue of abstention and the mutually constituted relationship of Sinn Fein and the IRA as the embodiment of the IRM. Throughout its history, the question of enlarging the political ambitions and endeavours of the IRM was a highly contentious one; the question of taking seats in what were considered illegitimate governing institutions caused a number of official splits in the IRM. Knowing this history is critical to understanding why the decision to take up seats in 1986 was so important. Not only did 1986

mark the first time the IRM did not split over the question of formally participating in politics, but it is counterintuitive in that abstention was a central aspect of the movement's identity.

Chapter two discusses the critical period of time known as the Troubles. This Chapter has two principal goals. First, it situates the thesis amongst the contemporary literature concerning the Troubles and explores the causes and dynamics of the period. Second, this thesis argues that the Troubles have explanatory power for understanding the decision to formally participate in politics. A number of occurrences throughout the Troubles created moments of reflection that challenged the IRM's self-concepts and their ability to fulfill their biographical narrative with the use of the military self-concept alone. Events such as the ceasefires that took place during the Troubles and the Hunger Strikes in 1981 forced the IRM to reimagine their past and current activities in light of new developments. Taken as a whole, it is posited that the events of the Troubles created a threat to the IRM's sense of self, eventually forcing the enlargement of their political self-concept and leading to the end of abstention in 1986. The chapter concludes by arguing that the Troubles created the context for change in the policy regarding abstention and that this transformation is best understood through the lens of ontological security.

Chapter Three offers a synopsis of ontological security. The two main proponents applying ontological security to group behaviour, Jennifer Mitzen and Brent J. Steele, draw their theories from the sociologically oriented work of Anthony Giddens. The theoretical models employed by all three authors are explored. Building on this overview, the chapter defines two central elements of role theory and ontological security: self-concepts and the biographical narrative. Self-concepts refer to how a group sees itself and makes sense of the actions it pursues while the biographical narrative is the story through which those concepts are reflexively understood. Both self-concepts and biographical narrative need to be aligned in order for a group

to feel as though they have agency. These terms will be of utmost importance in the application of role theory and ontological security to the case in question.

Chapter Four assesses the research problem outlined in chapter two using the theoretical framework that was detailed in Chapter Three. This analysis demonstrates how the events of the Troubles challenged the effectiveness of the military self-concept for fulfilling the goals of the biographical narrative of the IRM, eventually leading to the enlargement of their political self-concept in the form of ending abstention. This analysis is accomplished through a series of observations which connect ontological security and identity-needs to the actions of the IRM throughout the Troubles, up to and including ending abstention. To this end, chapter four is composed of six sub-sections: the first sub-section is dedicated to outlining the self-concepts of the movement at the start of the Provisional era; sub-sections two through five discuss each of the observations in turn; and sub-section six provides a meta-narrative concerning the observations, the Troubles and the end of abstention. The observations are analysed in regards to how they challenged the IRM's self-concepts; how these challenges created dissonance with their biographical narrative; and finally, how the need for resonance between self-concepts and biographical narrative influenced the rebalancing of self-concepts. These observations include: the Lower Falls Curfew in 1970; the 1972 IRA ceasefire; the 1975 IRA ceasefire; and, the 1981-2 Hunger Strikes. The Chapter concludes by tying all of the observations together into a meta-narrative that identifies the Troubles as a crisis that challenged the IRM's sense of self, which eventually led to the decision to formally participate in political institutions.

Finally, this thesis concludes by summarising the argument presented, discussing the implications of the case study, and suggesting ways that the insights generated by this thesis can be applied to understanding conflict.

Chapter One

Introduction

Chapter one explores the evolution of the IRM from the 1916 Easter Uprising to the emergence of the Provisional movement in the late 1960s. This Chapter provides the history and context of the rise of Sinn Fein and the IRA as the two halves composing the IRM with the intent of highlighting their mutually constituted relationship. An investigation of this history will demonstrate that, although the IRA and Sinn Fein are separate entities with different histories and serve different functions as the two elements that constitute the IRM, they share common foundational principles that have come to define the IRM as a whole. Understanding this complex history clarifies both how important the concept of abstention is to the IRM, as well as why the IRA and Sinn Fein must be treated as mutually constituted elements in the history of the IRM. Furthermore, this historical background sets the necessary context for understanding the importance of the Troubles and, importantly for this thesis, the decision to end abstention. This will be the focus of Chapter Two.

This Chapter is divided into three sections that analyze the effects of three historical periods on the IRM: section one focuses on the 1916 Easter Uprising; section two discusses the post-Anglo-Irish Treaty era; and, section three discusses the IRM in the period between 1926 and 1969. The first section discusses how the relationship between the IRA and Sinn Fein as the two components of the IRM developed as a result of the Rising. The relationship between these two organizations would henceforth be shaped by their commitment to abstention and the ideals of the Republic of 1916 as the foundational principles of the IRM, beginning with the first split in

the IRM over the Anglo-Irish Treaty¹⁰. The second section of the Chapter discusses how varying degrees of commitment to abstention within the IRM caused a split within the movement in the years following the implementation of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The recurring debate over ending abstention caused contention within the IRM between those members who were willing to compromise on the ideals of 1916 and those who were fiercely devoted to the Republic of 1916 and the abstention policy. The third and final section of the Chapter provides a brief overview of IRM after the split that occurred in 1926, where the IRA and Sinn Fein became disassociated from one another. However, when the IRA began planning a new campaign in the 1950s, Sinn Fein was the only legitimate option in terms of a political partner because they had upheld the foundational values of the IRM established in 1916. Following the failure of the 1950s campaign, Sinn Fein and the IRA, once again united in their roles as the mutually constituted elements of the IRM, took a turn toward Marxism in the early 1960s. The Marxist doctrine that influenced the IRM leadership during this period deemphasized the role of armed conflict in favour of implementing a social and economic programme, which implied the necessity for taking seats in government. The IRM split once again in 1969 over the issue of ending abstention, but what emerged in the aftermath of that split was a united, progressive, IRM that dominated Northern Ireland's political and social landscape for the next two decades—a period now known simply as the Troubles.

¹⁰ There were numerous splits between the IRA and Sinn Fein throughout their history and also within these two institutions themselves. Whenever these divisions occurred it was the group that remained steadfast in their loyalty to the 1916 Republic and the principles that derived from that event who were able to retain ownership of the IRM label as well as the official names Sinn Fein and IRA. The groups that parted from those loyalties were forced to adopt new titles that did not carry the history and weight of the aforementioned names.

The 1916 Easter Uprising

The Easter Rising of 1916 affected the IRM in three ways: first, the relationship between Sinn Fein and the IRA was established and these two organizations would come to be the two mutually constituted elements of the IRM, Sinn Fein representing the political voice of the movement and the IRA being the armed component; second, the abstention policy became a fundamental aspect of the IRM and played an important role in shaping the relationship between Sinn Fein and the IRA; and, lastly, the documents that were meant to settle the conflict caused the first split in the IRM between members who compromised on the abstention policy and those who viewed any compromise as traitorous to the Republic proclaimed in 1916. This analysis demonstrates the centrality of abstention to the IRM and the mutually constituted relationship between the IRA and Sinn Fein that is shaped by the abstention principle. A brief overview of the Easter Rising underscores how this event serves as one of the most important symbols in the modern IRM.

In 1916, a small group of men from the Irish Republican Brotherhood¹¹ organised a military revolt with help from the Irish Volunteers¹², the Irish Citizen Army¹³ and Cumann na mBan¹⁴ (Feeney 57). These rebels seized the General Post Office (GPO) and other key areas in Dublin on April 24. The Rising is considered a turning point in Irish history as it established the thirty-two county Republic¹⁵ that the IRM claims allegiance to. The “Proclamation of the Republic” that was recited by the Irish forces when they took the GPO is considered the

¹¹ A fraternal organization dedicated to Irish independence.

¹² An organization of Irish nationalists formed in 1913.

¹³ A group consisting of trained trade union members for the purpose of protecting workers from police at demonstrations.

¹⁴ An all-women paramilitary formed in 1914 as an auxiliary of the Irish Volunteers.

¹⁵ Historically, Ireland consists of thirty-two counties. Through partition, the six counties out of the nine that made up historical Ulster were constituted as Northern Ireland which remained part of the UK, and the twenty-six counties to the South became the Irish Free State.

“foundational document for the independent Irish state” (Hart 1). The document declared the right of the Irish people to ownership and governance over Ireland, as opposed to “the long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government” (Smith 30). The rebels fought for six days, at which point they were captured by the British, ninety people were sentenced to death, not all of them leaders or even participants in the conflict, and over 3,000 men across the island were imprisoned.

The first effect of the Uprising on the IRM was the emergent relationship between the militant supporters of the Republic who would come to be known as the IRA¹⁶ and the political organization known as Sinn Fein. This relationship ultimately began as somewhat of an accident: the Easter Uprising had been incorrectly dubbed the “Sinn Fein Rising” (Feeney 55-61). Sinn Fein was an organization founded by Arthur Griffith in 1904-5 that advanced the following set of policies: abstaining from sending Irish MPs to Westminster; peaceful resistance and opposition to physical force; a dual monarchy wherein Ireland and Britain would have the same monarch, but with two parliaments separate and independent from each other; and self-sufficiency through the use of Irish approaches to Irish problems (Coogan 26-8; Feeney 18-43; Maillot 8). The opposition to physical force and commitment to monarchism did not suit the IRA, but in need of a public face and recognizing the opportunities presented by a swell of national support for their cause and the use of physical force in the post-Rising period, the leadership of the IRA under Michael Collins and Eamon de Valera assumed control of the Sinn Fein banner¹⁷. The peaceful

¹⁶ The various volunteer organizations of the 1916 Rising did not officially become the IRA until after 1918, when the Dail Eireann, which will be discussed later, recognized the volunteers as their official Army.

¹⁷ There were already significant ties between the IRA and Sinn Fein previous to the establishment of this relationship. Arthur Griffith himself was a member of the Irish Volunteers, one of the groups that contributed members during the 1916 Rising (although Griffith himself did not participate). This was typical of many members of Sinn Fein; they were simultaneously members of the groups that participated in, or at the very least supported, the Rising and the principles that emerged in its aftermath. Therefore, when the leaders of the IRA embarked on

resistance and dual monarchy principles were abandoned in favour of an armed campaign and political independence in the form of a Republic, while the abstention policy was maintained as it resonated with the IRA's values of independence from Britain (Feeney 18-43; Maillot 8-9). The fact that the IRA assumed control of Sinn Fein is an important one: as a result of the belief that the armed struggle perpetrated by the IRA could achieve more toward establishing a Republic than the political avenues that would have been pursued by Sinn Fein, the IRA assumed the more powerful position in this relationship and in the IRM as a whole. The latter point will be elaborated on in the following paragraphs.

The second effect of the Uprising was that abstention became a fundamental principle of the IRM. The 1918 general election was the first opportunity that the IRM was given to demonstrate that they had the support of the Irish electorate in regard to the establishment of a thirty-two county independent Republic. In pursuit of this victory, the IRM leadership under Collins and de Valera, intent on fulfilling the goals of the Proclamation, fought the December 1918 Westminster general election under the Sinn Fein banner and on an abstentionist ticket. This meant that elected Sinn Fein candidates would abstain from taking their seat in Westminster, and would instead form their own assembly (Maillot 9-10). When the IRM won seventy-three seats out of one hundred and five in the election¹⁸ under the Sinn Fein banner, the IRM leadership read the outcome as “the people of Ireland's overwhelming support for independence in the shape of a republic...it was a retrospective endorsement of the 1916 Rising” (Feeney 110). The newly elected representatives abstained from their seats at Westminster and instead gathered in the Mansion House in Dublin and formed a new parliament: the Dail

uniting the two organizations, it was not difficult to assume control of the leadership of Sinn Fein as they already had the support of many of the membership through the armed component of the movement.

¹⁸ Because this election took place before the partition of Ireland, this was an all-Ireland election.

Eireann¹⁹ (Maillot 10). Although it was never officially recognized by the British, the creation of a government institution, completely independent of the British, legitimated by the votes of the Irish electorate, represented the greatest success for those who opposed British rule. The abstention policy allowed the IRM to both demonstrate support for their actions through electoral votes and to set up an elected assembly based on that support. For them, abstention came to be viewed as something “more than a tactic, it was an essential key to independence” (Maillot 10).

The importance of abstention was closely related to another guiding principle that emerged in the aftermath of the Easter Rising: the idea that the use of physical force, in contrast to politics, was the primary strategy for achieving Irish independence. In regard to the relationship between Sinn Fein and the IRA, wherein the armed struggle perpetrated by the IRA was given precedence, the IRM leadership read the electoral support for Sinn Fein as a vote supporting the goals of the 1916 Easter Rising; that is, a vote for a continued armed campaign to oust the British, with politics merely operating in the background until independence had been fully realized (Feeney 118-120). At the meeting in the Mansion House to inaugurate the Dail, a number of IRA members ambushed and killed two Royal Irish Constabulary officers, the armed police force for the United Kingdom in Ireland; this event is widely recognised as the beginning of the War of Independence (Feeney 119). By prioritizing the armed campaign of the IRA through those attacks over the proceedings of the First Dail, the military faction of the IRM demonstrated that they believed that the armed campaign was the primary tool for achieving Irish

¹⁹ At its inaugural meeting on January 21 1919, the members of the First Dail established the main resolutions of the parliamentary assembly: a constitution, a declaration of independence, an address to the free nations of the world, and a democratic programme. However, despite its importance to Irish republicans past and present, the First Dail Eireann was not internationally recognized as a legitimate governing institution. In addition to this lack of recognition and therefore international support, the British banned the First Dail in September 1919. This caused the membership to suspend participation in traditional political activity and forced them to operate underground where, in the context of the War of Independence, they had little ability to implement public policy or operate as a coherent and functional political institution.

independence. Although they shared leadership, goals and represented the two halves of the IRM, Sinn Fein was relegated to the role of organising elections and propaganda while the IRA would be the main tool through which victory in the form of Irish independence would be won (Maillot 5).

A number of features in the nature and timing of the attack illustrate the subordinate position of politics and Sinn Fein to the armed element of the IRM represented by the IRA. The armed campaign had been suspended in the run-up to the election; if violence had been allowed, it could have easily gotten out of control, Sinn Fein would be blamed for it and their electoral success greatly diminished. There is no evidence to show that those who perpetrated the attack either knew or cared about the inaugural meeting of the Dail. In fact, one of those involved later stated they had simply become fed up with forgoing the armed campaign to undertake political activities: they “were in great danger of becoming merely a political adjunct to the Sinn Fein organisation... We had enough of being pushed around” (Feeney 119). For these and men like them, the Republic would only be achieved by force and Sinn Fein’s electoral victory provided them the moral right to continue to fight for independence. This incident sparked a string of similar attacks that rapidly evolved into the War of Independence. In the guerilla-type warfare that the IRA engaged in, Sinn Fein had very little to do as a political party and thus their role became increasingly irrelevant in the actions of the IRM.

The final effect of the 1916 Rising is related to British intervention in Ireland and the lasting effects that would have on the IRM. Through two pieces of British legislation, the Government of Ireland Act and the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the importance of Sinn Fein’s role in the IRM was undermined and a major transformation of the relationship between the political and military wings of the IRM took place. In 1920, the British passed the Government of Ireland Act.

The Act would grant Home Rule to Ireland, administered through one parliament in Belfast and another in Dublin, both remaining part of the United Kingdom (UK) but effectively establishing a partition of Ireland (Feeney 130; Maillot 11). Taking the view that a partitioned Ireland was not the Republic that was fought for in 1916 and was therefore unacceptable, the IRM once again ran Sinn Fein candidates for both the northern and southern parliaments on an abstentionist ticket (Feeney 130-2). In the general election of 1921, Sinn Fein returned one-hundred and twenty-four unopposed candidates for the southern parliament; in the North, the Ulster Party that represented unionists secured forty out of the fifty-two seats and Sinn Fein won six seats (Feeney 132-3; Maillot 11). The elected Sinn Fein candidates from both the North and South assembled and declared themselves members of the Second Dail. Despite the importance of the Second Dail to the IRM it was not recognized by the British. King George V opened the Belfast parliament in June 1921 and Northern Ireland was established (Feeney 134). Due to the strength of the Ulster Party in Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein ceased to have a political influence there as early as 1922. As a result of the War of Independence that began with the attacks on the RIC in 1919, Home Rule was never even implemented in the twenty-six counties and Prime Minister of England David Lloyd George offered a truce to negotiate a settlement. Negotiations ended with the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty, which caused a split between those IRM members that supported the Treaty and those members that saw it as a betrayal of the Republic of 1916.

The Anglo-Irish Treaty established the Irish Free State by providing self-governing authority to the twenty-six counties, and its acceptance by the pro-Treaty IRM leadership was a contentious issue that caused the movement to fracture and led to civil war. Pro-Treaty IRM

members, led by Michael Collins²⁰ and Arthur Griffith²¹, saw the Anglo-Irish Treaty as a stepping stone to full independence (Maillot 12). The anti-Treaty IRM members were led by Eamon de Valera²², president of Sinn Fein as well as president of the Second Dail. This faction held steadfast to the Republic “that they were sworn to defend, which Sinn Fein had endorsed as its aim in the 1917 Ard Fheis and which the IRA had fought for since 1919” (Feeney 135). The two major disagreements between these groups revolved around their varying degrees of allegiance to the principles of the Republic of 1916 and their willingness to engage in British-constituted parliaments.

The first point of contention between pro- and anti-Treaty members was that the Treaty provided Northern Ireland the opportunity to opt out of the Irish Free State and solidify the partition implemented by the Government of Ireland Act 1920. Collins believed that once the political element of the IRM led by Sinn Fein was able to self-govern in the twenty-six counties, they could regain Northern Ireland soon after, while the de Valera division upheld that this undermined the thirty-two county Republic of 1916. Due to the nature of the partition²³ Northern Ireland did exercise this option and remained a part of the UK. The realisation of permanent partition caused resentment among anti-Treaty members and left republicans in

²⁰ A respected member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (one of the organizations that fought in the 1916 Rising and a predecessor to the IRA) who fought alongside the leadership at the GPO during the Easter Rising. Collins became one of the leaders of the independence movement following the Rising and became one of the leaders of Sinn Fein with Griffith and de Valera. Following the War of Independence, Collins was a signatory of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and one of the leaders of the pro-Treatyites.

²¹ Griffith was the founder of Sinn Fein. He led the independence movement alongside Collins and de Valera and also became one of the leaders of the pro-Treatyites.

²² De Valera was one of the leaders of the independence movement alongside Collins and Griffith. De Valera opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty and led the charge against the Irish Free State during the Civil War. De Valera managed to appropriate Sinn Fein in 1923 from former members that entered the Free State government. However, in 1926 he left Sinn Fein to establish his own party, Fianna Fail, when his motion to end abstention failed.

²³ Northern Ireland consists of six of the nine counties of the historical province of Ulster. The nature of partition was such that a unionist majority was ensured by only including the six counties in Northern Ireland, as the remaining three would have swung the balance in favour of a majority Catholic/nationalist population.

Northern Ireland feeling abandoned by the cause²⁴. The second conflict emerging from the Anglo-Irish Treaty arose due to the fact that the Irish Free State would not be a Republic, but an autonomous dominion of the British Empire with the British Monarch as head of state. Furthermore, IRM leaders would have to swear an oath of allegiance to King George. Obviously this was diametrically opposed to anti-Treaty ideals, in which complete political independence from the UK was central. Despite the protests of anti-Treaty members, the Treaty was accepted by a vote in the Dail in January of 1922, and the first split in the IRM took place. The pro-Treaty IRM leadership won the 1922 election that inaugurated the Irish Free State under the Sinn Fein banner, and de Valera continued to oppose the Treaty along with the anti-Treaty faction. The fighting between the Irish Free State forces and the anti-Treaty IRM members between 1922 and 1923 is known as the Irish Civil War.

The Irish Civil War led to first split in the IRM over the issue of participating in parliaments other than the First and Second Dails that were established through the use of abstention and supported by the majority of the Irish electorate. Following the break, those pro-Treaty members of the new Irish Free State government officially abandoned Sinn Fein, severed ties to the IRA and the armed campaign against the British, and focused on repressing the activities of those opposed to the new Free State during the Civil War: “meetings were broken up, documents seized and anyone or any organisation suspected of being opposed to the new Free State government relentlessly harassed” (Feeney 156). The severing of ties with Sinn Fein and the IRA meant the pro-Treaty members that formed the new government were no longer associated with the IRM, and the IRM was now being led by anti-Treaty members under de

²⁴ Collins, Griffith and de Valera all knew that running on an abstentionist ticket in the North would not be successful. The Unionist Party was strong in the North, and not taking their seats would mean republicans would have no say in the new parliament.

Valera. The IRM continued to fight against the Treaty but were not well organised or prepared to take on the Free State forces. As a result, when the IRA chief-of-staff issued an order to discard all armaments possessed by the Army in May of 1923, de Valera supported the move and the IRM ceased their physical force campaign. By June of that year de Valera was successful in appropriating the Sinn Fein banner that had been abandoned by the pro-Treaty leadership. As a result of the split described above, the IRM now consisted of members so uncompromising that “they were even dubious about using the name Sinn Fein because it had monarchial connotations” (Feeney 156). As is discussed in the following section, while the role of Sinn Fein would see a brief invigoration under his leadership, the influence and membership of the IRM in the post-Anglo-Irish Treaty era declined as a result of their respective commitment to abstention and the leadership of new Irish Free State government gradually gained popular support.

The Post-Anglo-Irish Treaty Era

The split in the IRM that occurred over the Anglo-Irish Treaty had severe consequences for the relationship between the IRA and Sinn Fein as well as the concept of abstention. The function of the following section is to address the two fundamental characteristics of the IRM in the post-Treaty era: first, for the most part, Sinn Fein and the IRA grew distant in the years following the Anglo-Irish Treaty; and, second, the commitment to abstention ensured that Sinn Fein played no significant role in the politics of the island for a very long time while the IRA’s commitment to armed insurrection in a time of relative peace both decreased their operations significantly as well as relegated what little action they took largely inconsequential. The intent of this section is to demonstrate how the relationship between Sinn Fein and the IRA as the two mutually constituted elements of the IRM has been shaped by their commitment to abstention.

After the Civil War and the defeat of the anti-Treaty IRM members by the Free State Forces, de Valera fought hard to retain continuity with the past through the appropriation of the IRA and Sinn Fein as well as his following of staunch IRM members, only to abandon the movement three years later when he put forward a motion to end abstention and failed. The ensuing De Valera departure had the effect of completely separating Sinn Fein from the IRA and had enormous consequences for abstention. As already mentioned, appropriating Sinn Fein had become extremely important for de Valera after the Civil War. As de Valera saw it,

whoever owned the name could claim copyright of republicanism and the continuity of the movement that had won the elections of 1918, 1920 and 1921 and expressed the self-determination of the Irish people. It would also be possible to claim that Sinn Fein remained the political embodiment of the self-determination of the Irish people (Feeney 136).

It was not until 1923 that de Valera was able to overcome the supporters of the Free State government, appropriate the name Sinn Fein and fill the organization with his own supporters, effectively taking over the IRM²⁵ (Feeney 137). One of the IRM's first actions under de Valera was to pass a resolution for Sinn Fein agreeing to abstain from the Free State parliament that had been elected in 1922. The IRM would only recognise the Second Dail (1921), claiming that this was the last time the Irish people voted as a nation. Although the party performed far better in the 1923 Free State elections than most observers thought they would, obtaining 27% of the vote (Maillot 12), de Valera observed that there was not much taste for abstention in the Free State (Feeney 140).

²⁵ Although the Free State government had all but abandoned Sinn Fein, they were reluctant to allow de Valera to appropriate the party: Free State supporters "stymied every attempt by de Valera and his supporters to take over the organisation...[they] began to crack down mercilessly on anti-Treatyites of every description, military or political" (Feeney 156). Unable to get the Sinn Fein members-turned-Free State officials to reconvene, he and his supporters set up their own committee structure and membership and appropriated the name Sinn Fein.

As a result, de Valera sought a compromise on the oath of allegiance in order to enable Sinn Fein candidates to take part in the Free State parliament (Maillot 13). As early as the 1925 annual ard fheis, de Valera proposed that: “once the admission oaths²⁶ of the twenty-six-county and six-county assemblies are removed, it becomes a question not of principles but of policy whether or not [IRM] representatives should attend these assemblies” (Maillot 13). Opponents of this view felt that sending candidates to any legislature that was set up by British law was “injurious to the honour of Ireland” (Maillot 13). The IRM split over the issue in 1926, when de Valera introduced a motion to enter the southern parliament at Sinn Fein’s annual ard fheis, which failed by two votes. De Valera and his supporters then established their own party, Fianna Fail, while those who opposed him remained part of Sinn Fein. Importantly, on the eve of the ard fheis in which de Valera proposed the motion to end abstention, the IRA Army Council, consisting of IRM members who opposed the ending of abstention, severed its ties with Sinn Fein. The IRA voted in favour of withdrawing its allegiance to the Second Dail (1921) in order to prevent the split in Sinn Fein over the issue of abstention from spreading into its ranks as well (Maillot 13). To add insult to injury, by 1932 the IRA openly called for a vote for de Valera’s new party (Maillot 13). This demonstrates both the severance of the relationship between Sinn Fein and the IRA in the post-Treaty period, as well as the centrality of abstention and taking up seats to the splits within the IRM. While in this period the abstention policy caused the IRA and Sinn Fein to split, it was the commitment to this policy on the part of those that left De Valera that helped re-establish the relationship between the IRA and Sinn Fein in the 1950s. The next section discusses the evolution of the IRA and Sinn Fein after their parting in 1926.

²⁶ Refers to the oath of allegiance to King George that was required of all republican leaders before participating in the Free State government.

Re-Establishing Ties and Moving to the Left

As it stood after 1926, the political and military wings of the IRM were completely disassociated from one another. To reiterate, the IRA went so far as to announce its support for de Valera's party, Fianna Fail. However, Sinn Fein's commitment to abstention and continuity with traditional IRM traditions made it the only viable candidate for partnership at a time when the IRA was regaining momentum in the 1950s. This section addresses the state of Sinn Fein and the IRA after their parting in 1926, the reinvigoration of the relationship between the two in the 1950s, and their turn to Marxism in the 1960s. Again, the intention of this section is to demonstrate the extent to which the IRA and Sinn Fein's mutually constituted relationship was tied to the IRM's value of abstention.

In regards to the IRA, after their break with Sinn Fein, the organization had gradually become an inflexible, autonomous military organization that was not being regulated by any meaningful political authority (Smith 116). The membership of the IRA consisted of staunch, hardline, physical-force IRM members who held the traditional belief that the use of arms could achieve more than formal political avenues (O'Brien 21). The general view amongst these members was "if you fight a war you fight it. If you go into politics you compromise" (O'Brien 34). As for Sinn Fein, the party had all but lost initiative, direction, support and influence. The party had begun to concentrate its efforts on debating the meaning of the IRM rather than doing anything to achieve the Republic. For this reason, the IRA did not feel that Sinn Fein had any role to play in advancing the Republic (Feeney 174-5); that is until the IRA was reconstituted following the Second World War and Sinn Fein was seen as the only viable partner for their new strategy. Sinn Fein came to be viewed as the only party that shared the IRA's political outlook as they remained steadfast in their commitment to abstention and to the principles of the Republic of 1916.

After the Second World War, the IRA reorganized itself under new leadership, developed a new cause and strategy, and rebuilt its relationship with Sinn Fein. In December 1946, the IRA membership elected a new Army Council, a new Chief of Staff and a new General Headquarters staff (Feeney 185-6). In September 1948, the Army Council held the first general army convention since the start of the World War II. At this meeting, three critical decisions were made: first, it was agreed that there would be no military operations in the newly-constituted Republic of Ireland²⁷; second, the IRA would redirect its activities from the Republic of Ireland to fighting the British and pushing them out of the North; third, the IRA should no longer be isolated from the political world. However, their defining political stance was, and would continue to be, abstention (Feeney 187; Smith 118-21). In regard to the last point, the IRA recognized that in order to achieve any sense of support from the Irish electorate, the IRM would need a political face. For this, they returned to Sinn Fein. Sinn Fein was seen as having the same outlook as the IRA: both had

acquired ownership of the terms ‘republican’ and ‘republican movement’...Although Fianna Fail was and is officially known as ‘the republican Party’, the name sounds like an afterthought...It was those who rejected the Treaty²⁸ who continued to be called republicans (Feeney 163).

Furthermore, Sinn Fein was the only party who shared the IRA’s views regarding abstention²⁹.

IRA members were instructed to join the party, and at the 1949 Ard Fheis, leading figures of the

²⁷ Established in 1949 when the remaining duties of the king were removed from the constitution and Ireland was declared a Republic under the Republic of Ireland Act 1948.

²⁸ Refers to the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921.

²⁹ Sinn Fein also were also committed to the ideals of the Republic of 1916 and considered themselves an all-Ireland movement, therefore, their views regarding abstention aligned with the IRA.

IRA became senior figures in the party³⁰ (Feeney 190; Smith 130), and the IRM once again consisted of these two mutual constituted elements.

As a result of their relationship with the IRA, Sinn Fein experienced a brief revival in this period. More importantly, it was at this time that the political and military wings of the IRM once again became inextricably linked, largely due to their commitments to abstention. Sinn Fein began reorganising throughout both the Republic of Ireland and the North, and by 1950 there was a *cumainn*³¹ “in every province if not in every county” (Feeney 194). The IRA bombing campaign along the border of Northern Ireland that began in 1956 and continued through to 1962 added to political support for Sinn Fein. In the general election campaign of 1957 in the Republic of Ireland, four Sinn Fein candidates were elected to Leinster House (Maillot 15). Despite this brief revival in the IRM’s electoral success under Sinn Fein, throughout the five-year campaign the IRM lacked the ability to consolidate their political goals and justify the violence (Smith 130). By 1962 the campaign ended, the IRA had again been defeated and demoralized, and support for Sinn Fein significantly decreased. It was at this time that Sinn Fein and the IRA, their relationship re-established, took a hard turn to the left.

Following the end of border campaign in 1962, the IRM became disillusioned. This provided space for the party to take a more radical ideological shift in the early 1960s. Under the leadership of Cathal Goulding, who became Chief of Staff of the IRA in 1962, and Tomas MacGiolla, who became Sinn Fein President at the same time, the IRM took a turn to the left. Although Goulding, MacGiolla and their supporters did not represent the views of the majority of IRM members, they formed the leadership of the movement and were in a position to push

³⁰ By 1948, membership in Sinn Fein was so low that “it would not be a question of the IRA infiltrating Sinn Fein, it could simply take over” (Feeney 189).

³¹ Sinn Fein Association.

extensive poverty and unemployment as the issues around which to organize a revolution (Smith 128). The leadership no longer believed that brute military force could alone address the problems of modern Ireland. They attempted to ensure that the IRA would end their attachment to the armed struggle that was central to the IRM. Similarly, Sinn Fein adopted a Social and Economic Programme at the 1964 Ard Fheis. In order to establish a political policy, the IRM would have to drop their commitment to abstention as well as the fight against partition to begin formally participating in the political institutions of the time (Feeney 211; Smith 135-6). In the unique situation of the North, the goal was to show Catholics and Protestants that it was in their social and economic interest to have a united, independent Ireland (Smith 136).

Consequently, when people in nationalist areas looked to the IRM for protection from increasing loyalist violence in 1969, the leadership faced two predicaments: they could not be seen defending Catholics because this ran contrary to the Marxist analysis of leadership; and, the IRA lacked military direction due to the reforms that had placed the armed struggle second to political avenues (Smith 138). The preoccupation with ending abstention that motivated the IRM leadership in the late 1960s distracted them from responding to the increasing violence in the North during the Civil Rights Movement, and this blindness caused a split in the IRM that led to the establishment of one of the most influential incarnations of the IRM: the Provisional. The Provisional were strongly committed to the use of physical force to achieve their objectives. However, it would be the Provisional incarnation of the IRM that moved the party and the Army toward ending abstention and formally participating in politics without causing a split. Understanding why and how they were able to do this requires an awareness of the period in which that decision took place and will be explored in detail in the next chapter.

Conclusion

As this Chapter has demonstrated, the IRA and Sinn Fein are two intrinsically linked halves of the IRM that share a common history shaped by the commitment to the long-standing tradition of abstention.. This common history began with the 1916 Rising. The 1916 Rising had three effects on the IRM: the relationship between the IRA and Sinn Fein developed in the aftermath of the Rising, and together they formed the political and military wing of the IRM; the concept of abstention became a fundamental element of the IRM when it led to formation of the First Dail (1918) in the spirit of the Republic; and, the documents intended to settle the conflict caused the first major split within the IRM over the issue of ending abstention and participating in illegitimate parliaments. In the Post-Anglo-Irish Treaty era, there were further splits in the IRM over the varying degrees of commitment to abstention. When the Sinn Fein split over de Valera's motion to end abstention in 1926, the Army severed its ties with Sinn Fein and the party fell into political oblivion. During this period, both the IRA and Sinn Fein became increasingly dogmatic and ideological while their membership and support declined. However, when the IRA was re-established following the Second World War and searched for a political partner to support its campaign along the Northern border, Sinn Fein was the only party that shared its political outlook; especially in regard to abstention. Sinn Fein and the IRA were once again united, and the principle of abstention again played a significant role in this relationship. It remained strong through the 1960s when the IRM adopted a Marxist doctrine. Again illustrating the centrality of abstention to the IRM and to the relationships between the IRA and Sinn Fein, the movement split over the issue of ending the policy in 1969. This split occurred as a result of the inability of Marxist doctrine to address the pressing concerns of Catholics and nationalists in Northern Ireland. While the leadership was busy debating the need to end abstention in order to implement a social and economic programme, a Civil Rights Movement was being established in

the North. The Provisional that emerged from this period led the charge against the British during what is now known as the Troubles.

The extensive historical overview of the IRM discussed in this Chapter focused on two fundamental themes: the mutually constituted relationship between the IRA and Sinn Fein as the embodiment of the IRM as a whole, and the centrality of abstention in defining that relationship. This historical background is essential to understanding the magnitude of the decision to end abstention in 1986. Not only did 1986 mark the first time the IRM did not split over the question of formally participating in politics, but it is counterintuitive in that abstention was a central aspect of the movement's self-concepts, albeit a contentious aspect. In the following Chapter, the period in which that decision was made is discussed in great detail. Chapter Two puts forth the argument that the Troubles have explanatory power for understanding the decision to formally participate in politics. The Troubles played an important role in shaping the identity of the IRM. As will be shown, the sectarian violence and direct conflict with the British Army worked to legitimize the IRM position in the early years of the Troubles. However, various events throughout the period challenged whether the IRM's strategy was the best means of achieving the movement's stated goals. The following Chapter connects those series of events and describes how their collective impact led to the ending of abstention and a re-orienting of the IRM's strategy.

Chapter Two

Introduction

Chapter Two focuses on how major events of the Troubles transformed the IRM's self-concepts as well as their strategies for ousting the British from Northern Ireland and ending partition. It details four critical moments between the years of 1969 and 1986 that challenged their self-perceptions. The result of *numerous* challenges to their self-concepts was an atmosphere wherein abstention could be successfully confronted by the leadership who took over the movement beginning in the late 1970s. Specifically, the Provisional that emerged as the embodiment of the IRM in 1969 was traditional and hardline in that its members viewed the armed struggle as the primary means for achieving their goals. However, by 1986, this same incarnation of the IRM was ending a decades-long policy to one that required a greater role for politics in achieving the movement's goals, an act which historically caused splits within the IRM. This Chapter explores the extent to which timing played a role in this historic decision as well as the relatively stable transition from a movement dominated by a commitment to armed resistance to one that accepts the importance of participated in politics.

Chapter Two consists of two parts. The first explores the emergence of the Provisional in the context of the Civil Rights Movement and the beginning of the Troubles. The second describes the evolution of the Provisional during the major events of the period leading up to the end of abstention. The first section of this Chapter analyzes the emergence of the Provisional in the context of the Civil Rights movement and defines the agenda of the Provisional as the legitimate embodiment of the IRM. The IRM under Goulding and MacGiolla was incapable of responding to the deteriorating situation in the North due to the re-organization of the movement described in Chapter One. An internal struggle within the movement finally led to a split in 1969 and the newly established Provisional emerged with a direction and an agenda that came to

define and shape both the Provisional struggle and the IRM as a whole. In the second section of Chapter Two, a progression of events that had a significant impact on the IRM are identified and described. The Chapter connects four events that were consequential for the self-concepts of the IRM: the 1970 Lower Falls Curfew; the 1972 ceasefire; the 1975 ceasefire; and, the 1981 Hunger Strikes. Following a detailed description of each event, their ramifications for the self-concepts of the IRM are analysed in terms of how new developments forced them to re-imagine their past and current activities.

1969: Emergence of the Provisional

Rooted in Northern Ireland, the Civil Rights Movement was the catalyst to the outbreak of the Troubles in 1969 and is critical to understanding the emergence of the Provisional as well as its initial agenda. This section begins with a historical overview of the Civil Rights Movement and demonstrates the political and social context in which the Provisional were established.

The Civil Rights movement began to organize in Northern Ireland during the mid-1960s, at which time the Campaign for Social Justice (1964) and the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (1967) were established (Cunningham 17). Both of these organizations were pushing for reform of: “the restricted local government franchise, gerrymandered local government electoral boundaries, the inequitable allocation of public-sector housing and discrimination in the provisions of public-sector employment” (Cunningham 17). All of these issues can be linked to the fact that prior to partition the local councils were elected under the system of proportional representation; following the implementation of partition, proportional representation was replaced with a first past the post system which played an inextricable part in the systematic

discrimination of Catholics³². First, business and property votes³³ still counted in local elections. This is important because the majority of business and property belonged to Protestants (Coogan 34). Second, the general vote was restricted to the occupier of a single house and his wife, but any tenants, servants or children over twenty-one were excluded from the local franchise (Coogan 34). In this case, the issue is that the allocation of public authority housing was controlled by the unionist-ruled local council, and openly favoured Protestant tenants to the social and political detriment of Catholics (Coogan 34-5). Combined with the practice of gerrymandering, wherein electoral wards were drawn in a way that produced an artificial unionist majority, the unionists were able to control the local councils, the allocation of housing and municipal jobs, and therefore, the outcome of the vote (Coogan 33-4). The Civil Rights Movement thus accused the British of not fulfilling their duty to uphold UK standards in all of their dominions and demanded reforms that ensured the representation of Catholic interests in government³⁴.

³² Catholics in Northern Ireland are historically aligned with nationalism and/or republicanism which supported the withdrawal of the British from all of Ireland's affairs and the reunification of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland. Protestants are historically aligned with unionism which supported the union of Northern Ireland and Britain.

³³ In local government elections in Northern Ireland, only those who paid local taxes (or rates) were granted the right to vote. The property vote was denied to lodgers, subtenants and servants of rateable premises. In addition, some business and universities were granted multiple votes.

³⁴ Governance in Northern Ireland was a marked departure from British practice in other parts of the UK. For example, the franchise had been extended to almost all adult citizens in Britain by 1950. By that time the British had also eliminated mostly all plural voting for Westminster as well as local government elections. It is important to note that the continued lack of attention to Northern Ireland on the part of the British was historical in nature, and thus, difficult to overcome even in the face of a mounting civil rights crisis. In 1920, Section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act "reserved the sovereign right of Westminster to legislate on any matter" in Northern Ireland. Importantly though, Section 75 did not provide any machinery for parliamentary or executive scrutiny of Northern Irish affairs (Cunningham 2). Making the situation even more volatile given the divisions in the North, Stormont was given full responsibility over electoral arrangements, law, order and internal security (Cunningham 3). When discriminatory and corrupt practices began to evolve, the British made it an official policy not to become embroiled in the affairs of Northern Ireland (Cunningham 6-7; Coogan 38-9). As early as 1922 it was established that areas under the responsibility of Stormont could not be discussed in the British parliament, and this convention was upheld until 1969 (Cunningham 9). Even the renewed pressure coming from the Civil Rights Movement did not change the formal position of Westminster and, instead of becoming directly involved, the

Unionists in Northern Ireland were united on upholding the union with Britain and maintaining the border between North Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The Civil Rights Movement that appealed for the political and social rights of Catholics was regarded as a threat to the power and dominance of the unionist minority. Protestants viewed any concessions made to the Civil Rights movement as “recognition of the legitimacy of Catholicism and the resurgence of nationalist irredentism” (Cunningham 18). For this reason, when the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Terrence O’Neill, pushed for reforms in Stormont that attempted to reduce the “autonomy and power of local government, which was an important power base for elements of unionism”, the Protestant population took their frustrations to the street (Cunningham 18). The opponents of reform countered Civil Rights marches with violence against the participants, and the streets of Belfast and Derry frequently became the stage for fierce rioting wherein Catholics and Protestants fought each other and the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) played a significant role in colluding with unionist mobs. As sectarian violence increased, the inability of Stormont to control the situation became apparent. Finally, on August 14, 1969 during the Battle of the Bogside in Derry, British troops were sent in at the request of the Unionist Party in Stormont.

While Catholics were blaming the IRM for not fulfilling its traditional role as the defenders of nationalists and “the letters IRA went up on the gable walls as: Irish Ran Away and I Ran Away” (Coogan 498), the IRM leadership in Dublin, under Cathal Goulding (IRA Chief of Staff) and Tomas MacGiolla (President of Sinn Fein), concerned itself with pursuing a political agenda that was focused on ending abstention, and that threatened to cause another major split in

British adopted a policy of pushing any reforms through the Stormont Prime Minister (Cunningham 16-7). This lack of oversight had allowed the Unionist Party, the Party representing the Protestant population and their political interests, to govern Northern Ireland virtually unchecked since the creation of Northern Ireland.

the IRM. At an extraordinary IRA Convention in December 1969, Goulding agreed to lift the restraints on abstention. At the same time, Ruairi O’Bradaigh, Sean MacStiofain, Daithi O’Conaill, Seamus Twomey, Billy McKee, Joe Cahill, Jimmy Steele, John Kelly and other hardline IRM members set up the Provisional IRA Army Council in Belfast (Coogan 499). When MacGiolla received a simple majority for ending abstention at the January 1970 Sinn Fein ard fheis, the opponents of the MacGiolla-Goulding leadership walked out of the venue and established the Provisional Sinn Fein. The new president of Sinn Fein, O’Bradaigh, issued a statement declaring that the split occurred due to five primary conflicts, of which two are important for the purposes of this paper: the issue of ending abstention and the failure to protect northern nationalists. The Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein as the true embodiment of the IRM were steadfast in their commitment to abstention and to the establishment of a Republic based on the ideals of 1916. These commitments, and the strategies for achieving their goals, influenced the activities of the Provisional throughout the Troubles.

By late 1970, the Provisional began working on re-establishing the legitimacy of the IRM that had been so damaged in the North by the Goulding-MacGiolla leadership. In September 1970, the first general Provisional IRA convention was held to elect a new leadership and to discuss strategy. The convention ended with the election of McKee, MacStiofain, O’Bradaigh, O’Conaill and Cahill to the Army Council (White 161). Militarily, the Provisional IRA strategy consisted of two goals; first, pooling the movement’s resources to establish a defensive force in order to protect Catholics in the North and second, to move to a defense and retaliation strategy that would force British withdrawal from Northern Ireland (Smith 94-5). On October 24-25, the annual Sinn Fein ard fheis saw O’Bradaigh elected unopposed as President of Provisional Sinn Fein (White 161). Sinn Fein called for a Democratic Socialist Republic based on the

Proclamation of 1916, and O’Bradaigh and O’Conaill went to work for the next two years to create an economic and social program for a united Ireland “with safeguards for the integrity and culture of the Protestant and unionist community” (White 165). Of course, the role of Sinn Fein would be of secondary importance in the IRM until British withdrawal and unification were secured by the military arm of the movement. Sinn Fein was therefore restricted to providing leadership to the civil resistance campaign and fighting the propaganda war for the IRM. The next section of this Chapter discusses the Lower Falls Curfew that occurred in June of 1970 and focuses on how the actions of the Provisional during this event confirmed them in their role as the protectors of Catholics in the North, the harbingers of Irish unity based on the ideals of the Republic of 1916 and, therefore, the true embodiment of the IRM.

The 1970 Lower Falls Curfew

By June of 1970, most people concerned with the condition of Northern Ireland recognized the threat posed by the upcoming Orange parades (Warner 5). The Orange parades are a series of annual Protestant parades that commemorate the victory of the Protestant King William of Orange over the Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. Although the newly elected Conservative government in Westminster had considered banning this “traditional and provocative practice of routing marches and demonstrations by one contending party through the territory of the other”, its inquest into the situation led it to conclude that “Orangemen felt passionately about these parades and that if they were cancelled this would be regarded as a victory for the republican cause” (Warner 5). Inevitably, over the weekend of June 27-28 the first major disturbances over the Orange parades arose when two parades moved through Ballymurphy and Ardoyne, both Catholic areas (Warner 7-8). When the Provisional IRA shot and killed three Orange gunmen during riots in Ardoyne, loyalists reacted by attempting to

burn down St. Matthew's Church in the Short Strand, a Catholic enclave (Coogan 546). A small IRA unit led by McKee and Cahill defended the church and after a five hour gun battle, drove the loyalist mob into retreat.

The following week, the British Army received a tip about an arms cache on Balkan Street in Catholic territory and took the opportunity to address the hostile unionist reaction to the Army's handling of the events over the previous weekend (Warner 8). On Friday July 3, munitions were found at Balkan Street. As the search ended and the Army tried to leave the area fierce rioting broke out. By 10 p.m. a curfew was announced and approximately 3,000 British troops were sent in to the Lower Falls Road. Gradually, the Army occupied and cordoned off the entire area and the inhabitants were confined to their homes by military order (Warner 3). During the curfew, the British Army conducted a rough search for weapons: "doors were kicked in, furniture smashed, floorboards pulled up, wall plaster ripped off, holy pictures stamped underfoot or thrust down lavatories". The Army used tear gas and opened fire on civilians as well as members of the IRM (Coogan 129). On July 5, 1970, the curfew was finally lifted. A few days later, the Army took two unionist ministers on a drive through the area to display the "cowed and pacified" area in an attempt to prove that their appeals had been heard and the Army was tough on Catholics (Coogan 548).

The Falls Curfew had two important consequences for the Provisional: it increased the support they had lost among Catholics in the North, providing them a base of public support; and, relatedly, it legitimised their role as the true representation of the IRM. To the first point, as this Chapter has already discussed, the leaders of the Provisional were well aware that Catholics in the North had turned their back on the IRM. In order to initiate its military strategy of defense and retaliation against the British it required a public base of support that it was severely lacking

as a consequence of the previous years' events. The IRM needed to demonstrate its commitment to the northern nationalists, and it needed to do so militarily. Both McKee and Cahill's defense of St. Matthews and the Provisionals' role in the Lower Falls Curfew helped to change the "I Ran Away" reputation and allowed them to reclaim their role as the harbingers of Irish unification. As O'Bradaigh put it: "If it had planned it, the British Army could not have done a better job of alienating the nationalist community in Belfast; it made IRA recruiting...that much easier" (White 159). This distrust of the Army combined with an invigorated IRM that used military might as the primary means for achieving their goals bred an environment conducive to raising support and recruitment. Barricades began to proliferate in Catholic neighborhoods to create "no-go" areas; security forces allowed the barricades to stay in place and did not operate behind them (Smith 92). It was in the no-go areas that the IRM worked to recruit members and bolster the propaganda war, eventually controlling entire neighbourhoods. As their support grew the transition from defense to a defense and retaliation strategy began and, more importantly, legitimacy of the Provisional as the embodiment of the IRM increased.

Secondly, in addition to re-claiming the role as the primary group fighting for British withdrawal and Irish unification, the Lower Falls Curfew provided the Provisional with the opportunity to claim legitimacy as the true representatives of the IRM. In his Presidential address at the October 1970 Sinn Fein ard fheis, O'Bradaigh made a speech demonstrating that "They were not new. They were Sinn Fein" (White 162). O'Bradaigh went so far as to ask the media to acknowledge his organization as the "true and official Sinn Fein", and stated that "because they were Sinn Fein, there were no changes in party policy to announce" (White 163). This was O'Bradaigh's plea to ensure that the symbols, myths and narratives of the IRM were associated with the Provisional. Furthermore, the "political program" of Provisional Sinn Fein demonstrated

no more enthusiasm for electoral politics than any traditional Sinn Fein—the program assumed that the Provisional IRA would defeat the British militarily and force a withdrawal, at which time the leadership of the IRM would establish a new government based on the Republic of 1916. In this case, the need to end abstention or contemplate electoral politics was not even a question. Regardless of their early preoccupation with securing their role as the principal group still fighting for the Republic of 1916 and, therefore, the only true representation of the IRM, the actions of the Provisional³⁵ over the next few years would propel them to that role, beginning with the events of the 1972 ceasefire.

The 1972 Ceasefire

The time leading up to the 1972 ceasefire brought an increasingly unstable situation in Northern Ireland. The IRM officially announced its offensive campaign in October 1971 and began to engage in systematic bombing of commercial targets such as shops and businesses³⁶ (Smith 95). The violent campaign of the IRM was paralleled by a rise in unionist paramilitary activities, and the security situation in the North was sliding into anarchy. This was largely the result of the state being run by both Stormont and Britain, leading to a paralysis of decision making (Coogan 550). Although the British did not become directly involved in the affairs of Northern Ireland as per their policy since 1922, they pushed reforms through Stormont Prime Minister James Chichester-Clark (who succeeded O'Neill). Chichester-Clark attempted to do Britain's bidding by pushing through reforms meant to appease the Catholic population. However, he was opposed by hardline unionists within his own party and "while genuine efforts

³⁵ The Provisional as a whole (i.e. both Provisional IRA and Provisional Sinn Fein) will henceforth referred to as the IRM.

³⁶ As most businesses were owned by Protestants by default most of these bombings involved Protestant shops and businesses. However bombs were not intended to target civilians but to attack the economic structure of Northern Ireland and contribute to creating instability eventually making Northern Ireland ungovernable.

were made, the delays meant that events on the ground overtook them, losing impact on Catholics and enraging unionists” (Coogan 550). Finally, on March 22 1972, Stormont was suspended and Britain began direct rule in Northern Ireland. The British were now faced with the reality that they were engaged in direct war with the IRM.

At this time, the new British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, William Whitelaw, began a series of discussions aimed at conceding safe conduct to the leaders of the IRM³⁷ to come to London and meet with him (Coogan 172-3). The IRM demanded two concessions before meeting with Whitelaw: first, they demanded political status, or Special Category Status³⁸, for the prisoners who were then on hunger strike at Crumlin Road jail; and second, they wanted Gerry Adams³⁹ to be released from Long Kesh prison for the talks (Coogan 173). On June 29, 1972, the IRM began a ceasefire, and on July 7 1972 a delegation including MacStiofain, Twomey, O’Conaill, Adams, and Martin McGuinness travelled to London to negotiate with Whitelaw (Coogan 173-4). For its part, the IRM had five demands: first, a public declaration that Britain was, for the whole people of Ireland, acting and voting as a unit to decide the future of Ireland⁴⁰; second, the British government would have to give an immediate declaration of its intent to withdraw from Irish soil, the withdrawal to be completed before January 1 1975; third, British troops would have to be withdrawn immediately from sensitive areas; fourth, a general amnesty for all political prisoners in Irish prisons had to be provided, as

³⁷ It was the Provisional IRA and not Provisional Sinn Fein that were invited to the talks as the British recognized that it was the IRA element of the republican movement conducting the war.

³⁸ Special Category Status gave IRM prisoners political status, rather than criminal status. This meant they had special privileges: the right to not do prison work, the right to wear their own clothing, the right to free association, and the right to extra visits and parcels (expansive overview on page 47-48).

³⁹ A young and influential republican in Belfast, Adams was viewed as a potential leader for the entire movement, and thus his presence was paramount in these negotiations.

⁴⁰ The goal of the Provisional was to secure British withdrawal and unify Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland. A declaration from the British that referenced the whole people of Ireland rather than just Northern Ireland symbolized that the British supported the end of partition upon their withdrawal from Irish affairs.

well as for all internees, detainees and persons on the wanted list; and fifth, the British Army would suspend offensive operations and call an immediate end to internment. Unfortunately, Whitelaw could not offer this degree of reform; the British had a constitutional obligation to Northern Ireland that could not simply be broken in the way the IRM leaders were suggesting (Coogan 567). Following the resulting breakdown of the ceasefire just two days later, the IRM intensified its campaign.

The first significant outcome of the 1972 ceasefire in terms of the IRM's self-concepts was that it demonstrated the ability of the movement to use military means to force the British to the negotiating table. The IRM had already moved from a defensive position to one of defense and retaliation, whereby they engaged in the systematic bombing of commercial targets. The logic behind this strategy was that given the disparity in resources between the British Army and the IRM, a limited form of war aimed at making Northern Ireland ungovernable would eventually force Britain to negotiate on the IRM's terms (Smith 95-6). Because it demonstrated the inability of the Unionist Party to continue governing Northern Ireland, the fall of Stormont and the implementation of direct rule was one indication that this strategy had worked; being granted Special Category Status was another. The final evidence that the Provisional's strategy was successful was Whitelaw's invitation to negotiate. This reinforced the notion that the armed struggle was the only means through which victory would be attained. This demonstrates how hardline and traditional the IRM was at this time. However, the lack of progress made in the negotiation revealed the weakness of a purely military approach to ousting the British from Northern Ireland, which this section discusses next.

The second effect of the 1972 ceasefire was the emergent realization that some form of a political strategy might have to be expanded to accomplish the goals of the IRM. While the

Whitelaw talks proved that the military strategy had worked, the inability to obtain any of their demands undermined the IRM's role as the harbingers of British withdrawal from the North and Irish unification in the spirit of the Republic of 1916. At this time, the IRM consisted mostly of hardline militarists; they viewed their struggle as a military one and a political program would only be important after the British conceded to their demands⁴¹. From the perspective of the IRM leadership, the armed struggle was what brought them to the negotiating table in 1972, not formal political action. For this reason, the very act of the British sitting down at the conference table was considered surrendering. Therefore, the IRM offered no room for negotiating beyond British withdrawal and the creation of a united Ireland (Smith 105). This has everything to do with the fact that the IRM placed themselves within the tradition of military action and thus were "conditioned to respond to the status quo in a pre-determined way" (Smith 105). To the IRM leadership, any compromise would be a betrayal of the Proclamation of 1916 and, as MacStiofain stated, "concessions be damned, we want our freedom" (Smith 106). As such, the perceived success brought by Whitelaw's invitation was undermined by the inability to gain any ground on their demands, and the disconnect between militarism and politics within the movement became evident.

The final effect of the 1972 ceasefire it legitimized the IRM's cause through the granting of Special Category Status. The concession of Special Category Status meant that all those imprisoned as a result of the conflict in Northern Ireland would be granted political status: they did not have to wear prison clothes or do prison work; they were housed together in their paramilitary factions, allowed the right of free association and to organise educational and recreational pursuits; and, they were allowed one visit, one parcel and one letter per week. First,

⁴¹ This is why O'Bradaigh's *Eire Nua* and *Eire Nua II* discussed political plans for a post-British, united Ireland; the assumption was that the IRA would secure those goals and a political programme would follow.

the granting of Special Category Status as a precursor to negotiations reaffirmed the IRM belief that their strategy was successful and the British were willing to concede to their demands. This was a major contributing factor to Whitelaw immediately coming to see the concession as a mistake (Coogan 173). Second, the IRM believed that with political prisoner status the war against the British was legitimized in the eyes of both Irish Catholics and the rest of the world. Under political status IRM members were not considered criminals but prisoners of war, and this legitimized the measures taken in the war against the British by undermining any allegations that they were simply terrorists representing the views of a small minority. Lastly, Special Category Status would have enormous consequences in the future events of the Troubles—particularly when the British moved to eliminate the privilege in 1976. This decision came on the heels of the demoralizing 1975 ceasefire, which is the next event this Chapter will discuss.

The 1975 Ceasefire

One of the more positive lasting effects of the 1972 ceasefire was the fact that the lines of communication had remained open (if only minimally) since the negotiations with Whitelaw. This would eventually lead to another ceasefire in 1975. The clergy provided an informal line of communication between the IRM and the British government, leading to a ceasefire on February 10 1975. The IRM declared the ceasefire in return for the phasing out of internment, the reduction of the British army presence in Catholic areas and the establishment of “incident centres staffed by members of Provisional Sinn Fein...to monitor the truce and liaise with the Northern Ireland Office” (Smith 129). The IRM again entered negotiations taking a hard line, demanding that...

[the] people of Ireland elect a constituent assembly that would draft an all-Ireland constitution with a ‘provincial parliament for Ulster (nine

counties) with meaningful powers', a public commitment from the British that they would withdraw within twelve months of the adoption of the constitution, and amnesty for all political prisoners and for those [IRM members] on the wanted list (White 223).

Although the IRM realized that the British could not concede these demands publicly, as they were made before the announcement of the truce, they expected to make significant progress in these negotiations in comparison to those of 1972. The IRM leadership was ideologically committed to British withdrawal as the minimum concession for an end to the war: just as during the previous negotiations, the IRM was unable to form a political strategy and they demonstrated once again "the movement's inability to cope with a period of peace" (Smith 129). It became clear very early that the ceasefire would not yield benefits for either side. The ceasefire officially ended in January 1976 because, as in 1972, no progress was made. However, unlike 1972, this ceasefire was demoralising for the IRM and led to a significant change in British policy in Northern Ireland, which this Chapter discusses next.

The dramatic shift in British policies in Northern Ireland following the breakdown of the 1975 ceasefire had an influence on the IRM. The British embarked on two policies that were aimed at undermining the capacity of the IRM to continue with its campaign: criminalization and ulsterization. Criminalization was most closely associated with the ending of Special Category Status for IRM prisoners. By March 1976 Special Category Status had been withdrawn. Because it delegitimized the nature of the struggle by denying political prisoner status for IRM prisoners so they were no longer viewed as prisoners of a legitimate war, this represented a major blow for the identity of republicans. The main purpose of criminalization was to portray and treat members of the IRM as ordinary criminals rather than as a Special Category group (Coogan, 583). The plan was to "characterise the [IRM] as a small, unrepresentative group defying the will of the majority of the population" whose actions would now be classed as criminal and who

would be sentenced as criminal (Feeney 278). Of course, this portrayal ran contrary to the fundamental IRM belief that it was “legitimate to use force to oppose the presence of British rule in Ireland and therefore that those engaged in using force are patriots and freedom-fighters” (Feeney 277). The second element of the new British policy in Northern Ireland was known as ulsterization and involved a reduction in the role of the British Army and increasingly devolving powers to the police and security forces that already existed in Northern Ireland. The strategy behind ulsterization was to reinforce the image that the violence in Northern Ireland was an internal conflict; it intended to work against the IRM plan “to embroil the British government in as direct a manner as possible in order to represent the conflict as a struggle for national liberation against an imperial oppressor” (Smith 144). While the new policy direction aimed at delegitimizing the military struggle, the IRM was attempting to adapt to a changing situation.

The most important impact of the 1975 ceasefire was the internal changes that began following the breakdown of negotiations, specifically, the emergence of Adams as a powerful force in the IRM. While the ceasefire yielded some important results, such as the phasing out of internment and the creation of incident centers manned by Sinn Fein activists (Coogan 578), the second failed attempt at negotiating a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland coupled with an unnecessarily long and ineffective ceasefire⁴² had the effect of demoralising the IRM and the communities that it served. The IRM was forced to acknowledge that there would be no immediate British withdrawal and ceasefires were far from bringing any peace. Some IRM members began to promulgate the doctrine that they were in for a “Long War” if they were unable to develop a political strategy (White 258-9). One of the most outspoken supporters of politicization would soon emerge as a leader of the movement: Adams. Adams wrote a series of

⁴² The ceasefire lasted nearly an entire year before it was called off and no progress was made in terms of securing a British withdrawal from Ireland.

articles that were both critical of the direction taken by the leadership during the ceasefire, and also argued for greater politicization of the IRM. Adams addressed “underlying questions regarding the nature and relevance of [the IRM’s] political beliefs and practice” (Adams 248). He argued that “there was a need for republicans not only to spell out their vision but to actively involve themselves in local issues which affected day-to-day life in the community” (Smith 147). Without a connection to their local communities, Adams argued the IRM “lacked the necessary political consciousness to exploit the momentum created by the military campaign” (Smith 146). In summary, Adams was calling for politicization of the movement, and as a young northern IRM member he was not alone. Adams and his like-minded comrades slowly gained influence in IRM and, after 1975, began a process of politicization that would ultimately gain credence through the Hunger Strikes in the early 1980s.

The 1981 Hunger Strikes

As previously discussed, Special Category Status was central to the legitimacy of the IRM. The Hunger Strikes that developed as result of its abolishment created a swell of public support for the IRM’s cause and helped to push the agenda of Adams and his supporters to a place they could not otherwise have gone. Led by Bobby Sands, ten IRM prisoners began a Hunger Strike on March 1, 1981⁴³. The British Prime Minister at the time, Margaret Thatcher, took the position that the strikers were common criminals, and her attitude was nothing short of hostile. Thatcher proved unmoved by international gestures of solidarity as well as high-level appeals for compromise (e.g. the Pope, other senior church figures, Irish MPs), which resulted in both sympathy and support for the cause of the prisoners in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and around the world.

⁴³ Francis Hughes, Raymond McKreesh, Patsy O’Hara, Joe McDonnell, Martin Hurson, Kevin Lynch, Ciaran Doherty, Tom McElrea and Michael Devine.

The first opportunity to exploit the support generated by the Hunger Strikes for political purposes arose when, on March 6 1981, the Fermanagh-Tyrone South (Northern Ireland) MP died. Some IRM members saw the election that was to follow as an opportunity to transform sympathies for their cause into political support for convicted IRM prisoners. However, the O'Bradaigh/O'Conaill leadership in Dublin was still fervently against participating in elections. It was eventually decided that Sands would run for the seat, supported by the party but not as an official Sinn Fein candidate. The rationale behind this strategy was that by throwing their weight behind the Hunger Strikers, they could gauge how well IRM members performed without any risk to the self-concepts of the IRM: "If they did well, Sinn Fein could claim its candidates would have done better. If they did badly, well then it was because they were not real Sinn Fein candidates" (Feeney 300). Furthermore, prisoners were naturally abstentionist in that they would be unable to take their seats in parliament, which made supporting them justifiable.

The electoral victories that followed this decision would legitimize the push for further politicization of the movement by demonstrating that an electoral strategy would not compromise the armed struggle. Amidst the continuation of the armed struggle, Sands won the by-election on April 9, 1981. In addition to this victory, on August 20, in the by-election created by Sands' death, his election agent Owen Carron won even more votes than Sands had. Thirty-six electoral victories followed and to the northerners this was evidence that the "armed struggle did not limit Sinn Fein's appeal to a nationalist electorate" (Feeney 291). Building on the electoral victories across Northern Ireland, the IRM decided they would throw their weight behind two more convicted IRM prisoners, but this time, in the Republic of Ireland itself. On June 11, 1981, Kieran Doherty (one of the IRM prisoners who ultimately died on Hunger Strike) and Paddy Agnew (an IRM prisoner) were elected to Leinster House. In October 1981 the

Hunger Strike was called off, and the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, James Prior, subsequently conceded to the prisoners' demands: the right not to wear a prisoner uniform; the right not to do prison work; the right of free association with other prisoners and to organise educational and recreational pursuits; the right to one visit, one letter and one parcel per week; and, full restoration of remission⁴⁴ lost through the protest. The successful experiment with politics while in the midst of a twelve-year armed struggle with the British encouraged Adams' and his supporters to officially contest elections as Sinn Fein. However, they would still have to convince the hardliners in the IRM that they could be both the true representatives of the IRM and participate in electoral politics.

The Hunger Strikes in 1981 ignited a tidal wave of support for the IRM, both amongst the communities that it represented in Northern Ireland and, as evidenced by the elections of Agnew and Doherty, in the Republic of Ireland. However, the way in which to proceed was viewed differently by the two factions now existent within the IRM: the older leadership, under O'Bradaigh and O'Conaill, and Adams and his supporters. For the former, the end of the Hunger Strikes meant an opportunity to return to the military struggle. Although the campaign had continued throughout the Hunger Strikes, the prisoners had hijacked the IRM and much of its resources had been directed toward supporting them (Feeney 293). On the other hand, Adams and his supporters wished to direct the momentum created by the Hunger Strikes toward further political activities, which would require allowing Sinn Fein candidates to contest elections⁴⁵. Rather than suggest that the movements' resources be concentrated on this goal, Adams realized he had to make a case for electoral politics that complemented the armed campaign.

⁴⁴ The reduction of a sentence for good behaviour.

⁴⁵ Sinn Fein could not officially claim the prisoners victories as their own, as they had not allowed the prisoners to run as Sinn Fein candidates

To this end, the Armalite and Ballot Box Strategy was announced at the October 1981 Sinn Fein ard fheis. The goal of the IRM was still to force British withdrawal and secure a united Ireland, but the way in which this would be achieved would change. The British under Thatcher still believed the solution to Northern Ireland was to defeat the IRM, and “since [Sinn Fein] supported the IRA’s analysis of the Irish problem, that meant Sinn Fein essentially agreed...that the problem was a military one” (Feeney 302). The solution for Sinn Fein

was to be able to show that a substantial percentage of the Irish people, North and South, supported the republican position that the British should leave and furthermore that the IRA was right to pursue armed struggle against the British Army to force it to leave. If the IRA could show that Sinn Fein had widespread electoral support, then the IRA could claim the electoral support was for the IRA’s policy. The military campaign would be endorsed by the people” (Feeney 303).

It was only because of the electoral victories of the prisoners during the Hunger Strikes that Adams was able to push this strategy. The Armalite and Ballot Box Strategy legitimized the enlargement of a political programme and for the most part, quelled the anxieties and frustrations of traditionalist IRM members. For their part, the southern-based leadership were “taken aback by the speed and apparent lack of concern for the consequences with which electoralism was embraced” (Feeney 305). However, the decisions were now being driven largely by those following Adams in the North, and they had their sights set on running Sinn Fein candidates in the both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

While electoral support for the IRM under the banner of Sinn Fein remained relatively stable in Northern Ireland, without the emotionally-charged environment of the Hunger Strike the IRM had lost political influence in the Republic of Ireland. In the February 1982 Republic of Ireland election, the IRM ran Sinn Fein ran candidates in constituencies where Hunger Strike

candidates had stood the previous year. The goal of this strategy was to garner the same support that had been shown during the Hunger Strikes, but for Sinn Fein specifically. However, Sinn Fein polled less than half of the votes the prisoners had received during the previous year (Feeney 306). It became obvious to Adams that without the highly emotional environment of a hunger strike there was no taste for abstentionist candidates in the Republic of Ireland. The role of Sinn Fein would require rethinking to accommodate the reality that, in contrast to the communities in Northern Ireland, the citizens of the Republic of Ireland accepted the government institutions that had been in place since 1922 as legitimate. By the end of 1982, the impetus for ending abstention was settled.

1986: Ending Abstention

In order to once again turn the IRM into a national movement (i.e., have the same electoral success in the Republic of Ireland as in the North), abstention had to be terminated. The groundwork was laid at the 1982 Sinn Fein ard fheis where Adams and his supporters accomplished two goals: first, O'Bradaigh resigned and Adams began his ascent to the Sinn Fein presidency; and second, the Sinn Fein constitution was ratified to allow previously banned discussion about abstention. Electoral success in 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985 at the local government, regional assembly, Westminster and European levels legitimized the claim that the Armalite and Ballot Box strategy was still working. At the 1985 Sinn Fein ard fheis, Adams felt secure enough to initiate a resolution proposing the removal of the abstention clause from the Sinn Fein constitution and officially enlarge the role of politics in the IRM. Although the motion did not pass, the leadership, now officially under Adams, was able to observe the extent of the opposition and how to deal with it at the next ard fheis. At the 1986 Sinn Fein ard fheis, the Sinn Fein resolution to end abstention passes with the two-thirds majority required. O'Bradaigh led

twenty of his supporters out of the meeting, effectively ending their membership in the IRM. A speech by McGuinness confirmed that the IRM was ending abstention to gain electoral support in the Republic of Ireland. Furthermore, McGuinness rejected any suggestion that entering Leinster House would mean an end to the IRM's unapologetic support for the right of the Irish people to oppose Britain through the use of arms. Together, Adams and McGuinness were able to expand the political involvement of the IRM without causing a split in the movement.

Conclusion

Chapter Two has provided a narrative for understanding the impact that the Troubles had on the IRM's self-concepts regarding their role in Ireland. The IRM that emerged from the Lower Falls Curfew as principal group fighting for Irish unification was steadfast in its belief that the use of arms could achieve British defeat and unite Ireland in the spirit of the Republic of 1916. The 1972 and 1975 ceasefires provided opportunities for this goal to be realized—the military strategy of the IRM through the IRA, bolstered by the propaganda and community work of Sinn Fein, had brought the British to the negotiating table. The inability of the IRM's leadership to negotiate as a result of their hardline mentality sent the conflict into an even worse state, wherein the British introduced the criminalization and ulsterization policies. Disillusioned by the inability of the Dublin leadership to capitalize on the momentum created by the military strategy, young IRM members such as Adams sought to enhance the political consciousness of the movement. Adams began working toward expanding the role of politics, and Sinn Fein, in the IRM strategy. The first opportunity in which to set this plan in motion came through the Hunger Strikes. The IRM was able capitalize on the support from the communities that it had sworn to protect and international sympathies by electing IRM prisoners. It was these successes

that allowed Adams and McGuinness to push the Armalite and Ballot Box Strategy in 1981. This Strategy proved to hardline traditionalists that a political program could exist alongside the armed struggle, and paved the way for completely abolishing the abstention policy in 1986.

As this Chapter has demonstrated, the transformation of the IRM was influenced by the period in which it took place. This thesis posits that at these four crucial moments during the Troubles, the IRM self-concepts were challenged, and the end result of these challenges was to change the movement's strategy by expanding their political role in the form of ending abstention. The assumption that the IRM was acting to protect their identity needs is tied to the theoretical framework employed by this thesis. From an ontological security perspective, behaviour and interests are motivated by the need to maintain a consistent self-identity. When actors' social actions no longer reflect how they see themselves, they will alter their behaviour. In the case of the IRM, the armed struggle was unable to produce any significant results in terms of British withdrawal and ending partition. Therefore, in order to fulfill their role as the harbingers of sovereignty, the IRM was required to change tactics and accept political avenues as a possible means to achieving their goals. This required a concomitant change in the way the IRM outwardly legitimized their actions. Chapter Three will discuss ontological security in greater detail and explore the theoretical tools of self-concepts and biographical narrative.

Chapter Three

Introduction

This thesis has described the significance of the IRM's decision to officially depart from what had been a central component of its strategy since the 1916 Easter Uprising: abstention. What is more, the abandonment of abstention was not accompanied by a major split in the ranks of the IRM, as it historically had been. Not only was the ending of abstention without causing any splits in the movement an anomaly in its seventy-year history, but the fact that this institutional change took place during a crucial period of time begs the questions 'how' and 'why'. This thesis explores the degree to which the context of this landmark decision—specifically, in the midst of a seventeen year war with the British—played a role in the accomplishment of such a major transformation in the IRM's strategy. A theoretical approach that treats identity as a central component of a group's actions helps to make sense of this decision and assists in answering the 'why' and 'how' of this change. Taking an ontological security approach, this thesis demonstrates that identity can be operationalised in these terms. From an ontological security perspective it can be argued that an actor's need to maintain resonance between their self-concepts and their biographical narrative motivated the behaviour of the IRM throughout the Troubles. By 1986, the abstention policy no longer resonated with the IRM's self-concepts and the goals of their biographical narrative and was therefore abandoned in favour of formal participation in politics.

Understanding Ontological Security

Ontological security is rooted in the constructivist school which argues that the structure of the international system consists of shared ideas and that it is these ideas that shape actors' behaviour and interests (Brown 51-2; Wendt 18). Constructivists contend that because interests

and behaviour are influenced by ideational as well as material forces, perceptions of threat and opportunity are subjective rather than a result of narrowly defined self-interest; a characteristic of the rational actor model which argues that actors are foremost concerned with securing their own physical security. This focus on an ideational concept of reality as arguably more important than the classic approach to analyzing human behaviour, lends itself to explaining the IRM's attachment to abstention as well as why and how they ended that commitment in 1986. During the Troubles, members of the IRM were obviously unconcerned with their physical security and, as such, an explanation for their actions cannot be understood through traditional approaches.

Ontological security on the other hand is rooted in the sense of who one is; in a world of shared ideas, actors' *ideas about themselves* are significantly important for motivating the perception of interests and behaviour. The two key ideas which constitute ontological security are self-concepts and a biographical narrative. Self-concepts are the way in which actors see themselves and wish to be seen by others; the contextual roles which define appropriate responses to particular situations. These self-concepts form the biographical narrative; the story that makes self-concepts knowable and which guides behaviour. It is referred to as ontological 'security' since a stable sense of self is required in order to feel agentic and take action based on perceptions of self. To that end, the narrative goals of an actor must align with their self-concepts; when self-concepts no longer reflect or can no longer achieve the stated goals of the biographical narrative, actors feel insecure and are unable to exercise agency until they re-establish that alignment. In the context of this thesis, various events throughout the Troubles led to a dissonance between the IRM's self-concepts and therefore the overall biographical narrative of the movement. By applying ontological security, this thesis will demonstrate that this dissonance is what motivated the decision to end abstention, ultimately substantiating the claim

that ideas, and identity, matter. In order to build this argument, this Chapter will begin with a synopsis of constructivism, the larger school of thought from which ontological security was born.

Constructivism posits that social structures drive behaviour as much as, if not more than, narrowly defined rational calculation⁴⁶. While other theories rely on the causal power of rational self-interest for explaining behaviour, constructivism emphasizes the role of ideas and identity in shaping interest and behaviour by defining threats, opportunities and the appropriate response to each in any given context. For example, the rational choice model suggests actors will engage in goal-directed behaviour aimed at securing their physical and material wellbeing. This excludes the identity of individual actors from analysis because behaviour is based on “what is essentially an ends-means calculation, in which the ‘end’ (security) is given in advance and the same for all actors” (Brown 53). By contrast, social constructivists argue that behavior is directed by the shared ideas of purposeful actors and that the interests and identities of these actors are in turn constructed by those shared ideas. In other words, actors both *shape and are shaped by* the social structures they are operating in. Wendt argues that “actions continually produce and reproduce conceptions of Self and Other” (Brown 53) meaning that identity is responsible for ascribing meaning to action. This is important to the argument of this thesis because the IRM continually engaged in action that was detrimental to their physical security; however, the routine of the armed struggle was a part of their identity, and therefore provided security of the ontological form. The IRM’s identity relied on the narrative goals as the harbingers of British withdrawal from Irish affairs and Irish unification. The cultural, economic and political occupation of

⁴⁶ The rational actor model assumes that actors make decisions and act based on rational calculations of preferences, costs and benefits. In international relations, narrowly defined self-interest is associated with maintaining physical security; therefore, all actions taken by an actor are a result of cost-benefit analysis with the intention of securing physical well-being over anything else.

Ireland by the British both awakened and threatened the very core of that narrative. This thesis demonstrates how identity generates meaning; the IRM as harbingers of Ireland's unification was a central component of their biographical narrative and this was the main influencer behind their actions against the British. The importance of identity needs in motivating behaviour is more closely related to ontological security, which is born of constructivism and which this Chapter will discuss next.

Crafted by Mitzen and Steele and based on the work of Anthony Giddens, ontological security builds on the work of constructivism but offers a slightly more refined theoretical framework for understanding how identity-needs are the primary facilitator and motivators of behaviour. Constructivism posits that behaviour is more often motivated by ideational and social factors than by physical security and material well-being. Identity matters in constructivism because, in a world where threats and opportunities are subjective, it serves as the primary tool for ascribing meaning to actions. The concept of ontological security develops this constructivist argument and offers more specific theoretical tools for understanding the dynamics of identity and its influence on behaviour. Giddens began with the assertion that in the traditional order⁴⁷, behaviour and interests were predetermined in the way that rational-choice assumes. However, he argues in the setting of modernity, the self and the broader institutions in which it exists are reflexively made (Giddens 2-3). That is to say modernity has produced a social structure⁴⁸ within which actors must develop a mechanism for managing all of the options in an inherently unstable

⁴⁷ In *Modernity and Self-Identity*, the traditional order is understood in opposition to modernity. Modernity is a post-traditional social order that differs from all preceding forms of order in regard to its dynamism, ability to undercut traditional habits and customs, and its global impact (Giddens 1-2).

⁴⁸ According to Giddens, modern institutions differ from all preceding forms of social order in regard to their dynamism and the degree to which they undercut traditional habits and customs, as well as their global impact: "modernity radically alters the nature of day-to-day social life and affects the most personal aspects of our experience" (Giddens, 1)

social environment. Giddens, Mitzen and Steele argue that identity is responsible for managing that plethora of options and decisions by providing meaning to external stimuli and therefore informing appropriate responses. Like constructivism, it is through contextually specific conceptions of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ that options are weighed and decisions are made. For this reason, it is crucial to protect one’s subjective sense of self as it provides coherence to the world. This is the argument developed through the concept of ontological security.

Ontological security refers to security in a subjective sense of who one is over time. It requires establishing a system of routines that work to minimize disruptions in that sense of self. According to Mitzen, Steele and Giddens, ontological security can be defined as “the need to experience oneself as a whole, continuous person in time—as being rather than constantly changing” (Mitzen 342). Continuity between self-concepts and the actions that reinforce identity are key to facilitating agency: identity is viewed as the mechanism through which meaning is made. As a consequence, an actor without a stable perception of ontological security is unable to determine which dangers to confront and which to ignore (Mitzen 345). In other words, without a stable sense of self, actors are unable to systematically manage the potential opportunities and dangers of everyday life and thus concentrate on tasks at hand. As opposed to this condition, an actor who is ontologically secure is able to act because their self-identity provides guidelines for what is appropriate behaviour. Ontological security therefore provides actors with “confident expectations, even if probabilistic, about the means-end relationships that govern” their life (Mitzen 345). In order to generate action and choice, therefore, actors become attached to routines that create a stable cognitive environment and provide continuity in their sense of self (Mitzen 346-7; Steele 3-5). Actors seek ontological security through routinizing their relationships with other actors and “since continued agency requires the cognitive certainty these

routines provide, actors get attached to these social relationships” (Mitzen 342; Steele 3). Day to day routines thus come to be invested with emotional significance. Disruptions to this sense of self causes anxiety for the individual. When routines no longer reflect or are reflected in the way actors see themselves, they will seek to re-establish routines that better reflect their sense of self. How these changes come to cause anxiety, as well as how they are legitimized for the purpose of decreasing the effects of disruption, is closely related to actors’ biographical narrative and self-concepts.

Biographical narrative and self-concepts are two important analytical tools created by Giddens and developed for group interaction in international relations by both Steele and Mitzen. An actor’s biographical narrative is the story through which self-concepts, or how an actor sees themselves and how they want to be seen by others, are brought to life. Mitzen and Steele apply this to group identity, specifically states. They illustrate that “states ‘talk’ about their actions in identity terms, and this is necessary because only in the telling of the event does it acquire meaning, the meaning that makes such events politically relevant” (Steele 10-11). Specifically, these stories “link by implication a policy with a description or understanding of a state ‘self’” in order to “create meanings for their actions [that are] logically consistent with their identities” (Steele 11). By understanding a state’s biographical narrative and how this aligns with its self-concepts, scholars can identify how identity needs place boundaries and limits on which actions a state is willing or able to pursue.

Shame⁴⁹ is a critical aspect of ontological security and plays an important role in understanding why the IRM chose to end abstention when they did. An important aspect of the biographical narrative is that it serves as the means through which actors justify their actions in

⁴⁹ According to Steele, “shame produces a deep feeling of insecurity – it is a temporary but radical severance of a state’s sense of Self. Its presence means that a state recognizes how its actions were (or could be) incongruent with its sense of self-identity” (Steele 3).

terms of their identity needs. According to Mitzen, actions will either reproduce or contradict identities, “and since identity motivates action, its stability over time depends on it being supported in practice” (5). Dissonance between self-concepts and narrative actions generates shame as there is anxiety regarding the “adequacy of the narrative by means of which the individual sustains a coherent biography” (Giddens 66). The presence of shame signifies that an actor is unable to “reconcile past (or prospective) actions with the biographical narrative” used “to justify their behaviour” (Steele 13). When actions no longer align with a sense of self, an individual cannot systematically relate ends to means and their ability to act, or their agency, is obstructed. For this reason, shame acts as motivating factor for changing behaviour and re-establishing routines that better suit the self-concepts of the actor. As will be argued in Chapter four, ending abstention in 1986 was an example of the IRM establishing new routines as a result of shame. The violent behaviour of the Provisional at the outset of the Troubles was justified by their narrative as harbingers of a united Ireland. However, a number of critical events changed the context of the conflict and challenged whether that behaviour best reflected their identity.

The methodology most often employed with ontological security is discourse analysis. It is employed to understand the content of an actor’s biographical narrative but also to “reveal how a discourse’s effects constitute certain types of action” (Steele 11). Discourse analysis accomplishes three important objectives in terms of understanding the link between self-concepts and biographical narrative. First, it demonstrates how an actor connects a policy to their biographical narrative or fails to do so. Further, discourse analysis demonstrates how a policy is justified in terms of what it means for the actor’s sense of self-identity. Second, discourse analysis reveals when considerations of identity-needs lead to a specific policy choice. Finally, discourse analysis illuminates how actors create meanings of both their vision of self-identity

and also of identity threats (Steele 11). In terms of this thesis, speeches, editorials and other relevant documents will be used to demonstrate the shift in the self-concepts and biographical narrative of the IRM. Specifically, Chapter Four analyses five critical moments during the Troubles that challenged the self-concepts of the IRM, caused feelings of shame, and eventually led to a change in the self-concepts of the movement in the form of accepting a greater role for politics by way of ending abstention.

Conclusion

This Chapter has provided a detailed overview of the theoretical framework employed by this thesis. Constructivism asserts the notion that identity matters in international politics. Because it acts as the lens through which generic actions are given meaning, the self-identity of an actor is of utmost importance when analysing behaviour. Building on this premise, theorists of ontological security assert that identity is the main factor determining the behaviour of actors. Identity enables actors to navigate and manage a plethora of options by giving them a mechanism for linking ends to means. As such, actors pursue ontological security, or security in the subjective sense of who one is. This requires a stable cognitive environment, which is achieved by establishing routines with other actors and through the continuity between action and narrative. Shame is produced when routines or actions no longer reflect an actor's sense of self. In order to correct these disrupted self-visions, new behaviours will emerge and will be justified through the biographical narrative. In the following Chapter, the degree to which the Troubles impacted the IRM's decision to end abstention is assessed using the theoretical tools described above. Discourse analysis of speeches, policy documents, editorials, and journals for example, will demonstrate the gradual shift in the self-concepts of the IRM and how their actions

were continually justified through their biographical narrative (including the decision to end abstention).

Chapter Four

Introduction

As detailed in Chapter Three, understanding the self-concepts and biographical narrative at work in the Irish Republican Movement (IRM) provides an explanation for the end of abstention. The tension between the military self-concept and the political self-concept of the IRM created dissonance with the biographical narrative which was defined by the IRM's commitment to ousting the British from Northern Ireland and uniting with the Republic of Ireland. While the military self-concept mostly dominated the IRM until the Hunger Strikes, the groundwork for a greater role for the political self-concept can be traced back to 1969 when the activism of the Provisional set up unrealizable goals. This came to the fore with a number of events throughout the Troubles which signalled that rebalancing the IRM's self-concepts in terms of expanding the importance of the political self-concept would be necessary in achieving those goals. This would eventually lead to the taking up of electoral seats in 1986 and therefore the ending of abstention.

This Chapter uncovers the two self-concepts and the biographical narrative of the IRM as it evolves through four events: the Lower Falls Curfew⁵⁰, the 1972 and 1975 ceasefires and the 1981 Hunger Strikes. The intent of this analysis is to demonstrate how the inability of the military self-concept to fulfill the biographical narrative of the IRM created dissonance. The rebalancing of the IRM's self-concepts, where greater importance was given to the political self-concept, brought the IRM's self-concepts back into resonance by demonstrating a way to fulfill the biographical narrative. Again, as discussed in Chapter Three, when there is dissonance between perceptions of self and an actor's biographical narrative, feelings of shame arise and the

⁵⁰ Hereafter referred to as the Curfew.

agency of the actor is hindered; without realigning the IRM's self-concepts with their biographical narrative it would be increasingly unable to act.

This thesis traces the evolution of the IRM's identity from one dominated by the military self-concept to one that assigned importance to the political self-concept as well. The military self-concept is embodied by a number of contextual roles: defender, protector, and liberator. The political self-concept is embodied by a different set of contextual roles: negotiator, community organizer, propagandist and political agitator. Since 1916, the IRM has been constituted by the interplay of these two self-concepts albeit with the military self-concept remaining dominant until the successful ending of abstention in 1986. As discussed in Chapter Two, there have been points of contestation in the past, creating notable splits in the IRM in 1921, 1926 and 1969. In each instance, the splits occurred due to the inability of the IRM to accept the legitimacy of the political self-concept for achieving the goals stated in the biographical narrative. When the Provisional were formed in 1969 in response to the IRM's movement toward enlarging the political self-concept in the MacGiolla-Goulding leadership, they split because those IRM members that formed the Provisional viewed the military self-concept as the primary means for achieving their goals. However, after the unsuccessful ceasefires in 1972 and 1975, the political self-concept would take on increasing significance under the influence of Gerry Adams. While the political self-concept was not given nearly as much credence as the military self-concept until the Hunger Strikes, the decision to end abstention in 1986, and to do so without causing a split in the IRM, was the ultimate admission that politics had a role to play – that it was a legitimate self-concept within the biographical narrative of the IRM.

This Chapter will detail how the events between the Curfew and the Hunger Strikes generated dissonance between the IRM's biographical narrative and its military self-concept.

This led to the legitimization of the political self-concept in the form of ending abstention as a means to move the IRM's narrative of achieving a united Ireland forward. To that end, this Chapter is organized into six subsections, beginning with an overview of the self-concepts of the IRM at the time of splitting from the MacGiolla-Goulding leadership in 1969 and forming the Provisional. A description of the self-concepts of the IRM at this time will assist in understanding just how central the abstention policy was. Following this overview, the Chapter considers each of the events which shaped the self-concepts and biographical narrative of the IRM up to and including the ending of abstention in 1986.

1969: Emergence of the Provisional

As discussed in Chapter Two, the socialist policies of the MacGiolla-Goulding leadership created dissonance in the IRM's biographical narrative by disputing the importance of the military self-concept and not putting the ultimate goal of uniting Ireland at the forefront of their policies and strategies. Specifically, two actions caused dissonance between the self-concepts and biographical narrative of the IRM at this time: the alleged "failure of the IRA to defend the people of the North" (White 153), where the military self-concept was a central component of IRM's identity, and the ending of abstention⁵¹, where the denial of a political strategy and participation in illegitimate political institutions was another central component of the IRM's self-concepts. As a consequence, the Provisional was formed in 1969 by traditionalists, abstentionists and other dissidents that viewed the military self-concept as the primary means of achieving the narrative goal of a united Ireland.

⁵¹ While the MacGiolla-O'Bradaigh leadership did indeed end abstention in 1969, this caused a split in the IRM. Because of their commitment to abstention and the use of physical force to fulfill the biographical narrative, the Provisional that were formed as a result of this split were viewed as the true embodiment of the IRM. The MacGiolla-Goulding side of the split in the IRM at this time lost influence over the IRA and Sinn Fein and therefore, their legitimacy as members of the IRM.

Under the MacGiolla-Goulding leadership the IRM had lost much of the influence it once had in Northern Ireland, shifting their focus away from militaristic defence through the IRA and focusing on the political avenues not traditionally viewed as a prominent self-concept across the IRM. MacGiolla and Goulding called for a socialist republic that would be achieved through “civil rights reforms and the establishment of political equality” (Smith 81). When and if political equality was established, Protestants and Catholics would unite under the “brotherhood of the proletariat” (Coogan 105) and collectively resist British colonial rule in Northern Ireland. As with the past splits in the IRM, these political strategies lacked broad support among rank and file IRM members because the focus on a political self-concept did not align with their narrative goals of using armed force to unite Ireland and establish a republic based on the ideals of 1916. Goulding himself stated that by 1967 “the movement had become dormant. It wasn’t active in any political sense or even in any revolutionary sense. Membership was falling off...Units of the IRA and the cumainn of Sinn Fein had become almost non-existent” (Smith 80).

In support of the attempt to embrace politics as the most important aspect of the IRM’s self-concepts, the IRM’s resources were dedicated to assisting the civil rights campaign and restricted to protest and activism. Thus, when violence broke out in the North in 1969, Goulding stated that “it is not our job to be Catholic defenders. When the time comes, we’ll put it up to the official forces, the British Army and the RUC, to defend the people” (White 143). The Northern Irish communities traditionally protected by the IRA could no longer look to the IRM for assistance in their plight. The lack of defense provided under the MacGiolla-Goulding leadership damaged the legitimacy of the IRM to those members that viewed the military self-concept as the primary means of achieving their goals as well as to the communities in Northern Ireland that relied on the IRM for defense. The actions of the Provisional during the Curfew allowed them to

present themselves as the heirs to the IRM's traditions and re-align their military self-concept with their biographical narrative.

In contrast to the socialist strategies of the Dublin leadership that placed importance on the issues of extensive poverty and unemployment and had essentially left the IRM demilitarised (Coogan 105), members of the Provisional were hardline militarists who felt the armed struggle was the only way to secure the goals of the biographical narrative. The Provisional also believed that abstention was a cornerstone of the IRM strategy which ensured that politics played only a secondary role in the movement. These two points formed the basis of the IRM biographical narrative, which were summed up in a speech given by Jimmy Steele⁵² at a funeral for two IRM members:

Our two martyred comrades whom we honour today went forth to carry the fight to the enemy, into enemy territory, using the only methods that will ever succeed, not the method of the politicians, nor the constitutionalists, but the method of soldiers, the method of armed force. The ultimate aim of the Irish nation will never emerge from the political or constitutional platform (White 145).

The Provisional argued that the MacGiolla-Goulding leadership had betrayed the biographical narrative of the IRM by deviating from the military self-concept. By contrast, the Provisional commitment to the military self-concept was the basis of their claim to represent the IRM. The next section will look at the Curfew, which legitimated the Provisional role in the IRM and consequently reinforced the dominance of the military self-concept.

⁵² Steele was a long-time republican who had fought during the War of Independence, helped to re-establish the IRA's Belfast Brigade in 1925, led a raid on the Royal Ulster Constabulary in 1935, escaped from prison in 1943, and then became a high-ranking member of the IRA's Northern Command (an adjunct of the IRA located in Belfast). As an author for many republican publications and the editor for *Republican News*, Steele was an outspoken critic of Goulding-MacGiolla's motion to end abstention. Steele was one of the leaders of the 1969 split, a founding member of the Provisional movement and an influential member until his death in 1970.

The 1970 Lower Falls Curfew

The first event on the path to ending abstention was counter-intuitively the Curfew. It is counter-intuitive in that the Curfew would seem to reinforce the dominance of the military self-concept in the IRM. However it also set unattainable outcomes that would lead to alternate methods best undertaken by the political self-concept as demonstrated during the Hunger Strikes. As discussed, the cornerstone of the biographical narrative of the IRM was the forcing of British withdrawal from Northern Ireland and the unification of Ireland. When members of the Provisional came to the defence of Catholics during the Curfew they successfully enacted their military self-concept thereby establishing resonance with their biographical narrative. These actions not only garnered a groundswell of support for their cause in Northern Ireland, which legitimized them in their role to the people of Northern Ireland, but more importantly they demonstrated their commitment to the military self-concept and to their goals in the biographical narrative.

The Curfew was the first opportunity for the newly formed Provisional to act on the military self-concept, re-align this with their narrative actions and, stake a claim as the true representation of the IRM. John Kelly⁵³, prominent IRM leader throughout the 1960s, described the character of the IRM prior to this event. This quote reveals a part of the IRM narrative and demonstrates that the military self-concept was the most dominant in the formation of the Provisional and prior to the Curfew:

(T)hose who had pursued the politicisation mind were seen to have failed because they hadn't provided the weapons to defend the nationalist population within [Northern Ireland] which was always part of the republican philosophy. The traditional republican attitude to Britain's occupation of Ireland was to remove England from Ireland by the use of

⁵³ Kelly joined the IRA in the 1950s and took part in the IRA campaign along the Northern border. Kelly was a founding member of the Provisional movement and one of the leaders of the Provisional IRA.

physical force. That changed in 1969, in the context of defending nationalism, of defending Catholics within [Northern Ireland], but out of that conflict grew, or reawakened the notion of traditional republicanism, that we would continue the ideological concept of removing England from Ireland that was through physical force... (Alfonso 43).

In contrast to the MacGiolla-Goulding leadership who had pursued politics as an avenue for achieving the IRM's goals, those who formed the Provisional saw themselves as fulfilling the traditional role of the IRM: the primary group fighting British imperialism and the harbingers of Irish unification in the spirit of the 1916 Republic. The Curfew allowed the Provisional to align the military self-concept in the IRM with its biographical narrative by countering the actions of the British Army through the use of armed force and proving to the communities in Northern Ireland that they were not only willing but able to fulfill their historical role.

A number of prominent IRM leaders have discussed the extent to which the actions of the Provisional during the Curfew confirmed them in their traditional role and as the true representatives of the IRM. During the Curfew, the heavy-handedness of the British Army in the raid of the Falls, coupled with the defensive performance of Provisionals such as Billy McKee and Joe Cahill, resulted in a groundswell of support for the Provisional and allowed them the opportunity to align their military self-concepts with the IRM's biographical narrative. The Provisional IRA (PIRA) Chief of Staff at the time, Sean MacStiofain⁵⁴, stated:

Coming on top of the successful IRA-led defence of Ballymacarrett and other districts, what the battle of the Lower Falls did was to provide endless water for the republican guerrilla fish to swim in" (Warner 13).

⁵⁴ MacStiofain joined the IRA in 1949 and became Chief of Staff of the Provisional IRA in 1969 following the split with Goulding-MacGiolla. He served as Chief of Staff until 1972 and took part in the negotiations with Whitelaw. He was arrested in November 1972 and upon his release the following year, he never regained influence in republican ranks.

Joe Cahill⁵⁵ shared the sentiment that the Curfew confirmed the Provisional in their role in both the eyes of the IRM members and the greater community which it served: “there was an upsurge in the number of young people attempting to join the IRA. [The] Belfast Brigade had many more potential recruits than [it] could handle” (Warner 13). Adams echoed the notion that the Curfew legitimized the Provisional as the legitimate representation of the IRM. He stated that engaging loyalist attackers and successfully driving them off was the Provisionals’ “most important action since the split” in 1969 because it provided credibility to the Provisionals as the true representatives of the IRM (Adams 140). This credibility resulted in support for the Provisional program of utilizing the military self-concept to oust the British: “Thousands of people who have never been republicans now gave their active support to the IRA; others who had never had any time for physical force now accepted it as practical necessity” (Adams 142). At the October 1970 Ard Fheis, President of Sinn Féin Ruairi O’Bradaigh⁵⁶ described how their actions during the Curfew confirmed the Provisional as the true embodiment of IRM:

You, the true republicans who stood steadfast in defense of the Republic against the attack made on it some months ago, are entitled to the respect and appreciation of the loyal republican people here in Ireland and in exile. You reorganized yourselves in the various organizations and the republican Movement is once more a sturdy stronghold...acknowledge who is the true and official Sinn Féin, upholding the Constitution of the organisation and having the allegiance of the vast majority of Irish republicans” (White 163).

⁵⁵ Cahill joined the IRA’s Belfast Brigade in 1938 and was an active member during the 1950s campaign along the Northern border. Cahill fought alongside Billy McKee in the defense of St. Matthews church and was a founding member of the Provisional movement. He was elected to the Provisional IRA Army Council in 1970, and in 1971 he became the commander of the Belfast Brigade.

⁵⁶ O’Bradaigh joined Sinn Féin in 1950 and the IRA in 1951. He participated in the 1950s Border campaign and he served as the IRA Chief of Staff from 1958-59 and 1960-62. O’Bradaigh was one of the leaders of the split with Goulding-MacGiolla in 1969, and one of the founding members of the Provisional movement. He was President of Sinn Féin from 1970-83 and was elected to the IRA Army Council from 1970 to at least 1975.

In this speech, O’Bradaigh not only demonstrates the legitimacy of the Provisional but his words highlight the shift from a movement that stressed the use of politics to achieve the IRM’s goals under MacGiolla-Goulding to one that believed primarily in physical force and the military self-concept – realigning their role as military actor and their biographical narrative which called for the use of physical force to achieve the movement’s stated goals. Leading up to and during the next event taken up by this Chapter, the 1972 ceasefire, the IRM, now embodied by the Provisionals, reinforced the dominance of the military self-concept in that they continued their armed campaign against the British, eventually bringing the British to the negotiating table through these efforts. As will be discussed, because the IRM focused on the military self-concept to fulfill their biographical narrative they were unable to enact the political self-concept when attempting to gain ground during the ceasefire negotiations. This signalled the first tensions between the military and political self-concepts.

The 1972 Ceasefire

The 1972 ceasefire is the first event that occurred during the Troubles that caused tension between the military self-concept and political self-concept, thereby creating dissonance in the IRM’s biographical narrative. Up until the ceasefire, the biographical narrative of achieving a united Ireland by forcing a British withdrawal resonated with the domination of the military self-concept. While seemingly assuming the role of political actor by engaging in political negotiations during the ceasefire, this was only important insofar as it supported the military campaign. In short, the political self-concept was only enacted to represent what the military had achieved. It was the inability to secure British withdrawal through the negotiations that began to cause tension between the IRM’s biographical narrative and its self-concepts. It started to

become clear to some in the IRM leadership that the political self-concept would need to be afforded a larger role in order to achieve the goals of the biographical narrative.

Following the Curfew, the Provisional leadership felt that the movement had gained strength and would be victorious in the effort to oust the British. As mentioned in the previous section, the Curfew generated resonance between the military self-concept and the biographical narrative of the IRM. The support from the community was read as support for the physical force strategy they were pursuing and all of the IRM's resources had been dedicated to increasing the capability of the IRA. In an interview many years after the fact, MacStiofain indicated that the state of the IRA at this time was "very good, I think, the best and better IRA for fifty years. More men, ammunition, equipment and very, very good morale" (MacStiofain). When asked if he felt that they were winning (in terms of getting the British to withdraw), MacStiofain unequivocally answered "yes" (MacStiofain). In his "Army Statement" in 1971, MacStiofain assured republicans that the IRA was "battle hardened, ready to face up to the hardships of the final phase which of course will be more intensive than anything experienced thus far" (White 173). These quotations provide evidence of the IRM's biographical narrative at this time, wherein the leadership believed the movement was strong enough to achieve their goals militarily and to continue to fulfill the biographical narrative through that form of action only.

This was not disputed by the Sinn Fein leadership. At the 1971 *ard fheis*, O'Bradaigh conceded that the goal was "to bring down Stormont by making the area ungovernable" followed by "an all-out effort to force British evacuation and disengagement" (White 174). In this strategy the IRA played the primary role through the military self-concept, while Sinn Fein was relegated to providing leadership to the civil resistance campaign. Sinn Fein's role would become important when the inevitable victory was won, and they could then "go to all people North and

South, unionist and nationalist with our Social and Economic programme and ask them to join with us in building the Democratic Socialist Republic” (White 174). These statements reveal that the armed struggle, and therefore the military self-concept, was still perceived as the main driver of the goals of republicanism prior to the 1972 ceasefire.

Further to the point that the IRM self-concepts had not experienced any tension leading up to the ceasefire, O’Bradaighs’ presidential address paid service to IRM military self-concepts and the fact they were not only the strongest oppositional force to British imperialism, but the only force that could accomplish the movements’ goals:

We must not fail our struggling people striving to be free of social, economic, cultural and political servitude; we dare not fail our dead—and there have been so many to make the supreme sacrifice in the past year—who made an act of faith in us, their comrades. Our oppressed and harassed people in the streets and the countryside, our menfolk being subjected to unspeakable degradations in the torture mills, our women and men in the concentration camps and prison cells, our exiled kith and kin, all look to us (White 174).

For O’Bradaigh and other leaders, the 1972 ceasefire was confirmation that the military strategy had been successful, and that the IRM was at liberty to make any demands of the British that they saw fit. This speech summed up the denial of a political apparatus and the prioritization of the armed struggle as the primary self-concept, thereby legitimizing the actions of the IRM leading up to and during the ceasefire through the biographical narrative.

When the ceasefire was called, the Provisional movement saw it as a victory for their military pursuits, and two events in particular validated the military self-concept and its alignment with the IRM’s biographical narrative: the dismantling of Stormont and the granting of Special Category Status. The first evidence of victory was the fall of Stormont, the parliament of Northern Ireland. The dismantling of the political apparatus responsible for the oppression of

Catholics was one of the Provisionals' demands in return for ceasing the armed struggle. This reinforced the dominance of the military self-concept by proving to the IRM that their narrative goals could be achieved through military means alone. The dismantling of Stormont in and of itself was not enough for the IRM leadership that were emboldened by this compromise.

MacStiofain released a statement stating that although disassembling Stormont was "an advance on previous British Government attitudes" (White 178), the campaign would continue until all of their demands were met. This illustrates the IRM's perception that they were close to victory and, therefore, to achieving their stated goal of removing the British from Northern Ireland. The second piece of evidence that the IRM was winning and that their actions were successful was the granting of Special Category Status. In order to even begin negotiations, the IRM leadership had demanded the granting of Special Category Status for the prisoners as well as the release of Adams. For the IRM leadership, Special Category Status legitimized the military self-concept: they were soldiers of a legitimate army fighting a war against an imperial oppressor, not common criminals. Thus, when Whitelaw invited a number of IRM leaders to negotiate the terms of complete ceasefire, the IRM thought that they had won the war.

The dominance of the military self-concept led the IRM delegation to take a hard line in the negotiations, in which their stubbornness is evidenced in a quote by MacStiofain: "concessions be damned, we want our freedom" (Smith 106). As a result of this attitude and the inability to enlarge the importance of the political self-concept, when the meeting began MacStiofain and the other delegates had "no interest" in anything Whitelaw had to say. Instead, they allowed him to speak for five minutes before reading their statement. In his 1997 interview with Frontline, MacStiofain stated that "we call[ed] on the British government to publicly acknowledge the right to the Irish people, [to] act in one unit to decide the future of Ireland"

(MacStiofain). They subsequently demanded a “military and political withdrawal” of the British from Northern Ireland. Though in his 1997 interview with Frontline MacStiofain admitted that “maybe” their demands were “hopelessly unrealistic”, in 1972 they gave Whitelaw only “three days for an answer” (MacStiofain). According to MacStiofain, “the British and the UDA⁵⁷ broke the bloody truce”, at which time “the leadership had an order to all units in the north, [to] get back into offensive action and...intensify the campaign” (MacStiofain). While the leadership held steadfast to the belief that the armed struggle would be the sole means of fulfilling the biographical narrative and were strengthened in that belief in the lead-up to the ceasefire, it was the breakdown of this negotiation and subsequent increase in the military campaign that would have a lasting impact on the self-concepts of the IRM. The inability to embrace the role of political negotiator due to the dominance of the military self-concept caused dissonance with the biographical narrative –it had become evident to some influential members in the IRM, such as Adams, that a political role would be needed to achieve the narrative goals of the movement. This represented the first challenge to the IRM’s self-concept as a primarily military actor.

The inability to secure British withdrawal from Ireland undermined the belief that the military struggle would ensure a quick victory for the IRM and highlighted the tension between militarism and politics within the movements’ self-concepts. As mentioned, this tension represented the first challenge to the IRM in terms of whether their self-concept aligned with their biographical narrative. To that end, following the 1972 ceasefire, talk of including a greater role for politics began to enter the ranks. It had become clear to some members of the IRM, specifically Adams and his peers, that it was not enough to bring the British to the negotiating table through military means in order to achieve their goals; there should also be a clear political

⁵⁷ The Ulster Defense Association was the largest loyalist paramilitary in Northern Ireland.

strategy both in order to carry out negotiations properly as well as to put forward demands that were possible and realistic. Although it would take additional challenges to the IRM's self-concepts to re-balance the military self-concept and the political self-concept, this is the first instance in which the need for a greater political role enters the IRM's self-concepts.

One of the more vocal republicans was Adams, who recognized the need for a more robust political approach immediately following the breakdown of the truce. In his autobiography, Adams discusses the disjointed relationships between the IRM leaders in the delegation that negotiated with Whitelaw. Adams alludes to the fact that MacStiofain "found it difficult to relate to [the younger activists], particularly those from Belfast" (Adams 200). This created a dissonance between the younger and older members of the delegation which was coupled with "a certain tension between MacStiofain, O'Bradaigh and O'Conaill" (Adams 200). For Adams, this meant that "there was no evidence of collective leadership on their part or of an appreciation of the need for this" (Adams 200). This quotation illustrates that while the leadership shared the same goals there was disagreement as to what self-concepts needed to be utilized in order to achieve it. Specifically there was a tension between those who saw the military self-concept embodied by the actions of the IRA as the primary means for achieving their goals and those that felt the political self-concept embodied by Sinn Fein was, to some degree, worth pursuing.

Additionally, Adams reveals that he was aware of the lack of political direction on the part of the delegation before the negotiations began, and he, at the time, advocated clarity:

I argued very strongly against the course of action which was being suggested, which appeared to see the pending negotiations as if they were a follow-through to the treaty talks of 1920, and which proposed a very formalised approach to our engagement with the British government (201).

Adams realized that the delegation was lacking a political direction and was utterly unprepared for its meeting with the British government. While others had gauged the meeting as successful, (i.e. MacStiofain proclaimed “Jesus, we have it!” when they were given time to discuss matters privately), Adams felt that

the meeting had been...part of the British government’s exploratory approach...They had shown no signs of conceding republican demands, and I took a fairly absolutist position regarding these demands. I was conscious of the historical nature of the negotiations. We were in a direct line of descent from the republicans of 1920—the last time such discussions had occurred—but they had represented a revolutionary government with massive support. A lot had changed since then (206).

This quote not only emphasizes the importance of connecting to the past in order to provide legitimacy to the movement, but it demonstrates that Adams had begun to recognize the necessity of a public base of support through the strategy broadening of the political self-concept. For Adams, in order to fulfill the IRM goals as outlined in their biographical narrative, purely military tactics would not be enough, as was evidenced in the 1972 ceasefire and through the narrative provided above. It was at this moment that the crusade to politicize the movement began and the 1975 ceasefire would provide the impetus for the acceptance of a political self-concept that was much broader than that accepted in 1972.

The 1975 ceasefire

The third event considered in this Chapter is the 1975 ceasefire. The 1975 ceasefire represents the second challenge to the IRM in terms of the tension between the two self-concepts and the dissonance this caused with its biographical narrative. The biographical narrative of the IRM still committed the movement to forcing British withdrawal and unifying Northern Ireland with the Republic, and Members of the IRM still viewed the military self-concept as the primary means for achieving that goal. While the military effort had made great strides leading up to

1975, the inability of the leadership to secure their demands for a second time worked to cause further tension between the IRM's two self-concepts. For a second time in three years, the military self-concept was unable to fulfill the commitments of the biographical narrative. It is at this juncture that the need to enlarge the political self-concept in order to fulfill the promise of what the military self-concept had begun through the armed struggle was realized. Adams and his associates began introducing politics as means of moving from military victory to achieving British withdrawal and the eventual unification of Ireland.

After the 1972 ceasefire, it was recognized by some members that the IRM required a degree of political know-how if they were to negotiate with the British. However, the IRM remained committed to the armed struggle and the military self-concept as the primary means for securing British withdrawal. Three articles from a 1974 edition of *Republican News* support this assertion: "*Are You a Deserter*" by an anonymous author, "*Guerilla Warfare*" by Thomas Neils and "*No Ceasefire*" also by an anonymous author. As the official monthly newsletter of Sinn Fein, these articles are a form of propaganda that represent the views of the leadership and therefore speak to the biographical narrative of the movement which mainly focused on propping up the armed struggle as the means through which Irish unity would be achieved.

The first article, *Guerilla Warfare*, discusses the success of the military struggle until this point:

The new IRA adopted the tactics of guerilla warfare. Since then their success has become assured. They have been able to make the British attempts to hold onto Ireland so expensive that the Imperialists have reluctantly been forced to relinquish their covetous hands from three quarters of Irish soil (Neils 4).

In this excerpt from Neils' article, it is clear that the leadership are committed to the armed struggle: they view it as having already brought a degree of victory, they believe that this

strategy guarantees a victory in the future and they are therefore steadfast in their belief that the military self-concept is the primary means through which they will achieve their goals. Neils also pays homage to the role of Sinn Fein: “Since the guerilla fighter needs the support of the populace in order to survive, he requires having some political aim which will gain their sympathy. The guerilla fighter is thus a propagandist, one who sows the seeds of the revolutionary idea” (Neils 2). The article can be viewed as a propping-up of the physical force aspect of IRM, and this quotation illustrates that the many of the IRM’s members at this time saw the political actor role as secondary to their military pursuits – this role would only be useful once victory had been achieved by the military actor.

In the article “*Are You a Deserter?*” the message is aimed at those who have become disillusioned by the campaign against the British, suggesting that the dissonance between military actor and the IRM’s biographical narrative was very real:

Are YOU serving Ireland and her cause today? Or are you one of the many who have become tired or disgruntled in the struggle or who now claim immunity from further service? Are you content to live with your record – prison or otherwise as an answer to your critics – looking with scorn or contempt on the men, especially the younger generation, who stepped into the places vacated by you and your friends? Remember it was your words, your service, your activities and sacrifices that recruited these men into the movement. It was you who sounded the clarion for youth to take their places in the ranks of the republican movement...There is no earthly excuse for the inactivity of anyone claiming republican principles today, providing he or she is physically fit, with no great personal responsibilities (1).

As previously stated, the failure of the 1972 ceasefire to provide any relief was demoralizing for some members of the IRM as well as the Northern Irish communities which they served and was the first instance in which the IRM’s self-concepts came into tension. After three more years of violence, the IRM was not experiencing the same increase in membership as they had after the Curfew. This article was aimed at increasing membership and support.

Furthermore, this quote reveals that the *type* of support required was militaristic in nature. Use of the terms “recruit”, “ranks” and “service”, with references to prison, demonstrate to the reader that the leadership was most interested in enrolling military-minded members, not in expanding a political program.

Finally, “*No Ceasefire*” discusses the fact that various organizations and community members had been calling on the IRM to declare a ceasefire, again highlighting the perception in the IRM and in the community that the military actor role was not enough to achieve the narrative goals:

During recent days various individuals and groups have called on [the IRA] to lay down their arms and to cease their military struggle which is aimed at withdrawal of the English garrison from Ireland and the establishment of an independent All-Ireland Republic. We have noted that these calls have been welcomed by the English government and the Dublin government...Derry Brigade, Mid Ulster Brigade and South Down Brigade, [IRA] recently issued statements asserting that the military struggle would continue until the English garrison withdraws” (1).

This statement reveals that, even in 1974, the IRM leadership was not at all considering stopping the military struggle and pursuing a political route to achieve their goals. Although the Northern Ireland communities that relied on the IRM had obviously become disheartened by the violence of the previous years, as can be seen in their call to lay down arms, the leadership still strongly believed that the military self-concept would force Britain to withdraw so that a united Ireland could be established. Following the long and drawn-out 1975 ceasefire, this stance would come under increasing criticism and scrutiny as the dissonance between the IRM self-concepts and their biographical narrative became far more apparent.

The drawn-out 1975 ceasefire was initiated by the British government in order to weaken the movement and prepare to introduce the criminalisation and ulsterization policies. As Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Merlyn Rees stated in February of 1975:

The importance of a ceasefire is that it offers us the opportunity to create the conditions in which the Provisionals' 'military' organization and structure may be weakened. They would not find it easy to start a campaign again from scratch (O'Dochartaigh 4-5).

While this does not allude to the fact that the British attempted to weaken the IRM for the sole purpose of introducing their two new policies, it does reveal that they wished to further demoralise the movement. As discussed in Chapter Two, these policies, especially the criminalization policy, were aimed at casting members of the IRM as petty criminals, thereby undermining the legitimacy of their military self-concept. Thus, these policies represent one of the triggers for change, in the form of politicization, which took hold of the movement after 1975. Two members of the IRM, Brendan Hughes⁵⁸ and Adams, recognized this tactic for what it was at the time. In an interview on the twentieth anniversary of the Hunger Strikes, Hughes talked about the 1975 ceasefire and the British strategy to weaken the Provisional:

[at] the end of 1974/75 another ceasefire was called, this time it was a long drawn out ceasefire and the intentions of the British at that time was [*sic*] to get the IRA involved in a long drawn out ceasefire, and an attempt to normalise the situation, criminalise the situation and to pacify the situation. That basically meant to get the British troops off the street, the RUC back onto the street and put republicans in jail. That they done [*sic*]" (Hughes).

⁵⁸ Hughes joined the Provisional IRA in 1969 and by 1972 he was the Officer Commanding of the Provisional IRA Belfast Brigade. He was arrested in May 1974 and convicted in 1976 at a time when the British had removed Special Category Status. Hughes became the Officer Commanding of the IRA prisoners and led the initial Hunger Strike that began in May 1980 and ended 53 days later.

Hughes believed, even in 2001, that the ceasefire was intended to decrease the military capability of the IRM and reduce the degree to which this struggle was viewed as a legitimate one. Similarly, Adams writes in his autobiography:

It appeared to me inside Long Kesh that the long protracted truce which the IRA started in December 1974, and the confusion which arose as this continued in tandem with [criminalisation], was to the benefit of the British and not to the advantage of the anti-imperialist struggle...British strategy between the fall of Stormont and the end of 1975 had consisted principally of a war of political suppression...by 1975 a strategy had begun to be implemented which sought, in broad terms, to deny the political nature of the struggle...the British government used the lengthy bilateral truce of 1974-75, and were unwittingly assisted by republicans, whose self-destructive feuding spread dismay and contempt amongst many of their supporters (249-255).

This excerpt shows that, whether or not it was the British intention, the IRM believed that the length and ultimate failure of the ceasefire was intended to break the movement militarily as well as politically. Furthermore, Adams reveals in this quotation the extent to which disagreement existed within the movement between those who wished to pursue a political route to peace and those who were committed to the physical force tradition. Because this is how IRM members such as Hughes and Adams read the truce, they began to initiate a strategy to contest the British. This is when the political self-concept, albeit minuscule at first, is earnestly embraced as a legitimate self-concept in the IRM.

Both Hughes and Adams recognized the absolute necessity for engaging as political actors following the 1975 ceasefire. Due to the demoralising effect of the ceasefire among the membership and the community, Hughes and Adams began to enlarge the political self-concept to regain resonance with their biographical narrative. In an interview with Radio Free Eireann, Hughes said that people like he and Adams “opposed the ceasefire...Gerry wrote many articles warning the leadership that you’re getting drawn into a long drawn-out ceasefire, the British are

trying to stop the war” (Hughes). In light of this realization within the prison, Hughes says Adams took it upon himself to begin pushing for education and dialogue among prisoners:

Gerry was the main driving force behind this [idea] that we need politically educated rank and file... and within Long Kesh we began to do that. We had debates, we had discussions, we had arguments we read about the Palestinian Cause we read about the South African Cause, we debated all these causes and we became politically educated, we became not just a soldier who was just a person who was able to fire a gun, but a person who was able to think before he fired a gun. So all that started there... (Hughes).

According to this interview with Hughes, political education began in the prison as a direct result of the failure of the 1975 ceasefire and the attempts of the British to criminalise the IRM struggle. While Adams and those like him were not yet pushing for an increased role for Sinn Fein, they were certainly becoming more critical of the current leaderships position and their whole-hearted commitment to a strictly military struggle:

I also wanted to develop collective political discussion and education, and as a project we took *Eire Nua*, the Sinn Fein programme. First we educated ourselves as to its content, then we critically reviewed the programme and identified what we thought was wrong with it... We considered questions such as communication with the base of our support, the role of newspapers, bulletins, co-ops, tenants’ associations and women’s organizations, as means of empowering people...there was a core of people who were political animals, who were keen to kick issues around. They became the catalyst for an intensive process of debate, dialogue and education, and we succeeded in getting a large turnout for a number of projects, in which we explored new ways of examining issues (246).

The process of politicization that Adams and his followers began in prison began to take hold among some of the leadership outside of the prisons. For example, the editor of the *Republican News*, requested that Adams contribute some pieces. Adams’ articles penned under the name ‘Brownie’ addressed “more underlying questions regarding the nature and relevance of

[republican] political beliefs and practice” (248). These criticisms were broadcast to the IRM members and Northern Irish communities in the form of a monthly newsletter and they reveal the extent to which politics was embraced in the self-concepts of the IRM at this time. In this series of articles, Adams explicitly proposed increasing the role of the political wing of the movement:

I embarked on discussions of what I called ‘active abstentionism’ and ‘active republicanism’. I suggested that we as republicans should be engaged in building the elements of alternative administration... In writing of ‘The National Alternative’, I argued the need to build structures, including street committees, establishing people’s taxis in place of bus service, people’s militias in place of the RUC (249).

For Adams and other young northern members of the movement who would soon take over its leadership, the primary issue facing the IRM was the unwavering commitment to the armed struggle: “the main problem was that the struggle had been limited to armed struggle. Once this stopped, the struggle stopped” (250). The 1975 ceasefire once again proved that physical force could only get the British to the negotiating table; it would no longer be viewed as the means through which the IRM’s demands would be met. In order to recreate resonance with the biographical narrative, they “desperately needed to rebuild a sense of political direction which would govern all our activities and which would offer [republicans] a strategic overview” (Adams 262). The 1981 Hunger Strikes that occurred over the ending of Special Category Status would provide a platform through which a change in the form of adopting a political strategy could be legitimized. This legitimization aligned the IRM’s self-concepts and their biographical narrative in terms of having a political strategy and was necessary to avoiding a split in the movement, which had occurred in every instance wherein the IRM embarked on enlarging the political self-concept. More importantly, this opened the doors to the ending of abstention and taking up electoral seats in 1986.

The 1981 Hunger Strikes

The Hunger Strikes that occurred in 1981 and 1982 are the third challenge to the IRM that caused dissonance in the biographical narrative due to the tension between the military self-concept and political self-concept. The events in 1972 and 1975 had made it evident to some in the IRM leadership that a shift in self-concepts was necessary for achieving the biographical narrative's goals of British withdrawal from Northern Ireland and a united Ireland. However, until the Hunger Strikes the IRM continued to view the dominance of the military self-concept as the primary means for achieving those goals. As noted in Chapter Two, the Hunger Strikes occurred as a result of the British criminalisation policy, and particularly the removal of Special Category Status. This offered an opportunity for insisting on the political nature of the struggle and to rebalance the self-concepts to give greater importance to the political self-concept while maintaining the importance of the military self-concept. When a number of Hunger Strikers ran in elections and were victorious, the extent to which the political self-concept in terms of running in elections and the military self-concept in terms of the continuation of the armed struggle could co-exist and re-establish resonance with the biographical narrative was made evident. It was only through this event that the process of creating a larger role for the political self-concept could begin in earnest. This shift in the IRM's self-concept culminated in the Armalite and Ballot Box Strategy of 1981, wherein Sinn Fein voted to enter elections under the IRM banner thereby embracing the political self-concept that had been subservient to the military self-concept for the last twelve years.

Following the demoralisation of the 1975 ceasefire and the realization that the movement required more than the dependence on the military struggle, talk of enlarging the role for politics began among some Members of the IRM's leadership. There were disagreements between the older leadership under O'Bradaigh and the young northerners under Adams whose influence was

increasing within the IRM. The older leadership at this time still felt disdain for politics and remained committed to ousting the British using physical force:

Ruairi occupied a particularly difficult role as president of Sinn Fein because the republican struggle was at the time entirely dominated by the IRA. Abstentionism and the lack of an electoral strategy...had their effect, but more tellingly Sinn Fein was in many ways a victim of the aversion to politics which marked republicanism at this time. Politics and politicians were widely blamed for the calamity of 1969...In this context Sinn Fein was eclipsed by the IRA, and there was little appetite for political work of the more conventional kind (Adams 263).

Despite the fact that some IRM members and leaders were not comfortable with “conventional” politics as the above quote demonstrates the project of building a sense of political direction in the IRM’s self-concepts was undertaken by Adams and his likeminded comrades:

Within Sinn Fein a younger, northern element, of which I was one, began to play a role in seeking development and change in political strategy...Politically, however, we encountered resistance to the direction we were pursuing, particularly when we argued for the development of an electoral strategy (Adams 263-4).

Of course, the old leadership was concerned that pursuing electoralism and expanding the political self-concept would require ending the abstentionist platform which had caused splits in the movement in 1921, 1926 and 1969. They believed that another such split would be highly detrimental to the IRM in the midst of a decade-long war. However, it had become evident to others in the IRM leadership that the military self-concept was not enough to fulfill the stated goal of achieving a united Ireland – if the political self-concept was not given greater importance, the movement would be increasingly unable to act to achieve their goals due to the dissonance between these two self-concepts. To overcome the worries of the old leadership and, more importantly, to create resonance between self-concepts and biographical narrative, Adams

would have to demonstrate how the political self-concept aligned with the IRM's biographical narrative.

As discussed, the failure of the two ceasefires to achieve victory led many members within the IRM who fell under Adams' sphere of influence to recognize the need for some sense of a political strategy in order to achieve their stated goals. In an interview with author Rogelio Alonso, a former IRA volunteer admitted:

Armed struggle was limited... armed struggle was never going to free Ireland, it was never going to get a united Ireland that we hoped for, everyone was aware of that, volunteers were aware of that, I was even aware of it even then. That wasn't going to be the aim, we had to go into negotiations, at some stage of the game we had to negotiate and we had to bring an end... (Alonso 66).

As this quote reveals, a need to embrace the political self-concept of the IRM began to be debated, even at the rank-and-file level. This suggests the recurring tension in the self-concepts and biographical narrative of the republican movement: were they soldiers fighting for independence or politicians seeking redress through the ballot box? At the level of the up-and-coming leadership under Adams, they could be, and *needed* to be both, and the justification for increasing the importance of the political self-concept in order to support their biographical narrative was well underway. In a very public speech given by Adams in 1979 he stated the following:

The Republic declared in 1916....cannot be fully re-established solely by military means, for while obstructions and obstacles may be cleared militarily and gains made may be protected militarily, the re-establishment of the Republic needs more than a military alternative...Our most glaring weakness to date lies in our failure to develop revolutionary politics and to build a strong political alternative to so-called constitutional politics...A British withdrawal can be secured more quickly and in more favorable conditions if it is achieved not only because of the IRA military threat, but also because resistance to British

rule has been channelled and built into an alternative political movement (Adams 278).

While Adams' call for a political strategy could have possibly caused dissent and anger among some of the older IRM members and leaders, the fact that he clearly states that increasing the importance of the political self-concept will work to support the military self-concept is an important one. Rather than calling for the laying down of arms, Adams is alluding to the need for both wings of the movement to play equal roles, thereby alleviating the fears of physical force traditionalists and aligning narrative actions with the self-concepts held by the IRM since the 1969 Curfew. In one of his prison writings, Bobby Sands⁵⁹ made a similar comment regarding the need for politics:

It must be said that an armed people are by no means a sure guarantee to liberation. Our guns may kill our enemies but unless we direct them with the politics of a revolutionary people they will eventually kill ourselves. Guns don't win wars; guns and bombs may kill a man but they cannot lead a man...nor will they ever coerce an unyielding man to yield" (Adams 287).

In this statement, Sands, a very prominent and influential republican, argued for the need to increase the role of politics while maintaining a connection to the armed struggle. Again, it is this connection that made Adams and his followers' plan successful – they did not simply halt the military struggle and end the dominance of the military self-concept, they attempted to justify engaging in politics by aligning it with the self-concepts of the movement in the biographical narrative.

Not only did the IRM begin to openly discuss politics, and in turn increase the importance of the political self-concept to better accomplish their narrative goals, they also

⁵⁹ Sands joined the Provisional IRA in June 1972. In 1977 he was sentenced to 14 years in jail for his involvement in a gun battle with the Royal Ulster Constabulary. While in prison, Sands wrote both journalistic articles and poetry and in 1980 he succeeded Hughes as the Officer Commanding of the IRA prisoners. Sands led the ten men who lost their lives in the 1981 Hunger Strike.

embarked on a process of education that was meant to politicise the membership. Beginning in 1979, the IRM began a series of educational courses for members of Sinn Fein and the IRA called the “Republican Lecture Series”. Particularly, the “New Members Course” reveals the extent to which a strategic political direction, and an enlarged role for Sinn Fein, existed in 1979. The course outlines that the role of Sinn Fein consists of: “Acting as the Movement’s political link with the people”; “Implementing the Movement’s social and economic policy”; and, “Organising electoral work” (Sinn Fein Education Department). These three aspects of Sinn Fein’s work are evidence that the political wing of the movement was no longer simply constrained to agitation and propaganda and that the political organization of the IRM would be encompassing of a more participatory role. The course also states that “Sinn Fein supports in principle the legitimate struggle being waged by the IRA” (Sinn Fein Education Department) which illustrates the degree to which these two elements of the IRM’s self-concepts were inextricably linked as well as the importance of pacifying the physical force traditionalists. This provided legitimacy to increasing the importance of the political self-concept because it claimed that both a military strategy *and* politics would support the biographical narrative of the IRM. While it was difficult to start the process of politicization and justify these claims to all of the IRM, especially the official leaders such as O’Bradaigh, the Hunger Strike would force the IRM to contemplate some participation in politics and allow Adams and those like him to pursue their goals further.

The Hunger Strikes contributed greatly to the legitimacy of the changes in the IRM as it provided not only an opportunity to adjust the self-concepts of the movement to be more inclusive of a political actor role, but it also provided a platform through which this could be justified to the IRM members and leaders as well as the broader Irish public. Both prisoners as

well as the leadership recognized the importance of securing the five demands of the prisoners⁶⁰.

Without the fulfillment of these demands, IRM prisoners were considered common criminals.

This delegitimized the struggle and challenged their self-concepts. In the first entry of the diary he kept during the first seventeen days of the Hunger Strikes, Sands wrote:

I am a political prisoner. I am a political prisoner because I am a casualty of a perennial war that is being fought between the oppressed Irish people and an alien, oppressive, unwanted regime that refuses to withdraw from our land. I believe and stand by the God-given right of the Irish nation to sovereign independence, and the right of any Irishman or woman to assert this right in armed revolution. That is why I am incarcerated, naked and tortured...I believe I am but another of those wretched Irishmen born of a risen generation with a deeply rooted and unquenchable desire for freedom. I am dying not just to attempt to end the barbarity of H-Block, or to gain the rightful recognition of a political prisoner, but primarily because what is lost in here is lost for the Republic and those wretched oppressed whom I am deeply proud to know as the 'risen people'" (Sands).

In this entry, Sands indicates that he is both on strike for political status and that this recognition is inextricably linked to the cause outside of prison. This political status was linked to the legitimacy of the IRM's military self-concept because republican prisoners were prisoners of war; even though they were being viewed as criminals, they saw themselves as a legitimate army fighting an imperial oppressor. The need to demonstrate the legitimacy of IRM's military self-concepts gave Adams the opportunity to argue for the enlargement of the role of politics and to justify the incorporation of an electoral strategy for achieving their stated goals:

In Sinn Fein we had promised to intensify our efforts on the outside, but hard as the H-Block/Armagh Committee worked, there was no sign of movement on the issue from the British government. The prisoners felt that little progress was being made either by our campaign of protests or by the IRA's campaign of shooting prison wardens (Adams 287).

⁶⁰ The five demands were as follows: the right to wear their own clothing at all times; exemption from all forms of penal labour; free association with each other at all hours; the right to organise their own recreational and educational programmes; and full restoration of remission.

As this quotation demonstrates, it was at this point that it was realized that something more had to be done to address the plight of the prisoners. The leadership decided that they would use the situation in the prisons to demonstrate the need for incorporating a greater use of politics in the movement, the necessity of political status, and how a political strategy encompassing electoralism fit into the goals dictated by the narrative established in 1969:

We had looked positively at electoralism, and we had recognised the importance of the prison issue...and the prisoners had become a prime focus of the republican struggle... It was inevitable that republicans would confront this British strategy head-on, to defeat the policy of 'criminalization' and to insist upon the political character of our struggle (Adams 283-4).

As mentioned above, it was decided that prisoners would run in a number of elections, and they won massive popular support. In the eyes of the IRM, the electoral success of the prisoners confirmed that the people of Ireland supported the idea that their political self-concept could co-exist with their military self-concept, albeit still with a lesser degree of importance.

According to Richard O'Rawe⁶¹:

In many ways you could argue that we achieved political status with the election of Bobby Sands. In the eyes of Ireland, we had, in that constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, a clear majority of the people that believed Bobby Sands was a political prisoner. That ultimately is the verdict of the people that were first and foremost our target constituency (qtd. in Alonso 106).

The realization that a majority of people in the Republic of Ireland supported the plight of the prisoners led the Thatcher administration to eventually concede to the five demands. The legitimacy of both the prisoners and of the struggle was confirmed through this concession. In

⁶¹ O'Rawe was a Provisional IRA volunteer as well as the Public Relations Officer for the prisoners during the 1981 Hunger Strikes.

his interview with Radio Free Eirann, Hughes commented on his feelings at the end of the Strike:

I have spent almost eight year in prison with my own clothes with political status, and here they were trying to take it away from us...and eventually they had to concede that we were political prisoners, they could not control us, they tried to control us... we resisted every attempt to the point where ten men died...and Thatcher... Thatcher. That woman. Thatcher...just could not accept the fact that we were political prisoners...we were fighting for a cause (Hughes).

Not only did the Hunger Strikes legitimize the armed struggle in regard to the granting of Special Category Status, it also acted as the vehicle through which Adams and his followers would demonstrate that an electoral strategy could co-exist with physical force. Through this, Adams and his like-minded colleagues were able to re-balance the IRM's self-concepts to increase the importance of the political self-concept while maintaining the importance of the military self-concept and align those with their biographical narrative.

The electoral success of the prisoners during the Hunger Strikes provided much-needed evidence that electoralism could exist alongside an armed campaign. This evidence helped to overcome the resistance to adopting electoralism as part of the IRM's political self-concept and justify this in the biographical narrative in order to avoid causing a split, as it had in each instance of the past. As a means to test the support for an increased role for the political self-concept, the candidates were not authorised to run as Sinn Fein candidates, but they were still known members of the IRM. However, these were republican prisoners whose success was viewed as support for the IRM's struggle and their participation in the election acted as a testing ground for adopting a more robust political strategy. Support also came in terms of membership; as a former IRM member recalls, "a lot of new volunteers came in 1981 who were prepared to do

another twenty years [of fighting] just because of the Hunger Strike” (Alonso 116). Adams and his comrades used these factors to legitimize and justify their political goals:

The Hunger Strikes...came at a time when my own political priority was to develop Sinn Fein’s political capacity and capability in a planned way, which could include a new electoral strategy...Attention *was* diverted from the planned efforts to build an electoral intervention; yet we found ourselves achieving, more by accident than by calculation, a series of resounding electoral victories...we derived immense new energy, commitment and direction from the extraordinary period...(Adams 285).

The Hunger Strikes provided an opportunity for the more politically-minded IRM members to create an electoral strategy and to begin directing this momentum toward political support for Sinn Fein. Furthermore, the electoral success of the prisoners provided the justification that Adams and his colleagues required to adopt an electoral strategy for Sinn Fein—thereby changing the self-concept of the movement from a purely militaristic role—and to demonstrate how this fit within their biographical narrative. After the Hunger Strikes, the political programme of the movement could be legitimately enhanced, and this would be justified in the Armalite and Ballot Box Strategy of 1981.

The idea behind this strategy was to allow Sinn Fein candidates to run in elections while at the same time maintaining the armed struggle. In an attempt to justify the shift toward political participation through the biographical narrative of the IRM, Danny Morrison⁶² introduced the policy at the 1981 Ard Fheis in the following words: “Who here really believes we can win the war through the ballot box? But will anyone object if, with a ballot paper in one hand and the Armalite in the other, we take power in Ireland?” (Feeney 303). The biographical narrative of the

⁶² Morrison joined Sinn Fein in 1966 and joined the Provisional IRA upon their split from Goulding-MacGiolla in 1969. He was interned between 1972 and 1975, and upon his release he was appointed editor of *Republican News*. When Adams began gaining influence in the movement, Morrison was one of the like-minded republicans who criticised the 1975 ceasefire as well as O’Bradaighs political programme. Morrison was given the position of Director of Publicity for Sinn Fein in the late 1970’s and maintained an influential role among the Adams faction.

IRM had not changed, but the strategy had and with it the importance of the political self-concept. The IRM leadership would now be able to show that it was possible to have both military and electoral success; to enact the roles of both soldier and politician. In this way, fears that political concerns would undermine the armed struggle on the part of physical force members could be quelled while still pursuing a political strategy. This belief is summed up in an interview with an IRM activist: “The step into politics was to win support for armed struggle, it wasn’t to solely engage in armed struggle or solely to engage in political struggle as such” (Alonso 118). The Armalite and Ballot Box policy initiated the acceptance of politics in the IRM’s ranks that would be required to fully engage in the political systems of Ireland and the UK, but this project would take a few more years to fully implement.

1986: Ending Abstention

The final transition in the IRM’s self-concepts was to accept that politics along with the armed struggle could help achieve the goals of the biographical narrative and end the abstention policy. And in so doing the political self-concept of the IRM was given legitimacy, thereby re-establishing resonance with the biographical narrative. The introduction of the Armalite and Ballot Box policy in which Sinn Fein candidates would be allowed to contest elections set the stage for Sinn Fein’s development in its role as political actor. However, as described in Chapter Two, the poor electoral outcomes for Sinn Fein in the Republic of Ireland after the Hunger Strike had ended led Adams to conclude that abstention had to be ended in order to regain support in the Republic and unite Ireland politically under the Sinn Fein banner. In 1986, after approximately five years of preparing both the leadership and the broader membership of the IRM, Adams and his colleagues passed a motion to end abstention without causing a split in the ranks. Adams was able to avoid a split by aligning the ending of abstention with the IRM’s

biographical narrative – that is, he successfully demonstrated how the taking of seats while continuing the armed campaign would allow the IRM to fulfill their biographical narrative goal as the group that would unite Ireland and oust the British.

Following the introduction of the Armalite and Ballot Box policy, half of the IRM leadership, under O’Bradaigh, were still under the impression that abstention was a necessary part of the IRM self-concepts while the other half, under Adams, were working toward implementing an even more comprehensive political programme through the ending of abstention and attempting to explain how this fit into the IRM’s self-concepts. According to “An Introduction to Sinn Fein and Irish Republicanism” on the Sinn Fein official website:

It was only in the early 1980s that the challenge of Sinn Fein as a serious political force and central element in the republican struggle was first fully felt. The re-evaluation of strategy and reorganisation which resulted from the mass campaign in support of republican prisoners in the H-Blocks and Armagh before and during the 1981 Hunger Strike (when ten prisoners died) set Sinn Fein on its course for the 1980s.

While this is evidence that the latter group was victorious in its political strategy and in abandoning the abstention policy, at the time there was still a degree of dissent that had to be overcome. In 1982, a Sinn Fein subcommittee was charged with preparing a report on the party’s electoral strategy in the Republic of Ireland. O’Bradaigh authored a piece of the report entitled “The Effects on the Developing of Such a Strategy of Sinn Fein’s Attitudes to, For Example, Armed Struggle, Abstentionism, Social Policy, etc.” wherein his distaste for ending abstention is made very apparent:

Abstention from taking part in enemy parliaments has a definite role in maintaining Sinn Fein’s non-conformism with regard to such institutions and the system they bolster up and perpetuate. The lesson Sinn Fein seeks to drive home is that switching the personnel operating such institutions or even replacing them with well-meaning and politically educated republican personnel may ameliorate conditions from time to time but will not and cannot—because of the nature of these institution—

bring about the fundamental changes needed to put the Irish people in control of their own affairs...It is useless for Sinn Fein to have [Teachta Dala]⁶³ until they can become abstentionists with political clout...(White 291).

This quote provides evidence of dissenting voices in the IRM following the decision to allow Sinn Fein candidates to run electoral candidates. However, by this time, O’Bradaigh had lost much of his own political clout as the leadership of the IRM had for all intents and purposes moved to the north. This was especially true following the 1982 Ard Fheis where Adams and his followers were able to pass a motion effectively ending the commitment to Eire Nua—O’Bradaighs' political policy. O’Bradaigh’s reaction is reflected in the following:

In 1982, by a two thirds majority, all references to [Eire Nua] were deleted from the Constitution of Sinn Fein. As one who has been closely and personally identified with that policy for ten years, my position as President in the face of a repeated defeat on a major policy has become untenable (White 293).

Adams took over as President of Sinn Fein in 1983 and began to propagate the notion of ending abstention. He argued the importance of this to furthering the goals of the IRM and through his arguments the biographical narrative and the IRM’s self-concepts were being realigned. In a “Republican Lecture Series” course of 1984 entitled ‘Economic Resistance’, the new leadership advanced the idea that Sinn Fein was just as important an element in the IRM’s struggle as the military wing:

Both the IRA and Sinn Fein play different but convergent roles in the war of national liberation. The Irish Republican Army wages an armed campaign in... occupied [Northern Ireland] while its elements in the 26 counties play a supportive role. Sinn Fein maintains the propaganda war and is the public and political voice of the Movement...The Movement must have a vital mass organisation of the Irish people on its side with which to confront reactionary elements in the country who will attempt to stop us advancing beyond a British withdrawal situation and on to the

⁶³ Teachta Dala are members of the Republic of Ireland parliament (Leinster House).

socialist republic. Such a mass organisation will not be built purely by calling on the Irish people to support the IRA. The exploited masses must be made to identify with the national liberation struggle because they see a successful conclusion of the war as being essential for their own social and economic liberation (Sinn Fein Education Department).

This quote illustrates Adams' belief that in terms of amassing political support a re-balancing of the self-concepts of the IRM was needed. Importantly, it also recognized the need for the military strength of the IRA – signalling that both a political and military self-concept were needed to achieve their goals. It also alludes to the fact that true popular support would extend beyond Northern Ireland, and the IRM thus required a strategy that recognized the fact that the people in the Republic of Ireland accepted the governing institutions in the Republic as legitimate. To be sure, Adams and those like him would have liked to embark on ending abstention as early as 1982. However, this strategy could not be pursued until it was justifiable in the biographical narrative and therefore pass without causing a split in the ranks which could damage the IRM at a critical time. An interview conducted by Alonso with a former IRM activist illuminates the degree to which unity was considered of utmost importance:

From my own point of view, the changes that happened within republicanism didn't happen soon enough. For instance, the decision to participate in the Dublin parliament in 1986, I would have been in favour of that happening long before that. But again I'm not, I'm not [*sic*] sure of the usefulness of that exercise, you know, there are a lot of things, a lot of developments within republicanism over this [*sic*] past thirty years I would have preferred them to have happened earlier, but I'm conscious of the fact that it's a large organisation and that unity is a cornerstone of republican strength and it's not enough for someone to have a great idea, the bulk of the republican movement has to first of all come round to that idea for it to take a life (qtd. in Alonso 139).

After many years of promoting the positive aspects of ending abstention, the chance to make that change in self-concepts happen without fracturing the IRM came at the 1986 Ard Fheis.

At Sinn Fein's annual conference in 1986, the motion to end abstention was passed without causing a major split in the ranks of the IRA or of Sinn Fein as it had in 1921, 1926 and 1969. This decision represented a major transformation in the way the IRM was organized; it recognized the importance of participating in electoral politics and created a greater role for Sinn Fein that supported and complemented the military effort. Of course, this was only possible due to the electoral success in the North, which proved to hardliners that it was possible to have both a political and military strategy to accomplish the goals of the IRM. In addition, the leadership under Adams was able to align this change in strategy with the self-conceptions of the IRM and therefore justify it in the biographical narrative.

However, there was a certain degree of dissent among the old leadership that is worth discussing as it illustrates the degree to which continuity with the past is important in a biographical narrative. O'Bradaigh was allowed to present a speech at the 1986 ard fheis before the vote was taken in which he denounced the motion to end abstention:

There's a total contradiction in this discussion, in fact, the discussion is totally out of order if this constitution of Sinn Fein means anything. Because it says there that no person who approves or supports candidates going into Leinster House, Stormont or Westminster shall be admitted to membership or allowed to retain membership, and yet on this floor we have plenty of resolutions proposing to go into Leinster House and indeed some of them proposing to go into Westminster and Stormont as well because they want abstentionism ended altogether. The constitution has been, and is being, flouted and has not been made effective (O'Bradaigh).

O'Bradaigh began his speech opposing abstention by stating that allowing any IRM member to enter the illegitimate parliaments of Leinster House, Stormont or Westminster was against Sinn Fein's constitution, therefore to even discuss abandoning the sacred principle was "totally out of order" because it did not fit the IRM's narrative goal of ousting the British and

uniting Ireland. Following his attempt to denounce abstention on legal grounds, O’Bradaigh used the symbols, myths and historical narrative of the IRM to delegitimize any organization that called itself republican and did not adhere to abstention:

And it says here...first the allegiance of Irish men and Irish women is due to the sovereign Irish republic proclaimed in 1916. It doesn’t say that we go into Leinster House or Stormont or Westminster... the sovereignty and unity of the republic are inalienable and non-renunciabile [*sic*]. In other words, they can’t be given away and are not a matter for reconsideration. They are absolute (O’Bradaigh).

In evoking the fundamental nature of the Republic proclaimed in 1916, O’Bradaigh demonstrates the extent to which continuity was essential to the IRM’s legitimacy. O’Bradaigh attacked the self-concepts of IRM at their core, which are represented by his invocation of the Republic of 1916. Through this use of history O’Bradaigh wished to convince the *ard fheis* that ending abstention meant that they were giving up their military self-concept and therefore the goals of their biographical narrative. For O’Bradaigh and physical force members like him, spending energy on electoral politics would weaken the IRM’s struggle and ending abstention meant admitting defeat:

The destabilisation of the state, we are told, will result and the movement will be strengthened. Always has it been otherwise, every time has it been otherwise, the movement suffered and the state was strengthened. Four times since 1922 it happened, all ended in failure and ended ultimately in the degradation and shame of collaborating with the British, of handing over our political prisoners to them and running counter to what they originally set out to do...I put it to you this way, we have not been wrong for 65 years, we have not been wrong for all those 70 years — we have been right and we should continue to be right (O’Bradaigh).

O’Bradaigh predicted that ending abstention would have the same effect that it had always had in the past—it would cause a split in the IRM, and this time the split would occur at a critical point in the Troubles. However, through the lens of ontological security the numerous

challenges to the IRM's self-concepts—from the Curfew, the 1972 and 1975 ceasefires and the Hunger Strikes—had created dissonance in the IRM's biographical narrative. The strict commitment to the armed struggle and aversion to politics no longer reflected how the IRM saw themselves. Hence, Adams and his leadership were able to use the same symbols, myths and history to argue their cause, as well as pass their motion on ending abstention.

In contrast to O'Bradaighs' position on abstentionism, Adams and Martin McGuinness⁶⁴ presented speeches at the 1986 Ard Fheis demonstrating how ending abstention was coherent with the IRM's biographical narrative and the next logical step in the evolution of the IRM, and in its progress toward securing a British withdrawal and uniting Ireland. In their respective speeches, both Adams and McGuinness addressed the possibility of a split. In opposition to O'Bradaigh, citing the legal authority of Sinn Fein's constitution, Adams presented the argument that members had no right to leave the IRM at such a critical moment:

...none of us, regardless of the strength of our views, has the right to present the establishment and our opponents with the opportunity to project internationally the spectacle of yet another republican 'split'. Indeed, we have a duty to deny them such an opportunity. This struggle is bigger than all of us and it demands of us...to unite in the great struggle for the re-conquest of our country (Adams).

Here, Adams refers to the fact that IRM members have an obligation to remain with the movement in order to further pursue their goals of a united Ireland free of British influence. Through this, he maintains that the narrative goals of the IRM have not changed, only the balancing of the self-concepts through which those goals will be accomplished. Adams goes on

⁶⁴ McGuinness joined the Provisional IRA around the time of their inception and by 1972 he was second-in-command in Derry. McGuinness claims to have renounced his Provisional IRA membership in 1974, at which time he did become increasingly active and influential in Sinn Fein. By 1986, McGuinness was Vice-president of Sinn Fein. Alongside Adams, McGuinness was one of the leaders of the charge to end abstention in 1986.

to argue against O’Braidgh’s notion that to end abstention is to no longer be identified as republican:

Some of you may feel that a republican organisation making such a change can no longer call itself ‘republican’. If there are delegates here who feel like this I would remind you that another republican organisation has already done what you fear we are going to do tomorrow. I would remind you that the Army Authority of Oglaiigh na hEirean, the rank and file volunteers...has remained united in its determination to pursue the armed struggle and is united in its confidence in us and in our ability to pursue the political struggle. There was no walk-out from the IRA by IRA Volunteers... And the logic which would dictate withdrawal of support from Sinn Fein if decisions go against you means that you have already decided to withdraw solidarity and support from the IRA and the armed struggle. It means that you have decided to stop supporting captured republicans incarcerated in British or Free State prisons or in prisons in Europe and the USA...To leave Sinn Fein is to leave the struggle (Adams).

This excerpt reiterates the historical fact that the IRA and Sinn Fein are two inextricably linked elements of the IRM’s self-concepts; to abandon one element is to abandon the other. Making this point also demonstrated to the ard fheis that the leadership was not interested in abandoning the armed struggle in favour of politics—rather, they saw the two as complementary.

McGuinness echoed this point in his speech:

the ranks of the IRA contain a minority of volunteers who, while opposed to the removal of abstentionism from Leinster House, have committed themselves to stand shoulder to shoulder in unity with their comrades. They will not split, they will not walk away from the armed struggle. They are the real revolutionaries. If you allow yourself to be led out of this hall today, the only place you’re going - is home. You will be walking away from the struggle. Don’t go my friends. We will lead you to the republic (McGuinness).

In this part of his speech, McGuinness shares the sentiment that Sinn Fein and the IRA are inextricably linked. Additionally, as the passage demonstrates, both Adams and McGuinness put forward the argument that ending abstention does not mean that the IRM has relinquished their

commitments. Rather, the leadership sees abandoning the abstention policy as the logical step forward:

We all must share the daunting and massive task of interpreting and applying republicanism to changing and changed political conditions. Our failure to do this is one of the tragic failures of the past...no generation of republicans could or should ever merely absorb the teachings of previous generations. Those who were successful in the past in advancing the republican cause, even by one inch, updated and modernised the teaching and experiences of their predecessors. This is what Lalor did, what Pearse did, what Connolly did - and it is what we have to do also (Adams).

According to Adams' speech, abstention was hindering the IRM from achieving their goals of British withdrawal and uniting Ireland. Adams states that dogmatism and inflexibility are responsible for the failures of the past. He emphasized continuity by invoking the names of prominent IRM members from the past who adapted the actions of the IRM to their particular political, social and economic conditions. Through the use of these symbols and myths, Adams combats O'Bradaighs' assertion that ending abstention is renouncing republicanism. In order to further make this point, both Adams and McGuinness make reference to the fact that the goal of British withdrawal and Irish unification have not changed; nor has the commitment to the armed struggle. Adams stated:

I share their abhorrence of neo-colonialism and their detestation of those who govern this part of Ireland in the interests of imperialism. My family were opposed to the Treaty and the Partition Act. Like many Northern republicans, they suffered for their beliefs at that time, not only in the 6 Counties but in later years in the glasshouse of the Curragh Concentration Camp and other Free State prisons...we are committed to the re-conquest of Ireland by the Irish people. This means the expulsion of imperialism in all its forms, political, economic, military, social and cultural. It means the establishment of a real Irish republic and the organisation of the economy so that all its resources are under Irish control and organised to bring maximum benefit to the people in a 32-County state in which Irish culture and national identity is [sic] strong and confident (Adams).

This quotation demonstrates Adams' use of historical ties to the IRM's cause to legitimize his position. Furthermore, he reiterates the commitment to Sinn Fein, the IRA and the thirty-two country Republic they had been fighting for for nearly twenty years. What is new is the suggestion that participating in electoral politics is the next step in the progress they have already made.

McGuinness also makes reference to the fact that nothing has changed within the IRM other than embracing a more robust political strategy:

Sadly the inference that the removal of abstentionism would lead to the demise of military opposition to British Rule has indeed called into question the commitment of the IRA to pursue the struggle to a successful conclusion. I reject any such suggestion and I reject the notion that entering Leinster House would mean an end to Sinn Fein's unapologetic support for the right of Irish people to oppose in arms the British forces of occupation. That, my friends, is a principle which a minority in this hall might doubt but which I believe all our opponents clearly understand. Our position is clear and it will never, never, never change. The war against British rule must continue until freedom is achieved (McGuinness).

Both Adams and McGuinness used their speeches at the 1986 Ard Fheis to rebalance the self-concepts of the IRM to include a greater role for electoral politics and therefore the political self-concept. They used the symbols, myths and narratives of historical republicanism to legitimize their position in the IRM. Importantly, they demonstrated that the biographical narrative of the IRM had not changed, but they had to re-balance their self-concepts to include a greater role for the political self-concept in order to achieve those objectives.

Conclusion

This thesis introduced the decision to end abstention, a core policy of the IRM, and subsequently explained this decision via ontological security and argued that such a change in policy direction was required to reconcile the growing dissonance between the IRM's biographical narrative and its self-concepts. Since the Proclamation of the Republic was read during the 1916 Easter Rising, the IRM had committed itself to forcing the withdrawal of the British from all of Ireland and, after partition, the unification of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland. Two cornerstones of these efforts were abstention and armed struggle – wherein the use of arms was viewed as the primary means for achieving the IRM's stated goals and the abstention policy limited any political strategies through the practice of not taking elected seats in what were considered 'foreign' and illegitimate parliaments. Efforts to end the abstention policy were pursued at various points throughout the IRM's history; however, this caused major splits in the movements' ranks in 1921, 1926 and 1969. On one side were the IRM members who held up the traditions of the IRM as they has been established during the 1916 Easter Rising, especially in regard to the use of physical force and abstaining from participation in formal political institutions. On the other side were the members who pushed to end abstention insofar as they believed political participation could achieve their goals to a greater degree than the use of arms. It was not until 1986 that the IRM successfully ended the abstention policy while maintaining the confidence of IRM members and thereby avoid any split in or between Sinn Fein and the IRA. This was achieved during the seventeenth year of the Troubles – the violent conflict that engrossed Northern Ireland for most of the 1970's and 1980's. This thesis sought to answer both why the IRM decided to end abstention at this time as well as how they were able to achieve such an important institutional change. This thesis argued that the timing in

which this decision took place is integral to understanding how and why the decision was made. Over the course of the Troubles the IRM faced a number of critical events that caused dissonance between their self-concepts and biographical narrative. The result of numerous challenges to the IRM's ontological security was the realignment of their self-concepts and biographical narrative which was achieved through ending abstention.

Chapter two utilized four events, the Lower Falls Curfew, the 1972 and 1975 ceasefires and the 1981 Hunger Strikes, to illustrate how the IRM transitioned from a movement dominated by their commitment to armed conflict to one that embraced ending abstention and participating in politics to achieve their aims. The first event, the Lower Falls Curfew, is important because it legitimized the IRM in the eyes of the community that they protected and consequently, in the belief that the armed struggle would be the primary means to achieve their goals. Following the Curfew, self-concepts and biographical narrative resonated and the IRM engaged in a military conflict with the British as well as unionist paramilitary forces. The 1972 and 1975 ceasefires were important because, by bringing the British to the negotiating table, the IRM's claims that the armed struggle was the way to securing Irish unification were substantiated. However, the inability to make any progress in both instances led some members to recognize a need for a change in strategy. Following the 1972 and 1975 ceasefire, the dissonance between self-concepts and biographical narrative became apparent and it was at this time that Adams began to recognize and propagate the need for embracing politics in the IRM. The final event, the Hunger Strikes, is important because the electoral success of IRM members proved to the majority of the IRM that a political program could not only exist alongside the armed struggle, but act as the gateway to moving from military conflict to British withdrawal and eventual reunification. As a

result of this recognition, the abstention policy could and would be abandoned in 1986, and resonance between self-concepts and biographical narrative was re-established.

In order to make sense of the transition laid out in Chapter two, an ontological security model is used. Ontological security is understood as “the need to experience oneself as a whole, continuous person in time...in order to realize a sense of agency” (Mitzen, 342) and it is useful for understanding the otherwise “irrational” behaviour of the IRM. Chapter Three argues that the IRM was acting to protect its identity needs. It utilizes an ontological security perspective to describe how the behaviour and interests of the IRM from the beginning of the Troubles to the ending of abstention were motivated by the need to maintain a consistent self-identity. This is important to this thesis because the IRM sought routines that maintained resonance between their military and political self-concepts and the biographical narrative which stated that they were the harbingers of British withdrawal and Irish unification. At the outset of the Troubles, the military self-concept embodied by the armed struggle resonated with that narrative to a much greater extent than the political self-concept. Through the events of the Troubles it became increasingly evident that the IRM’s military self-concept alone no longer reflected and no longer achieved the stated goals of the biographical narrative. This is important to this thesis because the dissonance that this created meant that the IRM was ontologically insecure and would have been unable to exercise agency had they not re-established that alignment. More specifically, when the IRM’s military self-concept alone no longer reflected how they saw themselves in terms of their biographical narrative, they altered their behaviour by ending their commitment to the abstention policy and enlarging the role of their political self-concept.

By applying the ontological security model to the four identified events between 1970 and 1986, Chapter four details the fluctuations in resonance and dissonance between the IRM’s

two self-concepts and their biographical narrative which eventually led to the ending of abstention. At the time of the Lower Falls Curfew the IRM was ontologically secure as there was resonance between self-concepts and biographical narrative. The primacy of the military self-concept resonated with the narrative goal of ousting the British and unifying Ireland because the IRM successfully used military means alone to defend the community. Resonance between self-concepts and biographical narrative was also present at the outset of the 1972 and 1975 ceasefires – the IRM had twice demonstrated that they could utilize the armed struggle alone to bring the British to the negotiating table. Following the ceasefires the IRM began to experience ontological insecurity as a result of dissonance between their self-concepts and biographical narrative. That is, the lack of progress made in the two ceasefire negotiations made it evident that the military self-concept alone could not achieve the goals stated in the biographical narrative. Some IRM members began to understand that the military self-concept was useful for bringing the British to negotiate but, in order to make those negotiations successful, the IRM would have to enlarge their political self-concept.

The 1981 Hunger Strikes offered the first opportunity to re-establish resonance between the self-concepts and biographical narrative of the IRM through the enlargement of the political self-concept and the eventual ending of abstention. When Adams ran IRM prisoners in elections on an abstentionist ticket he maintained continuity and routines by demonstrating a commitment to abstention while at the same time creating a larger role for the political self-concept. The electoral success of the IRM prisoners demonstrated that the military self-concept and political self-concept could coexist to achieve the goals of their biographical narrative. Following the success of the Armalite and Ballot Box strategy wherein Adams successfully demonstrated that formal participation in politics could help achieve the goals of a continuing armed struggle, the

abstention policy was ended in 1986. By ending the abstention policy and justifying this institutional change in their biographical narrative, resonance between the IRM's self-concepts and the biographical narrative was re-established and ontological security restored.

This thesis demonstrated that the IRM abandoned the abstention policy because, by the end of the Troubles, abstention no longer resonated with the self-concepts and biographical narrative of the movement. Throughout the Troubles, the IRM faced numerous challenges to their self-concepts that resulted in dissonance with their biographical narrative. In order for the IRM to feel agentic, a change in the form of ending abstention was needed. Importantly, this shift in the IRM's self-concepts placed them in a legitimate position to negotiate with the British and usher in a relative era of peace; that is, the end of abstention and entrance into existing political institutions enabled the movement to participate and, make actual progress in, peace negotiations. This formal political participation eventually led to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, which is viewed as the cornerstone to peace in Northern Ireland today. The success of the agreement hinges on the IRM's participation in existing political institutions as well as their ability to prevent the movement's inclination to use armed force to achieve their goals. While the goal of the IRM has never changed – the leadership is pushing for the unification of Ireland to this day – the strategy for achieving those goals, including the ending of abstention and the disarmament of the IRM, offers far more stability and peace than what was experienced during the violent era of the Troubles. It is worth exploring to what extent conflicts such as this can be resolved by understanding the biographical narrative of a group, in terms of their stated goals, and how this resonates with their routines and creates ontological security.

The argument presented in this thesis has two interesting insights to be considered more generally: the possible limitation on the rational actor model and consequently the possibly

utility of applying the ontological security model to conflict. There are two important implications of these conclusions: first, the rational actor model cannot be used to understand the behaviour of the IRM; and second, ontological security offers an alternative understanding of the IRM's behaviour and extends insight into conflict resolution. To the first point, the history of the IRM and their decision to end abstention is better understood through ontological security than through the lens of traditional security models such as liberalism and realism. These schools of thought assume that the behaviour of a rational actor is based on calculations of physical security and economic prosperity. As has been shown, since its inception during the 1916 Easter Rising, the IRM has not been motivated by either their physical security or economic prosperity. Members of the IRM pledged their lives to achieving the goals of ousting the British from Ireland and unifying the Republic of Ireland with Northern Ireland, and they did so at a time when the armed struggle was viewed as the primary means for achieving those goals. The IRM and its members saw themselves as a legitimate army fighting a war with the British and, as such, were very aware that their physical security was at risk. It can therefore be concluded that reasons of physical security and economic prosperity did not influence the behaviour of the IRM and its members. This thesis sought to demonstrate that the behaviour of the IRM was motivated by an alternative consideration – that of their identity.

Ontological security suggests that an actor's behaviour is motivated by the need to maintain a consistent self-identity over time and this explanation offers different insight into the actions of the IRM than that of traditional security models. In the case of the IRM, the commitments to abstention and the armed struggle were an integral aspect of the movement's routines since the 1916 Easter Rising through to the Troubles that began in 1969. Although these commitments put their physical security at risk insofar as they were a relatively small group

fighting a far better-equipped British Army that enjoyed the backing of the entire British political apparatus, they pursued these actions because they had become part of the routinized social relationships that are integral to self-identity. As Mitzen explains, self-identity is formed and sustained in social relationships and actors achieve consistency as well as agency by routinizing their social relationships. For the IRM, the conflict with the British was a part of their routines insofar as this social relationship came to sustain their self-identity needs and, importantly, this conflict would be difficult to resolve without the challenges the IRM faced during those four moments of the Troubles.

Glossary of Terms

abstention: the practice of contesting elections and not taking elected seats. For Republicans, this meant not abstaining from taking seats in Westminster (UK), Leinster House (Dublin) and Stormont (Northern Ireland). This is one of two principles that are central to republicanism (the other is armed struggle/physical force).

Act of the Union: passed in 1800 after the rebellion of the United Irishmen (1798) and mandated that the Irish electorate would send their representatives to Westminster rather than Dublin.

Anglo-Irish Treaty 1921: effectively ended the War of Independence and established the Irish Free State by providing self-governing authority to the twenty-six counties. It also provided the option for Northern Ireland to opt out of the Free State and remain with the UK, which they exercised. The Treaty caused splits within and between Sinn Fein and the IRA.

ard fheis: Sinn Fein's annual part conference.

armed struggle/physical force: the tradition of using violent/military means to oust the English/British from Ireland, in recent history, carried out by the IRA and the PIRA. This is one of two principles that are central to republicanism (the other is abstention).

cumann: a Sinn Fein Association.

Cumann na mBan: an all-women paramilitary formed in 1914 as an auxiliary of the Irish Volunteers and who participated in the 1916 Easter Uprising.

Dail Eireann: after the 1918 general election wherein Sinn Fein won 73 seats out of 105 and abstained from taking their seats in Westminster, the representatives gathered in the Mansion House in Dublin and formed this parliament. The Dail was never officially recognized by the British.

Fianna Fail: the party started by Eamon de Valera in 1926 following the split in Sinn Fein over the issue of ending abstention.

Free State forces: formed by the Free State government to combat de Valera's anti-Treaty IRA 'Irregulars' during the Civil War. Only operated in the Irish Free State.

Government of Ireland Act: passed in 1920, the Act was intended to grant Home Rule to Ireland and was to be administered through one parliament in Belfast (Stormont) and another in Dublin (Leinster House). Both the North and South were to remain a part of the United Kingdom. However, Home Rule never took place in southern Ireland as a result of the War of Independence, while Northern Ireland was established with the opening of Stormont (Belfast parliament) in 1921. Republicans and nationalists viewed the two parliaments as an unofficial partition of Ireland and this undermined the Republic that was established in 1916.

Irish Citizen Army: a group consisting of trained trade union members for the purpose of protecting workers from police at demonstrations that participated in the 1916 Easter Uprising.

Irish Free State: refers to the twenty-six counties in the south of historical Ireland that became self-governing as a result of the Government of Ireland Act 1920. The remaining six counties became Northern Ireland and remained part of the UK. In 1949, the Free State became the Republic of Ireland.

Irish Republican Army: a paramilitary organization formed after the 1916 Easter Uprising and descended from the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the Irish Volunteers and other participants in the Uprising. The military half of what makes up the larger republican movement, the IRA's goal was to oust the British from Ireland and secure a united Ireland through military means.

Irish Republican Brotherhood: the predecessor of the IRA that ceased to exist after 1924. A fraternal organization dedicated to Irish independence that helped to organize, and participated in, the Easter Uprising.

Irish Volunteers: an organization of Irish nationalists formed in 1913 that helped organize the Easter Uprising with the IRB and participated in the event.

Leinster House: the national parliament of the Republic of Ireland located in Dublin.

loyalist: individuals that consider themselves attached to the British monarchy and who support the preservation of Northern Ireland and oppose a united Ireland.

nationalist: refers to someone who believes in the unification of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland.

Northern Ireland: refers to the six counties in the north of historical Ireland that were partitioned from the rest of Ireland under the Government of Ireland Act 1920 and remained part of the UK. The remaining twenty-six counties became the Irish Free State.

oath of allegiance: the oath republican leaders would have to swear to King George as a required by the Anglo-Irish Treaty 1921.

Orangemen: Protestants that belong to the Orange Order who is responsible for organizing the Orange parades that celebrate Protestant/English military victories.

Proclamation of the Republic: considered the foundational document for the independent Irish state, this was the Proclamation that was read when the rebels took the General Post Office during the 1916 Easter Uprising. The document declared the right of the Irish people to ownership and governance over Ireland, as opposed to the long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government and established the Republic that republicans claim allegiance to.

Provisional Irish Republican Army (Provisional IRA; with Sinn Fein: Provisional): the Provisional Irish Republican Army was a paramilitary organization formed in 1969 when the Irish Republican Army split over the issue of ending abstention. With Provisional Sinn Fein, they formed the Provisional republican movement, which was the true embodiment of republicanism, and their objective was to defend Catholics and nationalists in Northern Ireland, oust the British from Northern Ireland and unify Ireland.

Provisional Sinn Fein (with IRA: Provisional): the Provisional Sinn Fein was the political organisation formed in 1970 when Sinn Fein split over the issue of ending abstention. With the Provisional IRA, they formed the Provisional republican movement, which was the true embodiment of republicanism, and their objective was to support the Provisional IRA in the armed struggle. Throughout the Troubles, as the movement politicised, Sinn Fein's role increased.

The Republic (of 1916): refers to the Republic established by the Proclamation read during the 1916 Easter Uprising. Although it was never officially recognized as such, it is this Republic that republicans claim allegiance to.

Republic of Ireland: in 1949, the Republic of Ireland was established amongst the twenty-six counties of the south. While the constitution was adopted in 1937, it was not until 1949 that the remaining duties of the king were removed and the Republic of Ireland Act was passed.

Second Dail: the second parliament convened by abstentionist Sinn Fein elected representatives. Convened in 1921 this parliament was also not recognized by the British.

Sinn Fein: formed in 1904-5 by Arthur Griffith who advanced a policy of: abstaining from sending Irish MPs to Westminster; peaceful resistance and opposition to physical force; a dual monarchy wherein Ireland and Britain would have the same monarch, but with two parliaments separate and independent from each other; and self-sufficiency through the use of Irish approaches to Irish problems. The leadership of the Easter Uprising assumed control of the Sinn Fein banner following the Rising and abandoned the peaceful resistance and dual monarchy principles in favour of an armed campaign and political independence in the form of a Republic. However, because it resonated with the goals of the Proclamation, the abstentionist policy was maintained. Sinn Fein evolved to become the political wing of the larger republican movement.

Special Category Status: all those imprisoned as a result of the conflict in Northern Ireland would be granted political status. Granted by Whitelaw in 1972 and removed in 1976 as a result of the criminalisation policy. This resulted in the Hunger Strikes of 1981 that led to the death of ten men and eventually the re-granting of SCS.

Stormont: the parliament in Northern Ireland that was set up under the Government of Ireland Act 1920 and which remained tied to the United Kingdom until its cessation in 1972.

unionist: The *Act of the Union 1800* stated that the Irish electorate would cease to send its representatives to Dublin and instead return them to Westminster. Henceforth, those Protestants/loyalists who supported the union with Britain earned the term 'unionists'.

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