

**Community and Identity: Shifting Discourses of
Provisional Irish Republicanism**

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Chapter I-Identity, Community and Nationalism

The whole map of Europe has been changed...The modes of thought of men, the whole outlook on affairs, the grouping of parties, all have encountered violent and tremendous changes in the deluge of the world. But as the deluge subsides and the waters fall short we see the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone emerging once again. The integrity of their quarrel is one of the few institutions that has been unaltered in the cataclysm which has swept the world.¹

Churchill's oft-quoted speech has become something of a cliché for commentators on Northern Ireland, shorthand to argue that the politics of the region are set in some immutable dialectic impervious to change. While the truth of this pessimistic deterministic view was always doubtful the 'modes of thought of men, the whole outlook on affairs' and consequently the nature of the politics of Northern Ireland have certainly been affected by the 'deluge of the world' that was emerging in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Nowhere has this been proven more dramatically than in the apparent transformation of the Republican movement from an anti-state insurgency with claims to revolutionary leadership to a potential partner in governing the state it was pledged to destroy. There are various ways that we can explain this change ranging from the secret diplomatic history of Gerry Adams² through to the success of British government counter-insurgency strategy.³ Whilst these factors related to the strategies and activities of key political actors are important it is the political/military stalemate facing the Provisionals in the late 1980s that is the primary explanation for the sea change in the movement's strategy and ideology in this period. This failure by republicans to move their project forward is also a reflection of other contextual and conjunctural themes: thus the frequently unspoken assumptions and the external structures that influence 'the modes of thought of men' need some initial exploration. Contrary to many points of departure that regard Northern Irish politics as *sui generis* and in particular treat Provisional republicanism as a local growth largely uninfluenced by the wider world it may in fact be helpful to take some of these broad political and intellectual frameworks as a starting point. Indeed the organising framework of both this chapter and the rest of the thesis is that

¹ W. S. Churchill speaking in the House of Commons, February 16th 1922, quoted in A.T.Q., Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: The Roots of Conflict in Ulster*, London 1977, 179.

² E. Moloney, *A secret history of the IRA*, London 2002.

³ T. Hennessey, *The Northern Ireland Peace Process: Ending the Troubles?*, Dublin 2000.

the shifts in the ideology, strategy and organisational structures of Provisional Republicanism can only be successfully explored and theorised by considering the movement within a much wider framework than simply its own self-referential history and traditions or even Northern Ireland's politics as a whole. Whilst important these factors are merely local variants of a more general pattern which has variously been considered as a crisis of radical, transformative politics since 1989 or more generally as a profound ideological and intellectual crisis affecting states, established parties and non-state challengers alike which has acted to undermine established concepts of authority, political legitimacy and even the very idea of the political subject and the political itself. It is in this attempt to link the discursive shifts in Provisionalism around the themes of community and identity to these broader assessments of the crisis of politics and ideology that my central innovative contention lays.

The End of History?

Many of the recent accounts of Provisionalism have adopted an internalist perspective and stressed the importance of the movement's internal dynamics and organisational structure as a means of explaining its ideological and political development from the late 1980s. Whilst the particular form of this ideological development has inevitably been formed by the political culture, traditions and characteristics of Provisionalism as a distinctive structure of power and regime of truth, my thesis is that it can only be fully understood in its true complexity by reference to not only the wider patterns of Irish nationalism and culture, but also to the broader themes of political and social change in Western societies in the late twentieth century. This is not simply an analytical conceit, since there is a strong case that Irish politics, society and culture, both north and south of the border, exhibit many of the characteristics of the recently emerged post-ideological and post-political world.⁴

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the apparent triumph of liberal capitalism, the ending of a bi-polar system of international relations and the emergence of apparently new forms of threat such as 'fundamentalist Islam' contrived to give Western democracies in the late twentieth century a contradictory character of

⁴C. Coulter, 'The end of Irish History?' 4-10 and P. Shirlow, 'Northern Ireland: a reminder from the present', 192-195 in C. Coulter and S. Coleman (eds), *The end of Irish history?* Manchester 2003, 4-10: see also D. Lloyd, *Ireland After History*, Cork 1999.

both triumphalism and exhaustion. Alongside far-reaching changes in the forms of domestic politics such as the collapse of class based politics, growing disillusionment with the political process and challenges to the legitimacy of the liberal democratic state in the West these trends prompted widespread discussion about the nature of politics and even the future of ideological projects.⁵ This 'sense of terminus' suggested that the modernist project and the fundamental bases of politics since the French revolution were exhausted and devoid of further potential or even relevance to real life.⁶ Ideas such as the 'end of politics', the 'end of ideology' and even the 'end of history' reflected a sense not only of closure, but also a crisis going beyond mere institutions and structures.⁷ This crisis was widely perceived to be universal and fundamental with an impact that was not just political and economic, but social and moral in character.⁸

If the symptoms were generally agreed on, the causes were not. The intellectual origins of these debates was often to be found in the aftermath of 1968. A common thread in the discussion was around the question of whether the modernist project in politics and culture had run its course and if the guiding principles of enlightenment rationalism had any relevance to the apparently qualitatively new period in which we lived. The idea of a break with the past was reinforced by the rapid and apparently fundamental nature of political and social change in the late twentieth century, especially after 1989. Some broad themes emerged both from supporters and detractors, and in radical critiques of what became increasingly defined as the post-modern moment and its political project. Related questions were posed about the contemporary condition of post modernity: was it the end of an historical period and a radical break with the past,⁹ a product of the defeat of the left,¹⁰ or a fundamental rejection of the Enlightenment project?¹¹ Most agreed that

⁵ For example, J. Gray, *Al Qaeda and what it means to be modern*, London 2003, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age*, London 1995 and *End games: Questions in Late Modern Political Thought*, Cambridge 1997.

⁶ F. Fueredi, *Mythical Past, Elusive Future: History and Society in an Anxious Age*, London 1992, 214.

⁷ For example see, C. Boggs, *The End of Politics: Corporate Power and the Decline of the Public Sphere*, New York 2000, G. Mulgan, *Politics in an Antipolitical Age*, Cambridge 1994 and F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man*, London 1992.

⁸ E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: the short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, London 1995, 10-11.

⁹ For example, Z. Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, London 1992 and J. Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, Cambridge 1988.

¹⁰ T. Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, Oxford 1996 and A. Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique*, Cambridge 1989.

¹¹ F. Fueredi, *Mythical Past, Elusive Future*, viii.

when applied to political projects that either aimed at radical transformation or simply challenged the status quo the dominant discourse reflected a scaling down of ambition and ultimately adaptation and accommodation to the world that is. As one critic accurately argued 'the ideology of the end of modernity and progress corresponds to a sense of retreat from radical ambition.'¹²

The End of Politics?

One widely acknowledged symptom of this trend has been an apparent de-politicisation, linked to a crisis of meaning for the concept of the political itself¹³. The increased privatisation of life seemed to render the political process irrelevant. As large numbers of citizens withdrew from active participation in politics, activism as understood since the late nineteenth century became a minority interest, increasingly the preserve of a political class. Declining electoral turnouts accompanied by falling membership contributed to this sense of the collapse of organised mass parties, whether class based or ideologically defined, which had been the main means of political engagement since the advent of universal suffrage.¹⁴

In a compelling argument based on political trends in the USA, but surely more widely applicable, Boggs suggests that even where apparently grassroots politics seemed to survive they become fragmented and particularist in form disconnected from national and global issues of a universalist character. In what is seen as an increasingly corporate-dominated consumerist culture which stresses individual interests, politics have lost their inspiring and empowering character, throwing the public sphere into a deep crisis.¹⁵ In such a climate, citizens become consumers and political parties take on the character of pressure groups

Despite offering radically differing prescriptions, most critics of this process tend to agree in their discussions of the pattern and shape of the problem. Ranging from anti-establishment critics such as Monbiot and Klein through to more measured

¹² J. Heartfield, *The 'Death of the Subject Explained'*, Sheffield 2002, 103.

¹³ The symptoms of this process were most clearly apparent in Western Europe and North America. However some areas of the Third World and the recently emerging polities/crisis zones of South Africa, the former Soviet Union and Israel/Palestine still retain high degrees of political mobilisation and engagement.

¹⁴ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 581.

¹⁵ C. Boggs, *The End of Politics*.

analysts such as Giddens and Held attempts have been made to create new structures through which people might reengage with or reinvent the idea of 'the political.'¹⁶

Identity, nation and community

Three themes, identity, community and nation emerged in the search for a new political paradigm. Drawn from an existing political language these words appear at once familiar and even commonplace, but were in fact old ideas being reworked to create a new discourse, attempting to revive the fundamental idea of the political as a means of engagement between the state and the citizen and between the individual and the greater group, whether it be the nation or the community, or the nation as a community of communities. Although the Enlightenment project was increasingly attacked as exhausted or restrictively arrogant in its totalising claims, most attempts to develop a new paradigm on the left either drew from, or were positioned against, the basic premises of Enlightenment thinking, especially around the themes of identity, community and nation as a means of achieving solidarity, justice and political legitimacy. However, the very terminology of reinvention is itself suggestive of crisis and collapse drawing as it does on 'such conservative words as family, kin, neighbourhood and community [which] have long held appeal for the political clerisy in the West.'¹⁷ Hobsbawm describes this late twentieth century crisis of ideology and subsequent attempts at reinvention in terms evocative of contemporary Northern Ireland:

It was not a crisis of one form of organising societies, but of all forms. The strange calls for an otherwise unidentified 'civil society', for 'community' were the voice of lost and drifting generations. They were heard in an age when such words, having lost their traditional meanings, became vapid phrases. There is no other way to define group identity, except by defining the outsiders who were not in it.¹⁸

Many of these attempts to reconstitute politics by drawing on new concepts of identity, community and nation indicate the influence of a particularist framework of thought drawn from ideas of multiculturalism and pluralism ultimately rooted in turn in an underlying suspicion of the universalist meta-narratives of the modernist project. At a pragmatic and somewhat prosaic level this discourse can be seen in the 'Third

¹⁶ A. Giddens, *Beyond left and right: the future of radical politics*, Cambridge 1994.

¹⁷ R. Nisbet, *Conservatism*, Milton Keynes 1986, 107.

¹⁸ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 11.

Way' project of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton, but a case can be made that these ideological elements have also had an impact on Northern Irish politics in general and in the ideological and strategic re-definition of Provisional republicanism in particular.

The Politics of Identity

The political and cultural ideologies that emerged from the post-modernist currents on the left in the 1980s increasingly focussed on the theme of identity, which paradoxically began to take on some of the conservative characteristics of an almost fixed essentialist category of thought. In many ways issues of identity and its parent framework, tradition, have become the central organising principles of contemporary politics. In this context identity is defined as a text and a narrative with a myriad of potential meanings: as such it challenges those hegemonic discourse and meta-narratives of class and nationality that underpin modernist politics. As Stuart Hall explains it, the post modern subject is composed not of a single identity, but several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved identities: identity is 'formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us.'¹⁹

This is a significant shift in the categories and framework of previous modernist political thought and practice. By placing the definition, negotiation, revision and constant re-interpretation of identity at the heart of politics and culture this approach exposes a process of acculturation of politics. Identity theory has been identified with radical and anti-establishment politics because it adopts the construction of identities oppositional to dominant norms as its starting point. Conditions of oppression and exclusion are frequently inverted to become a sense of strength and pride, as in the case of Black Power as well as some aspects of Irish cultural nationalism.

Identity is thus presented as a product of exclusion and oppression, but also as source of inner strength and nobility. In calling into question the claims of dominant cultures the formation of cultural identity becomes, for cultural politics, possibly the main site of resistance and action. But the range of political and cultural possibilities allowed is, by definition, limited by context and inheritance. Identity politics thus

¹⁹ S. Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity', in Hall, Held and McGrew (eds), *Modernity and its Futures*, Cambridge 1992, 276-277.

define identity as a permanent category of political thought and practice, even if the actual content and form of a particular identity is subject to change as a work in progress. If the personal is political, then the political is now cultural.

This approach to politics has been criticised because 'Identity is the passive by-product of history...As it were, one is simply born into it, history supplies the rest.'²⁰ As such it represents the victory of tradition over consciousness. Despite an iconoclastic reputation, these ideas can be considered as deeply conservative, implicitly rejecting forms of politics based upon the idea of transcending existing categories of identity. Political projects of change are thus replaced by projects of cultural formation, stabilisation and management. For its critics, new post-modernist is but old conservative writ large.

A persuasive approach in considering the impact of the politics of identity is to site this ideology within a framework bounded by themes of assertion and recognition. Politics within Northern Ireland are increasingly conducted through such discourses of identity and recognition, which one observer sees as a process where 'the recognition of cultural diversity is essentially an acknowledgement of cultural otherness...an acknowledgement of difference legitimises the existence of separate groups with distinct identities.'²¹ If the central question is, who is doing the recognising and who has the power and ability to define the situation, where does power ultimately reside?

A related approach is to consider identity politics and its relationship to political discourse in Northern Ireland through the categories of modernist political thought where the politics of assertion relate to the idea of the universal whilst the politics of recognition are particularist. Taylor theorises this distinction further by defining 'the politics of universalism' and 'the politics of difference' in the following way:

With the politics of equal dignity, what is established is meant to be universally the same, an identical basket of rights and immunities; with the politics of difference, what we are asked to recognise is the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctness from everyone else.'²²

²⁰ F. Fueredi, *Mythical Past, Elusive Future*, 258.

²¹ M. Nic Craith, *Culture and Identity Politics in Northern Ireland*, Basingstoke 2003, 16.

²² C. Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition', in C. Taylor (ed), *Multiculturalism; Explaining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton 1994, 38.

As the 'politics of difference' focus on 'identity' and are reflected in the discourse of parity of esteem, positive discrimination, group and collective rights, so the 'politics of universalism' stress a neutral civic equality, which is culture blind and theoretically based on the individual subject.

These terms can also be approximately related to the implicit distinction between the ethnic, cultural and civic, subjective elements within nationalist discourse. Barry has criticised the 'politics of difference' as a 'formula for manufacturing conflict, because it rewards groups that can most effectively mobilise to make claims on the polity, or at any rate it rewards ethno cultural political entrepreneurs who can exploit its potential for their own ends by mobilising a constituency around a sectional set of demands.'²³ Irrespective of whether this critique has value, it is clear that the politics of difference and identity are now central to both contemporary republicanism and to the politics of the 'peace process' in general.

Frames of identity politics in Northern Ireland-the 'Two Traditions'

One way to assess the framing influences of this discourse is to consider the cultural politics of the British state and assess the continuities and shifts in the normative patterns of Northern Irish nationalism in general both as determining factors and influences over Provisional Republicanism. Conflict between the politics of difference and the politics of universalism is fully reflected in the public and political sphere. Taking one of the dominant structures that help to shape both thought and action in the region, British state discourses stress the fundamental duality of the conflict using the framing reference of 'the two traditions.' Although other frames previously challenged this view of the conflict-notably the Provisionals' earlier perspective which characterised the conflict as imperialist or unionist analyses that stressed a clash of different national aspirations or irredentism-the internal, 'two traditions' model based on a cultural as opposed to a political discourse of two discrete cultures and communities is now overwhelmingly adhered to by all parties to the conflict.

Likewise the politics of difference are reflected in the language and policy of the British state that insist on parity of esteem and equality between the traditions in the public sphere. The history of this approach can be traced back through a series of changes in British governments' presentation of conflict, to the political structures

²³ B. Barry, *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism*, Cambridge 2000, 21.

proposed for resolving or increasingly managing the conflict from Sunningdale 1973, through to the Anglo-Irish Agreement 1985 and more recently the Good Friday Agreement 1998.

A good example of this discourse, the Framework Document 1995 took its starting point as ‘the balance of legitimacy’²⁴ between the two traditions and communities. Politics within Northern Ireland, it was argued, should ‘respect the full and equal legitimacy and worth of the identity, sense of allegiance, aspiration and ethos of both unionist and nationalist communities.’ Furthermore the British government guaranteed that the administration of the region should be based on ‘full respect for and equality of, civil, political, social and cultural rights and freedom from discrimination for all citizens, on parity of esteem, and on just and equal treatment for the identity, ethos and aspirations of both communities.’²⁵ The Good Friday Agreement itself was structured around the idea of the equal legitimacy bestowed on two fundamentally conflicting nationalist and unionist aspirations for Northern Ireland’s future constitutional status reflecting not simply a skilful piece of political legerdemain but also the absorption of political discourse into a cultural framework.²⁶

Civil society and the ‘Two Traditions’

Whilst these political declarations and structures conferred political legitimacy on a two traditions model, government policy was supported at pre- and sub- political levels by cultural and community relations support networks within civil society and an infrastructure which helped to shape the climate of opinion at all levels of Northern Irish society.²⁷ Indeed successive British governments from the middle 1970s placed increasing stress on the significance of these activities and on the structures of ‘civil society’ as a decisive arena for shaping political attitudes. One would not need to adopt either a Gramscian view of hegemony or an Althusserian analysis of the ideological state apparatus to see the value of this policy for the state.

However, the mechanical reductionism of a simple base superstructure model that sees the British government thus framing the context in which all other political

²⁴M. Nic Craith, *Culture and Identity Politics in Northern Ireland*, 55.

²⁵ The Framework Document 1995, in M. Elliott (ed.), *The Long Road to Peace in Northern Ireland*, Liverpool 2002, 215.

²⁶ The Good Friday Agreement 1998, in M. Elliott (ed), *The Long Road to Peace in Northern Ireland*. See Declaration of Support and Constitutional Issues, 223-225.

²⁷ M. Nic Craith, *Culture and Identity Politics in Northern Ireland*, 52 drawing on the phraseology of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council.

and social actors operate by promulgating a cultural policy that suits its political agenda can only be supported if one views the state standing apart from the dominant political and cultural streams. The British government did not remain aloof. Thus the influence of this culturalist approach on political discourse can not be entirely discounted, especially if it is reinforced by other external and conjunctural factors. Through an increasingly hegemonic commonsense within the political class and key opinion formers in civil society such as the churches, the media and the voluntary sector the politics and culture of difference began to be reflected at all levels of cultural production, political discourse and social activity.

The strength of these ideas in Northern Ireland's civil society, and indeed the increasingly positive and politicised use of the idea of 'civil society' as an alternative discursive framework was indicated by the evidence, findings and report of the Opsahl Commission in 1993.²⁸ The methodology of the Citizens' Inquiry, it was argued, provided 'a shared space where dialogue and debate can begin to take place...away from the barriers of a divided society.'²⁹ Opsahl focused on transcending the central problematic at the heart of the paradigm of self-determination and majority rule in a divided society by arguing for political institutions based on the concept of parity of esteem, a powerful statement of the analysis and politics of cultural identity.³⁰

Specific British government policy initiatives across a wide area of the public sphere supported the development and consolidation of this new discursive framework. Ranging from background financial support for the activities of the voluntary and community sectors through to direct intervention to encourage diversity and cross-community partnerships this process might be defined as social engineering by mission statement and funding application. Not so much bullets as bullet points. Alongside the voluntary sector the work of statutory bodies and supporting initiatives such as the Cultural Traditions Group, the Central Community Relations Unit, the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council and Education for Mutual Understanding aided the development of new political models. For example the CTG in 1995 explicitly emphasised the central place of the politics of cultural identity by privileging the collective identity over that of the individual:

²⁸ A. Pollak (ed.), *A Citizens' Inquiry: The Opsahl Report on Northern Ireland*, Dublin 1993.

²⁹ Pollak, *A Citizens' Inquiry*, 393.

³⁰ Pollak, *A Citizens' Inquiry*, 393. See also E. Gallagher, 'Northern Ireland: Towards a New Paradigm' *Fortnight*, March 1994.

The Group's philosophy involves a general acceptance of the validity of all cultural traditions, the importance of tradition in the creation of a sense of identity, the importance of group identity as a means of self-fulfilment and to give a sense of security to the individual.

Continuing, it argued that hybridity was essential:

there has been such a degree of interaction between the various elements of the culture that there is unlikely to be a pure-bred or pedigree version of anything and that life is likely to be richer and conflict more likely to be contained in a multicultural society with pluralist values.³¹

Thus did the discourse of the politics of cultural identity become firmly embedded in and transmitted the language and activities of not only civil society, but also increasingly amongst that of a range of political actors, including Sinn Féin activists, nationalist client groups and politicians. Given the greater sense of the collective in the communal culture and underlying patterns of nationalist politics it could be argued that this discourse of the politics of difference would 'naturally' be more congenial to nationalists and essentially congruent with existing frames of reference. The transmission of new ideas into existing structures is reflected in the facility with which Community Relations and Cultural Traditions funding supported the growth of the community sector in nationalist areas throughout the 1990s.

National identity and the re-imagined community

In terms of Irish nationalist culture another significant feature was the increasing dominance of discourses of identity and their impact as a framework for the language and grammar of politics. These general processes, described by Barry as the acculturation of politics, were part of a much wider shift within Irish culture and society, which had a concomitant impact on nationalist political discourse on both sides of the border.³² Key elements were theories of post colonialism that stressed the significance of the residual psychological and cultural impact of colonial rule on former colonial societies. These were linked to wider debates about the nature of Irish identity, which were celebratory and yet couched in terms of a historically informed victimhood. Alongside this debate was a challenge to the dominant political and social

³¹ Cultural Traditions Group, *Giving Voices: the Work of the Cultural Traditions Group 1990-1994* quoted in M. Nic Craith, *Culture and Identity Politics in Northern Ireland*, 52.

³² Barry, *Culture and Equality*, Cambridge 2001.

orthodoxies of the Southern state reflected, for example, in the election victory of Mary Robinson in 1990 and the nature of official celebrations of the 1916 rising in 1991. Catholic-nationalist certainties were in retreat before the forces of modernisation and secularisation.³³ In this political and social context Irish identity was seen as plastic, malleable and capable of a variety of readings.

Central to this shift was a process of intellectual re-evaluation of Irish history. Styled by its opponents 'revisionism' or 'Dublin 4 liberalism' this critical interrogation of the founding myths of Irish nationalism was to have a direct impact on politics and ideology throughout Ireland. The onset of the Troubles resulted in historically informed assessments of the nature of the conflict, which argued that the issue was one of a clash of cultures and communal identities.³⁴ This analysis was rooted in concepts of pluralism based on the idea that no one culture is superior to another and that all cultures should be valued equally. Ideologically and politically this was reflected in the acceptance of the view that there were multiple and equally legitimate identities and cultures on the island of Ireland. The Sunningdale Agreement and the rhetoric of the SDLP and Fine Gael in the 1970s can be seen as reflections of this intellectual climate.

This process of acculturation of politics can be seen in the way that the language of political discussion which previously turned around traditional concepts of power, authority and legitimation has shifted into the area of culture and identity. These pluralistic themes positively celebrated diversity and particularism as opposed to what were seen as the political and cultural straitjackets of the universalistic political language of a united Ireland.

The most significant theme in the repertoire of cultural diversity was the idea of essentially political conflict being transcended and resolved by culture: writers for Field Day, for example, discussed the idea of the 'Fifth Province' as a cultural space for the development of new ideas and identities annexed to the other four provinces. In this reading Ireland was a blank canvas to be painted on by the artist and brought

³³ In a perceptive and more widely applicable comment on this process Ryan argues that 'the real force behind the changes in Irish politics has proved to be not so much the force of the new as the decay of the old.' M. Ryan, *War and Peace in Ireland-Britain and the IRA in the New World Order*, London 1994, 95.

³⁴ The role of historians and other public intellectuals such as F.S.L. Lyons and Roy Foster in developing these ideas and thus influencing debate and thinking on these political issues cannot be overstated. See for example, R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, Harmondsworth 1988 and F.S.L. Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland 1890-1939*, Oxford 1979.

into life by an act of creation, a true representation of the Imagined or Invented Ireland. The concept of the Imagined Ireland also opened up the possibility of choosing and mixing from a range of equally legitimate and authentic identities and becoming whatever type of Irish person one wanted to be. These ideas entered the cultural and political mainstream and quickly became part of the political discourse, even if in a somewhat bowdlerised form.³⁵

These intellectual currents can be clearly placed within a much wider general category of Western thought that was increasingly suspicious of the idea of the meta-narrative and the totalising explanation which were the hallmark of the ideologies such as Marxism, Liberalism and Nationalism. The objectivity of the modernist meta-narrative was replaced with a variety of relativistic post-modern readings of any given structure or situation. The deconstruction of texts and the possibility of infinite, multiple readings meant that post-modernists privileged eclecticism, instability and impermanence of meaning and stressed that the dominant characteristics of what were increasingly seen as 'new times' were construction, invention, re-construction and above all, uncertainty.

Communities and communitarianism

Theorising the nature of 'community' has been a central problem of modern politics and sociology since the nineteenth century. The crisis of legitimacy for states and elites in an age of masses, industrialisation and urbanisation was posed in terms of nostalgia and binding together in social harmony by drawing on the distinction between *gemeinschaft* (community) and *gesellschaft* (society).

Similar issues were posed by the crisis of community and the ideology of communitarianism in the late twentieth century. Communitarianism is one attempt to re-establish what has been described as social feeling or social solidarity in societies that appear to be undergoing major social change and disintegration. It links individual rights and social responsibilities by arguing that the individual cannot exist or be understood in isolation from the culture and values of the community. Politically this view returns to the idea of community as organic *gesellschaft* making it the central feature of political organisation where individualism and particularist interests

³⁵ The most coherent and consistent political exponent of these pluralist ideas was Garret Fitzgerald. John Hume's deployment of the language of the 'two traditions' has often been parodied as the 'single transferable speech', but his influence and that of this pluralist discourse on the contemporary politics of the peace process is clearly strong.

are subordinated to the common good.³⁶ Frequently expressed in nostalgic terms it can appear to be a lament for a world we have lost; in American and British political discourse the ideal is of a golden age ‘when there was an identifiable respectable working class, disciplined by the culture of respectability and deference’³⁷ and where social cohesion was maintained by ‘everybody knowing their place.’³⁸

This organic view of community was counterposed to what was seen as the contemporary destruction of communities by social change, new technologies, an unbalanced emphasis on individual rights, redevelopment and economic change. Symptoms of this breakdown were frequently expressed in terms of moral panics around single parents, alienated youth, especially working class males, crime and disorder and the emergence of the underclass.

Taken together with growing political disengagement and a sense of alienation from the traditional idea of the political in Western societies communitarianism was seen as a means of rebuilding not only social solidarity, but also in the broader sense political legitimacy for states, institutions and parties increasingly challenged by apathy and quiet hostility from their citizens. Although communitarian theorists and political advocates have frequently been drawn from what can be defined as the Left the appeal of this approach is its stress on balancing rights and responsibilities and creating new relationships between the individual and the community thus drawing on both the language and discursive elements from across and beyond what is increasingly seen as the irrelevant polarities of right and left.³⁹ Indeed in the hands of politicians its emotional and nostalgic appeals to both ‘traditional ‘ and new, re-imagined ideas of community can appeal to wide sections of the political nation.

Communitarianism and Catholic –Nationalist culture

The strength of these ideas in the contemporary *zeitgeist* is widely acknowledged. But in order to understand their relevance to contemporary Irish republicanism we need to consider the specifically Catholic origins of communitarianism and how these apparently new approaches can be sited within a broader context of nationalist culture

³⁶ A. Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities and the Communitarian Agenda*, London 1995.

³⁷ J.W. McAuley, *An Introduction to Politics, State and Society*, London 2003, 133.

³⁸ McAuley, *Politics, State and Society*, 133.

³⁹ Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right*.

and politics in Ireland.⁴⁰ Both in historical and contemporary terms there is a strong case that the Northern Irish nationalist population has been shaped by a 'profound sense of community', both in the sense of being part of an all-Ireland national community and as a distinctive community within the Northern Irish state.⁴¹ In this political culture the elements of justice and nation are fused together by the concept of community and collective identity, which are primary determinants, and categories of thought. Thus 'the concept of community remains central to Northern nationalist politics.'⁴² The characteristics of that community, it is argued, are reflected in a series of self-consciously communal values and assumptions that privilege strong communal solidarity, and collective needs over individual rights.⁴³ This sense of solidarity can be ascribed to the structural position of nationalists within the northern state and to specific elements in the dominant Catholic culture. The strength of this culture is, Burton argued, seen in the Provisionals' appropriation of pre-existing Catholic communalist tradition and culture as a means of political mobilisation in the early 1970s.

Irish nationalism is hardly unique in this in that the creation of an imagined national community, frequently portrayed as organic, essentialist and primordial in origins, is the main thrust of all national and state building projects.⁴⁴ What gives the contemporary theory of communitarianism its potency within Northern Irish nationalist political culture is its resonance with some of the main building blocks of that culture as well as its salience as a mobilising discourse in contemporary Northern Ireland that appeals for exactly the same reasons as in other contemporary societies.

The strength of this discourse could thus explain the ease with which communitarianism has entered mainstream nationalist and republican politics. The precursors of communitarianism have been located in late nineteenth century Catholic social teaching.⁴⁵ Along with other ideologies posing an 'organic' opposition to modernism these elements can also be located at the heart of Irish nationalist politics since the late nineteenth century. On the left Connolly deployed an invented tradition of primitive Gaelic communism and Catholic social teaching and theology in support

⁴⁰ T. Robson, *The State and Community Action*, London 2000, 114-135.

⁴¹ C. Coulter, *Contemporary Northern Irish Society: An Introduction*, London 1999, 81.

⁴² J. Todd, 'Northern Irish Nationalist Political Culture', *Irish Political Studies* 5, 1990, 36.

⁴³ Todd, 'Northern Irish Nationalist Political Culture', 36.

⁴⁴ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London 1983.

⁴⁵ Robson, *The State and Community Action*, 120, 126-130.

of the 'native' Irish origins of socialism and the compatibility of socialism with Catholicism.⁴⁶ On the right ideas of corporatism, vocationalism and the Catholic social teaching of Leo XIII and Pius XI in, for example, *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* influenced the 1937 Constitution and development of De Valera's autarkic nationalism.⁴⁷ Of particular significance to Northern Nationalism and later Provisionalism was both the strength of influence of Catholic social teaching and indeed the Church as a communal mobilising framework for the nationalist population in Northern Ireland.⁴⁸

A direct connection between this body of Catholic social thought antecedent to modern communitarianism and Irish Republicanism can be seen in the philosophy of Comhar na gComharsan which was developed in the 1940s as an attempt to give republicanism a social dimension based on Irish and Christian values as distinct from foreign communism.⁴⁹ It explicitly drew on *Quadragesimo Anno* and was to be influential in certain strands of Provisional thinking such as Éire Nua.⁵⁰ Not only did this accurately reflect the Catholic framework of thought and commonsense of the Provisional core constituency, but its nativist, decentralising and community based themes placed Éire Nua within the broad parameters of Irish nationalist thought in general.

The emergence of an explicitly socialist republicanism, the deletion of Éire Nua and the harder urban tones and style of Provisional politics from the late 1970s might be thought to minimise the importance of Catholic social thought, but Provisionalism was a mixture of diverse and eclectic threads from its beginnings; these traditions remained part of the tapestry. In practice the Catholic commonsense and framing communal culture of both the movement's activists and base were to remain significant parts of the unspoken assumptions of the Provisionals throughout their history. For example these elements were to surface in the construction by the

⁴⁶J. Connolly, *Labour in Irish History*, Dublin 1910 and *Labour, Nationality and Religion*, Dublin 1910.

⁴⁷Robson, *The State and Community Action*, 120, 126-130, and J. Coakley and M. Gallagher (eds), *Politics in the Irish Republic*, London 1999, 77.

⁴⁸Todd, 'Northern Irish Nationalist Political Culture', 31 and M. Harris, 'Catholicism, Nationalism, and the Labour Question in Belfast, 1925-1938', *Bullán* 3:1, 1997, 15-32.

⁴⁹H. Patterson, *The Politics of Illusion: A Political History of the IRA*, London 1997, 86.

⁵⁰However the origins of Éire Nua in the 1960s as the work of Roy Johnstone and Sean Ó Bradaigh perhaps indicate a less straightforwardly Catholic framework of thought; perhaps, like Connolly, Johnstone worked within the tradition and used its language and concepts for more radical purposes. This does not, however, negate the general point about the *influence* of Catholic social thought; if anything it confirms its significance on republican positions in general during this period. Note of conversation with Roy Johnstone, 13th July 2004.

Provisionals of the imagined resistance communities of the 1970s and early 1980s as well as in the ideology and practice of community and electoral politics in the 1980s and 1990s.

Channels of communitarian communication

In assessing the possible channels of connection between the broader currents of communitarian thought and practice and the republican movement a number of possibilities present themselves. At a micro, local level nationalist politicians including Sinn Féin came into contact with communitarian definitions of 'the community' and ideas of stake holding and partnership through direct involvement with the state, NGOs and the voluntary sector where this discourse was dominant and actively informed both theory and practice in, for example, economic and social regeneration, housing policy, education and, by its very nature, 'community development'. The increasing involvement of activists and councillors during the 1980s in local government and in multi-agency and cross sector/cross community partnerships provided the context for the republican discourse of community to be transformed and hollowed out; in this sense theory began to reflect practice.

Less easy to quantify is the impact of the changing climate of politics internationally from the mid-1980s. Sweeping assertions about *zeitgeist* and 'unspoken assumptions' are notoriously problematic. If the Provisionals saw themselves as part of a wider radical current, a rainbow coalition that internationally encompassed the political spectrum from the Sandinistas through to Ken Livingstone, then the increasing focus in formerly radical politics in the late 1980s and 1990s on the local, the particular, and the small scale must have had some impact on their readiness to absorb these new ideas of community.

In the face of a period of retreat for radical politics and a scaling down of the *grandes projets* of changing the world this utopian discourse of rebuilding community must have seemed realistically achievable. Other elements in the specific political physiogamy of Provisionalism such as its eclecticism and pragmatism, its own lack of developed political theory and susceptibility to more powerfully developed external intellectual forces must also have played their part in this process. One such force in the 1980s was the SDLP, which was perceived to be intellectually influential over Dublin's political thinking and policy. Increasing public and private dialogue between Sinn Féin and the SDLP was reflected in ideological shifts in the republican analysis;

if both parties can be said to operate within a common nationalist discursive framework then John Hume's 'Europeanism' with its communitarian themes would form an almost natural conjunction for constitutional and physical force nationalism.

Modernity and the Nation

A key element in the ideological framework of Provisionalism was the modernist conception of the nation. Given that Irish Republicanism defined itself and the Irish nation against a perceived external oppressive force in the shape of Britain, this definition was also inextricably linked to anti-imperialism in both theory and practice. English has described the Provisionals as embodying some of '...the most powerful forces in modern world history: the intersection of nationalism and violence, the tension between nation and state, the interaction of nationalism and socialism...'⁵¹ It is in that context of modernity that the linked opposites of nation/state and imperialism/anti-imperialism and a further linked triad of great significance for nationalism, people- nation- state will be applied to the discussion of the development of republicanism.

There is an extensive and growing literature that seeks to define these terms, which despite the assaults of post-modernism continue to have analytical validity and are intimately connected. Indeed it could be argued that the history of modernity is the history of the nation. Modernity has been defined as '...the rise of industry, cities, market capitalism, the bourgeois family, growing secularisation, democratisation and social legislation.'⁵² Concomitant with these developments was an ideology of progress and rationality defined as 'the Enlightenment' which 'aimed at human emancipation from myth, superstition and enthralled enchantment to mysterious powers and forces of nature...'⁵³ The nation-state and nationalism's place within this framework might seem problematic given its contemporary association with irrationality and essentialism⁵⁴, but in the eighteenth, nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries 'the nation-state became the structural manifestation of the triumph of modernity.'⁵⁵

⁵¹ English, *Armed Struggle; A History of the IRA*.xxiv.

⁵² R. Hollinger, *Post-modernism and the Social Sciences-a thematic approach*, Thousand Oaks, Calif.1994, 25.

⁵³ T. Docherty, *Postmodernism; A reader*, London 1994, 5.

⁵⁴ See, for example, E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth and Reality*, Cambridge 1990,Chapter 6 on Twentieth-century nationalism.

⁵⁵ C. McCall, *Identity in Northern Ireland: Communities, Politics and Change*, Basingstoke 1999, 5.

Within this discourse of modernity many accounts of nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalist movements consider them in relation to the process of state and nation building. Gellner, for example, defined nationalism as 'primarily a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent.'⁵⁶ In this reading nationalism has a significant role in the modernization process and in the formation of new social and political elites. Likewise, Anderson's definition of the nation as an 'imagined community' places great stress on nationalism as an agency of modernization and political and social mobilization against both traditional forces and external oppression⁵⁷. These approaches have been influential in our understanding of Irish nationalism and its role in the construction of both national identity and state structures after 1922. Even so the nation was an ambiguous concept from the beginning of the modern period and was (as it ,of course still is) capable of being used as both a progressive and reactionary concept. What emerged from the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and Romanticism were the contrasting and contradictory ideas of 'civic' and 'ethnic' nationalism.

Civic nationalism was rooted in the democratic and secular traditions of the Enlightenment, which stressed the citizens' identification with the state and the nation as a voluntary and conscious choice. This 'Western' tradition was based on the identification and affinity of the citizen with a political community, while the 'Eastern', ethnic tradition was rooted in the concept of the *ethnos*, a community of fate which defines the nation in terms of primordial elements such as language, culture, tradition and race. With its stress on the *Volk*, this Eastern tradition emphasised the irrational and given nature of national identity. As Gellner has argued, these civic and ethnic elements remained in creative tension in the development of nineteenth- and twentieth –century nationalisms which defined the nation-state as a sovereign entity representing, acting and speaking on behalf of a culturally homogeneous people; nationalism, in general, with varying degrees of emphasis could thus be described within a variable triad of nation-state-people.

This analytical distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism has been both consciously and unconsciously influential in discussions of Irish nationalism and

⁵⁶ E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford 1983, 1.

⁵⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

republicanism either as historical forces or contemporary political currents.⁵⁸ Amongst the more coherent attempts to develop a contemporary political taxonomy of Irish nationalism and republicanism, particularly as it applies to the Northern Irish conflict, is that of McGarry and O'Leary who suggest civic and ethnic nationalism can be further subdivided into militant and constitutional strands alongside neo-nationalism and revisionism.⁵⁹ In suggesting that 'individuals and movements have regularly cut across this fourfold categorization, and [that] Irish nationalists have had other than nationalist political beliefs-they have also been conservatives, liberals, socialists, feminists...'⁶⁰ they are alerting us to the flexibility of many political labels in Northern Ireland. Likewise modernism was a key element in the ideological framework of Ulster Unionism. Ulster Unionism defined itself against the perceived backwardness of Irish nationalism, emphasising the political relationship between the individual and the state-but actually, like republicanism, containing elements of civic and ethnic nationalisms. Thus all political definitions in Northern Ireland were and are subsumed within questions of national identity.

New Nationalism

The last element to be considered in this discussion on the themes of the new forms of nationalist politics is the idea of the nation itself. In the literature of contemporary nationalism studies, 'new nationalism' refers to a wave of regionalist, autonomist and separatist movements that represent, in varying degrees, a revolt of the marginalized and the peripheral against the centre and the metropolis. The movements for autonomy /sovereignty in Quebec and Catalonia and devolution in Wales and Scotland are frequently cited as examples of this new nationalism which has developed a distinctive idea of the nation representing a clear delineation from classical nationalism's emphasis on nation-state building.

New nationalism apparently represents the fracturing of this linkage and sees a reconnection with the civic elements that were submerged in the 'ethnic' emphasis of

⁵⁸ Amongst the most powerful advocates of the 'ethnic' interpretation of Irish nationalism has been Conor Cruise O'Brien in (ed), *The Shaping of Modern Ireland*, London 1970, *States of Ireland*, London 1972 and *Ancestral Voices: Religion and Nationalism in Ireland*, Dublin 1994. T. Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, Dublin 1981 and *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland 1858-1928*, Oxford 1987 has also been influential in the study of the history of Irish nationalism. Many so-called Revisionist historians have emphasised the ethnic and essentialist elements in Irish nationalism and republicanism.

⁵⁹ J. McGarry and B. O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland*, Oxford 1996, 17-22.

⁶⁰ McGarry and O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland*, 17.

classical nation state building nationalism: it stresses the 'demos' rather than the 'ethnos'.⁶¹ Nairn, for example, argues that this type of nationalism is qualitatively different from the anti-modernist and Romantic based movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth century and instead represents an engagement with the contemporary world.⁶²

Other characteristics mark it out as a different formation from classical nationalism. Breuilly suggests that new nationalism has a specifically 'political' orientation and is frequently driven by the social and economic concerns of key social groups, such as the upwardly mobile managerial and business classes.⁶³ Further, these movements are also based in regions with a coherent, developed civil society and a certain level of wealth: as such this is a nationalism of rising expectations rather than the despairing cry of the alienated poor.⁶⁴

Another marked contrast with classical nationalism is the complexity and ambiguity in the relationship between political and cultural nationalism. With its stress on a civic discourse of identity rather than an ethnic one, this appears to mark something of a step away from the simple particularism of descent and ethnicity towards the flexibilities of 'identity politics' operating within a framework that recognises a plurality of elements within a national, political identity rather than a fixed set of cultural characteristics. As such this type of identity politics closely corresponds to Hall's concept of cultural identity, which he defines in terms of production, process and becoming rather than being. In this light it is possible to place new nationalism centrally within the frames of contemporary political discourse. Thus cultural identity

...belongs to the future as much as the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending time, place, history and culture...like everything which is historical they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialist past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power.⁶⁵

In distinction to the idea of a unified national essence and clear cultural framework of the state building nationalisms this conception of process reflects a deep uncertainty

⁶¹ D. McCrone, *The Sociology of Nationalism*, London 1998, 147.

⁶² T. Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain*, London 1977, 127.

⁶³ J. Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, Manchester 1993, 333-338.

⁶⁴ The following defining elements of new nationalism are drawn from McCrone, *The Sociology of Nationalism*, 128-129.

⁶⁵ S. Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in J. Rutherford (ed.), *Identity, Community Culture and Difference*, London 1990, 224.

about who 'we' are, even in those nations with an apparently clearly defined sense of national identity and the political structures of the nation state. Thus identity politics are a debate about where 'we', individually and collectively are now and where we want to go. These readings stress that national identity is a discourse and the nation a symbol that emerges from a socially constructed narrative rather than a 'natural' growth or simply a convenient political form ultimately rooted in universal values. Hall, for example, argued that this identity will inevitably be plural and multifaceted, subject to competing narratives and identities. Identity is portrayed as a culture of hybridity and a work in constant progress rather than a pure, fixed, unitary or frequently coherent set of propositions or simply political set of arrangements.⁶⁶ These themes are not just analytical presentations of national identity, but are increasingly how governments and new nationalist political parties present ideas of the nation and identity.

These nationalisms are also of a liberal and social-democratic character in which self consciously progressive political and socio-economic themes outweigh the conservative and backward-looking elements of traditional nationalism. It is also a reflection of the relatively recent origin of most of these movements; as an essentially contemporary creation in both ideological and ideological form they reflect the political terrain of their birth and the dominant post-ideological and pragmatic politics of the late twentieth century.⁶⁷ This contradictory character can be seen in the political goals of these movements: is the ultimate aim 'independence' or some form of 'autonomy'?

Their discourse is studiously ambiguous drawing on concepts of process, transition and movement rather than fixed points, defined destinations and clear aims. This studied ambivalence can be best seen in the changing definitions of the nature and structures of political power, which have influenced the political framework of these new nationalisms. This theoretical structure develops the simple triad of people-state-nation into an expanding and developing continuum that on one hand relates to supranational bodies above the state-nation and on the other, to the distribution of power and the organising structures within the state itself; new nationalist demands for 'independence within Europe' and devolved power sharing at all levels show both

⁶⁶ H. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration*, London 1990.

⁶⁷ See McCrone's discussion of case studies from Scotland, Catalunya and Quebec in McCrone, *The Sociology of Nationalism*, 129-147.

the application of these ideas in practice and the almost limitless variety of interpretations that can be placed on them in theory.

It would be wrong, however, to overstate the coherence and clarity of definition of these movements; indeed the literature lays great stress on the frequently contradictory nature of this ideology and support base that these movements draw upon. McCrone persuasively argues that this much commented upon Janus-like character of new nationalism-the ability to incorporate contradictory elements and to shift the ideological pattern and direction of its message- is a reflection both of post-modern politics and of a more diverse social base than that which sustained nineteenth- and early twentieth- century nationalisms. For example these niche nationalists

...can present themselves as on the left as well as on the right, as in favour of neo-liberalism as social democracy, as civic as well as ethnic depending on the circumstances.⁶⁸

As an adaptable ideological framework nationalism has always had this ability to incorporate contradictory elements, but new nationalism takes this a stage further by combining both 'vertical' patterns of historical memory and invented tradition with 'horizontal' issues of contemporary political, economic and cultural power which 'gives neo-nationalism its power and significance in the territorial politics of western states.'⁶⁹

There is a compelling case that elements of these ideological themes of new nationalism can be found within the main discourse of Northern Irish nationalism, whether it be of the SDLP or Sinn Féin variety. There is however a tension within the overall framework between a democratic discourse framed in terms of national self-determination, political equality and universalist conceptions of justice which can be framed as having its origins ultimately in a civic form of nationalism and a more particularist approach based on communal, collective and interwoven ideas of community and justice.⁷⁰ Although drawing on some democratic elements these frames can be situated ultimately in concepts of ethnicity, tradition and cultural identity. Northern Irish nationalist politics have been defined in terms of a powerful and historically adaptable ideology with 'a rich and flexible conceptual structure

⁶⁸ McCrone, *The Sociology of Nationalism*, 145.

⁶⁹ McCrone, *The Sociology of Nationalism*, 148.

⁷⁰ R. Bourke, *Peace in Ireland: The War of Ideas*, London 2003, x-xvi.

which allows it to express divergent interests and accommodate very different political tendencies.⁷¹ The framework of this ideology has been located in the themes of nation, community, and justice which Todd argues form a common heritage and increasingly a common discursive framework for both Sinn Féin and the SDLP.

The SDLP's analysis of the conflict was widely influential in the 1980s as reflected in the New Ireland Forum Report 1984. As defined by John Hume this analysis of the conflict drew heavily on themes of cultural and identity politics starting from the position that the nature of Northern Ireland was multifaceted as frontier zone of Britishness and Irishness which gave the province an Irish, a European regional character as well as a broader international dimension through its links to the USA.

This analysis of the conflict and the SDLP's policy of power sharing was ultimately rooted in a culturalist view of internal models. It revised traditional nationalism by downplaying the role of the British government and proposing a model of nationalism where nation and state are not congruent; instead Nic Craith argues that Hume's focus was on the 'multiple locations where political interaction could and should take place.'⁷² Although the political terminology was influenced by 'soft' concepts of power, in many ways the discursive focus on the particularism of culture and identity with its attendant focus on justice and communal rights can be accommodated within what Todd has defined as the essential triad of Northern nationalism-community, nation and justice.

⁷¹ Todd, 'Northern Irish Nationalist Political Culture', 34.

⁷² Nic Craith, *Culture and Identity Politics in Northern Ireland*, 30.

Chapter II-Reading the Provisionals

In 1990 John Whyte famously referred the tremendous output of books on Northern Ireland as ‘an explosion of research.’⁷³ The impact showed no signs of lessening during the 1990s:if anything it has intensified during the peace process and the development of the post-Good Friday Agreement institutions. Much of this interest has continued to focus on the transformation of republicanism, but there has been something of a shift in the nature of that focus during this period. This has partially reflected the increased availability of sources and accessibility of individual republicans,⁷⁴ but perhaps more importantly these emerging perspectives reflect both the dramatic patterns of change in Northern Ireland and the rest of the world in the last decade of the twentieth century. There are a number of difficulties in attempting to establish a taxonomy of the literature of Provisionalism which in part reflect the contradictions of the movement itself. The Provisional republican movement has been considered from within a wide range of paradigm frameworks. From a review of the literature it seems that two broad categories can be used as boundaries for an assessment of both the contemporary and historical-developmental nature of the movement and its ideology: they are, on one hand, the idea of republican politics as a tradition-driven paradigm⁷⁵ and on the other that the Provisional movement is a contingent product of a particular time and terrain.⁷⁶ The debate also engages with wider issues concerning the degree of ideological coherence, rationality and conscious agency that was present within Provisional republicanism.

⁷³ J. Whyte, *Explaining Northern Ireland*, Oxford 1990, x.

⁷⁴For examples of a wide range of accounts that are now emerging, see E. Collins, *Killing Rage*, London 1997, P. Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Fein*, London 1997, and K. Toolis, *Rebel Hearts: Journeys within the IRA's Soul*, London 1995.

⁷⁵ Probably best exemplified in the work of J. Bowyer Bell who described a Bodenstown commemoration in the following terms; ‘...an army without banners or victory...listen once more to the magic words of faith and ...the faint whispers of victory...listening to the old litany. And they believe, as many of their fathers did and some of their children will, that an Ireland divided shall never be at peace. Then they go home...and elsewhere out of sight the invisible army of the Republican [sic] marches...to martial pipes audible only to the faithful’. J. Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army-a history of the IRA, 1916-1970*, London 1970,436. Significantly he wrote these words in what was meant to be an epitaph for the IRA before the outbreak of the Provisional campaign. However his later revised editions and other writing continued in the same vein when the real ‘army without banners’ had become much more than a sentimental memory.

⁷⁶ For example, A. McIntyre, ‘Modern Irish Republicanism; the product of British state strategies’, *Irish Political Studies* 10, 1995 and R. W. White, *Provisional Irish Republicans; An Oral and Interpretive History*, Westport, 1993.

These discussions about the nature of Provisionalism can be characterised in terms of, on one hand, the power of the past that fetishises an essentialist historical imperative, and on the other the sovereign command of the present that dismisses the influence of the past altogether. Whilst initially appealing, this framing of the debate is too stark and fails to assess the complexity of the relationship between past and present in republican ideology and politics. As in other areas of social and historical analysis, a nuanced approach marrying the urgency of contemporary exigency and argument within a framework of inherited tradition and politics seems the most satisfactory approach to an understanding of Provisional Republicanism.

Another pattern in the critical debate is that of the journalistic-sometimes disguised as the first draft of history- and the analytical. The distinctions between studies grounded in political and organisational sociology and those whose focus is on ideological change are also significant ways of describing the patterns of the literature. Another pole of disputation turns around the balance between tradition and pragmatism within republicanism and their relative importance in shaping the ideology and politics of the movement. Above all the fault lines run within dialectic of continuity and change, between those who stress the exceptionalist nature of Irish republicanism, usually within a context of a specifically Irish *sonderweg*, and those who place the Provisionals firmly and centrally within the wider patterns of international politics. Obviously these categorisations represent ideal types and as forms they often incorporate two or more of these more general positions within the framework of a particular account or analysis of Provisional republicanism.

Much of the earliest work on the Provisionals understandably focused on the IRA as a military group and operated implicitly within a broadly terrorist paradigm, arguing either in support or against this assessment of republicanism. The work of J. Bowyer Bell and Tim Pat Coogan was influential in the 1970s and 1980s in providing some insights into the operation of Provisionalism, but because it largely combined descriptive journalism with an overemphasis on the almost mystical power of the tradition within republicanism the enduring analytical value of this work has been limited.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ J.B. Bell, *The Secret Army: The IRA 1916—1979*, Dublin 1989, first edition, London 1970, *IRA Tactics and Targets*, Dublin 1990, *The Irish Troubles: A Generation of Violence, 1967-1992*, Dublin 1993, *The IRA 1968-2000: Analysis of a Secret Army*, London 2000, and T.P. Coogan, *On the Blanket: The H-Block Story*, Dublin 1980, and *The IRA*, London 1980.

The first drafts of history

Some of the best work of this period, initially sketched as the first drafts of history by journalists such as Ed Moloney, Mary Holland and Fionnuala O'Connor, was to bear fruit later in more developed form as analytical reportage.⁷⁸ The accounts of Bishop and Mallie stood in this tradition and combined journalistic experience with a mission to explain the context of Provisional republicanism as the ballot paper and armalite strategy unfolded. Clarke's account of how the Provisionals 'broadened the battlefield' was a significant addition to the reportage of republicanism in that it focused on the emerging patterns of slightly constitutional politics and outlined the significance of these developments for the political trajectory of Provisionalism.⁷⁹ O'Brien built on this approach and in the period leading up to the first IRA ceasefire provided a useful summary of the shifts in analysis, style and balance within the Provisionals' patterns of thought that correctly pointed towards the possibility of future shifts in position and political practice.⁸⁰ In this sense his account reflected an emerging journalistic consensus that significant alterations to the shape of the republican project were taking place, but that the overall direction and trajectory was uncertain.

Despite these accounts have value in providing an insight into the developing thinking and attitudes amongst the republican leadership and contribute to our understanding of what was to be a dramatic shift in the movement's position. Although written later, the work of O'Doherty and Feeny comes into this category: in O'Doherty's case the polemical edge highlights both the ideological character of Provisionalism and the sociology of its emergent power structures within the nationalist community.⁸¹

The terrorist paradigm and strategic theory

Because this relationship between the ballot paper and the armalite seemed unclear for many external observers it was not really until around the period of the first IRA ceasefire in 1994 that the wider political implications of what was occurring within

⁷⁸ E. Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, London 2002, F. O'Connor, *In Search of a State: Catholics in Northern Ireland*, Belfast 1993.

⁷⁹ P. Bishop, and E. Mallie, *The Provisional IRA*, London 1988, L. Clarke, *Broadening the Battlefield: The H-Blocks and the rise of Sinn Féin*, Dublin 1987.

⁸⁰ B. O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Féin 1985 to Today*, Dublin 1993.

⁸¹ B. Feeny, *Sinn Féin: A Hundred Turbulent Years*, Dublin 2002; M. O'Doherty, *The Trouble with Guns: Republican Strategy and the Provisional IRA*, Belfast 1998.

republicanism began to be theorised as opposed to merely being described. Thus White's work in the early 1990s, although counter to the terrorist paradigm, still considered Provisionalism historically within an insurgency framework of micro mobilisation whilst, for example, Wilkinson's frames of reference for Provisionalism appeared remarkably unaltered by events in the real world.⁸²

The scepticism of political opponents and other political actors in Northern Ireland about the nature of Provisional politics after the first ceasefire and during the subsequent drawn out quadrille of the peace process was understandable, The exact relationship between constitutional or even slightly constitutional politics and the military instrument, as defined in strategic theory still remained unclear and the breakdown of the first ceasefire reinforced both this political uncertainty and the apparent salience for some observers of the terrorist paradigm as an analytical tool. The best account of the Provisionals' military strategy by M.L.R. Smith, which appeared in this period, rejected the psychological simplicities of the terrorist paradigm and assumed a degree of strategic rationality in the IRA's deployment of 'the military instrument.'⁸³ Smith correctly identified that the political –military stalemate of the late 1980s had encouraged the development of a more realistic strategic calculus and that the Provisionals were pragmatic in the range of instruments, electoral as well as military they deployed to achieve their objectives. However despite this valid approach Smith seemed wedded to the power of tradition and ideology as powerful determinants of republican strategy when he argued that 'Republicans are creatures of tradition. They do not undergo dramatic ideological conversions.'⁸⁴ Although written before the protracted pre-and post-Good Friday negotiations Smith accurately pointed to the style of Provisional politics in which, whether the approach is peaceful or violent, it is always war. However whilst this characterisation of the style may be accurate Smith underplayed the inherent and essential pragmatism at the heart of Provisionalism when he overemphasised this sense of teleology within republican thought and practice. As such, despite the

⁸² R.W. White, 'Revolution in the City: On the Resources of Urban Guerrillas', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3,1991, 'Political Violence By The Nonaggrieved: Explaining The Political Participation Of Those With No Apparent Grievances', *International Social Movement Research* 4,1992 and *Provisional Irish Republicans: An Oral and Interpretive History*, Westport 1993: P. Wilkinson, *Terrorism: British perspectives*, Aldershot 1993.

⁸³ M.L.R. Smith, *Fighting For Ireland? The Military Strategy of the Irish Republican Movement*, London 1995.

⁸⁴ Smith, *Fighting For Ireland*, 218.

strengths of his work, he seemed unable to comprehend the potential within republicanism for fundamental ideological and structural change.

Secret Histories

Since the first IRA ceasefire in 1994 a series of accounts have appeared that are rooted in the journalistic experience of their authors. Although presented as reported narratives without an explicitly analytical framework or explanation beyond the actions of the leading participants within the peace process these accounts have all added to our knowledge of the politics of the Provisionals.⁸⁵ The best of these accounts that combines excellent reportage with a clear interpretation is Moloney's *A Secret History of the IRA*⁸⁶. Moloney's account draws heavily on over thirty years of reporting the Troubles. Closely sourced with interviews with republican activists at all levels he weaves a convincing narrative of the development of the Provisionals' 'Peace Strategy' and the role of the Adams leadership in apparently shifting the axes of the republican movement. Although the narrative framework is journalistic in tone, Moloney does convincingly shape his material by reference to an analysis of the ideological nature of Provisionalism, and the significance of its 'founding moment' in 1969–70 in determining its political and organisational trajectory. Much of the Provisional leadership's hostility to Moloney's version of events lies in his argument that a small circle around Gerry Adams had been working towards contact and negotiations with the British from as early as 1986 with the explicit aim of reaching an accommodation that would result in an internal settlement whose parameters would fall far short of republican aims. Although this thesis can be criticised as a conspiracy theory or a variant of the leadership betrayal school of history that argues that Adams and company have been bought off by the blandishments of Perfidious Albion, Moloney does produce convincing evidence to support his case.

Above all, he roots his case in an understanding of the organisational and ideological structures of Provisionalism as a mass movement of sections of the Northern nationalist working class. In doing so he stresses the differences between traditional, ideological republicanism and the more eclectic and pragmatic strands of Provisionalism. Implicit in this reading is that Provisionalism, from its founding

⁸⁵ B. Rowan, *Behind the Lines: The Story of the IRA and Loyalist Ceasefires*, Belfast 1995, *The Armed Peace: Life and Death after the Ceasefires*, Edinburgh 2003 and, E. Mallie, and D. McKitterick, *The Fight for Peace: The Secret Story behind the Irish Peace Process*, London 1996.

⁸⁶ Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*.

moment, was more concerned with defending the nationalist community and acting as an armed veto on Stormont and British government policy rather than developing as a well-defined ideological movement shaped by republican tradition. As McIntyre has argued, Provisionalism was essentially directed against British policy rather than the British presence.⁸⁷

This emphasis on community and communalism-of fighting for their streets, as one rural republican described the motives of Belfast Provisionals⁸⁸ - was to become central to the political practice of the Adams leadership from the early 1980s onwards. Moloney convincingly shows that in seeking to hollow out the republican ideology, Gerry Adams and friends were simply returning to the communal and Defender consciousness of Provisionalism's founding moment. Despite the focus on internal Provisional politics the value of this account lays in this accurate contextualisation. Consequently, Adams can be seen as less of a revisionist and a traitor to some republican essentialism: in advancing the claims of the nationalist community within what is a partitionist political framework he has, paradoxically, fulfilled Provisionalism's genetically determined destiny and has come full circle to remain true to the movement's roots in the sectarian cockpit of Belfast.

New World Orders

If Moloney's assessment linking the Provisionals' apparent ideological shift to the origins of the movement forms one boundary of the debate then Mark Ryan's focus on the importance of the wider national and international context of the New World Order as a way of understanding the development of Provisional politics forms the other.⁸⁹ Ryan argued that the changing balance of international political power in the early 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the defeat of a wide range of socialist, nationalist and oppositional politics was also reflected in the retreat of the Provisionals. To Ryan this was not just a temporary set-back for radical politics, but represented an existential challenge and a qualitatively new historical period in which national liberation movements internationally were not only contained by the new imperialist hegemony of the New World Order, but were defeated from within by a

⁸⁷ Letter to author, 12th December 2000.

⁸⁸ Quoted in E. McCann, 'The Real IRA', *The Blanket*, Winter 2001.

⁸⁹ M. Ryan, *War and Peace in Ireland: Britain and the IRA in the New World Order*, London 1994 and 'From the centre to the margins: the slow death of Irish republicanism' in C. Gilligan, and J. Tonge (eds.), *Peace or War? Understanding the peace process in Northern Ireland*, Aldershot 1997, 72-83.

sense of futility and disillusion with the nationalist project as a concept: not only in Ireland, but throughout the world, Ryan argued, 'the climate of cynicism and low expectations has taken its toll on popular engagement in the nationalist cause.'⁹⁰

This thesis certainly had explanatory value in its attempt to link the collapse of transformative projects, which had challenged the political and social status quo in the developing and former colonial world to events in Northern Ireland. The strength of the argument lay in its assessment of the social psychology of political radicalism and its account of the impact that the decline in nationalism as a political force could have on popular mobilisation and engagement in politics. Implicit in Ryan's argument as it emerged in 1994-1995 was a description of a more fundamental crisis in ideology, especially in the concept of political subjectivity and the potential for radical challenges to the newly emerging post-Cold War domestic and international consensus. Viewed within this frame the republican retreat from militant opposition to 'British Imperialism' and the consequent scaling down of the movement's aims from the assertive and hegemonic to the recognition and representational essentially within a Northern Irish polity seems to confirm Ryan's general approach. However the containment and possible incorporation of the Provisionals by the state that is central to Ryan's argument seems to rest on an unduly sanguine assessment of the coherence and self-confidence of the political class and their project. A case can be made that the crisis of ideology and political subjectivity combined with a loss of self-confidence is a truly general one that affects both the state and former radical challengers.

Because of the obvious links between Ryan's account placing the scaling down of Provisionalism's ambitions within a common pattern of defeat for radical projects of transformation internationally and Moloney's view that the Provisionals have simply returned to their communal roots, it is best perhaps to see these positions as themes of debate within a continuum rather than as simple polar opposites.

Wars of Illusion

Central to that debate and one of the first serious attempts to theorise republican politics in the late 1980s was Patterson's *The Politics of Illusion*.⁹¹ In words that were to have particular resonance after 11th September 2001 Patterson follows Said in arguing that many analyses of 'terrorism' decontextualise and thus isolate this

⁹⁰ Ryan, *War and Peace in Ireland*, 9.

⁹¹ H. Patterson, *The Politics of Illusion: A Political History of the IRA*, London 1997.

phenomenon from the dysfunctions and maladies of the contemporary world that give rise to it. Patterson compellingly argues that a similar decontextualisation of the Provisionals has failed to adequately situate those political and ideological currents of 'mainstream' Irish life that have sustained physical force republicanism. The value of Patterson's assessment of the republican socialist tradition lays in his exploration of the themes of continuity and change, both within the tradition itself and in how the transformation of Provisionalism was assisted by '...the very ambiguities in the relations between the state and constitutional nationalism and republicanism revealed the existence of a tendency which, despite the stridency of anti-terrorist rhetoric, treated republicanism as a force not totally beyond recognition.'⁹² His interest in the discontinuities within the republican tradition, whilst accepting the existence of 'certain moral-existential characteristics' within republicanism, leads us usefully away from ideas of an ineradicable tradition towards the more realistic view of Provisionalism's survival and development as a product of its ability to exploit 'a range of social, economic and communal grievances.'⁹³

If Ryan contextualises republicanism within an international framework and links the peace process to a general transformation in the patterns of politics in the 1990s, Bourke's approach in *Peace in Ireland: The War of Ideas* similarly also attempts to generalise the Northern Irish experience.⁹⁴ He considers the forms and language of political conflict within the region as not specifically Irish or the product of an age-old conflict of atavistic nationalisms. Instead his focus is on the ideological and political crisis of democracy as a concept. By rooting both Nationalism and Unionism within this universalist, Enlightenment framework of democracy and self-determination Bourke points out that the conflict itself and the politics of the peace process, which are designed to resolve the conflict, are themselves both products of a wider contradiction within these conceptions of democracy. Although he does not fully develop the implications of this line of argument Bourke does point towards a position that sees the transformation of republicanism not as a penitential embracing of democracy and a repudiation of violence, but as a reflection of a deeper crisis in our very idea of the political itself.

⁹² Patterson, *The Politics of Illusion*, 10.

⁹³ Patterson, *The Politics of Illusion*, 11.

⁹⁴ R. Bourke, *Peace in Ireland: The War of Ideas*, London 2003.

In this sense the crisis of Provisional republicanism is thus a product of a general crisis of democracy and politics in Western culture and ideology. This stress on the universal and general rather than the particular and the local is compelling when so many of the features of contemporary republicanism, both ideologically and organisationally, correspond to the ideal types of the new politics of postmodernism. McCall takes these new politics as his starting point for an assessment of the conflict in Northern Ireland. He looks at changing understandings of the ideas of 'the nation' and 'the state' as a means of charting the potential for fundamental shifts in communal identity and relates this to the political positions of both unionist and nationalist parties. Because he locates his approach firmly within the themes and methods of 'resistance postmodernism' McCall can lack a little critical distance from the phenomenon he defines, but this engagement also has a certain value in highlighting the elements of post-modern discourse within New Sinn Féin.⁹⁵

The Provos and pluralism

McGovern is also interested in this discursive framework, but in a critically distinctive argument he draws instead on the themes of universalism and particularism to classify both the historical and contemporary configuration of republicanism.⁹⁶ By showing that contemporary republican discourse is the product of a combination of external political and material conditions and ideological forces as well as a wide range of internal, inherited ideological traditions, McGovern indicates that Provisionalism's ideological and structural trajectory is subject to the gravitational pull of more powerful external forces. The value of this reading is that it shows both the diversity and range of the ideological resources available to republicans as well as the political and contextual limits on the movement's development. If McGovern's argument were extended it would be possible to see that the uneasy combination of radical universalist themes of class and self-determination, and the particularist, ethnic tropes of communal solidarity within contemporary Provisional ideology make for an inherently unstable structure that in the long term will collapse.

In stressing the attractive power of external ideological forces for republicanism in general this argument could be extended still further towards the

⁹⁵ C. McCall, *Identity in Northern Ireland: Communities, Politics and Change*, Basingstoke 1999.

⁹⁶ M. McGovern, 'Irish Republicanism and the Potential Pitfalls of Pluralism', *Capital and Class* 71, 2000.

conclusion that the pluralist discourse of 'the two traditions' that is embedded in the Good Friday Agreement and the resulting institutions of the 'new dispensation' has indeed intensified the already existing particularist elements of community and identity politics within Provisionalism. McGovern focuses on the pluralistic implications of the Belfast Agreement for the politics of Provisional republicanism, but it is probably more accurate to look somewhat further back chronologically to locate the time and the channels of communication whereby the external ideological and political forces of the British state met the particularist and communal currents within republicanism. Likewise it is not necessary to share McGovern's view that 'it is in the contestation of this trend [towards communalism] that the future potential of a positive, dynamic and radical republican politics will be won or lost.'⁹⁷ Instead it may be more accurate to argue that the assertion of these more particularistic strands is itself a reflection of a much deeper crisis of republican ideology that by its very nature precludes any such development.

Power in movement

One persuasive approach that helps us considerably in assessing this ideological crisis is to locate its origins in the political and organisational sociology of Provisional republicanism. Comerford has examined the historical relationship between the political mainstream and republicanism in terms of a process of incorporation into the state whereby outsiders gain admittance to the constitutional power game and write new rules of constitutional propriety, at the same time both slightly constitutional and slightly Fenian. The recent developments in Provisionalism are, he suggests, 'a spectacular case of the old trope of republicans coming to terms with democracy...albeit one with several original twists.'⁹⁸ Amongst the twists Comerford identifies are the unwritten rules of the new order which allow what he describes as 'localised mafias' to exist, giving the republican leadership social and political power over its bases of support.⁹⁹

Touching on similar themes McIntyre has charted the shifts in republican politics in both ideological and structural terms. Recently he has explored what he considers to be a process of bureaucratisation within Provisionalism where the

⁹⁷ McGovern, 'Irish Republicanism', 133.

⁹⁸ R.V. Comerford, 'Republicans and democracy in modern Irish politics' in F. McGarry (ed.), *Republicanism in Modern Ireland*, Dublin 2003, 20.

⁹⁹ Comerford, 'Republicans and democracy', 21.

structures of the movement cannot function without the routinised exercise of structural power. The value of this focus on control and repression is that its explanatory power lays in showing how appeals to a culture of collective loyalty can be used to create a culture of conformity and control, not only within the republican movement, but also throughout the wider nationalist community. This is in contrast with Irvin, for example, who discusses the changing strategy of the Provisionals as a product of the internal balance of power between different factions which she relates to external political environmental factors such as regime responsiveness. Her focus is implicitly descriptive in its account of the rational choices posed by leaderships rather than a nuanced sociology that assesses movements as organisations of power and control in their own right.¹⁰⁰ Thus McIntyre's structural approach is compelling because it does focus on power rather than pure ideology or individual careerism as the motive force for these patterns. In this reading, Provisionalism takes on some of the functions of a pseudo-state, both mediating between the British state and sections of the nationalist community and carrying out some law-enforcement and control functions of its own.¹⁰¹

Continuity in the IRA?

Underpinning these discussions of republicanism in the late twentieth century were major problems in defining exactly what we mean by the term 'republicanism'. It would appear that in a world in which all the political certainties of left and right have been swept away republicanism has also been carried off with the flood. How else can we explain the difficulty of finding a terminology that covers a political movement that has undergone such a transformation? One useful approach in assessing the disparate phenomenon of Provisional republicanism is to pose the questions of degrees of continuity and change, that is to treat the movement, as English argues, like one would any other important historical or political phenomenon. His useful starting point is that republicanism is 'richer, more complex, layered and protean than is frequently recognised.'¹⁰² It is in his discussion of the degree of ideological continuity

¹⁰⁰ C. Irvin, *Militant Nationalism: Between Movement and Party in Ireland and the Basque Country*, Minneapolis 1999.

¹⁰¹ A. MacIntyre, 'Provisional Republicanism; inequities, internal politics and repression' in McGarry (ed.), *Republicanism in Modern Ireland 178-198*, and, 'Modern Irish Republicanism and the Belfast Agreement: Chickens Coming Home to Roost, or Turkeys Celebrating Christmas?' in R. Wilford, (ed.), *Aspects of the Belfast Agreement*, Oxford 2001.

¹⁰² English, *Armed Struggle: A History of the IRA*, xxiv.

and the legitimating role of republican tradition alongside the significance of the contingent that English poses some interesting questions and suggests a nuanced synthesis by way of explanation for the movement's development. He correctly emphasises the importance of the founding moment of Provisionalism in August 1969 and goes on to discuss how republicanism was composed of a number of strands that were consciously exploited and developed by successive leaderships. But in presenting the political and ideological development of the Provisionals as the working out of an historical dialectic of continuity and discontinuity he does not simply show republicans to be prisoners of history and tradition.

The value of this approach is to show that in key elements of republican thinking there is an interaction of republican tradition, political context and leadership pragmatism. English's identification of the family resemblances within, say, the republican socialist tradition are useful in helping us to understand how Provisionalism was hollowed out from within whilst the external rhetorical shell was preserved. By showing how republicanism as an ideology gave its adherents plenty of scope for the conscious invention of tradition he indicates the form that the revision of Provisionalism could take in the 1980s and 1990s, but not necessarily the means and the mechanisms by which this revisionist project could be achieved. It is this issue of how some of these internal republican structures and traditions combined with powerful external political and ideological forces to secure the success of that project that this thesis will now attempt to investigate.

Chapter III- Actually existing Provisional Republicanism 1977-1983

Ideological Themes and Keywords

In political science and cultural studies ideology is itself a deeply contested ideological term. In this initial section my working definition of Provisional ideology is of a framework of ideas with varying degrees of coherence that provide a basis for organised political activity. This general framework is grounded in a world-view which develops a critique of the status-quo, which in the Provisionals' case rests on themes of anti-imperialism and self-determination. Connected to the definition of current wrongs is the prescription of an ideal future-the Republic-and the political methods for bringing it about-'armed struggle and revolution' initially, adaptation to constitutional politics latterly.¹⁰³ In this sense ideology is concerned with a general process of the production of meanings and ideas and their impact on the political-historical realm. Above all its development is an active process which stresses conscious agency as much as conditioning, whether by 'tradition' or contingency.¹⁰⁴

One of the ways of approaching these issues is to delineate some key themes within the normative and discursive framework of Provisionalism and to assess shifts in both emphasis and shape over a given period. This is not simply meant to be an analysis of a linguistic turn, but will attempt to show frameworks of thought and action that have shaped military-political strategy and activity.¹⁰⁵ Consequently this chapter will adopt a thematic rather than a chronological approach to consider some of the evidence illustrating Provisional republican interpretations and analyses of the nation, the people and imperialism as a means of fixing some of the elements that have contributed to Provisional praxis in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Following the definition of ideology as an organising framework for political action outlined

¹⁰³ See I.MacKenzie, 'The arena of ideology', in R.Eccleshall, V.Geoghegan, R.Jay, M.Kenny, I.MacKenzie, and R.Wilford, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, London 1994, 1.

¹⁰⁴ This analytical framework is influenced by R.Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford 1977, 55-71 and E.P.Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Harmondsworth 1980, and *The Poverty of Theory*, London 1978. In Thompson's discussion of class he argues that it is a real historical relationship. 'Like any other relationship, it is a fluency which evades analysis if we attempt to stop it dead at any given moment... The relationship must always be embodied in real people and in a real context.' *The Making of the English Working Class*, 9. With obvious amendments the same can be said to apply to the historical study of ideology, especially one so protean and evasive as Irish Republicanism.

¹⁰⁵ In so doing I am following the approach suggested in R.Williams, *Keywords*, London 1976.

above this section will present aspects of the republican critique of the status quo and how the movement's assessments of British imperialism, unionism, Dublin governments and the SDLP reveal the movement's frameworks of thought in this period.

Ireland and British Imperialism - varieties of anti-colonialism?

To fully grasp the nature, strategy and tactics of Provisional Republicanism an understanding of the centrality of anti-imperialism and the movement's analysis of the historical and contemporary role of British imperialism in Ireland is essential. In this way we are better able to read the movement's ideological development by understanding it as a dialectic between continuity and change rather than a simple relationship, whether real or 'invented', with a pre-existing theoretical and strategic tradition. Ideas of self determination and anti-imperialism formed the core of the legitimating corpus of Provisionalism, not only defining the historical context of and responsibility for the contemporary problems and politics of the whole island of Ireland, but also placing the nation within a broader international explanatory framework of anti-colonial, liberation struggles that arguably linked Ireland to comparable struggles elsewhere.

The analysis of British Imperialism was Provisionalism's master narrative providing an overarching framework linking such disparate and subordinate themes as the movement's analysis of unionism, its assessment of the role of the SDLP and the Catholic middle class, and the nature of the Dublin regime. It also shaped the military-political strategy for liberation that would be conducted on the terrain that had been shaped, both historically and contemporarily by British Imperialism. The analysis of British Imperialism also functioned as a central rhetorical and symbolic device and trope in Provisional discourse, drawing on republican tradition as a source of legitimation and linking into a wider nationalist commonsense reading of Ireland's past and present: As with nationalist discourse in general it was able to straddle a variety of ideological categories from 'traditional' anti-modernist Catholic conservatism through to a more fashionable Third -world Marxism. Given the centrality of Britain's colonial role to republican politics, any small shifts in emphasis would have a significant impact on the movement's wider political strategy. Republican assessments of Britain's role and interests although increasingly dressed in Marxist terminology from the late 1970s remained generally consistent throughout

the twentieth century. Britain was a colonial power with clearly defined economic, political and strategic interests in Ireland: partition was a product of these interests and indicated the British determination to control the country-either directly in the six counties or through the collaborationist Free State regime in Dublin.¹⁰⁶ In its most developed form this analysis of imperialism saw it as a totalising system that asserted both a direct control over the politics and the economy of the whole island in classic imperialist style and an indirect neo-imperialist hegemony 'through cultural domination by the English language, literature and ways of thinking in all aspects of life'.¹⁰⁷ One leading republican argued:

The military occupation of the six counties was designed and has acted since as a bridgehead for the economic and socio-cultural domination of the island as a whole. The nature of the British connection in the post 1921 period, therefore, goes much deeper than the occupation of part of the country by British troops.¹⁰⁸

The anti-imperialist elements of the ideological framework that underpinned the founding moment of Provisionalism in 1969-1970 have been well-described. Amongst the initial statements attacking the Officials the newly emerging Army Council and the Caretaker Executive argued that the main aim of the Republican Movement should be to 'strengthen the people's will to resist British Imperialism', that 'participation in the institutions designed to frustrate our people's progress to full freedom is certain to weaken that will to resist' and that it was necessary to 'build an alternative 32-County State structure which will draw off support from the existing British-imposed partition system within which our objectives are unattainable'.¹⁰⁹ These contemporary arguments against the recognition of an imperialist, partitionist framework were derived from a series of legitimising references to the body of the republican canon from Tone, Mitchel, Pearse and Brugha.¹¹⁰

If imperialism was initially characterized in rather traditional and nationalist terms-possibly to distinguish the Provisionals' position from that of the explicitly

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, the colonial analyses of the Northern Ireland state in *The United Irishman* January-March 1954 where explicit comparisons are made between colonial issues in Kenya and Cyprus, and Northern Ireland. The salience of this type of analysis for Irish nationalism generally is challenged by S.Howe, *Ireland and Empire; Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture*, Oxford 2000, Chapters 4 and 9.

¹⁰⁷ P.Flynn, 'What is Republicanism?', *An Phoblacht* October 11th 1980.

¹⁰⁸ Flynn, 'What is Republicanism?'.

¹⁰⁹ 'Attempt to take over the Republican Movement-Sinn Fein Statement', *An Phoblacht*, February 1970.

¹¹⁰ 'On this we stand-The Rock of the Republic', *An Phoblacht* February 1970.

revisionist Officials, then from the mid 1970s the Provisionals' analysis of British aims and strategy in Ireland was broadened and began to draw on some of the same strands of the republican socialist tradition that had allegedly influenced the Officials in the 1960s. This analytical shift was not simply an intellectual exercise or indeed a purely 'political' and strategic reorientation: it was intimately connected to an emerging ideological and factional power struggle within the Provisionals in the aftermath of the 1975 Truce and the negotiations with the British Government. The Provisional leadership had initially believed that the 1974-75 negotiations showed that the British wished to 'devise structures for disengagement from Ireland...' but as part of a diplomatic game during the discussions 'they [the British government] were giving the impression [about withdrawal] without confirming it.'¹¹¹

The ultimate failure of the Truce only strengthened the 'imperialist' analysis of British strategy in Northern Ireland and was to have a significant impact on the development of the military-political strategy of the 'Long War' which was first publicly enunciated in 1977.¹¹² The breakdown of the 'negotiations' and Britain's failure to initiate the expected withdrawal could perhaps have weakened this imperialist analysis just as easily as it strengthened it. During the 1960s and 1970s wherever post-colonial conflicts arose, British governments had tended not to intervene militarily, diplomacy being the preferred option. Britain's role in Zimbabwe and its facing down of Rhodesian 'kith and kin' during the Lancaster House process could have raised questions for republicans, suggesting that the relationship between Britain and, what republicans saw, as its oldest colony were not simply imperialistic.

As such both the Provisional analysis and the resulting military-political policy contained contradictions that not only reflected the theoretical and intellectual Limitations of the Republican tradition, but also the birth-marks of internal debate and the eclectic nature and influences on Provisionalism in this period. Despite these weaknesses an attempt was made to develop a comprehensive strategic approach grounded in an analysis of imperialism and using this analysis as an overarching framework for all aspects of Provisional practice.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Ruairi Ó Bradaigh, Interview with author, April 20th 2003.

¹¹² 'The Tasks Ahead' and 'Oration at Bodenstown Jimmy Drumm', *Republican News* June 18th 1977.

¹¹³ See, for example, P. Dowling, 'The British Presence, Partition and Protestant Privilege', *An Phoblacht* October 22nd 1981, 'Lessons of the Malvinas', *An Phoblacht* July 8th 1982 and J. Doyle, 'Facing Realities', *An Phoblacht* August 5th 1982.

The connections between the 'Long War' and an analysis of British Imperialism were further elaborated in a series of internal debates, articles, speeches and position papers which increasingly laid bare the implications of this analysis for various aspects of the Provisionals' military and political praxis. Questions were inevitably raised around issues such as the assessment of the development of unionism in the post –Sunningdale period, the nature of its relationship with Britain, the conduct of the 'Ulsterisation' security policy, the nature of British interests in Ireland in the context of the EEC and NATO, the strategic importance of an anti-war/troops out movement in Britain, the type of guerrilla war that should be waged, and, increasingly, the kind of electoral and 'mass politics' that should be deployed to support the 'Long War.' Within Provisional discourse of this period the definitions of Britain, England, British Imperialism and Colonialism were quite fluid and somewhat interchangeable. The elements frequently overlapped and were not usually part of a systematic theory, either of the British state and a definition of its historical and contemporary interests in Ireland as a whole or of imperialism as a system in general.

Neo-imperialism

The two boundaries of the discussion seemed to be a traditional nationalist assessment of Britain's oppressive, colonising role in Ireland and a more contemporary Marxian interpretation. This blended elements of economic, strategic, political, and cultural analyses of imperialism with a reading of British state strategies which adopted a *naïf* form of the Realist school of international relations. There is also a recognition that post 1945 geo-politics impinged on Ireland and that other neo-imperialisms and power structures such as the EEC, NATO and the United States had now to be factored into an assessment of British objectives and policies in an Irish context.¹¹⁴ Drawing on themes that had been raised initially by the Republican leadership in the 1960s this ideological framework was also significant in republican analyses of the neo-imperialism of the EEC, British views of partition as an economic obstruction for changing British and multinational capitalism and 'the full motivation behind today's

¹¹⁴ See, for example, 'Ag labhairt leis an Uachtaran', *IRIS* April 1981 where R.Ó Bradaigh discusses the concept of neo-colonisation, 'European –wide Platform against the EEC', *An Phoblacht* May 19th 1979 and 'IRA Statement-Early Stages of American Imperialist Involvement', *An Phoblacht* August 11th 1979 for examples of this wider definition of imperialism and bureaucratic capitalist structures.

cross-border co-operation, Dublin –London summits, Councils of Ireland and the like.¹¹⁵

The themes are consistent in both public and internal republican material: for example in sections of the Green Book, which has been described as ‘a cross between a political manifesto and a training manual’¹¹⁶, the discourse is historically conditioned and morally informed; one section is, for example, headed ‘Moral Superiority’.¹¹⁷ It describes an 800 year Irish resistance to the ‘British ruling class’ in the following terms:

Campaign after campaign, decade after decade, century after century, armies of resistance have fought and despite setbacks, slavery and famine, penal laws and murder, the will of the Irish people in their desire to cast off the chains of foreign occupation continue an unremitting and relentless war against enemy occupation¹¹⁸

In this Manichean schema an eternal and unchanging enemy—the British Ruling Class—is faced with an equally implacable ahistorical foe—the Irish People—‘whose stubborn confidence’ to overcome superior forces is ‘an immortal monument to their courage and to their belief in an eventual victory.’¹¹⁹ This creation of an ahistorical People and their antithetical Enemy, almost outside real time and space, is a pattern typical of all nationalist historiographies. Thus the flattening of real events makes the past contemporaneous and distorts the current motives and strategies of the actually existing ‘British ruling class’ by observing them through a teleologically grounded prism shaped by an invented tradition.¹²⁰

The balance between the different elements and themes within the discourse during 1977-1983 shifted over time reflecting the shifts within the leadership of the

¹¹⁵ G. Adams, ‘Sound Political Analysis’, *An Phoblacht*, December 16th 1982.

¹¹⁶ E. Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, London 2002, 154.

¹¹⁷ Sections from the Green Book in B. O’Brien, *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Féin 1985 to Today*, Dublin 1993, 289. The significance of the Green Book, both as a reflection of dominant Provisional ideology and as part of an educational process for shaping the ideas of Volunteers during induction is widely asserted, eg, Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, 154, O’Brien *The Long War*, 289 and English, *Armed Struggle: A History of the IRA*, Basingstoke 2003, 213. However another view is that the process of ‘Green Booking’ Volunteers was more concerned with anti-interrogation techniques and security issues and that the whole ‘Book’ was read to Volunteers to acquaint them with their duties and rights within the Movement, as it were. One former IRA member compared it to listening to health and safety instructions in a new job. Note of conversation with former IRA Volunteer, April 14th 2004.

¹¹⁸ O’Brien, *The Long War*, 289.

¹¹⁹ O’Brien, *The Long War*, 289.

¹²⁰ See Chapter IV on Provisional readings of history and O. Mac Donagh, *States of Mind: A Study of Anglo-Irish Conflict 1780-1980*, London 1983, 13.

Provisionals and the changing political –military terrain on which they were operating.¹²¹ Republican interpretations of British policy and the resulting adaptations to Provisional practice show marked swings as the Movement settled down to the ‘Long War.’ From a somewhat limited monocausal approach in the early seventies attempts were made to see British strategy in a total context drawing on the then fashionable Marxist and Leninist theories of imperialist and capitalist crisis. Still within an essentially colonial framework these analyses took an explanation of the policies of ‘Ulsterisation ‘ and ‘Normalisation’ as their starting points and explained them as part of a British policy to stabilise Northern Ireland by simultaneously marginalizing and ‘buying off’ a section of the Nationalist population. The IRA’s continuing campaign and the emerging polarisation and radicalisation caused by the H-Block protests, it was argued, would ultimately shift opinion within the British state-‘in the boardrooms, Cabinet and Army officers’ clubs’-so that a ‘combination of international opinion, economic pressure from international consortiums and the futility of its position will make at least a military withdrawal by Britain unavoidable...’¹²²

Theories of imperialist crisis and ‘real British interests’

The significance of this analysis is its wider contextualization within general theories of capitalist crisis which thus explains this external pressure on government policy, with the Northern Irish crisis being seen as central to the wider crisis of British society and European capitalism. Whilst imperialism could continue to exploit and oppress the Third World, it was argued, ‘explicit imperialist involvement within Western Europe...would be too blatant a sham of Western liberal democracy, which acts as the main safety valve in capitalist society...’¹²³ Although Britain considered a number of policy options, such as ‘six county independence’ and ‘power sharing’ the imperialist strategy is to be ‘...free of the constitutional headache of the North, while still being able to use it as a source of cheap imports and a market for British exports, and as an Atlantic base in the event of a ...conflict, or indeed in the event of a revolutionary

¹²¹ A view expressed by Tom Hartley, a leading Sinn Féin theorist who argued that this period illustrated Von Clausewitz’ dictum that ‘the strategy of one dictates the strategy of the other’. Quoted in English, *Armed Struggle*, 187.

¹²² ‘What kind of Withdrawal?’, *An Phoblacht* February 10th 1979. Significantly the phrase ‘within a short space of time’ which occurs in this passage was disputed by the editors, although the article was praised as ‘a useful contribution to our analysis of British strategy’.

¹²³ ‘What kind of Withdrawal?’.

socialist government in Ireland such as Sinn Féin aims to establish.’¹²⁴ British fears of the revolutionary potential of an independent Ireland, its impact on British geopolitical interests and its destabilising effect within the United Kingdom as a whole permeate this analysis. The ultimate neo-imperialist stabilisation strategy, republicans argued, would be some form of reunification-effectively the absorption of the North by the existing ‘puppet’ Southern state-as the best means to safeguard private enterprise, landed property, British state prestige and NATO and EEC interests.¹²⁵

These interests were considered permanent, in the sense of British *realpolitik*, for although changes of government might alter the emphasis, the essentially imperialistic character of British policy remained a normative constant in Provisional discourse.¹²⁶ Variations on the theme that ‘The British establishment is prepared to pay a high price for its continued domination of the six counties...continued control of Ireland is such a vital interest of the British State...’and that ‘the British establishment...remain determined to hang on to the six counties to protect their strategic interests’¹²⁷ were developed by reference to the need for political stability, the protection of British, European and American imperialist economic interests throughout Ireland and the revolutionary threat to capitalism if a united Irish working class were to be created by the ending of the ‘sectarian mechanism’ of partition.¹²⁸

Where distinctions were made between the operational approaches of Labour and Conservative governments, these were deemed the product of the parties’ differing relationship with the British establishment. Psychologically and historically the Conservatives had close links to Unionism, had a ‘continued taste for colonial rule’ and ‘continue to be born and bred in the traditions of the English aristocracy...[they] feel that they have a divine right to rule.’¹²⁹ Labour’s desire for respectability made them subservient to the establishment and anxious to carry out an objectively pro-imperialist policy.¹³⁰

For the Provisionals these distinctions were not academic becoming increasingly significant both in the development of the ‘Long War’s military strategy

¹²⁴ ‘What kind of Withdrawal?’

¹²⁵ ‘What kind of Withdrawal?’

¹²⁶ For example, K.Burke, ‘Shallowness of Fianna Fail republicanism exposed once again’, *An Phoblacht* October 11th 1980.

¹²⁷ ‘No Change’, *An Phoblacht* May 5th 1979.

¹²⁸ ‘No Change’.

¹²⁹ ‘No Change’.

¹³⁰ ‘No Change’.

and the Provisionals' political orientation towards Britain. This approach initially turned on the development of a 'mass' anti-war/troops out movement in Britain along the lines of the American anti-Vietnam war movement, but later evolved into a more 'diplomatically' focused approach targeted at the left wing of the Labour Party. It was hoped that the left might capture the party for 'troops out' and wield influence over what was seen throughout the eighties as the inevitably incoming Labour government. This shift was significant in indicating the beginnings of an underlying movement in the Provisionals' strategic calculus and political framework in the early 1980s.

Britain-the key to the Irish revolution

From the earliest period the Provisionals had been paying close attention to developments in Britain at both government and popular protest level, noting both calls for withdrawal from 'within British establishment circles [editorials in the *Daily Mirror* and a speech by Liberal M.P.Cyril Smith] 'and the 'building of a radical solidarity movement amongst activists of the far left.'¹³¹ However as the 'Long War' strategy was predicated on a British desire to remain in Northern Ireland the republican focus both militarily and politically was to undermine that will. These strategies [military offensive against the state and political approaches to the British Left] were designed to work in tandem. The British bombing campaign would not only weaken British determination to hold on to the North but, it was argued, both strengthen the cause of Irish independence and the struggle for socialist revolution in Britain by weakening imperialism. The debates within the British Left and sections of the Provisionals drew on arguments going back to Marx and Engels' analysis of the Chartists, the Repeal Movement and the Fenians. Consequently close attention was paid to building an anti-war movement in Britain; given that for many British-based revolutionary groups Ireland was the key to the British Revolution¹³² the features and letters pages of *An Phoblacht* between 1979-1982 often echoed the debates and polemical disputes within and between far left groups on Irish solidarity issues.¹³³ The

¹³¹ 'Success opens up new challenges', *An Phoblacht* January 27th 1979.

¹³² The title of a book that reflected the views of an active current of pro- Republican leftists. See D.Reed, *Ireland; the key to the British Revolution*, London 1984.

¹³³ See, for a small selection of examples, 'Revolutionary Cover Blown Away', *An Phoblacht* February 3rd 1979, 'Bombs in Britain-What kind of Solidarity Movement?' *An Phoblacht* May 12th 1979, 'Building an anti-war movement in Britain', *An Phoblacht* August 18th 1979, 'The anti-war movement in Britain', *An Phoblacht* February 9th 1980, 'Easter visit' (on letters page), *An Phoblacht* April 29th 1982, 'British Allies' (on letters page), *An Phoblacht* August 19th 1982.

traffic in ideas was bi-lateral; not only did many British leftists regard Ireland as a significant issue for their revolutionary project, but the emerging Provisional leadership also saw British developments as significant to their strategy and were influenced by some elements of leftist ideology and practice.¹³⁴

Initially the model of the anti- Vietnam War movement in the United States had influenced the Provisionals who believed a similar process could occur in Britain. The 'Long War' in Ireland and the bombing campaign in England would produce an unacceptable level of violence that would result in demoralisation within the British forces and government as well as war-weariness within the general British population who would then pressurise their government to withdraw from Ireland. However by the early 1980s this central part of the Long War strategy was open to challenge for a variety of reasons. The effective military stalemate and containment of the Provisional campaign in Northern Ireland was an obvious factor. However just as important politically was the failure to build an anti-war movement in Britain and to effect the demoralisation of British forces and public opinion, which republicans attributed to the professional nature of the British Army as opposed to the conscript nature of the American army in Vietnam.¹³⁵ In this sense Britain was the key to the Irish Revolution.

The other factors were explained by way of a reassessment of British motivation, strategy and policy in Ireland. For example, republicans realised that Britain had long ceased to profit economically from Northern Ireland, but her motives remained driven by 'political imperialism designed to ensure that the whole of Ireland remains politically stable and sympathetic to British interests...' According to this analysis:

The British know that the North is the key to political control of Ireland. They are aware of, and they fear, the socialist direction Ireland could take if it were free from imperialist bondage. They also fear the political repercussions in Britain which a defeat in Ireland would bring.

¹³⁴ Many British leftists visited Northern Ireland and contributed to the debates on Provisional strategy and tactics, both in their own newspapers and in the pages of *An Phoblacht*. Perhaps the most significant individual example of this ideological traffic was 'Peter Dowling' [a pseudonym for Phil Shimeld, a member of the International Marxist Group] who contributed articles to *An Phoblacht* which came to be regarded as authoritative statements of the Provisional position. Note of a conversation with Dr. Bob Purdie, former member of the International Marxist Group, April 18th 2004.

¹³⁵ P. Arnalis (Danny Morrison), 'Revolutionary Guerrilla War in Ireland Today', *An Phoblacht* May 17th 1980.

Quoting Conservative M.P. John Biggs –Davison-‘perhaps what is happening in Northern Ireland is a rehearsal for urban guerrilla warfare more widely in Europe, particularly in Britain’- this reassessment focused on the wider revolutionary implications of events in Northern Ireland that were now believed to influence British policy.¹³⁶

Diplomacy- talking to the Labour Left

The Falklands War contributed to this reappraisal, as did Mrs Thatcher’s election victory in 1983 and the failure of urban discontent and rioting in British cities in the early 1980s to begin a revolutionary transformation. The Provisionals’ own electoral successes in the Assembly elections 1982 and in West Belfast in the 1983 General Election may also have had some impact on the development of a new diplomatic orientation in their British strategy. The Provisionals were possibly becoming more aware of the need to apply greater pressure as the British government’s hand was strengthened in the wake of military success abroad and the defeat of opposition at home.

In this sense there was an emerging understanding by the early-1980s of republicanism’s own limitations and isolation in terms of military capability and revolutionary potential along with a more realistic assessment of the British position. However, the central themes of the Long War strategy were still considered to be relevant after the Falklands War demonstrated that the IRA could not militarily defeat the British in Northern Ireland and that, *a la* Vietnam, it was the political impact on British public opinion of the successful military and political actions of Irish Republicans ‘that would bring the struggle to remove British troops to a successful conclusion.’¹³⁷

There was also a nuanced Clausewitzian assessment of the balance between ‘objective factors’ of military and financial costs and the ‘subjective factors’ of government credibility and political will, especially in light of Mrs Thatcher’s perceived impregnability and the swing to the right within British society after the success of the Falklands campaign. Republicans believed this success had strengthened jingoism and ‘old fashioned gun-boat diplomacy’ at the expense of the

¹³⁶ P. Arnlis (Danny Morrison), ‘ Revolutionary Guerrilla War in Ireland Today’.

¹³⁷ P.Dowling, ‘Lessons of the Malvinas’, *An Phoblacht* July 8th 1982.

alleged neo-colonial policies of the Foreign Office ‘bright boys who favoured handing over colonies to the locals in the interests of political stability and capitalist prosperity.’¹³⁸

The contacts between Sinn Féin and the Labour Left were to have ideological as well as political significance for the republican movement. Calls for a revolutionary alliance that allegedly emulated the United Irishmen in linking the ‘oppressed black community’ and other revolutionary elements within the British working class to the republican movement still occasionally featured in the letters page of *An Phoblacht*.¹³⁹ However from the autumn of 1982 the focus was on discussions between ‘elected representatives’ from Belfast and London, visits to the GLC, fringe meetings at the Labour Party conference and talks at the Commons with sympathetic MPs. In these contacts Sinn Féin Councillors, Assembly members and MPs refer to the positive aspects of the British socialist and Labour tradition, the then fashionable discourse of community empowerment and local government socialism; whilst still defending the ‘armed struggle’ as legitimate resistance, the republican representatives also pointedly refer to the electoral mandate they have received. The community politics discernible within the emerging electoral strategy of Sinn Féin was later to resonate with the politics, discourse and style of Livingstone’s GLC.¹⁴⁰

Identity politics and anti-imperialism

In addition to the explicitly political themes of anti –imperialism, issues of cultural identity also start to assume some significance in republican discourse. There is a strong case that the dominant elements in traditional republican analyses were grounded in a discursive framework that emphasised normative values of democratic self-determination for the Irish nation against a perceived British imperialism.¹⁴¹ Themes of cultural and ethnic identity, and the tensions between civic conceptions of nationality and the ethno-cultural definitions of Irishness have, of course, been present throughout the history of modern Irish nationalism and

¹³⁸ Dowling, ‘Lessons of the Malvinas’.

¹³⁹ For example, ‘Hanging on’-Mala Poist, *An Phoblacht*, March 17th 1983, which criticises Ken Livingstone’s analysis of Conservative policy in Northern Ireland as an oversimplification because of his emphasis on the value of Unionist parliamentary support for the Conservatives.

¹⁴⁰ See ‘From Invitation to Exclusion’, *An Phoblacht* December 9th 1982, ‘Belfast Welcome for GLC Leader’ and ‘Interview with Ken Livingstone’, *An Phoblacht* March 3rd 1983, ‘Sinn Féin in London’, *An Phoblacht* July 28th 1983 and ‘Sinn Féin at Brighton Conference’, *An Phoblacht* October 6th 1983.

¹⁴¹ Bourke, R., *Peace in Ireland: The War of Ideas*, London 2003, 1-20.

republicanism since the eighteenth century. These ethno-cultural definitions of nationality were a significant subsoil that combined with Catholicism to provide an essentialist language and ideological framework for an apparently secular, civic political project. These 'unspoken assumptions' frequently had a view of Irishness that counterposed Gaelic, Catholic, traditional, rural, organic, spiritual, communal, and anti-modern against Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, modern, urban, capitalistic, materialistic and individualistic values.¹⁴²

These elements within the pre-existing nationalist discourse could be deployed within a new discourse of identity and cultural struggle. Initially the old tropes of Gaelicism and Catholicism appeared to be simply writ large in modern garb to supposedly supplement republicanism's political language and normative frameworks of nation, state, democracy, self-determination and anti-imperialism. But increasingly during the late 1980s these old discursive fields were absorbed and then replaced with new concepts of identity and culture which were rooted in fundamentally different conceptions of the very nature of the political itself. This superstructural shift reflected a fundamental movement in the bases of Provisional and other radical political projects during this period which indicated a growing sense of the diminished scope and perceived limitations of political action and subjective agency in history.

Coalitions of the oppressed

In this outline the aim is to indicate some of the origins of this development within the early Provisional discussion of cultural identity and the nationalist resistance to cultural imperialism. The starting point is the Irish republican identification of its struggle against Britain with the anti-imperialist national liberation movements of the Third World. This identification, as we have seen, was clearly grounded within republican (and, indeed, the broader Nationalist) tradition and readings of Irish history as well as contemporary republican analyses of the imperialist nature of conflict in Northern Ireland. Culturally there were good reasons to define the struggle in anti-colonial terms. But there were even better pragmatic and ideological reasons to do so in the context of the politics and society of the post-war

¹⁴² There is an extensive literature on the significance of these themes in Irish history and politics. S. Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture*, Oxford 2000 has a stimulating summary of the main arguments, especially in terms of contemporary post-colonial theory in Chapter 7.

world-the era of decolonisation and the victories of national liberation against the metropolitan powers.

While a range of evidence exists to illustrate this influence the exact balance and a structured causal relationship is less capable of definition. Media images of the war in Vietnam, Black civil rights in the United States and the *zeitgeist* of the 'swinging sixties' are frequently mentioned by republicans as having influenced their worldviews during this period. The style and approach of the early Civil Rights movement clearly owed a great deal to student movements and radical politics in Europe and North America.¹⁴³ The identification by republicans with oppressed peoples and their successful struggles reflected these moods and could be shown to have valid precedents in Ireland's history of struggle against British colonial rule. This historically informed approach was quite widely adopted throughout nationalist Ireland and was reflected in an 'official' sympathy for Third world causes.¹⁴⁴ This approach was very much in tune with a fashionable 'Third Worldism' which believed that causes lost or at best delayed in Europe and North America could be won in the Third World and that Ireland occupied a unique colonial –post –colonial position.¹⁴⁵ This identification was further reinforced for the Provisionals by their study of guerrilla wars and related political struggles in Vietnam, Cuba, China, Portugal and Algeria. Attempts were made to apply their lessons to the Irish context and this was reflected in the discursive frames and even language of Provisional Republicanism. Sections of the Green Book dealing with the activity of fighters as political cadres appear to be drawn from Mao's theories of guerrilla war, whilst the Long War reflects ideas of 'protracted peoples war' developed by Mao and the Vietnamese general Giap.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Interviews with Danny Morrison, January 5th 2004 and Tommy McKearney May 30th 1998: see also B.Devlin *The Price of My Soul*, London 1969; contemporary press coverage in Britain tended to assess aspects of the civil rights movement in terms of New Left student movements in Europe and North America.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, C.C.O'Brien, *Memoir: MyLife and Times*, Dublin 1998, Chapters 7 and 8 on Ireland's role in the United Nations in the 1950s and early 1960s.

¹⁴⁵ See C.Coulter, *Ireland; Between the First and the Third Worlds*, Dublin 1990 which was followed by a discussion in *The Irish Times* and elsewhere on the question-Is Ireland a Third World Country? Whatever the answer the fact that the question could be posed is indicative of a certain attitude. The reference to 'lost causes' is from E.P.Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Harmondsworth 1980, 12. The sentiment reflected a popular view amongst sections of the radical left in the late sixties.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Tommy McKearney May 30th 1998. There were also frequent articles in *An Phoblacht* on revolutionary guerrilla war e.g. series of articles on Cuba, China, Vietnam and Nicaragua, *An Phoblacht* February –March 1980. The introduction to each argued that 'Irish Republicans can learn and

Resolutions of solidarity, fraternal delegations and other more direct, material assistance reinforced this identification and influenced Provisional ideology and strategy.¹⁴⁷ This in turn reflected the limited nature of Republicanism's theoretical development and political tradition which could be pulled by the attractive force of guerrillaism and yet in turn related back to some of the dominant tropes of Irish nationalism and historical Catholicism. Even within Europe, these patterns of thought could be operative in explaining opposition to the bureaucratic, capitalist EEC by the small nations of Europe. The defence of the small nation could be couched both in leftist anti-capitalist terms, but also as part of an anti-modernist and traditional defence of organic, essentialist nationality against the standardising juggernaut of a multinational capitalism that obliterates marginal languages, cultures, economies, and ways of life in the name of progress.

An example of how these themes could be brought together can be seen in an interview with an American Indian Activist, Wally Feather, published in *An Phoblacht* in 1981

Listening to Wally Feather...who visited Ireland recently to lend his support to the H-Block campaign is almost like listening to a potted history of Ireland...[His] description of the plight of his own people parallels that which has befallen the Irish nation and indeed oppressed peoples throughout the world at the hands of colonial regimes....**Recognition is half the battle of liberation** [my emphasis].¹⁴⁸

Cultural anti-imperialism

The confluence of these ideas of anti-imperialist cultural resistance and traditional Irish nationalism was effected through discussion of Irish language and cultural politics and the application of the theories of Frantz Fanon and other anti-colonial Third World writers, such as Paolo Freire to Irish politics. In these readings liberation was as much a cultural act as a military-political process. Indeed it might be argued that an individual emancipation from the dominant culture of colonialism had to precede the struggle for collective liberation; culture, in this sense almost becomes an

draw inspiration for our own struggle 'from these successful cases that show 'ever struggle for national liberation and socialism has involved armed struggle'.

¹⁴⁷ For example the speech by Portuguese revolutionary General Otelo de Carvalho at Sinn Féin's 1980 Ard Fheis, lists of solidarity greetings and fraternal delegates from Western Europe and North America and regular articles in republican publications on foreign struggles and international issues.

¹⁴⁸ Interview in *An Phoblacht* August 29 1981 with Danny Morrison: note the way Ireland's fate befalls it as a victim of powerful external forces along with the fashionable adoption of the American Indian cause.

act of will. For example, in an article entitled, 'Shame' which was part of a regular *Dúchas* series, Deasun Breatnach argued that the use of the Irish form of surnames was part of the liberation struggle:

Our greatest enemies are within ourselves. Conquer them and we can reconquer Ireland with very little effort. One of our greatest enemies within ourselves is a false sense of shame. Let us begin the work of liberation in ourselves, deciding on our identity, naming ourselves in a way those ancestors of ours would have had it, who knew freedom more than 800 years ago.¹⁴⁹

Provisional republicans also drew on the intellectual resources of non-Irish anti-colonialist cultural theorists who were in the 1980s and 1990s to be intellectually influential internationally in post-colonial and subaltern studies theory.

The imprint of Fanon has been detected in much Provisional thought: direct reference was especially marked in educational and ideological material produced in LongKesh.¹⁵⁰ A good example is a comparative assessment of Fanon's work by Richard McAuley which stressed the way the 'the colonisers try to legitimate their occupation on the basis that the colonised are an 'inferior race.' Amongst the 'useful comparisons' that are noted are that 'the colonial power's prime necessity is the enslavement, in the strictest sense, of the native population' and that to achieve this McAuley suggested that Fanon argued that 'its systems of reference have to be broken. Expropriation, spoliation, raids, objective murder are matched by the sacking of cultural patterns.' The imitation of the coloniser, as a supposed superior race explains 'attitudes in the Free State today'. Other aspects of Fanon's work are quoted to support analyses of British political, social and economic strategy: for example,

Aided by, and manipulating official collaborators such as the SDLP the colonists portray the political problem they have created as being, for tactical reasons purely social and economic. Thus in the North the Brits provide

¹⁴⁹ D. Breatnach, 'Shame', *An Phoblacht* February 21st 1981. Breatnach's regular historical column developed similar themes in relation to culture, law and the 'Irish Way of life'. He edited the paper 1975-1979. The general framework of his thought echoes that of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Gaelic Revival and the Self Reliance of Sinn Fein in that period. For a critique of this position which has a contemporary resonance see M. Goldring, *Faith of our fathers: the formation of Irish nationalist ideology 1890-1920*, Dublin 1987.

¹⁵⁰ For example, see *Iris Bheag* and the accounts of the 'Frelimo' prison structures that developed 'communes' within the wings as a means of liberation within the framework of a gaol! These issues are discussed in detail in an untitled Republican prisoners' document on 'gaol history' (in author's possession). Freire's work on education as liberation was also clearly influential within the prisons, and so, indirectly on the Movement's thought and practice outside, if only in terms of rhetoric and language.

leisure centres and job centres, but few jobs...But ...we see another facet of the imperialist 'problem': armed military repression.¹⁵¹

Other facets of this discourse of cultural anti-colonialism were reflected in reviews where they frequently merged with more traditional cultural attitudes. An interesting correspondence followed criticism of James Joyce as a 'man whose confused intellectual fantasying caused him to reject his native land' and that:

republicans and those concerned with **our national culture**[my emphasis]have little reason to cherish [his] memory...Maybe Joyce did hate the British establishment in Ireland, but to conceal his cowardice he set himself up as a wise man who knew more about the world than the revolutionaries who fought against the British....¹⁵²

A defender of Joyce drew on post-colonial theory in his defence of the writer and not only showed the tensions within that discursive framework, but also how it could be used to subvert and then conscript critical culture to the national cause. He argued that Joyce,

...through his characteristically **Celtic, universal outlook** he made a vast contribution to perpetuating Ireland's **profound and massive cultural difference** from the land and the people in whose tongue he wrote most of his work...he made his Dublin into our universe[my emphasis]...Joyce was the contemporary of men whom in retrospect we see more and more to have been giants... This paradox of Ireland, retrograde yet in advance of the rest of the world in vision and capacity for action, has been noted by some. To reject Joyce is therefore to reject one of the columns of modern Ireland.¹⁵³

This Fanonist approach was also evident in republican analyses of political events and Provisional critiques of the political discourse that stressed the internal nature of the conflict in the North. The themes of the 'Two traditions' and the need for accommodation which had become a significant discourse in the period 1974-1982 and indeed was to be absorbed into the thinking and politics of Sinn Féin from the late 1980s were initially subject to severe polemical attack in Fanonist terms as a product of 'a slave mentality.' Garret Fitzgerald's Dimpleby Lecture May 1982 was described as 'pseudo-intellectual claptrap':

¹⁵¹ R. McAuley, 'Insight into Imperialism', *An Phoblacht* September 13th 1980.

¹⁵² C.O Muiri, 'James Joyce', *Mala Poist*, *An Phoblacht* March 11th 1982.

¹⁵³ F.O'Sullivan, 'Joyce', *Mala Poist An Phoblacht*, April 15th 1982.

His mentality is a regrettable tribute to, but logical outcome of, centuries of cultural attacks by the British on the Irish. The slave apologises to his master...He desperately, but unsuccessfully, tries to prove himself through over-enthusiastic acceptance of his master's values.¹⁵⁴

The republican response to Fitzgerald's argument about the complexities of identity is to counter a cultural argument with a political analysis that the conflict is a clear case of colonialism and institutionalised discrimination and privilege. Continuing in this Fanonist vein the point is made that

...he is deliberately obscuring the real issue... The grovelling Fitzgerald praises his masters for the great virtues of the British democratic tradition that we have been glad to inherit while British democracy grows out of the barrel of a plastic bullet gun?¹⁵⁵

Realism and Identity

The focus in the Provisional discussion on the nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland was rooted in an eclectic mixture of 'realistic' assessments of political power and Marxist analyses of the determining relationship of economic-political base and ideological superstructure. The argument that the conflict was between identities and traditions was dismissed as obscuring the real issues of imperialist power and mistaking symptoms for underlying causes

The state of republican thinking was indicated by a polemical controversy in 1976 between *Republican News* and 'Freeman' around the issue of an independent Northern Ireland. 'Freeman' had considered that 'an independent Northern Ireland was well worth thinking about' in terms which were shaped by what came to be described as an internal conflict framework. The essence of his argument appeared to be that the root of the conflict was a clash of identities within Ulster, thus questioning the relevance of the all-Ireland context and anti-imperialist framework that republicans had traditionally used. Given the significance of this type of analysis in

¹⁵⁴ P.Dowling, 'Distorted Vision', *An Phoblacht* May 27th 1982.

¹⁵⁵ Dowling, 'Distorted Vision'.

the later development of republican politics the debate around Freeman's ideas is worth considering in some detail.¹⁵⁶

He argued that the northern republican struggle has been concerned with 'freedom from English rule, recognition of nationality and the right to cultivate and display Irishness' alongside 'substantial control of those parts of the Northeast where Catholics are in a clear majority and equality of treatment for Catholic communities with Protestant communities.' The answer to the conflict could be guaranteed by changes to the constitution, laws courts and local government system which recognise that '...Northern Ireland contains people of Irish nationality', although Freeman's approach also recognised the importance of the 'political will and behaviour of the Ulster British majority' for any future political settlement which he situated within the federalist context of Éire Nua.¹⁵⁷

The critique of this position is indicative of the patterns of republican politics. Denouncing the internal conflict perspective as partitionist, an oversimplification influenced by the SDLP and British interpretations of the conflict, *Republican News* summed up the issues at stake in the following terms:

...[The aims of the struggle are not sectional], but the socialist republic which will be achieved through class struggle. This is a contestation for political power and its justification lies not in the sectional ill treatment of the northern nationalist population, but in the illegitimacy of partition and British imperialist control...¹⁵⁸

The argument for an autonomous thirty- two county Ireland is couched in democratic terms, which are not dependent on either the political goodwill of the Unionist majority or of recognition of Irishness and cultural-identity claims. Indeed issues of identity and equality are dismissively swept aside:

...he hasn't a clue of what we're at [since all Irish Republicans in the country KNOW their Irish and aren't going to preoccupy themselves in a wasteful demand] and...he equates **existence** under the Free State regime as concomitant to Irish national recognition [my emphasis].¹⁵⁹ Volunteers aren't just fighting for Ardoyne. Volunteers throughout the north aren't just fighting for the north. Their struggle is

¹⁵⁶ Freeman has been identified with Desmond Fennell, who has written extensively on the nature of Irish identity and attacked the so-called revisionist analysis of history and cultural identity.

¹⁵⁷ 'Talk of an independent North', *An Phoblacht* 25th June 1976.

¹⁵⁸ 'Freeman hasn't a clue', *Republican News* 31st July 1976

significant, noble and revolutionary because they are motivated for the working –class people of all Ireland. Cork and Kerry are as important as Crossmaglen.¹⁵⁹

In the republican schema the root of the conflict is British imperialist control of the whole island and an analysis that limits itself to the north is misleading and obscures the true nature of the war. In this reading the ‘Free State’ is as much part of the problem as the northern statelet and the struggle in the south is inextricably linked to the conflict in the north. Above all events since 1968, according to this revolutionary scenario, have taken on broader implications and make the possibilities of an all-Ireland struggle much more realistic. It was argued that:

We cannot really expect republicans from, for example, Wexford or Galway, to come North to shoot Brits on the Falls Road. That is for republicans from the Falls to do: but we can expect them to go on active service in their own areas, in Galway or Wexford, showing a lead to people and linking the local problems where they belong at the government’s door and as part of the National Question. We can expect them to agitate and link their agitation because we are intent on establishing a new society in Ireland and because we want a socialist republic, not a thirty-two county Free State.¹⁶⁰

This definition of the nation was significant because it situated the unionists within the nation in a particular way and clearly indicated the underlying national-democratic assumptions that justified republican politics. In many instances a specific unionist identity was simply ignored or subsumed under the general heading of British imperialism or collaborators; the territorial –democratic definition of the nation was deemed the main determinant of nationality and assumed an automatic relationship between population and Irishness. However elements of sectarian identification did coincide and grasp towards the very identity politics and ethnic nationalist definitions that the dominant civic nationalist trope of the democratically defined nation sundered by British Imperialism denied.

If we find a section giving allegiance to an external power...as they have been doing down through the centuries, then I propose that we should debate our acceptance of them as children of the nation...Is it good enough to take nationality as a reflection of where you and your direct relatives were born or should it be based on political allegiance? Even if you are born on Irish soil, you still have to choose your country of allegiance. If your loyalty lies outside the national interest then you should leave for the country of your allegiance.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Freeman’s Views completely unacceptable to Republican News’, *Republican News* 3rd July 1976.

¹⁶⁰ ‘Freeman hasn’t a clue’.

Free Stateism and loyalism travel a similar road—they subvert the national status as a unitary body and perpetuate sectarianism and injustice to maintain their own sectional... interests... You can't sectionalise democracy—it must be power to the people as a whole. You can't be Irish and serve the forces, which perpetuate division, be they Free Stateism or loyalism.¹⁶¹

The underlying assumption of this argument was that the natural unit for the exercise of political democracy was the historic Irish nation and that unionism was an allegiance to another country not an expression of a legitimate identity within the nation. Indeed the removal of disloyal elements from the nation is posed. Unionism in this period was defined primarily as a political entity; indeed given the interlocking nature of the republican worldview it could be little else. An acknowledgement of the legitimacy of unionism either politically or more significantly as a specific identity would undermine the whole rationale of the republican war in the north: either rendering it a sectarian struggle to crush unionism or a misdirected and futile attempt at unification that ignored the underlying and essential nature of Unionist resistance. In the post –Sunningdale period there was an apparently *realpolitisch* approach that focused on the strength of ‘paramilitary right-wing’ resistance which was held to be the decisive factor over and above the unionist numerical majority or the necessity for unionist consent, whilst ‘the sated middle classes would accept our victory in the expectation of prosperity.’¹⁶²

The relative consistency of this approach can be seen in the Provisionals’ response to some of the more pluralistic elements in the New Ireland Forum and the strengthening discourse of identity that was emerging both from within the northern nationalist community¹⁶³ and from southern politicians, such as Garret Fitzgerald. Unionism, accordingly, is interpreted in political terms as a ‘racist and imperialist ideology, which sets British above Irish...and [justifies the]...oppression of half a million nationalists.’¹⁶⁴ Attempts to understand the ‘unionist ethos’ and to define the conflict as one grounded in ‘different heritages and different identities’ were regarded as ludicrous and a product of self –delusion.¹⁶⁵ Cahal Daly’s definition of unionism in cultural terms and his recognition of it as an ‘intrinsic, rightful and legitimate

¹⁶¹ ‘Nationality’ letter in *An Phoblacht* October 28th 1982.

¹⁶² ‘Freeman hasn’t a clue’.

¹⁶³ For example, see Bishop Cahal Daly’s speech in St Anne’s Cathedral, Belfast, ‘Bishop Daly urges acceptance of two identities in North’, *Irish Times* March 23rd 1983.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Constitutional manoeuvres in the dark’, *An Phoblacht* August 25th 1983.

¹⁶⁵ ‘Constitutional manoeuvres in the dark’.

component of Northern Ireland and Irish reality' is sweepingly dismissed as an expression of double standards lacking any sense of engagement with political reality or the underlying historical narrative of British domination of Ireland.¹⁶⁶ Unionism is defined as a *political* entity and as such is the antithesis of republicanism.

Defining the nation: defining Unionism

In assessing the ideological and political development of the Provisionals the movement's analysis of the politics and indeed the nature of the Unionist population is of major significance. In general, this republican discussion was based within the modernist discourse of the nation and the progressive conceptions of self determination and political democracy. Within this dominant nationalist frame Unionism had no independent existence, either politically or as a social force, as it was considered within the ambit of British Imperialism in a colonial context. The suspension of Stormont and Direct Rule strengthened this tendency within republican thought to focus on the connection with England, but the emergence of Loyalist paramilitarism and the Ulster Worker's Council strike against Sunningdale did explicitly challenge these assessments. In particular these events raised issues concerning both the historical and contemporary relationship between British imperialism and Unionism, the degree of relative and absolute autonomy that Unionism enjoyed and how much of an obstacle Unionism and the Unionist population posed to the reunification project.

There were three, frequently contradictory but coexisting and overlapping elements within Provisional analyses of unionism. As with other ideological and strategic themes these elements reflected the wider forces that had shaped Provisionalism from its founding moment. Provisional Republicanism from its very inception had been a somewhat unstable coalition of disparate and potentially mutually hostile forces. It is too simplistic to categorise these tendencies as hawks and doves, Northerners and Southerners, Sixty-niners and forties men, traditionalists and modernisers, but perhaps a key distinction was around the issue of defence and the experience of 1968-70 which gave those from particular parts of 'the war zone' a harder, urban edge.

¹⁶⁶ 'Bishop defends Unionism', *An Phoblacht* July 7th 1983.

The first theme was a Catholic Defenderist¹⁶⁷ consciousness, which was frequently linked to personal experience and a heightened sense of place and communal and ghetto identity which could be translated into a Defenderist or, in extreme cases Catholic sectarianism, that might underpin any political –military analysis. The founding statement of the Provisionals stresses the importance of defence; the Provisionals reclamation of that traditional role by the summer of 1970 of the IRA as ghetto defenders has been frequently cited as a significant factor in their growth.¹⁶⁸

Many Provisionals were aware of these elements and considered sectarianism to be a danger to what they saw as the unifying aims of the republican project. During the 1974 –6 Truce period a number of IRA operations were criticised within the movement as being explicitly sectarian and although these attacks and the spiral of sectarianism was often attributed to agent provocateurs and a deliberate British counter –insurgency strategy to encourage sectarianism, there was also a recognition of a degree of sectarianism within the Belfast Brigade leadership.¹⁶⁹ These sectarian attitudes were undoubtedly present at all levels of the movement, but it is hard to measure their direct impact on the ideology and strategy of the Provisionals.

The stated Provisional position, especially emphasised at the annual pilgrimage to Bodenstown, was that republicanism was secular and non-sectarian, that many of the founding fathers of the movement were Protestants, that sectarianism was a poison introduced by the British as part of a strategy of divide and rule and that attacks on the RUC and UDR were on British colonial forces, not Protestants as such.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore the Catholic hierarchy was seen as a traditional enemy of the Republican movement and an ally of conservatism and the status quo in Ireland. Thus there was no simple equation between Provisionalism and Catholic sectarianism, or a

¹⁶⁷ For discussions on the historical nature of Defenderism see M.Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster; A History* 244-9. S. Cronin, *Irish Nationalism: A history of its ideology and roots*, New York 1980, 209 makes a contemporary link to Defenderism, the nature of northern Catholicism and traditional role of IRA.

¹⁶⁸ Interviews with Mickey McMullen April 13th 1998, Brendan Hughes August 10th 1998 and Tony Catney, April 15th 1998.

¹⁶⁹ Interviews with Mickey McMullen April 13th 1998, Brendan Hughes August 10th 1998 and Tony Catney, April 15th 1998. The principled attacks on sectarianism were also felicitously coincidental with the factional interests of the Adams group in seeking to undermine Billy McKee and the existing, allegedly Catholic –dominated Belfast Brigade leadership: Danny Morrison’s criticism of *Republican News* editor Sean McCaughey’s Catholic sectarianism and editorial attack on contraception in the paper [1974?] and his recollection of internal debate on the saying of the rosary at republican commemorations point to the varying degrees of Catholic popular culture within the Provisionals. Interview with Danny Morrison January 5th 2004.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Tommy McKearney May 30th 1998.

clear pattern in its influence on Provisional analyses of unionism. Explicitly sectarian attitudes rarely surfaced in the public position, but are important in understanding the ideological framework of republican analyses of unionism.¹⁷¹

Unionist autonomy

The second element was a fundamental ambiguity within republican discourse on the nature of unionism and its relationship with British imperialism, especially around themes of relative and absolute autonomy. This discursive frame drew heavily on a reductionist Marxism and a simple model of base/superstructure. The overriding theme within the analysis during this period was that Unionism and Colonialism were intimately and inextricably linked. It has often been argued that republican analyses ignored the complexities of unionism and treated the Unionist population as a non-people.¹⁷² By emphasising the Anglo-Irish context of the conflict republicans relegated unionists to the role of minor actors misled by the occupying power. They were seen as political collaborators, adjuncts to the central conflict between Britain and Ireland rather than as an autonomous group with their own interests, identity and politics. Ireland's divisions had been imposed by Britain.

The Unionist identity and culture were reactionary, unbalanced and distorted. They drew strength from the reality of British power and from a false consciousness that rested on the relatively privileged position of the Protestant labour aristocracy. To republicans the history of unionism and the unionist state illustrated this dependent character. One of the rhetorical starting points for this analysis was Tone's oft-quoted statement on breaking the connection with England¹⁷³ and an historical account of the relationship between Unionism and the British state.

In some readings of the history of unionism sectarianism was seen as an independent factor that historically had actually acted within and for itself: 'it was the

¹⁷¹ Interview with Danny Morrison January 5th 2004 where he discussed the importance of Catholicism as a popular culture and influence.

¹⁷² Tom Hartley quoted in English, *Armed Struggle: A History of the IRA*, 312.

¹⁷³ 'To subvert the tyranny of our execrable Government, to break the connection with England, the never-failing source of all our political woes, and to assert the independence of my country-these were my objects. To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter-these were my means'. *The Autobiography of Wolfe Tone*. Note the relationship and schematic order of objects and means in the statement and contrast it with the following republican pattern: 'Sectarianism cannot be ended by nibbling away at its political manifestations, only by ending its political causes. Real unity between our people can only be achieved after re-unification'. M.McClelland 'Bodenstown Commemoration 1980', *An Phoblacht* June 28th 1980. See also M.Elliott, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence*, Yale 1989, 134-151 for the eighteenth century context.

Orange Order (not the bosses) which took the initiative of intimidating Catholics out of the workplaces' during tense sectarian periods in the late nineteenth century one republican historical analysis argued.¹⁷⁴ However the opposition to Home Rule was characterised as an alliance between the 'selfish political interests of the Tories and the ignorance of Orangism'; the Tories drew on 'the vast sectarian cesspool of Orange bigotry', instigated a counter-revolutionary movement to defend aristocratic privilege in Britain and used Ulster unionism as the ideological link in Ireland, which the Tories needed.

The partition of Ireland and the creation of 'the Orange State' merely institutionalised the 'mindless sectarianism' which had been whipped up in the process, the argument continued. The Orange Order 'has always provided the sectarian backbone of the Northern State' and the Protestant working class had to be supplied with a bogus reason for opposing Home Rule and independence beyond the labour aristocratic status of a minority: 'anti Home Rule hysteria embraced all loyalists equally...' it was concluded.¹⁷⁵

Frankensteins and false consciousness

The historical framework for this analysis drew on ideas of false consciousness, the Frankenstein analogy and a history of imperialist manipulation. The Frankenstein analogy reflects both the strengths and weakness of the assessment. In one sense Unionism was seen as the product and historical creation of British rule-the monster created by Frankenstein, but was also a force that is now either straining at the leash or is actually out of control. This analysis appeared to argue that there was a structural imperative in British policy to re-establish Stormont and 'loyalist power.'¹⁷⁶

Since 1974 British policy has steadily... drifted along the Orange way. Ulsterisation of the war...has been increasingly satisfactory from a loyalist viewpoint...This Orange drift...flows remorselessly on, irrespective of which party is in power in Westminster... The Brits, as always, remain extremely conscious that Orangism is an important reactionary bulwark against the revolutionary threat of republicanism.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴The following quotations are taken from Sinn Féin educational material (undated-circa 1981?).

¹⁷⁵ *Sinn Féin Educational Programme* (undated-circa 1981?) The term 'Loyalist' was used generally to define the unionist population at this point: the later distinctions within unionist politics were not made using this label in the early 1980s.

¹⁷⁶ P.Dowling, 'Stormont without security', *An Phoblacht* January 19th 1980. Also note the lurid use of Frankenstein phraseology in the article.

¹⁷⁷ Dowling, 'Stormont without security'.

This analysis also made limited distinctions between the forces operating within unionism. It was an undifferentiated 'unionism' that demonstrated 'its ugly sectarian face to the world in its determination to preserve its 60-year old ascendancy.' The failure of the liberal unionism of O'Neill and Faulkner was ascribed to the rightward drift of Unionism and the failure of Britain to get 'their own creation to budge.' The central analytical dilemma can be seen here in this assessment of contemporary unionism:

It would be wrong...to conclude...that modern loyalism has somehow developed an independence from British control and direction...Britain's differences with the loyalists, though serious, are tactical ones within the framework of broad political and military cooperation.¹⁷⁸

Another pattern of thought was derived from the Connollyite and republican socialist tradition which considered the relationship between national and social liberation as a means of understanding the past, present and future role of the Unionist population in Northern Ireland. Other elements of this tradition focussed on the progressive nature of nationalism and the revolutionary implications of the demand for self-determination, both in an historically schematic sense and in contemporary terms as a means to undermine capitalism and imperialism. When linked to other aspects of the leftist anti-colonialist agenda the unionists were defined as either a labour aristocratic stratum or as colons comparable to the Algerian *pied noirs* .¹⁷⁹ In practice republicans did recognise a considerable degree of autonomy and the potential for independent action by unionists; their analysis of unionism was more sophisticated and nuanced than some of their balder comments would suggest.

The colon and labour aristocratic thesis actually emphasised the degree of independence enjoyed by unionism, although in the last analysis it was dependent on the partnership with Britain. 'Popular unionist bigotry', as evidenced by the Ulster Worker's Council strike was strong, but its roots were in its desire to maintain its marginal privileges, it was suggested:

¹⁷⁸P.Dowling, 'Stormont without security'.

¹⁷⁹M. Farrell's *Northern Ireland: The Orange State*, London 1980 was influential in popularising the terminology within Provisionalism. See, for example, R. McAuley, 'The Orange State' *An Phoblacht* July 19th 1980.

Loyalist sectarian privilege is guaranteed by the continued existence of the six-county statelet... which in turn is guaranteed by the British. So the loyalists have always viewed the British as their benefactors in that it is the British who have guaranteed Protestant privilege. But in so far as the British have tried to reform the Orange... state and to erode loyalist privilege, the loyalists now resent British interference...¹⁸⁰

This also resulted in an unstable relationship with Britain that could be strategically and tactically exploited by the republican movement. For example aspects of the IRA's initial campaign in the spring of 1971 had been designed to provoke a political response from the unionist population that would result in Stormont introducing internment earlier before the RUC and British Army had built up an accurate and potentially damaging level of intelligence on the Provisionals. Likewise throughout the late 1970s the IRA's campaign continued to have a political agenda directed towards unionism: building on an analysis of the tensions and divisions within Unionism. The bombing campaign was designed to:

exacerbate these differences, to weaken their resolve and to heighten the sense of political crisis. Every sign of British weakness encourages different strands of loyalism to experiment with integration, six county independence or a return to Stormont as the best means of preventing the Irish people's right to self-determination from being realised.¹⁸¹

The irreformability of the northern state was encapsulated in this relationship between unionism and the British state. Britain could not structurally confront loyalism for the pragmatic reasons that they both 'safeguard British economic and political interests within the six counties'¹⁸² and

Loyalism is a decisive divisive instrument in their control of the while of Ireland. For propaganda purpose they mainly justify their presence through its presence; to smash it would be to jeopardise their own continued rule and interests.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰P. Dowling, 'Preserving Privilege', *An Phoblacht* February 17th 1979.

¹⁸¹'Armed with the facts', *An Phoblacht* April 7th 1979.

¹⁸²Dowling, 'Preserving Privilege'.

¹⁸³Dowling, 'Preserving Privilege'.

Parasites in the nest

Unionism's relationship with Britain was intimate and structural, historically based and determined as a means of:

dividing the working class and maintaining British rule. It was expressed symbiotically. Loyalism and its sectarian divisions sustain British power, the British presence perpetuates sectarianism. Each feeds off the other-**sinister parasites in our land** [my emphasis].¹⁸⁴

Provisional debates concerning loyalist reaction to a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland also indicate the strengths and weaknesses of their approach. 'The most popular scenario' saw the British presence as a prop for unionism¹⁸⁵: its removal would have dramatic effects. In this reading loyalism is not ideologically or politically strong enough to stand alone and will 'see sense and come to terms with the new situation.'¹⁸⁶ However the position that was most identified with the Adams leadership was one of *realpolitik*: there would be strong violent unionist resistance to a united Ireland resulting either in UDI or an attempt at negotiation from strength for some form of confederation which would be merely a new form of partition. This scenario was used to support arguments for a political movement that would be able to win the peace and gain electoral support: such a movement would also be more likely to be successful politically if Unionists faced 'an honest, principled and truly representative opposition' rather than if they were opposed by 'a bunch of compromised parties and a minority republican group.'¹⁸⁷ Unlike those republicans who 'appealed to the Protestants of Ulster to reject the evil and bigotry of Ian Paisley to emerge from the centuries of sectarian rule and to march forward together'¹⁸⁸, this analysis took a harder view of loyalism, both in the present and the future.

It argued implicitly that unionism would act for itself in its own interests: 'Loyalism is like a **hungry fat cuckoo in a nest**. Its appetite can never be satisfied. The more it gets the more it wants...' (my emphasis).¹⁸⁹ Alternatively the unionist

¹⁸⁴ M. Mc McClelland, 'Bodenstown Commemoration', *An Phoblacht* June 28th 1980.

¹⁸⁵ Brownie, 'Scenario for establishing a socialist republic', *An Phoblacht* April 19th 1980.

¹⁸⁶ Brownie, 'Scenario for establishing a socialist republic'.

¹⁸⁷ Brownie, 'Scenario for establishing a socialist republic'.

¹⁸⁸ D. Ó Conaill, 'The seeds of victory', *An Phoblacht* August 18th 1979.

¹⁸⁹ 'Disastrous approach', *A Phoblacht* May 3rd 1980. The use of the cuckoo image and its inference of illegitimate interlopers are revealing. Compare it to M. McClelland's **sinister parasites in our land** (my emphasis) used at Bodenstown in 1980.

population were 'pampered at the expense of the Irish people': they are 'sympathetically understood to have a siege mentality which is why they behave as they do...but the pampering has to stop some time.'¹⁹⁰The essence of Unionism was defined by republicans as privilege and sectarian domination. Even the Union was a tactic-other options such as confederalism or an independent Northern Ireland might be considered, it was argued, provided 'the Protestant way of life', identified with a quasi-fascist and racist supremacism was maintained.¹⁹¹ This opposition posed the possibilities of a 'nationalist /loyalist civil war in the North in the event of a British withdrawal...There can be no ducking the... fact of political life ...that the Loyalists will become increasingly enraged as they see their Orange statelet...being destroyed by Republican successes.' The implied perspective of civil war was justified and explained as an inevitable stage on the road to the socialist republic:

The breaking of the union with Britain will be a necessary step on the path to breaking them from their supremacism, their loyalism. For whilst a necessary condition for breaking them from unionism...is when they see [it is] no longer viable, a sufficient condition can only be when they see that there is a better ...alternative... The need to provide a socialist solution then becomes obvious.¹⁹²

Republicans analysed the shifts in the Unionist monolith by drawing on a sub-Marxist discourse. Official Unionist support for the union and even integration amongst the unionist upper and middle classes and sections of the organised working class in traditional industries was rooted, it was stated, in their mutual economic dependence on Britain. The lower middle class and lower working class identified their lost status with 'the ascendancy before the Union' and supported the DUP and UDA. For the working class unionists who took part in the 'festivals of bigotry' there was little sympathy. Their identification with, and integration into, the state meant that they enjoyed 'higher rates of employment, better jobs and housing than the nationally dispossessed people' and the social contract between this working class 'who march to the field without question to their middle class and aristocratic bosses...' and the

¹⁹⁰ No capitulation to Loyalists-Fatal Error', *An Phoblacht* October 17th 1981.

¹⁹¹ Shifts in British policy?' *An Phoblacht* January 17th 1981.

¹⁹² P. Dowling, 'The British presence, partition and Protestant privilege', *An Phoblacht* October 22nd 1981.

Unionist leadership meant that it was 'through **their state** [my emphasis] and its forces-legal and illegal-**they physically repress us** [my emphasis].'¹⁹³

This analysis was used to explain the destabilising nature of the republican campaign which had split the 'Orange monolith along class lines...'. In response to those socialists who saw such intra-Unionist splits as the harbinger of class politics and the possible transcendence of sectarianism some Provisionals argued that sections of the Protestant working class were almost genetically mired in reaction; inevitably it was the '...lower segment which is more reactionary than the upper echelons.'¹⁹⁴

Unionists and the nation

The dominant Provisional conception of the nation was the classic pattern of modernity reflected in the founding documents of Irish nationalism. Unionists were Irish-'we regard everyone born in Ireland as Irish'¹⁹⁵-and the 'Algerian solution' of driving out of the descendants of colonists was explicitly rejected.¹⁹⁶ Divisions were fostered by an alien government and the transcendence of division would come from removing 'the foreign body which is keeping the Irish wound open and bleeding.'¹⁹⁷ Although the common interests of working people in all parts of the island were recognised as a basis for bringing people together, it was the power structures and the material conditions that they promoted that created division and a sectarianised consciousness that must be removed before conflict could be resolved.

It was posed as a process of starting afresh and building a new Ireland, a transformative process of mutual liberation in which 'the nationalist people must liberate themselves and in doing so they will liberate also the loyalist people who are **caught in a trap of history** and are unable to liberate themselves' [my emphasis].¹⁹⁸ The nationalist population are thus given the central role as the agency of transformation in Irish society whilst the unionist population are cast in a passive and illegitimate role which required liberation by a force external to themselves. History, in this reading, is a trap and a nightmare from which only certain people can awaken: significantly history is also seen as an impersonal force that has produced and shaped

¹⁹³ 'The Twelfth-Festival of Bigotry', *An Phoblacht* July 14th 1979.

¹⁹⁴ P. Dowling, 'Orange Segments', *An Phoblacht* December 10th 1981.

¹⁹⁵ R. Ó Bradaigh, 'Ag labhairt leis an Uachtaran', *IRIS* April 1981.

¹⁹⁶ See 'Tyranny of sectarianism', *An Phoblacht* July 8th 1982.

¹⁹⁷ Ó Bradaigh, 'Ag labhairt leis an Uachtaran'.

¹⁹⁸ Ó Bradaigh, 'Ag labhairt leis an Uachtaran'.

the current conflict. In this reading it is defined as a force and a process almost independent of man.¹⁹⁹

The tensions within this position towards unionism were revealed during the debate around Éire Nua, the Provisionals' programme for the decentralisation of government structures and the creation of provincial parliaments based on the four historic provinces. Although the rejection of federalism is sometimes seen in the context of factional struggle between the young Northern Radicals and a southern – based old guard of traditionalists²⁰⁰ the debate touched on wider ideological elements within republicanism. As critics of federalism correctly argued the policy was not traditional-it was promulgated in 1972 but had its origins in the mid 1960s re-evaluation of republicanism and reflected both a desire for a new kind of society of local power and a recognition of the need to engage with the unionist population.²⁰¹ Éire Nua had certainly been used by the Ó Bradaigh - Ó Conaill leadership in that way during the ceasefire and discussions at Feakle.²⁰² The criticism of Éire Nua's federalism centred on a characterisation of unionism and the nature of the unionist population. Any attempts to differentiate forces and ideological elements within unionist politics was dismissed as 'absolutely reactionary'²⁰³ or 'apologetic.'²⁰⁴

Likewise federalism was dismissed as a sop to loyalists and any compromise with 'that same philosophy...[will mean] we are effectively maintaining this division [partition].'²⁰⁵ The democratic national framework that underlay the republican analysis was part of a wider consensus within some sections of nationalism about the nature of the Irish nation, the illegitimacy of unionism and the rejection of a unionist veto. Despite the differences in means the New Ireland Forum 1984 revealed a strikingly similar set of assumptions within constitutional nationalism to those held by the Provisionals about the nature of unionism although these were taken to a predictably extreme, if logical conclusion, by the militant republicans. Likewise the

¹⁹⁹ Note that this vanguard's liberating role also includes freeing 'the ordinary people of England from a centuries –old imperialism which is exercised in their name by the ruling classes of England'. Ó Bradaigh, 'Ag labhairt leis an Uachtarán'.

²⁰⁰ See report of Sinn Féin Ard Fheis, *Irish Times* November 6th 1980.

²⁰¹ Profile of Ruairi Ó Bradaigh, *Hibernia* 17th January 1980 and Letter from Roy Johnston, *Hibernia* 24th January 1980.

²⁰² 'The Unionist –oriented people of Ulster would have a working majority within the Province and would therefore have considerable power over their own affairs', *Éire Nua*, Dublin 1972,56.

²⁰³ 'Review of *The State in Northern Ireland 1921-1972*, P.Bew, P.Gibbon and H.Patterson', *An Phoblacht* December 20th 1980.

²⁰⁴ B.McClafferty, 'Message of the Lambeg Drums', *An Phoblacht* April 20th 1979.

²⁰⁵ R.McAuley, 'Federalism'-Mala poist, *An Phoblacht* July 12th 1980.

challenge to Irish national unity posed by Unionists and the transcendence of these divisions was not seen as a product of either concessions to unionism, a la Eire Nua, or dialogue, a la the New Ireland Forum or Garrett Fitzgerald's constitutional crusade- 'a fatal error', in the words of *An Phoblacht*.²⁰⁶ Gerry Adams summed up these arguments at the 1981 Sinn Féin Ard Fheis:

We must recognise that loyalists are a national political minority whose basis is economic and whose philosophy is neo-fascist, anti-nationalist and anti-democratic. We cannot, and we should not ever tolerate, or compromise with (by government structures or any other means), loyalism. Loyalism is a major obstacle to democracy in Ireland, and to Irish independence. Federalism, by giving loyalism a privileged position, becomes an obstacle.²⁰⁷

Collaborators and imperialist lickspittles

At the end of the 1981 Hunger Strike republican prisoners in Long Kesh produced a statement outlining their assessment of recent events. In the course of a bitter attack on the 'true face of the present Irish establishment...-the Catholic Church, the Dublin government and the SDLP...' their politics of 'nationalist pacificism' were condemned as dooming the nationalists to subservience and perpetuating partition. Contrasting the bravery of the Hunger Strikers with the 'cowardly collaborationist and quisling behaviour of the Dublin political establishment it was argued that 'if John Bull doesn't actually rule the twenty-six counties physically, he still rules it in spirit'. Fianna Fáil's role was deemed particularly shameful- '... a pathetic reflection of republicanism...', but it was the SDLP that came in for especially vitriolic criticism as 'imperialist lickspittles' and '...an amalgamation of middle class Redmondites, devoid of principle, direction and courage.'²⁰⁸

Republican hostility to the Irish political establishment of constitutional nationalism is well established as one of the dominant themes of the movement's politics.²⁰⁹ This goes beyond mere rhetorical invective or even the bitterness of electoral rivalry from the early 1980s; it reflects some key features of both the republican analysis of the conflict and the Provisional strategy for establishing the thirty-two county socialist republic. Likewise the shift in the movement's position

²⁰⁶ 'No capitulation to Loyalists-Fatal Error'.

²⁰⁷ 'Report of Sinn Féin Ard Fheis', *An Phoblacht* November 10th 1981.

²⁰⁸ 'Statement at end of second Hunger Strike' in B. Campbell, L. McKeown and F. O'Hagan (eds), *Nor meekly serve my time*, Belfast 1994, 259-264.

²⁰⁹ M. de Barra, 'Seirbhisigh na Banriona', *An Phoblacht* August 29th 1981.

from the late 1980s was correspondingly reflected in its changing orientation towards the SDLP and Dublin alongside its strategic revision of cherished positions; this was to be more than a mere opportunistic tactic, but a fundamental ideological and paradigm shift within the movement's leadership.

Constitutional nationalism, both North and South of the border had been analysed by republicans within the broad anti-imperialist framework discussed above. This analysis was grounded in both contemporary realities and historically determined tradition, although as the abstentionism debate was to show, Provisionalism could travel ideologically light and be pragmatically imaginative in its attitude towards invented tradition. The significance of questions around the recognition of Leinster House and the legitimacy of the Dublin government were central to the founding of the Provisionals: their founding statements were couched in traditional terms counter-posing the defence of the Republic against a 'British financial and economic dominance' which made the 'Leinster House parliament... as essentially powerless as... the one in Stormont.'²¹⁰ Republican antagonism towards the Dublin government and Fianna Fáil in particular was rooted in both the history of republicanism and the southern state itself; De Valera's harsh treatment of republicans combined with the party's continued deployment of republican rhetoric made Fianna Fáil the central target for Sinn Féin hostility.

The almost theological dogma of republicanism's apostolic succession from the second Dail continued to undermine the legitimacy of the southern state for traditionalists and the history of Fianna Fáil-along with that of others who had sold out and compromised with parliamentarianism-was a warning of the dangers of abandoning tradition.²¹¹ But increasingly by the late 1970s the position of the South in Provisional strategy was to undergo a subtle shift; the South became a central element in both the movement's analysis of the conflict and the revolutionary politics that were to be developed to achieve the republic. In this sense the road to victory in Belfast lay through Dublin.

As with other aspects of Provisional strategy and tactics this shift should be seen as part of a totality. Historically republicans had defined the post-Treaty Twenty-six county state as a puppet regime; in the 1970s this analysis was strengthened by greater emphasis on the neo-imperialist nature of the Anglo-Irish relationship, which

²¹⁰ 'North Kerry Sinn Fein condemns deceit and treachery', *An Phoblacht* February 1970.

²¹¹ See 'Attempt to take over the Republican Movement'.

defined the Dublin government as 'simply another department of the British government.'²¹² This approach was more systemic and structural, not only seeing Dublin falling within Britain's external sphere of political and economic influence, but also perceiving this influence as defining the internal political, social, economic and cultural patterns of the southern state. It also identified the political history of the southern parties in class terms: 'the pro-Treaty split and the Fianna Fáil split from republicans...[were] motivated by the interests of the capitalist class, who saw the Free State as safeguarding their interests.'²¹³

The road to victory in Belfast goes through Dublin

The idea of reconquest in this analysis was as much directed at the transformation of the southern state as it was at abolishing the border.²¹⁴ Neo-imperialism made this process a structural and strategic imperative for the Provisionals; in this reading it also made collaboration between Dublin and London a structural imperative that went beyond mere individual corruption, lack of patriotism or a mistaken belief in parliamentarianism.²¹⁵ The original sin of the Dublin government is that the state was founded 'in the interests of British Imperialism' and, as such, 'Free state politicians will inevitably serve 'their Imperial masters by openly consorting with the British government and its armed forces in attempting to suppress republicanism'.²¹⁶ Indeed, it was argued, this imperialist framework shaped the whole politics of the island; 'Loyalism and Free Stateism' are being characterised as 'twin ideologies' that act on behalf of 'vested interests' and, taken to their logical conclusion' attempt to stabilise political structures that have 'proven inherently unstable'.²¹⁷ Jimmy Drumm's 'Long War' speech at Bodenstown in June 1977 was one of the first public statements outlining the importance of developments in the South for the Provisionals.

²¹² 'IRA: Confidence, Maturity and Military Expansion', *An Phoblacht* August 11th 1979.

²¹³ J. Gibney quoted in, 'The need to be active on all fronts', *An Phoblacht* October 4th 1980.

²¹⁴ For example, see criticisms of the cultural, social and economic policies of Dublin governments which were reflections of '...useless Victorian notions imported...as economic and social controls of the subject nation remain enshrined in conservative confessional brainwashing...' 'Gerry Adams' Presidential Address 1983', *AnPhoblacht* November 1983.

²¹⁵ However, traditional republican and nationalist criticisms of 'the West Briton, Shoneen and pro-British ethos...of the Dublin establishment ...' could still be found. For example, Gerry Adams, 'Bodenstown Speech', *An Phoblacht* June 23rd 1983.

²¹⁶ J. Drumm, 'Annual Wolfe Tone Commemoration Speech', *Republican News* June 25th 1977.

²¹⁷ M. McClelland, 'Bodenstown Commemoration Speech', *An Phoblacht* June 28th 1980.

Although the 'Long War' phrase is often the element most highlighted, the key theme of the speech is in fact the relationship between 'the advanced forces of Irish national liberation' and 'its other half-the struggling mass of workers and small farmers in the 26-Counties [both]...at the mercy of British Imperialism'.²¹⁸ Strategically and tactically the potential development of this relationship is seen as significant in winning the war- 'without this breakthrough, which is feared equally by **Irish capitalism** [my emphasis] and British Imperialism, the struggle for the socialist republic...will be heavily borne by the Republican population and will be a bloody and protracted affair'²¹⁹ -but it is the political implications of the neo-colonial analysis that are a striking departure. Partly pitched in terms of supporting the war in the occupied counties the definition of both the problem and the solution shifts to a broader front, which includes 'national and economic liberation':

We find that a successful war of liberation cannot be fought exclusively on the backs of the oppressed in the six counties, nor around the physical presence of the British Army...the isolation of socialist republicans around the armed struggle is dangerous and has produced... the reformist notion that 'Ulster' is the issue, which can somehow be resolved without the mobilisation of the working class in the 26 counties.²²⁰

Although this speech poses and consequently justifies the development of a mass movement in the South as essential to winning the war, the implied all-Ireland nature of the revolution makes success in the North conditional on developments in the South-not merely as a support base but as an integral and possibly determining component of the revolutionary process. The implication of this revolutionary schema was therefore problematic; for conversely, the failure to develop a movement in the South would isolate the North and possibly result in defeat, as had been the case in previous IRA campaigns. For example, the IRA statement ending the Border campaign in 1962 attributed the failure of the campaign to 'the attitude of the general public whose minds have been deliberately distracted from the supreme issue facing the Irish people-the unity and freedom of Ireland.'²²¹ Although this comment applied to the relative apathy of the nationalist population in the North by 1962 in particular, it would also have to apply the whole country in 1977 if the Southern strategy failed.

²¹⁸ 'The Tasks Ahead', *Republican News* June 25th 1977.

²¹⁹ J. Drumm, 'Annual Wolfe Tone Commemoration Speech'.

²²⁰ J. Drumm, 'Annual Wolfe Tone Commemoration Speech'.

²²¹ *United Irishman* March 1962.

The unforeseen implications of this strategy was to tie the fortunes of the Provisionals into developments in the South and to increasingly tailor their strategy and politics to the overwhelming need to build this mass base. It was argued that there was 'passive, Republican sentiment [in] the twenty-six counties ... which at some stage will become ignited into a massive conflagration, which together with Republican forces in the north, will not only destroy partition but the Free State as well.'²²² The possibilities of armed conflict between the Free State army and the IRA in a future revolutionary situation and the 'underlying trend towards a strong state with military intervention...' against republicans highlighted the need for Sinn Féin to 'develop as a powerful political force...explaining Republican policies...' in line with the imperatives of the Southern strategy posed in Jimmy Drumm's Bodenstown speech.²²³

Class and collaboration

One of the key assumptions underlying the southern strategy was belief in a widespread, if passive popular support for republicanism electorally expressed in the Fianna Fáil vote; the shifting patterns of republican rhetoric deployed by Fianna Fáil leaders indicated the potential volatility of that republican vote and the possible electoral base for Sinn Féin, as the Hunger Strike was to illustrate.²²⁴ The Hunger Strike confirmed the 'despicable role 'of southern politicians; Haughey was consistently identified with collaboration and the maintenance of the status quo alongside an opportunistic use of the H-Block issue to 'satisfy the ...republican aspirations of his base...and the **basically sound nationalist electorate in the South**' [my emphasis].²²⁵ Republicans also saw a similar electoral dialectic between popular support and party leadership in the position of the SDLP. Like Fianna Fail the SDLP were identified in class terms as an opportunist middle class party who favoured stability and the de facto continuation of partition and direct rule. However they were susceptible to the pull of their electoral base and could don 'republican clothes' as the occasion demanded.²²⁶ Ideologically and politically, especially in terms of their

²²² P.Dowling, 'A Treacherous Trap', *An Phoblacht* February 24th 1979. The pyrotechnic metaphor is also an interesting indication of the Provisionals' theory of revolution and the significance of subjective agency in making history.

²²³ 'What kind of withdrawal?', *An Phoblacht* February 10th 1979 and P.Dowling, 'The impossibility of 26-County Socialism', *An Phoblacht* March 10th 1979.

²²⁴ 'Success opens up new challenges', *An Phoblacht* January 27th 1979.

²²⁵ P. Dowling, 'The despicable role of Charles Haughey', *An Phoblacht* June 13th 1981.

²²⁶ 'Success opens up new challenges'.

relationship with British imperialism, the SDLP and Fianna Fail were seen as fulfilling the same collaborating function on each side of the border. Both parties were seen as part of a broad current of 'compromise and compromising conservative forces' [including Fine Gael and Unionism] that would have to be confronted in a post-British Ireland.²²⁷

The electoral battle between the SDLP and Sinn Féin brought out these antagonistic themes of class and collaboration. There were also significant ideological differences: the SDLP's analysis of the nature of conflict within the 'irreformable Northern state' which recognised the possibilities of political movement and power sharing were highlighted as evidence that the 'SDLP has masqueraded as the voice of Irish nationalism...and effectively neutralised the demand for freedom within the nationalist population'.²²⁸

Above all the Provisionals' focus on the imperialist nature of the British presence contrasted with John Hume's idea that Britain had a positive role to play and that its interests in the North sought peace and stability. In rejecting Hume's view that 'Britain has psychologically withdrawn from Ireland', Gerry Adams not only reiterated the republican commitment to an anti-imperialist struggle, but also accused the SDLP of 'fundamental errors' and 'psychologically joining Britain by taking the oath of allegiance [in the House of Commons]'.²²⁹ The inadequacy of the SDLP's analysis for the Provisionals was compounded by their political strategy, which rested on persuasion and parliamentary diplomacy: '...they have no muscle...no means of pressurising the British bar begging Uncle Sam (and Uncle Teddy) to do it by proxy'.²³⁰

From the inception of the Provisional movement there had been a struggle for hegemony within the nationalist population between the movement and existing traditions and centres of social and political power, such as the Church and the SDLP. There was nothing inevitable about the growth of the Provisionals as a military-political force; republicanism had historically been weak in Northern Ireland, especially in West Belfast²³¹ and the Provisionals themselves were aware of the battle they were engaged in to 'politicise' and 'republicanise' their base in competition with

²²⁷ Brownie, 'Scenario for establishing a socialist republic'.

²²⁸ M. McGuinness, 'We have the spirit of freedom', *An Phoblacht* May 12th 1983.

²²⁹ H. MacThomas, 'Taking the oath', *An Phoblacht* June 30th 1983.

²³⁰ P. Amlis, 'Report on SDLP Annual Conference', *An Phoblacht* November 10th 1979.

the SDLP. The Hunger Strike elections and the emotions generated during that period presented the SDLP with a clear dilemma on which the developing Provisional electoral strategy was able to capitalize.

Republicanization

Electoral politics were the SDLP's *raison d'être*; if they identified too closely with the prisoners' campaign their own organisation might be rent with internal dissension while on the other hand their support [for the campaign] might contribute 'to the makings of a victory for the prisoners that might see them swept aside in favour of more republican representatives for the people.'²³² For the Provisionals this division represented a 'clarification within nationalism'; not only as a statement of the clearly longstanding distinction between themselves and the SDLP, but also as a demonstration of the propaganda value of electoral success and the possibilities of 'establishing [Sinn Féin's]... undisputed leadership of the nationalist people'.²³³ It also represented a clarification of a trend that had been emerging within the Provisionals since the late 1970s which favoured greater electoral participation. Frequent clerical attacks on the Provisionals during the elections were seen within an historical context-'the church in Ireland has been since the ending of penal days a formidable agent of British Imperialism'-and it was consistently argued that it continued to be 'an ally of the ruling class...an integral part of the British establishment...its task to blunt...the struggle for freedom'.²³⁴

This combination of traditional republican reservation about the role of the Catholic clergy with a Marxist rhetoric of class struggle within the nationalist population was especially developed around Provisional analyses of the politics and electoral strategy of the SDLP. The strategy meant in effect a power struggle and a revolution within the nationalist population concomitant with the war against Britain. It was an inevitable war on two fronts that could not be avoided if victory and the Republic was to be finally gained. Its significance for the Provisionals' war was summed up by Danny Morrison in 1981:

That a people...should move from a position of supporting peaceful reform...to guerrilla warfare...is a revolution in itself, especially against a fairly powerful and influential Catholic middle class. Breaking their

²³² D. Morrison, 'Scandalous Inaction Continues', *An Phoblacht* August 29th 1981.

²³³ 'The People's Choice', *An Phoblacht* August 29th 1981.

²³⁴ J. Carlin, 'Hierarchy's Attack', Mala Poist, *An Phoblacht* December 3rd 1981.

hold, and the clergy's grip on nationalist thinking, is part of an ongoing ideological struggle...²³⁵

Sinn Féin's electoral challenge to the SDLP rested on a realistic assessment of the contradictory moods within the nationalist population and revealed some fundamental themes within Provisional ideology and politics. In the classic inverted pyramid of revolutionary theory the collaborationist SDLP were the apex upon which direct British rule in the North rested, whilst the Dublin political parties [especially Fianna Fáil] fulfilled a similar function in the South. Like Fianna Fáil the SDLP rested on nationalist electoral support and the 'greening of the SDLP' became an increasingly important theme as Sinn Féin's electoral challenge became more serious from 1982 onwards. Just as the transformation of politics in the South came to be seen as the key to the Irish Revolution as a whole so the electoral destruction of the SDLP in the North became increasingly significant politically for the Provisionals. The emerging electoral strategy was partially explained and justified in those terms:

The coexistence of John Hume in the Bogside with local freedom fighters is an anomaly, but unfortunately it shows that in the eyes of the nationalist people there is no contradiction between having an armalite under the bed, on the one hand, and a ballot paper for the SDLP in the other, so to speak. This is certainly no way to go forward and it leads to the confused situation where the IRA have military creditability and the SDLP political credentials. This hold must be broken. The SDLP, because they fill a vacuum, must be replaced...²³⁶

Sinn Féin versus the Rest

During the electoral campaigns for the Assembly in 1982, the General Election in 1983 and local Government by-elections in 1983, Provisional propaganda reflected a subtle balancing act within republican politics between stressing the clearly defined hostility between Sinn Féin and the SDLP, and making appeals for nationalist unity against the common enemy. For example, Danny Morrison typified this tactical approach and orientation towards the SDLP when he commented: There is 'nothing to be lost...for us ...having been seen to have attempted to secure maximum nationalist successes...' The 'SDLP will have to face up to a historical compromise with...radical republicanism...' or face being pushed aside...' for being more

²³⁵ P. Arnalis, 'The War Will Go On', *An Phoblacht* September 10th 1982.

²³⁶ Arnalis, 'The War Will Go On'.

concerned with opportunism and careerism'.²³⁷ The promises of 'strong uncompromising leadership' and hope of displacing the professional politicians of the 'well and truly established nationalist middle class'²³⁸ were built on an analysis of the republican base as lying in the resistance community of the risen people: the election campaigns were a battle for hegemony which the Provisionals saw as 'Sinn Féin versus the rest'.²³⁹

As early as October 1981 members of the SDLP commented on the organisational strengths and community roots of the Provisional electoral machine; other themes raised at this time which recurred in succeeding years were Sinn Féin's youth, enthusiasm and professionalism.²⁴⁰ Similar themes emerge in other analyses of the electoral battle between Sinn Féin and the SDLP during the early 1980s. It was argued '...that ... Sinn Féin had been able to mobilize hundreds of young and working class supporters' while 'the SDLP quite plainly had not'. Significantly there were also suggestions that these voters had 'always been there, but had largely been ignored, forgotten or written off... Sinn Féin has been able to mobilise them and... they represent a sufficiently large section of the Catholic community to present a threat to the SDLP...' The battle between Sinn Féin and the SDLP was a battle of ... 'youth versus middle-age, working class versus middle class and enthusiasm versus weariness'.²⁴¹

Whilst not all concurred with *An Phoblacht's* assessment that these electoral battles showed that the key issue was the middle class electoral sway and influence over an increasingly radicalised nationalist working class²⁴², attempts to explain Sinn Féin's electoral breakthrough frequently turned on issues of nationalist alienation and the political culture of the nationalist ghettos. *The Irish News*, in particular, saw the electoral support for Sinn Féin in 1982 as 'a shock development' of especial concern for the Catholic Church which had 'preached the politics of non-violence' and argued that '... a large section of the nationalist community are so alienated from the

²³⁷ H. MacThomas, 'Election fever mounts', *An Phoblacht* April 28th 1983.

²³⁸ 'The Price of Stormont', *An Phoblacht* September 2nd 1982.

²³⁹ 'Sinn Fein versus the rest', *An Phoblacht* May 19th 1983. The rest, in this instance, not only being the SDLP, the Church (in the shape of Bishop Daly) and the 'nationalist middle class', but also the media, the Irish government, the Unionists and the British government.

²⁴⁰ 'Organisationally collapsing, financially broke and politically bankrupt', *An Phoblacht* October 3rd 1981.

²⁴¹ E. Moloney, 'Success of Sinn Fein big threat to SDLP', *Irish Times* October 22nd 1982 and 'Test for Sinn Fein electoral strategy', *Irish Times* March 22nd 1983.

²⁴² 'Clearly defined', *An Phoblacht* May 5th 1983.

system...frustrated with the British government...fed up ...with...harassment from the security forces...that they are prepared to make their voices heard in the only way they can. And that is by voting ...for Sinn Féin...the arch-enemies of British rule'. Given the paper's traditional links to the Catholic Church and the Nationalist establishment these concerns were significant. Likewise in 1983 it warned that 'Sinn Féin's [electoral] achievement...will be underestimated by the British government at its peril...It is essentially a protest vote by young Catholic voters against British rule in Northern Ireland'.²⁴³

These mainstream analyses were in turn reflected back into republican electoral strategy and Provisional assessments of the impact of Sinn Féin's growth at the expense of the SDLP.²⁴⁴ The emerging theme within Provisional discourse of a 'republican veto' both over Ireland's political future, and constitutional nationalism's tendency to compromise, was itself paralleled by a growing focus within British and Irish government circles on the political dangers of republican support and its causes.

²⁴³ W. Graham, 'Sinn Féin Vote Puts Pressure on Britain', *Irish News* October 22nd 1982, 'A Clear Message'-Editorial, *Irish News* October 22nd 1982 and Editorial- 'Lost Opportunity', *Irish News* June 11th 1983.

²⁴⁴ For example, see discussion of the significance of the 1982 and 1983 Assembly and General Election results in *An Phoblacht* that draws heavily on the analyses of the mainstream press e.g. H. Mac Thomas, 'An electoral shock wave', October 28th 1982 and 'Establishment pollaxed by Sinn Féin vote', June 16th 1983.

²⁴⁴ For the first use of the republican veto concept, see 'Help Me! -Call from Hume to British', *An Phoblacht* May 19th 1983: for discussion of British concern about the support for Sinn Féin and its impact on 'the Anglo-Irish process' see 'SDLP hang on to lifebelt', *An Phoblacht* June 23rd 1983 and H. Mac Thomas, 'SDLP cries for help heard by Prior', *An Phoblacht* November 17th 1983. For the initial impact of Gerry Adams election victory in West Belfast and the increase in the Sinn Féin vote in 1983 on Irish government opinion see D. Walsh, 'Dublin concern at rise in SF vote', *Irish Times* June 10th 1983: the longer term implications are discussed in G. Fitzgerald, *All in a life; an autobiography*, Dublin 1991, 462-3, 471 and Chapters 16-17. For a different view of British interpretations of the rise of Sinn Féin and its limited impact on the Anglo-Irish Agreement 1985 see P. Neumann, *Britain's Long War: British Strategy in the Northern Ireland Conflict, 1969-98*, Basingstoke 2003, 137-141.

Chapter IV-The deeper silences of Provisionalism

Made by history, making history?

In 1986 the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis voted to end the policy of abstentionism and to allow elected candidates to take their seats in the Dublin parliament. The decision was significant to both supporters and opponents of the change as it marked the beginnings of a fundamental restructuring of Provisional politics that could and indeed eventually would culminate in the movement's participation in mainstream, constitutional politics.²⁴⁵ Beyond internal division over questions of strategy and tactical advantage, the debates around ending abstentionism demonstrate the multi layered nature of the Provisional movement and ideology, pointing up fundamentally opposed understandings of the historical process and the nature of political action. The discussion around the abstentionism issue showed that Provisionalism was not monolithic or an isolated self-contained phenomenon. The complexities of the republican movement are reflected in its political behaviour and character, in the interplay between ideology and strategy or tactical advantage. It is in these patterns that Provisionalism exhibits the general features of most ideological formations and political organisations.

A helpful comparison that goes beyond mere analogy can be made between the streams and currents within republicanism and other political groups, such as the British Labour Party. The debate over abstentionism, the conflict between traditionalists and pragmatic modernisers and the succeeding project of revisionism and modernisation within Provisionalism had its parallels within the British Labour tradition: the traditionalists are often perceived to be the keepers of the sacred flame and the soul of the movement, whilst the modernisers, 'coming to terms with reality' are accused of selling out. Likewise there are similar tensions between sticking to principle and the will to power which are common to political movements rooted in ideology and tradition. The Old Labour/New Labour antagonisms are also similar to those between Republican Sinn Féin/New Sinn Féin in that in both cases all sides to the debate spring from the same political tradition and ostensibly share the same

²⁴⁵ For example, R.Ó Bradaigh's speech at the Ard Fheis predicting the Provisionals' future road to constitutionalism. *Magill* 13th November 1986.

values. What has changed, it is argued, is simply the language and presentation of those values.

The usefulness of this comparison is also to be found in how both the Irish republican movement and the British Labour Party responded to and reflected the challenges of the general crisis of politics and ideology in Western societies in the 1980s and 1990s. The comparisons between New Labour and New Sinn Féin are not simply those of suits and style: there are valid similarities in substance, as we shall see in the following chapters. In Sinn Féin's case in 1986 these tensions between past and future were presented as a drama, played out in public at the Ard Fheis in which both sides had to act and ultimately decide the future path of the Provisional movement. One useful way of fixing these emerging ideological differences is to focus on the discussion around the nature of mandates and the republican justification for their campaign which can be neatly encapsulated by the contrasting ideas of *dílseacht* and the politics of revolution.²⁴⁶

Mandates and the definition of the nation

The emerging differences were reflected in the discourse of mandates and legitimation. Did the republican campaign derive its *raison d'être* from History, the people or increasingly from the electorate?²⁴⁷ At the root of these disagreements lay differing concepts of the nation and the democratic impulse behind self-determination: that is between a politics **ultimately** rooted in a universalist and civic understanding against an approach based on particularist and essentialist definitions of the nation. As we have seen, this division was always present in republicanism-it might be termed its original sin²⁴⁸ - and often revealed itself within Provisionalism in ideological forms that stressed the power and authenticity of tradition as a political imperative in contrast to a politics that asserted the primacy of contemporary demands and the drive for power.

²⁴⁶ See below p.87.

²⁴⁷ The significance of these terms as descriptions of what were substantially the same group of real people is, of course, indicative of an historical and political shift within republican discourse from a revolutionary conception-the people- to a liberal democratic one-the electorate. History hovers over both definitions as an unquiet and indeterminate spirit.

²⁴⁸ This division can correspond to the broader divisions between civic and ethnic nationalism; it was always a particular problem for republican socialists and their analysis of the relationship between class and nation in relation to the Protestant working class. The contradictions between these themes of universalism and particularism are most clearly apparent in the republican *legerdemain* in annexing the civic universalist politics of the United Irishmen to a particularist nationalist tradition.

These differences seemed also to be sited within differing conceptions of historical agency and subjectivity within the republican canon, with one approach stressing activism and intervention in history, the other historical inevitability and determinism. Given that Provisional republicanism had been an eclectic ideological coalition marked by the circumstances of its birth rather than 'pure' tradition a split of this nature, irrespective of the personalities involved, had always been immanent within the movement. While arriving at quite different- and antagonistic- positions, these different views on abstentionism drew on elements of a common republican tradition and analysis.

By accepting too much of Provisional Republicanism at its own face value, it is often all too easy to mistake its form for its substance, and its speech for the discursive reality and grammar of its politics. From its very birth Provisional republicanism was an invented and consciously developed tradition, which legitimated pragmatism by means of a faux heritage. *Pace*, E. P. Thompson, Provisionalism was present at its own birth.²⁴⁹

Although couched in familiar terms and created from pre-existing elements these new forms of politics were, in fact, based on radically different patterns of thought. This was particularly true in terms of language where an emerging discursive framework employed much of the old phraseology, but with new and increasingly divergent meanings. The underlying conception of national self-determination had been based on modernist concepts of the nation and democracy and was common to both sides in the debate on abstentionism. At root, imperfectly appreciated at the time, were differing conceptions of what and who constituted 'the nation' and whether its history was conceived as active process or determined destiny. Above all the differences were grounded in contrasting definitions of the nation as either a real collective subject or an idealised people who were the passive instruments of a metaphysical national spirit. In this sense were republicans making history or being made by it? As Liam de Paor has argued this tension was present in one of the founding documents of republicanism, the 1916 Proclamation, showing that:

The traditional abstract was already yielding to the modernist concrete; the often personified but essentially abstract Ireland of the imagined past was, to

²⁴⁹ Interview with Danny Morrison, January 5th 2004 He discussed the conscious evolution of republican politics and the importance of context in shaping this tradition.

some extent at least, superseded by actual, living and breathing people, the Irish.²⁵⁰

There were, of course, other ideological and political crosscurrents and this broad definition simplifies frequently complex variations on these themes within individual positions.²⁵¹ It also raises questions of the significance of the unconscious and the irrational in republican politics, and how far these elements can coexist alongside conscious rational agency and pragmatism in military-political practice. It is certainly more accurate to discuss **republicanisms**, to consider the movement as a coalition of forces and confluence of currents, to emphasise discontinuity and disjunction rather than monolithic coherence and a seamless web of republican tradition and readings of history.²⁵²

While there is a theological tradition and a sense of apostolic succession in the republican movement it would be mistaken to assume that Provisionalism is essentially an unthinking replication of tradition with a deterministic cyclical conception of history. Tradition is not the only or necessarily the most dominant theme in the history of its ideological development: the harsher, pragmatic tones of ‘the war zone’ were eventually to grow much louder and gained a wider audience than the modulated passivity of tradition. [Provisional Republicanism, both organisationally and ideologically, was in constant tension: its development represents a dialectic between tradition and contingency, between inherited positions and conscious adaptation and innovation.²⁵³]

²⁵⁰ L. de Paor, *On the Easter Proclamation and Other Declarations*, Dublin 1997, 38. In the political sphere this tension between abstract and modern was [and is] revealed in the conflict between universalist, civic and particularist, ethnic conceptions of the nation. De Paor also discusses the evidence of this tension between modernist and particularist elements revealed in the text of the 1916 Proclamation. See L.de Paor, *Easter Proclamation*, 53-57.

²⁵¹ For example, the grouping that became the League of Communist Republicans was opposed to ending abstentionism, but from a ‘revolutionary’ as opposed to a ‘traditional’ perspective. Similarly, former Chief of Staff and close colleague of Gerry Adams, Ivor Bell was court martialled in his absence for ‘treason’ as a result of his opposition to the ‘political’ direction that the Provisionals were taking in 1984. Bell was considered to be politically on the Far Left. Note of conversation with former Staff member, Belfast Brigade, IRA

²⁵² Interview with Tommy McKearney, May 30th 1999: see also his comments on the local autonomy and character of the republican movement in the 1970s, quoted in A. McIntyre, ‘Provisional Republicanism: Internal politics, inequities and internal repression’, in F.McGarry (ed), *Republicanism in Modern Ireland*, Dublin 2003, 193.

²⁵³ Interview with Danny Morrison, January 5th 2004. Speaking of the early 1970s he argues that ‘I don’t agree with the idea of “romantic republicanism”, but I don’t deny its importance’.

The mandate of history?

The discussion of particular elements of Provisional ideology in the last chapters offered an illustration of the significance for the Republican movement of a particular reading of Irish history. This historical understanding underpins and informs the movement's politics, both at theoretical and practical levels. However, History in this sense is not just an 'un-ending dialogue between the present and the past'²⁵⁴: republicans use and shape it, sometimes quite self-consciously, as explanation, legitimation and justification for past and current actions. Irish republicanism is not unique in this. An understanding of history informs the practice, the rationale and the wider ideological framework of all political movements, especially at the level of the unspoken assumptions and the deeper silences of politics.²⁵⁵

The development of nationalism as a political ideology and as a medium for the consolidation of states is inextricably intertwined with the creation of national mythologies and the development of historically informed metanarratives that give meaning to the nation's story²⁵⁶. However, there is a widespread assumption that Irish republicanism and Irish nationalism generally is possibly uniquely trapped by its reading of both its own and Ireland's history. Conor Cruise O'Brien's discussion of the relationship between nationalism and religion has been influential in stressing the evocative power and influence of Pearse's ghosts on republicanism which function literally as the dead hand of tradition.²⁵⁷ It is a widely developed theme: political journalist Dick Walsh argued that IRA members 'see themselves as a force apart, responding only to the commands of history'²⁵⁸ whilst accounts of Provisionalism's history or military-political strategy frequently stress patterns of continuity or retell a history beginning variously in 1169, 1798, 1867, or 1916.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ E.H.Carr, *What is History*, London 1987, 30.

²⁵⁵ A theme developed by ATQ Stewart in his discussion of the United Irish movement, *A Deeper Silence; The Hidden Roots of the United Irish Movement*, London 1993.

²⁵⁶ See, for example, E.Hobsbawm and T.Ranger (ed), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge 1983.

²⁵⁷ See, for example, C.C.O'Brien, *Ancestral Voices: Religion and Nationalism in Ireland*, and Dublin 1994, 167-174 for a discussion of 'Patrick Pearse, Bobby Sands and Jesus Christ.' See also P.H. Pearse, *The Murder Machine and other essays*, Dublin and Cork 1976, 28-44 and R.D.Edwards, *Patrick Pearse: The Triumph of Failure*, London 1977, 252-254 on the significance of 'ghosts' in the republican separatist tradition developed by Pearse. According to R.D. Edwards, Pearse freely acknowledged his debt to Ibsen in the title of his pamphlet *Ghosts*. See Edwards, *Patrick Pearse*, 252

²⁵⁸ Quoted in B.Walker, *Past and Present: History, identity and politics in Ireland*, Belfast 2000, 110. Walker's chapter 4, 'The burden of the past', offers a comprehensive range of examples illustrating the popularity both of this view of republicanism and the broader idea that the conflict in Northern Ireland is almost uniquely informed and shaped by History and history.

²⁵⁹ See for example, M.L.R. Smith's *Fighting For Ireland? The Military Strategy of the Irish Republican Movement*, London 1995 adopts a generally 'strategically realist' approach to

[It has been argued that by considering the concept of the ‘republican imaginaire’ it is possible that these readings of history can take us to the heart and the ‘essence’ of the movement itself.²⁶⁰ This approach raises themes of irrationality and the power of the emotional in politics. Drawn from Lacan’s psychoanalytical approach its central theme is the captation of the self by a reflected image: this fusion of self and ideal image is held to be central to the animating ‘imaginaire’ of ideologies such as nationalism and Marxism, which have a mythology of pre-lapsarian origins. Whilst some of these elements are present within Provisional Republicanism there was, and is, also a degree of pragmatic distancing and invention of tradition which rather than being captured by the mythology subverts it and reworks its elements to suit contingent political needs.

Superficially the use of history within republican discourse seems to support the view that the Provisionals operated within a traditionally determined framework.²⁶¹ Nationalist movements have a particular narrative of the story of the nation frequently following a teleological pattern of oppression, national awakening, struggle and martyrdom, and liberation. This narrative frame can appear quite deterministic and historicist in approach pointing as it does towards an inevitable national victory.²⁶²

The means to achieve that victory can be contradictory, mixing themes of quietist witness as well as activism and intervention. The quietist tradition concentrates on waiting for the wave of history. The functions of keeping the faith, safeguarding esoteric knowledge and preparing for the inevitable revolution are elevated into moral categories and outward signs of republican virtue.²⁶³ Other

republicanism, but even so occasionally explains strategic origins in cultural, almost mystical terms in his introduction.

²⁶⁰ See E.O’Brien, ‘A Nation Once Again: Towards an Epistemology of the Provisional Imaginaire’, in F.McGarry (ed), *Republicanism in Modern Ireland*, Dublin 2003.

²⁶¹ For example, the ‘Glover Report’ produced by British military intelligence in 1978 defined Provisionalism as ‘committed to the traditional aims of Irish nationalism’ and characterised the Officials as Marxist ‘whereas the Provisionals are motivated by an inward looking Celtic nationalism’. Northern Ireland: Future Terrorist Trends, November 1978, appears as appendix in S.Cronin, *Irish Nationalism: A History of its Roots and Ideology*, New York 1981. This report was written during a period when many media commentators were commenting on the Marxist nature of the radical Provisional leadership!

²⁶² See R.Kearney, *Myth and Motherland*, and Derry 1984, 9-12 for a discussion on the power of myth and sense of the past in Irish nationalist tradition in general.

²⁶³ The definition of tradition as a mode of political and historical thought has been at the heart of political discourse since the Enlightenment: Burkean ideas of a body of tradition, inherited and positively shaping the lives of future generations seem to be an apt description of these elements of nationalist ideology.

readings of this sense of revolutionary destiny are much more millenarian and chiliastic in character, privileging an instinctive sense of activist agency to assist history in its path towards its pre-destined end. However, both approaches posed the question of the revolutionary instrument and what was regarded as the next step in determining the patterns and mechanics of revolution, the transformation of quality into quantity and the creation of a revolutionary consciousness in almost a Leninist sense.

In terms of political agency a central theme is how far the republican movement sees itself as destined to be the instrument of history or whether its agency is a subjective, self-conscious product of time and place. For example, any attempts by Provisional leaders to define republicanism as an ideology almost invariably began with a description of the movement's historical development or by specific references to a corpus of thought embodied in historically significant documents, such as the 1916 Proclamation or epigrammatic selections from republican heroes such as Wolfe Tone.²⁶⁴ Other republican accounts of the movement's own history foster this impression, for example during the annual round of commemorations for historical events and republican martyrs culminating in the Easter Rising commemoration and the 'pilgrimage to Bodenstown'.²⁶⁵ This process of appropriation of history and a positioning of the republican movement within history is common to a range of political and social organisations. States too have their legitimating invented traditions and ironically many aspects of republican commemorations parallel those of state remembrance.

The set piece speeches at Bodenstown or at Easter commemorations combine many of these themes. In 1981 Danny Morrison established continuity by speaking from a platform 'which has been shared the activists of this generation and by leaders of the Irish Republican **faithful** [my emphasis] in past generations', presenting Tone and other historical figures as 'fighters and supporters of armed struggle'. It was from

²⁶⁴ For example P.Flynn, 'What is Republicanism?' *An Phoblacht* October 11th 1981 which takes its lead from Pearse in illustrating the component elements of republicanism in terms of traditions and the contributions of individuals rather than in terms of general principles, although it would be accurate to argue that those general principles, e.g. self determination were themselves embodied in the work of the individuals.

²⁶⁵ A phrase frequently used by republicans themselves, either specifically quoting Pearse's description of Bodenstown as the 'holiest site in Ireland' or in a more general reference to the sense of continuity implicit in the Bodenstown ceremonies. For example: 'The annual pilgrimage to the graveside of the father of Irish republicanism, [is] always a source of renewed strength for the participants...' D O'Rourke, 'Bodenstown 1981', *An Phoblacht* June 27th 1981.

this activism that contemporary republicans could legitimately 'claim to be true followers of Tone'. Morrison went on to use history and the perceived continuous republican tradition to attack the Dublin establishment and to legitimate the contemporary necessity for armed struggle by reference to its efficacy in the past:

the only real political change...has been brought about...as a result of the blood, sweat and tears of bloody protest. We follow, and we make no apologies for it in the steps, traditions and actions of Mellowes, Brugha, Clarke, Connolly and Pearse, of O'Donovan Rossa-a bomber of England! -and Tone... We are, warts and all, the descendants of 1916, the followers of Tone; we are the men and women and, increasingly, the youth of no property who will break the link with Britain and have our Irish Republic!²⁶⁶

These were conscious legitimating devices using aspects of nationalist readings of history to appeal within a common nationalist frame of reference. However there is a conscious selection and particular reading of history occurring here.²⁶⁷ It is not simply a response to the establishment who 'concoct distortions of republican history to berate us' but a reading of the movement's own history that specifically justifies a current position by drawing on references within the militant republican socialist canon- 'the men of no property' -and by an apparently realistic appreciation - 'warts and all' - in contrast to the distortions of official history which relies upon 'acceptable, selective parts of that history and noble gestures they... draw upon...'.²⁶⁸ Above all if that was how it *had* to be then, Morrison argued, given British power, then the implication is that this [the armed struggle-'the bloody protest'] is how it *has* to be now.

This reading described an unbroken chain of history and, frequently, a personal continuity with the past, merging individual and political-historical legitimation. For example, Republican veteran Dan Gleeson's appearance at the 1985 Ard Fheis not only emphasised the unbroken continuity linking 'past republican struggles to today's struggle for freedom', but also gave legitimacy to the leadership's position on abstentionism that was to be discussed later at the conference. Gleeson

²⁶⁶ D.Morrison, 'Bodenstown 1981', *An Phoblacht* June 27th 1981.

²⁶⁷ Morrison's reference to the 'men of no property' is part of a widespread radical misreading of eighteenth century political history by republicans. Tone was, in fact, placing his faith in the middle class *not* the masses, although both were outside the political nation in the late eighteenth century. See M. Elliott, *Wolfe Tone, Prophet of Irish Independence*, London 1989, chaps 7,8, and 9.

²⁶⁸ Morrison, 'Bodenstown 1981'.

argued for the ‘inevitability of struggle... While there is a British presence in our country; there will never be peace. And while they hold guns to the throats of the Irish people, there will always be an IRA to fight them.’²⁶⁹

Mandate from the people?

The issues surrounding the abstentionist debate had been well-rehearsed before 1986. The sensitivity of the issue for Provisional Republicanism was intimately connected with the origins of the leadership and the split with the Officials in 1969-70 over taking seats in partitionist parliaments. For those who see republicanism as a tradition fixed around historically defined principles the Caretaker Executive statement provides strong evidence. The Provisional argument was that ‘participation in parliaments constitutes recognition’ and citing various precedents from the inception of Sinn Féin in 1905 argued that the task of republicans was to work ‘towards the reassembly of the 32-County Dáil... which will... rule all Ireland.’²⁷⁰ This was a political argument which, it was argued, had a quasi-legalistic basis. Thomas Maguire, ‘as sole surviving member of the Executive of Dáil Eireann’ declared that the Official Army Council was illegal and that ‘the government authority delegated in the Proclamation of 1938 [by the ‘surviving faithful members of the latest 32-County Parliament of the Irish Republic...’] now resides in the Provisional Army Council and its lawful successors....’²⁷¹ These were powerful arguments that seemed to accord the Provisionals not only historical legitimacy in continuing the struggle against Britain, but also a high degree of legal authority. English sums up what is a dominant view amongst scholars and commentators that these almost theological arguments of an apostolic succession from the Second Dáil via the 1938 Proclamation and the individual imprimatur and laying on of hands by Tom Maguire [as the last surviving member] were the ‘philosophical orthodoxy’ of the Provisionals and that the IRA leadership was regarded as the direct representative of the 1918 Dáil and, as such, the lawful government of the Irish Republic.²⁷² There are also echoes of the Defender,

²⁶⁹ ‘Committed to Victory’, *An Phoblacht* November 7th 1985.

²⁷⁰ ‘Attempt to take over the republican movement’, *An Phoblacht* February 1970.

²⁷¹ ‘Comdt. General Thomas Maguire’s Statement’, *An Phoblacht* February 1970.

²⁷² R.English, *Armed Struggle: A History of the IRA*, Basingstoke 2003, 213-4.

oath-bound tradition that posed an alternative moral authority to that of the state and social status quo.²⁷³

Likewise the language and patterns of historical thinking are reflective of the Fenian tradition and its belief in the legality of the invisible, metaphysical Republic 'virtually established' or in temporary abeyance.²⁷⁴ In Provisional usage, however, there appears to have been a studied ambiguity about the usage of the term 'The Republic'. In Easter Statements, for example, the term applies to the historic entity of 1916, but it is unclear if its 'overthrow' by the Treaty and continued usurpation by the Free State means its actual or merely metaphysical abeyance. Although the IRA used legalistic language in its activities, whether this reflected a real mentality or merely the aping of official state language common to insurgents is unclear. It is likely that for most members of the IRA the justifications and legitimations were mere sophistry. As a leading Provisional was to argue:

No one who joined the republican movement post '69 had heard of the theology that the Army Council was the legitimate government of Ireland... as far as I was concerned this was a bit farcical... You could only argue the justification for armed struggle in the North came from the conditions under which we live. The mandate would come from the support you had in the community.²⁷⁵

The founding moment of Belfast Provisionalism in August 1969 seems to have had more of a vivid impact than any historical sense of continuity and the need to complete the unfinished business of the Irish revolution.²⁷⁶ This suggests that History was made by living people and active memory, not dead tradition.²⁷⁷ But history, both contemporary and past, real and imagined did have its legitimating and explanatory uses for the Provisionals.

²⁷³ 'The republicans, in every generation, were aiming at a 'moral polity', the political equivalent, more or less, of the 'moral economy' of the peasants'. O. MacDonagh, *States of Mind: A Study of Anglo-Irish Conflict 1780-1980*, 72.

²⁷⁴ The phrase 'virtually established' is taken from the Fenian Oath. See MacDonagh, *States of Mind*, 83 for the full text and discussion on this pattern of thought. L. de Paor, *On the Easter Proclamation and Other Declarations*, Dublin 1997 also discusses how these Fenian themes might have had an impact on later republicanism, 39-42.

²⁷⁵ Danny Morrison, Interview January 5th 2004

²⁷⁶ Interviews with Mickey McMullen April 13th 1998, Brendan Hughes August 10th 1998 and Tony Catney, April 15th 1998.

²⁷⁷ Interviews with Mickey McMullen April 13th 1998, Brendan Hughes August 10th 1998 and Tony Catney, April 15th 1998. These republicans stress the impact of events in 1968-72 in influencing their involvement with IRA

Dilseacht and the Politics of Revolution

This strand of thought was to be reflected in the debates on abstentionism in what initially appeared to be a simple, theological defence of tradition. The apparent essence of this approach was summed up in the word dilseacht variously translated as right, loyalty, fidelity, genuineness and allegiance, which would appear to define the 'traditionalist' case.²⁷⁸ Some of the deeper silences of the Republican tradition are also apparently relevant here concerning the contemporaneous nature of the past, the intersection of past, present and place, the cyclical nature of history and concepts of destiny and historical progress.²⁷⁹ This implied a loyalty to a fixed body of doctrine that had been handed down and would in turn be passed on.²⁸⁰ It also implied a politics based on moral worth and faith. Tom Maguire's description of his comrades in the Civil War had contemporary resonance: '...They were my men and they were faithful... others were unfaithful, were unworthy,'²⁸¹ and he went on to quote Terence Mac Swiney on the characteristics of the incorruptible republicans: 'If but a few are faithful found, they must be all the more steadfast for being but a few.'²⁸² Cumann na mBan's position during the debate on taking seats is a classic statement of the 'traditionalist' arguments rooted in a moral posture. A statement refers to the organisation's

explicit allegiance to 1916 Proclamation...our constitution states unequivocally that the sovereignty ...of Ireland [is] non-judicable and inalienable...our stance is not something new for Cumann na nBan [details the historical record of the organisation]...the constitution of Cumann na mBan is based on certain fundamental truths on which people take their stand and which we now uphold.²⁸³

The emotional and morally sustaining power of tradition was indeed evident in some of these arguments. Abstentionism was:

²⁷⁸ Dilseacht was the title of a biography of Tom Maguire and a general statement of the 'traditional' republican case. R.Ó Bradaigh, *Dilseacht: the story of Commandant-General Thomas Maguire and the Second All-Ireland Dáil*, Dublin 1997.

²⁷⁹ Kearney identified tensions and ambivalence between this mythic discourse and anti-mythic, more pragmatic frameworks of thought within Provisionalism during the Hunger Strike period. See R.Kearney, *Myth and Motherland*, Derry 1984, 13.

²⁸⁰ See, for example, M.Mansergh, 'Tom Maguire and the stretching of Republican Legitimacy', in *The Legacy of History* Cork 2003, 304-309.

²⁸¹ Tom Maguire, quoted in R.Ó Bradaigh, *Dilseacht*, 47.

²⁸² 'A Veteran Speaks' quoted in R.Ó Bradaigh, *Dilseacht*, 65. MacSwiney quotation from T. Mac Swiney, *Principles of Freedom*

²⁸³ 'Statement by Cumann na mBan, *An Phoblacht* October 30th 1986.

the very principle on which the Republican movement has been built...to enter Leinster House would be a complete betrayal of the all-Ireland republic, a betrayal of all those who gave their lives...Ernie O'Malley would turn in his grave if he thought that this motion was before this Ard Fheis²⁸⁴

Tradition seemed to be its own legitimation:

We have not been wrong for 65 years...we have been right and we should continue to be right [refers to all attempts to break movement-the firing squad, the hunger strike, the prison]...those in Leinster House were not able to break this movement [now the Dublin establishment can say]...they have come in from the wilderness and we have them now.²⁸⁵

The illegitimacy of the decision to end abstentionism, in the sense of lawful and democratically justified, was also embodied within a reading of the authority of tradition.

I do not recognise the legitimacy of any Army Council ...which lends support to any person or organisation...prepared to enter ...Leinster House' 'The Irish Republic, proclaimed in arms in Easter Week 1916 and established by the democratic majority vote of the people in...1918, has been defended by Irish Republicans for several generations...I am confident that the Cause so nobly served will yet triumph.²⁸⁶

Thus a variant of democratic legality and the popular will move further and further from contemporary, and historical reality ossifying into the grotesquery of one man claiming to be the embodiment of the will of the Irish nation as expressed in the Second Dáil. Politics thus cease to be about conscious subjectivity and human activity, and become instead a form of diminished, debased tradition and ancestor worship. Politics become frozen in time and action circumscribed by a mandate from 1918.

History and politics could also have other meanings within the Provisional canon. In 1970 the Officials were accused of wanting to '...change a National Movement into yet another political party seeking votes at all costs'²⁸⁷ indicating that republicans saw themselves as beyond mere politics, which they identified with

²⁸⁴ 'Ard Fheis report '85, *An Phoblacht* November 7th 1985.

²⁸⁵ R. Ó Bradaigh, *Magill* 13th November 1986.

²⁸⁶ 'A Veteran Speaks' quoted in R. Ó Bradaigh, *Dilseacht*, 65.

²⁸⁷ 'Attempt to take over the republican movement', *An Phoblacht* February 1970.

careerism and opportunism. Instead republicans were the bearers of a national mission fully consonant with both Ireland's history and their own tradition. Likewise the pattern of historical experience could be elevated into a cyclical historicist pattern of inevitability. The original sin of parliamentary politics and its fatal corrupting embrace was shown in the experience of the Officials who were revolutionaries until they entered Leinster House. It was only a matter of time before the system would do the same to the Provisionals, opponents of the charge argued the dropping of the principle of abstentionism was seen as the

slippery slope to Stickyism... The Collinses, Griffiths, de Valeras and Mac Giollas all pragmatically changed it into a tactic, and then went into objectionable parliaments.... Let's not kid ourselves that we are better than the Sticks were or Sean MacBride or Fianna Fáil. ²⁸⁸

But this criticism was rooted in a revolutionary absolutism not solely grounded in tradition. How could Sinn Féin claim to be a revolutionary organisation, it was argued, 'if it participated in the institutions of the state that it opposed? The history of revolutionary movements ...demonstrates that bourgeois politics cannot be used in a revolutionary and non-reformist way.'²⁸⁹ The links between this absolutism and 'practical politics' were seen in calls for the establishment of a convention of Sinn Féin elected representatives which would be implicitly a revolutionary constituent assembly with the implication of an emerging dual power challenge to the southern state. However even this revolutionary approach referred back to the tradition and theology of the virtually existing republic when Ruairi Ó Bradaigh argued that all Sinn Fein parliamentary representatives were 'deputies of an all-Ireland Dáil' and should not be described as Assembly members or MPs. ²⁹⁰

The Politics of Revolution

The politics of the Adams leadership were rooted in the republican socialist analysis that linked national and social oppression in its analysis of British imperialism and capitalism's role in Ireland. They argued that national and social liberation were inextricably linked and identified the working class as the only true bearers of the

²⁸⁸ 'Ard Fheis report '85, *An Phoblacht* November 7th 1986.

²⁸⁹ D.Minta, Letter-Mala Poist, *An Phoblacht* Oct 23rd 1986.

²⁹⁰ 'Ard Fheis report '85', *An Phoblacht* November 7th 1985.

national mission. Partly as a reflection of the social base of the Provisionals, partly as a means to broaden the support base of the movement and partly as a result of the international currency and prestige of the left project, these analyses were influential amongst the leadership of the Provisionals from the late 1970s. Although this analysis drew on some metaphysical themes of nationality it was largely a stylistic device in which the traditional content was hollowed out and mixed with a Third world guerrillaist Marxism. In this case the Hegelian spirit of the nation was replaced by the risen people as the agency of historical change in Ireland. *Pace* Pearse, instead of waiting for the revolutionary wave the risen people were to become their own messiahs. Thus nationalist readings of history were conjoined with forms of Marxism that stressed the collective agency of the working class as a world-historical force to defeat imperialism and the republican movement as the vanguard that would achieve this historical task.

Although this Maxiant framework could be deterministic and almost Aquinian in its metaphysics it did stress agency and direct intervention in the making of history. It also argued that history was made by the masses under the leadership of the vanguard, linking Leninist conceptions of party to republican-Fenian-conspiratorial traditions of the leadership role of the movement. The politics that emerged from this marriage, although bearing the marks of tradition, were also a pragmatic response that reflected the social base and the founding moment of Provisionalism in the nationalist ghettos. As with the idioms and language of Catholicism, the language and tropes of nationalism were consciously and creatively used as a medium to communicate different messages drawing on the commonsense and republican culture of the movement's base. In its ideology of revolution and sense of history it also reflected a pragmatic eclecticism by developing a different sense of the relationship of the past and present, along with a different conception of political change and history and the revolutionary process.

[This underlying pragmatism was reflected in the language of the debate. Supporters of maintaining abstentionism were accused of emotionalism and political immaturity, of elevating tactics into principles and of being trapped by tradition. This was counterposed to political and historical realism: the lessons of history here were about political failure, not moralising around individual betrayal of the faith. One contribution to the debate argued in this vein when s/he stressed that '...it is time when tactics and principles should be agreed on. And the most important of all

principles should be recognised-and that is the principle of winning.’²⁹¹ The betrayals of past leaderships were seen as the product of structural social determinants and political culture rather than moral failure and corruption.

Collins and De Valera were patriotic...[not] true revolutionaries...who never trusted the people. In 1918-21 the power in Ireland was moved sideways to the native capitalist class to act on behalf of their British Masters. This was possible because the political culture of the republican leadership was not to take power on behalf of the people...so that the people would control...the nations resources. The crisis in some people’s minds over the abstentionist issue is basically a crisis of confidence... A revolutionary will use any method that will serve the interests of the people...Because of their fundamentally different political outlook; these people’s fears will not be allayed....²⁹²

Two conceptions of politics and history clash here which reflect emerging differences in underlying patterns of thought. The pragmatic approach of the Provisional leadership is animated more by the sprit of the nationalist ghettos than the geist of the historic nation. It has conceptions of movement and development of strategy; evolving politics and using history to meet changing circumstances. To a certain extent Republicans theorised these differences by discussing their own history as a struggle between conflicting tendencies. This was a self-conscious definition, formed and used during this period of factional conflict.

Significantly this analysis also appealed to tradition but in a creative way which attempted to contextualise²⁹³ and historicize politics rather than see development in a cyclical or Manichean fashion which moralised, for example, Fianna Fáil and the Workers’ Party as simply the morally corrupt who have fallen from the true faith.²⁹⁴ As one correspondent to *An Phoblacht* put it in discussing ideas of ‘progress and going forward’: ‘All of us have our past, our history in common...but

²⁹¹ ‘Young Republican’, Mala Poist, *An Phoblacht* November 21st 1985. A textual analysis of letters dealing with abstentionism in *An Phoblacht* during this period provides evidence of the repetition of common themes, the significance accorded to the views of republican prisoners and the strength of emotional appeals. Taken together these aspects betoken a degree of co-ordination and common purpose behind the pattern of the debate.

²⁹² Emmet Walsh, Mala Poist, *An Phoblacht* November 21st 1985.

²⁹³In discussing a pre-revolutionary situation it was argued that the internal divisions within republicanism ‘...are relative to the conditions, the circumstances and the historical background against which the movement functions.’ See Sinn Féin Educational Programme document *The Split* [undated-1979?].

²⁹⁴ For example, in the Sinn Féin Educational Programme *The Split* [1979?] republicanism is described as **always** [my emphasis] having had three tendencies: ‘a militarist... and apolitical tendency, a revolutionary tendency and a constitutional tendency’.

the republic lies in the future and so it is to the future we should look. The republic is not just an abstract word or an ideal.’²⁹⁵

Although rooted in pragmatism and a sense of realism²⁹⁶ that was heightened to emphasise the traditionalism, elitism, passivity and utopian nature of the traditionalist opposition²⁹⁷, the leadership could also deploy a historical sense in support of their case. The IRA statement supporting the constitutional change on abstentionism significantly blurred the issue of legalism and historical descent in a studiously ambiguous manner that was to be at the heart of the Provisional project until arguably the Good Friday Agreement. It referred to the attacks on the legitimacy of its position by counterposing a ‘real’ historic tradition of resistance that was no less invented than the pseudo –legalism of Tom Maguire’s trousers:²⁹⁸

...The IRA predates the First Dáil, the Second Dáil, its constitution is a military constitution and our legitimacy stems from organised popular resistance to British rule in Ireland, a tradition that was **reinforced** [my emphasis] in 1916, by the Fenians, by the Young Irelanders, by the United Irishmen. Its legitimacy stems from the tradition of resistance which has been a fact of history since Britain first encroached Irish sovereignty 800 years ago.²⁹⁹

In this reading the right of resistance is ‘historical’, although there are signs of an emergence of a different historical and, hence, political sensibility. This drew on some of the common themes of republicanism and combined them with a sense of an anti-colonial and popular, democratic history rather than the traditional metaphysical categorisation of the spirit. However, the justification at this stage remains rooted in ahistorical conceptions of sovereignty and ‘Britain’. Its conception of the past is still

²⁹⁵ J. McCombe, Mala Poist, *An Phoblacht* September 18th 1986.

²⁹⁶ G. Adams, Presidential Address, *An Phoblacht* November 7th 1985. ‘They are not so much afraid of Sinn Féin as afraid of the inherent soundness of the Irish people... It is that threat, as yet unrealised, it is that fear that the people will become organised and that Irish Republicanism – always a potent and radicalising force in Irish politics – will become a catalyst for a reawakened and militant alternative to the present mess...’ The language here betokens a ‘politician’ engaging with a real force and attempting to build support amongst the electorate.

²⁹⁷ See, for example, Seán Crowe’s speech at the 1985 Ard Fheis, ‘Report ’85,’ *An Phoblacht* November 7th 1985 and similar contributions to the debate in 1986 that stressed the sterile nature of abstentionism and, its failure to generate long-term support. References are made to opponents of change who are ‘content to sell Easter Lilies and attend commemorations. History should have taught us that somewhere along the road we have been doing something wrong.’

²⁹⁸ A reference to a sacrilegious joke made by a Belfast republican who asked whether when Tom Maguire died did the mandate of the Second Dáil pass on to his trousers or would they have to look for a ‘new Tom Maguire’ like the Buddhists look for the Dalai Lama.

²⁹⁹ ‘IRA Statement’, *An Phoblacht* November 9th 1986.

not a developmental one in that history is seen as a contemporary terrain where past and present interpenetrate.

The Uses of History

This emerging historical sensibility was also evident in the 'political' approach of the Sinn Féin leadership, which increasingly used the language of conventional political parties reflecting the beginnings of a discursive shift. The mandate now was not one of history or necessarily tradition, although that too could be called into service to support the idea of accountability and political dialogue with the electorate if needs be. During the debate on abstentionism the leadership consciously stressed that the right to change the movement's constitution lay with the **current** party membership: it would be a product of democratic debate and resolution. This points up a clearly intended contrast between living, active democracy and the dead hand of the past generations represented by tradition.³⁰⁰ The references to history here were used as an exemplar of the contingency and developmental nature of politics. Tradition is placed at the service of modernisation by showing that republicanism is not merely a corpus of ideas handed down unchanged but is updated and developed, 'a process of continual interpretation and refinement in response to constantly changing social and political reality.'³⁰¹ Adams' attack on what he presented as a cult of tradition and political sectarianism that isolated republicanism from the people was designed to produce a different type of republican political instrument that was rooted in a different understanding of the need for active engagement with the historical process:

... if we have no concept of winning we can remain as we are-a party apart from the people, proud of our past, but with little involvement in the present and only dreams of the future... **The aspiration for the Republic** [my emphasis] has never been defeated, even when the republican forces were defeated and the legitimate government of the Republic overthrown. It is not vested merely in proclamations or in parliaments of the past. It cannot be voted, negotiated or coerced away. Even if our history only started yesterday the right to the Republic exists today in the right of the Irish nation to sovereignty and national self-determination...³⁰²

³⁰⁰ A point made by P.Doherty in a speech quoted in 'Ard Fheis report', *An Phoblacht* November 6th 1986.

³⁰¹ G.Adams, 'The Politics of Revolution', *An Phoblacht* November 6th 1986. The examples of Lator, Pearse, Connolly and Mellows are cited to support this developmental perspective during the abstentionism debate.

³⁰² G.Adams, 'The Politics of Revolution', *An Phoblacht* November 6th 1986.

This political analysis is rooted in the democratic idea of national self-determination. The republic is a potential political choice of the population and is not simply a tradition vested in historic statements and documentation. It is above all an aspiration of living people that rests on pre-existing rights not 'merely' the mandate of the past.³⁰³ As one leading Sinn Féiner was to later argue:

The argument [that the IRA was the legitimate government] might have been raised when people said, 'Where do we get our mandate?' The reply might have been: We get it from... 1916...subsequently endorsed by the First ...and ...Second Dail, which was never dissolved.' So, therefore, the people who were loyal to the objectives of the Dail programme, we're them. It really is extremely weak; it turns on its head... What about the people of the Twenty Six Counties who vote for Fianna Fail and Fine Gael? They don't count? They've no say? That again is nonsense.³⁰⁴

This pattern of thinking is evolving away from a fossilised, almost fetishised reification of History and is now becoming self-critical and contingent on a wider political context. In practice then the Provisionals were always much more pragmatic than the idea of the tradition driven paradigm would suggest, but now this pattern was becoming central not only to the historically informed elements of their ideology, but also to the concomitant aspects of their political practise and sense of agency. Agency and active intervention had always been central to Provisionalism. Now it was becoming increasingly theorised as the conscious agency of the people and, in time, would be increasingly defined in terms of the (nationalist) electorate rather than historical abstractions such as the nation and the spirit of freedom. This meant not only a theoretical revision, but also a major shift in the Provisionals' analysis of the nature of the Southern state and the possibilities of revolutionary change south of the border. Although not immediately apparent this *de facto* acceptance of the legitimacy of the twenty-six county polity on the grounds of its evident constitutional credibility and popular support reflected in the poor electoral showing of Sinn Féin fatally undermined key aspects of the Provisionals' imperialist analysis of the political structures of the whole island. The inaccuracy of the previous dominant abstentionist orthodoxy, rooted as it was in a definition of the Dublin government as structurally

³⁰³ Interview with Danny Morrison, January 5th 2004.

³⁰⁴ Interview with Danny Morrison, January 5th 2004.

neo-colonialist, was now emerging for the leadership as both a theoretical and practical obstacle to political and electoral advance.

However, this emerging sensibility did not initially result in major non-historicist revisionism. Indeed the opposite was true. History was still placed at the service of contemporary politics, except now the aims and the means were somewhat different.³⁰⁵ If anything the Provisionals' use of history became more politicised and concrete, as it moved from an ideologically metaphysical discourse to the explicitly republican realism, which had always expressed their practice. These historical comparisons had always attempted to legitimate the current activities of the IRA by stressing historical parallels- 'the **objective** [my emphasis] of the republican struggle has not changed since Kevin Barry went to the scaffold' and 'the guerrilla war waged by IRA Volunteers against the British...between 1919-21 has striking similarities with the liberation struggle today...'³⁰⁶, but increasingly elements of republican realism entered the analysis where direct **political** lessons were drawn to justify contemporary politics in the idiom of the past. For example, it was argued that 'if we do not ...implement **the lessons learned from history** and win by whatever tactics necessary, we will never be able to stand here as a people to **honour** Liam Mellows or any other republican' [my emphasis].³⁰⁷

Perhaps the most self-conscious amendment of republican history that illustrated this critical approach to aspects of tradition was the legitimating of the contemporary IRA by highlighting the less romantic and violent aspects of the Tan War period. In the words of Danny Morrison 'it did more of a demolition job on the mythology of the Good Old IRA than anything Peter Hart has been able to do.'³⁰⁸ More importantly politically was the undermining of the constitutional nationalist critique of the Provisionals by highlighting the lack of a democratic mandate for 1916 and the unrepresentative, elitist nature of the 'Good Old IRA'. Republican propaganda and republican revisionism were mixed in equal measure in attacks on 'constitutional nationalists who have been forced into all sorts of revisionism, intellectual dishonesty

³⁰⁵ 'Electoral Interventions', *IRIS* November 1981.

³⁰⁶ 'Kevin Barry Remembered'-Report of Commemoration, *An Phoblacht*, December 4th 1986 and K. McCool, 'Smashing the Garrison', *An Phoblacht* December 11th 1986.

³⁰⁷ J. Sheehan, 'Liam Mellows Commemoration', *An Phoblacht* December 11th 1986.

³⁰⁸ A reference to the pamphlet *The Good Old IRA*, Dublin 1984. Interview with author, January 5th 2004.

and outright hypocrisy...Redmond's language [in attacking the 1916 Rising] prefigures the language of the SDLP's condemnation of the IRA.'³⁰⁹ In these political and intellectual battles to establish hegemony within the nationalist community and undermine the dominant nationalist consensus the Provisionals were as pragmatic and unsentimental in their republican realism and use of the past to legitimate contemporary politics as they were in their ruthless guerrilla tactics directed against the RUC and informers.

³⁰⁹ P.O'L, Mala Poist, *An Phoblacht* October 9th 1986.

Chapter V-Understanding the Republican debate 1986-1994

Military and political stalemate

Following on from the consideration of the significance of the debate on abstentionism this section attempts to place the development of republican ideology within a wider organisational and political context. In looking at some features of the debate within the movement it attempts to get a sense of the ideological dynamics of Provisional political development. The internal discussion implicitly prefigures the direction the movement was to take and points towards an accommodation with old enemies in the SDLP and Fianna Fáil. However, the subsequent move towards building a political strategy within existing frameworks and, of course, ultimate engagement with the British state during the peace process itself are not clearly defined in this debate. It is possible, however to see these developments as implicit in the military-political position the Provisionals found themselves in by the late 1980s. The debate seems to indicate a sense of an organisation which had punched above its weight but was now increasingly shrinking in impact and ambition. Already small and marginal in its domestic sphere in spite of its ambitions, within a wider (global) political context, which increasingly emphasised identity as a key political force, it was appearing as a movement increasingly out of step with the times. The Marxist framework and language of the debate seemed antique and scholastic even in the 1980s. In terms of its relevance to the politics of the period it is like reading the transactions of the Synod of Dort.

The underlying context for republican assessments of their position was the relatively successful British containment strategy. Politically Sinn Féin's advance had been halted after the dramatic successes of the pre-1985 period and remained becalmed at around 10%-11% in local government and Westminster elections until the beginnings of the peace process.³¹⁰ This stagnation was even more apparent in Sinn Féin's poor showing in elections for the Dáil where the expected breakthrough after the ending of abstentionism failed to materialise.³¹¹ Given the significance of the southern strategy for the overall Provisional perspective this was disastrous and suggestive of a need for a political re-orientation within the movement. A similar

³¹⁰ Figures taken from 'Political party support in Northern Ireland, 1969 to the present', cain.ulst.ac.uk.

³¹¹ Sinn Féin failed to poll above 2% in Dáil elections until 1997. Coakley, J. and Gallagher, M., *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, London 1999, 367.

pattern of military containment was reflected in the decline in the measurable levels of violence after the defeat of the IRA offensive in 1987-1988.³¹² These failures were increasingly seen not simply as technical or practical operational problems or a reflection of the imbalance of strength between a guerrilla army and a powerful state opponent. Taken with other factors and evidence it appeared to many that the Provisionals' military-political strategy as a whole had not worked, was not likely to work and that indeed the strategic premises on which even the post-Truce leadership were working were seriously flawed, if not completely wrong. Not only had the military-political campaign failed to obtain a British declaration to withdraw, but also by the mid-1980s this seemed even further away than had been the case in the early 1970s. Likewise the rising levels of loyalist attacks during the same period fatally undermined the IRA's claim to 'defend' the nationalist community, which had been such a powerful legitimising element in the development of the Provisionals. Indeed some aspects of the IRA's campaign had actually increased sectarian and communal polarisation rather than diminished it.

Other key themes in the strategy also began to appear less coherent and achievable. The 'Southern' strategy, even when scaled down from the revolutionary scenario of the late 1970s to the mundane aspirations of Dáil representation after 1986, had also patently failed. At a fundamental level the working assumptions of republican socialism, rooted as they were in ideas of anti-colonial national liberation and Third World Marxism, could no longer be made to appear as adequate and serviceable explanations of the world or as effective guides to action within it. The philosophers had merely interpreted the world, but their prescriptions of how to change it had proven hopelessly wrong.

The political and psychological significance of these developments cannot be underestimated. Its impact was that not only were specific aspects of the military strategy questioned, but also the whole effectiveness of 'armed struggle' as a political instrument was thrown into doubt. As one senior republican commented later:

There was talk of a kind of Tet offensive...I was totally opposed to it because ...the IRA wasn't strong enough...We weren't ready. And this is where some

³¹² 'Security' information on shootings, casualties and incidents from S. Wichert, *Northern Ireland Since 1945*, New York 1999, 256-258.

suspicion comes in. Why opt for that strategy? Given the way things worked out a lot of people died needlessly.³¹³

Questions of this character were posed because the movement had been geared up for a decisive offensive that would determine the success or otherwise of the whole strategy.³¹⁴ Failures like Loughgall meant that 'the myth was blown, and they [the IRA] and the British realised that they couldn't do what they thought they could do'. Thus military failure fed directly into the political strategy and contributed to a broader feeling that the ballot paper and armalite strategy had run its course. Some suggested that the dynamics of the peace strategy itself were strengthened because 'they [the IRA leadership] needed to get out of the war'.³¹⁵ On an individual level there was a sense that the military option was at least questionable as a tactic and that by the late 1980s 'it was all over'.³¹⁶ Others looked at the international situation and argued that pragmatic strategies other than armed struggle were possible to achieve political aims.³¹⁷

Republicans theorised this stalemate by assessing not only British strengths but also their own political weaknesses and ideological limitations. One contribution to the debate that may reflect leadership thinking encapsulates this well and points towards some of the elements that were to emerge in the Provisional strategy in the 1990s. The argument sensed an underlying 'defensiveness' in the idea that there was an impasse and that the British were able to contain, but could not defeat, the Provisionals. It developed a case for an ideological, political and military offensive in the following terms:

If our struggle is a revolutionary struggle then our actions should be guided by our ideology...just as the use of armed action is a tactic, so too is the cessation of armed activity...if we become assured that our political offensive was being successful and that an intensification of armed action would seriously undermine that success then, as a movement, we should be mature and disciplined enough to accept-even though we may not understand-that such a development would warrant cessation. Equally, if we become assured that no further advance could be made politically then we should argue for an

³¹³ Brendan Hughes, interview with author, August 10th 1998.

³¹⁴ Anthony McIntyre, interview with author, May 30th 1999.

³¹⁵ Anthony McIntyre, interview with author, May 30th 1999.

³¹⁶ Tommy Gorman, interview with author, August 12th 1998.

³¹⁷ Mickey McMullan, interview with author, April 13th 1998.

intensification of armed action while we make political withdrawal by seeking to consolidate the political gains previously made.³¹⁸

This statement highlights some of the features of republican political culture and the patterns of debate that were taking place within Provisionalism in the period preceding the peace strategy and later ceasefire. It points to the possible tactical use of armed struggle and the political value of a 'cessation' and uses a language which was to become familiar to republicans in the 1990s.

The political culture of Provisionalism

The political culture of republicanism played a decisive role in shaping the nature of the debate and the resulting political –military direction. The important features of that culture were the relatively undeveloped theoretical basis of republican ideology as opposed to military-political strategy along with the importance placed upon loyalty, discipline and unity within the movement as opposed to the democracy of discussion and debate. Editorials in *Iris Bheag* laboured the point 'that because we have no tradition of political debate within Sinn Féin many articles are leaving the vast majority of our members behind'³¹⁹ or complained that 'there is very little participation from the membership in debate of the issues... It is a measure of how passive a party we remain.'³²⁰ The first item on the agenda of any republican meeting might well have been the split, but it was rarely preceded by a drawn out theoretical struggle.

Likewise the culture of loyalty and discipline combined with the prestige of leadership were important factors in political development. As one leading republican was to later explain, republicans accepted the Good Friday Agreement because Gerry Adams was like an archbishop who could rely on rank and file support, even when the movement did not really know what it contained.³²¹ This culture of dogma and leadership infallibility has deep roots in republicanism, a fact recognised by the leadership themselves who when initiating debate in the late 1980s as part of their modernising project were to use strikingly similar theological terms to criticise their

³¹⁸ H-Blocks Education Committee, 'The Need For A Broad Front Now', *Iris Bheag* 11, 1988.

³¹⁹ Editorial, *Iris Bheag* 10, 1988

³²⁰ Editorial, *Iris Bheag* 13, 1988.

³²¹ A. McIntyre, 'Inequities, internal politics and repression' in F. McGarry (ed), *Republicanism in Modern Ireland*, Dublin 2003, 193-194.

own movement.³²² Rather like Old Labour's definition of socialism, republicanism is what the movement's leadership says it is.

Many contributions to the discussion emphasised the way in which external and internal aspects of republican political development were closely linked.³²³ In many ways there was a 'crisis of ideas and ideology' for the Provisionals in the late 1980s, as there were for so many other radical movements who sensed that their projects were being challenged by new realities. The central existential question for the Provisionals was linked to the core problem of defining republicanism and the strategy for achieving their goals in a period when, it was overconfidently argued, Sinn Féin was 'moving from an almost non-political supporters club to the most lively political party in the 32-Counties in the space of a few years.'³²⁴ The recurrent theme in debates and internal education was 'What is Republicanism?' The debates over abstentionism 1985-86 and the strategic direction in the 1990s were to show that this was not an easy question for the Provisionals to answer. This problem of definition was further heightened by the questions thrown up by politics of the peace process in the early 1990s.

We need to be clear what our ideology is-what sort of beliefs does an Irish Republican have? If you think that this is only stating the obvious then ask each member of your cumann to write down the four most important beliefs in Republicanism and compare answers.³²⁵

These problems of definition highlight one key theme in the republican political tradition which proved useful for a revisionist leadership- the degree of necessary continuity behind which any change in strategy or ideology must hide. This reflects a considerable degree of pragmatism amongst the Provisionals and the ability to consciously develop a new position to adapt to new circumstances: the tradition is skilfully deployed and re-invented, but does not limit the real scope for revision.³²⁶ For example, in developing the electoral strategy in the 1980s Provisional leaders

³²² Editorial, *Iris Bheag* 22, 1989: 'We need to stop looking on republicanism as a religion instead of a set of political ideas that are developing to meet changing circumstances. And we need to cease to be afraid that some members might have ideas which challenge orthodoxy...'

³²³ Morrigan, 'The Dual Task: Internal Politicisation, External Mass Mobilisation', *Iris Bheag* 2, 1987.

³²⁴ Editorial 'Crisis of Ideas and Ideology', *Iris Bheag* 11, 1988.

³²⁵ Editorial - 'Crisis of Ideas and Ideology'.

³²⁶ McIntyre convincingly argues that Provisionalism has always been in many ways a departure from pre-1969 republicanism, especially illustrated in the manner that new discourses have 'unceremoniously usurped' the 'vestiges of tradition' in, for example, the abstentionism debate. . A. McIntyre, 'Inequities, internal politics and repression', 193.

were aware of how difficult 'it would be to make that transition given the whole history of the movement and the negative associations of that strategy.'³²⁷ Thus the electoral strategy was developed pragmatically and presented as part of a continuing commitment to revolutionary politics. As Morrison explained it:

We were quite clear that what we wanted to produce was a larger movement...and that in building up a political movement we were building up an insurance policy...I saw that a number of things were holding back the struggle and a number of things could lead to defeat and stalemate...What we had to do was have as many options open as possible...if there is a vacuum there fill it, if we can develop, develop.³²⁸

Some critics of the leadership sensed that this pragmatism was combined with bureaucratic manipulation to trade on loyalty and divert the movement from the true path. As one leading opponent of the Adams leadership in the mid-1980s put it:

In a lot of places we did draw in a lot of H-Block supporters...into Sinn Féin, but by this time political education was largely in the hands of people who had a certain agenda. New supporters would ask: 'Why don't you sit in the southern parliament?' That type of thing was let run whereas in the early 1970s these things were faced up to and answered...The mass support of the H-Block campaign was diverted into non-revolutionary paths.³²⁹

Other less conspiratorial explanations could well lie in the attempts by republicans working within the limits of this culture to explain and pragmatically engage with changing political situations. The result was a grafting of new ideological elements onto an existing body of doctrine. Given the limited nature of republican theorisation historically this might mean attempting to draw on classic texts-such as the 1916 Proclamation or the writings of Liam Mellows-or refer to one of the dominant theoretical traditions that existed outside republicanism, but which could be related to it, such as Marxism.³³⁰ This type of thinking in and of itself indicates the nature of republicanism reflecting both the northern social base of the movement and the diverse strands of thought that made up its ideology.

³²⁷ Danny Morrison, interview with author 6th January 2004.

³²⁸ Danny Morrison, interview with author 6th January 2004.

³²⁹ Ruairi Ó Bradaigh, interview with author, April 20th 2003.

³³⁰ For example see Susini's call for a form of 'Republican Marxism' in the internally produced 'Armed Struggle: A Strategic Imperative' (undated, 1992?). Copy in author's possession.

This diversity was to be both a strength and a weakness allowing quite disparate elements to hold together and giving the leadership a wide ideological repertoire to draw upon as a means of mobilisation and development of political and electoral support. However, it also meant that in periods of defeat for the republican project the contrary could apply and fragmentation and sectarianism could predominate.³³¹ Although media commentators frequently characterised republican politics in terms of hawks and doves, traditionalists and modernisers or politicians and militarists, these bald categories fail to encompass the fluidity and dynamics of the movement, especially the importance of local and regional factors and Provisionalism's interaction and complex relationship with pre-existing nationalist political culture. In order to understand this debate we perhaps need to consider Provisionalism as a series of coalitions of ideologies and interests. Rather than discussing **Republicanism** as a unified concept we should perhaps assess **republicanisms**.

This definition is a recognition that the Provisional movement was not only the product of a particular conjuncture in terms of time, but that place and the wider political environment were significant features in the development of what was quite a dynamic and disparate movement. As chapters III, V and VII illustrate local characteristics and the role of particular individuals within their communities would prove to be vital in shaping the ideological and organisational forms of Provisionalism. Local loyalty in, say Ardoyne and Tyrone gave a particular shape to the activities and the political direction of republicanism. This localist Defender sense of identity has proven to be an enduring factor, especially in the politically difficult periods of the Peace Process when it posed a challenge to the politics of the movement's leadership.³³² Local identity was simply one vector, but other forces of social class, ideology and tradition were also just as important in the organisational and ideological configuration of the movement. Indeed there is both a degree of intersection and congruence as well as a pattern of conflict that means that any analysis of the ideology and strategy of Provisionalism must take this inherent instability and dynamic tension into account. Not only does this help us to understand

³³¹ A theme developed in P. Walsh, *Irish Republicanism and Socialism: The Politics of the Republican Movement 1905 to 1994*, Belfast 1994.

³³² See, for example, T. Harnden, 'Bandit Country': *The IRA and South Armagh*, London 1999 and Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, Chaps 15-16 on the importance of local loyalty during the development of the IRA ceasefire in the 1990s.

the strategic trajectory of the Provisionals in general throughout the whole period of the Troubles, but it also explains on a micro level the specific tactics of the leadership in their attempts to win support for their 'New Departure'.³³³ Likewise, what English has described as 'the most powerful forces in modern world history...nationalism and socialism...[and] aggressive ethno-religious identity...' have all contributed their particular world-historical spirits to Provisional republicanism to give it both a distinct collective flavour and yet to allow the individual essences to be retained and to emerge in conflict during periods of crisis and tension.³³⁴

Military and political instruments

One of the dominant themes of the press coverage of the early 1980s was the politicisation of the republican movement and the emergence of Sinn Féin as an electoral force in the wake of the Hunger Strikes.³³⁵ The development of electoral politics is obviously a significant factor in the development of the Provisionals but it is probably safer to see it as only one factor in that was re-considered during this period. The dominant strategic theme had been armed struggle as the cutting edge of the republican movement with the aim of bringing the British to the negotiating table. Political and electoral mobilisation played a subordinate role in this strategy. Underlying the discussion of this relationship was the perceived need to reconnect with and rebuild a mass revolutionary movement that had created the founding moment of the Provisionals between 1969-1973.

The internal debate around these issues was conducted within the boundaries laid down by the movement's political culture and traditions, although some contributions went outside that framework in questioning the utility of the IRA's campaign.³³⁶ The Provisionals had a developed military-strategic tradition and a culture of agency which was political in the Clausewitzian sense.³³⁷ There was also an electoral tradition that had existed before 1981, but had been strengthened by

³³³ See Chapter V for the importance of these factors in the political culture of Provisionalism.

³³⁴ English, *Armed Struggle: A History of the IRA*, xxiv. An example of the inherent tensions within Provisionalism would be between republican socialism's universal language of class and nation against the particularism of the Hibernian and Defender tradition. These ideological tensions were factors in the debate around abstentionism in 1985-86. See Chapter V.

³³⁵ L. Clarke, *Broadening the Battlefield: The H-Blocks and the rise of Sinn Féin*, Dublin 1987.

³³⁶ This does not preclude the possibility that privately sections of the Provisional leadership had concluded that the armed campaign should be ended. See Moloney's argument in E. Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, London 2002, 219-375.

³³⁷ M.L. R. Smith, *Fighting For Ireland? The Military Strategy of the Irish Republican Movement*, London 1995.

understanding of the need to develop a base of support in furtherance of the armed struggle in the traditional guerrilla mode.³³⁸ Although the military reorganisation of the Provisionals in the late 1970s along cellular lines and the post- Hunger Strike ‘politicisation’ have been seen as a new departure, it is also possible to place them within a republican strategic tradition. The republican socialist politics and organisational forms identified with the ‘northern radicals’, such as Gerry Adams and Danny Morrison, in the late 1970s and exemplified in the Staff Report and the Brownie articles drew on a number of existing traditions within republicanism and were not necessarily as innovative as later claimed by their proponents.³³⁹ Ideologically this was done by drawing on the republican socialist tradition which in the past had been used in an attempt to rally the ‘men of no property’ to the cause of the Republic.³⁴⁰ Other emerging positions fused the then dominant ideas and organisational rationales of left and radical politics with the military-political traditions of republicanism. This organisational and ideological hybrid was to be the form that was to be filled out by the surge in electoral support and new activists that followed the Hunger Strikes.³⁴¹ That surge in support receded somewhat, but it did leave behind a structure and a political framework that could facilitate a shift in the strategic balance within Provisionalism.³⁴²

Leninism and Fenianism

The discussions about the future direction of the Provisionals were clearly influenced by forms of Marxism. In particular the debate in the Marxist theoretical tradition on the relationship between the national democratic and socialist revolutions as well as Leninist readings of imperialism and the role of the revolutionary party was reflected within the republican movement. The republican military tradition, rooted in Fenianism and conspiratorialism, which stressed agency and the role of leadership in bringing the masses onto the field of history, could also be regarded as cognate to the Leninist idea of the revolutionary party as the vanguard of the working class. Some

³³⁸ Tommy McKearney, interview with author, May 30th 1998.

³³⁹ The Brownie articles were attributed to Gerry Adams and discussed aspects of republican strategy. They were carried in *Republican News* and *An Phoblacht/Republican News* in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Staff Report was a captured IRA document of the 1976-1978 period, which discusses the re-organisation of the IRA and Sinn Fein. See L. Clarke, *Broadening the Battlefield*, 251-253.

³⁴⁰ An argument developed in Walsh, *Irish Republicanism and Socialism*.

³⁴¹ Patricia Campbell, interview with author, January 7th 2004.

³⁴² L. Gorman, ‘Pan-Nationalism or an Anti-Imperialist Front’, *Iris Bheag* 13, 1988.

republicans were certainly comfortable in applying Leninist conceptions of party membership directly to their political project.³⁴³ However, the context in which these debates were taking place was a movement that at all levels was disparate and uneven in character and structure.³⁴⁴

There were tensions between those who favoured an overtly republican Marxism because, they argued, 'we can no longer rely on traditional methods and analysis' and who were critical of the conservatism and failure of the movement to embrace necessary change³⁴⁵ and those more pragmatic voices who criticised 'the Marxist Esperanto' of some contributions to the debate, not solely on grounds of literary merit but as a coded attack on perceived ultra-leftism, purist reluctance to compromise and implicit hostility to the broad front strategy. Perhaps the first signs of a republican realism could be detected in Danny Morrison's comment within an article on political language that it was the 'height of arrogance to dismiss the electoral support gained by the Free State parties'.³⁴⁶

These other views on party culture probably reflected the more disparate and incoherent reality on the ground and help to partially ground the process of ideological shift in terms of internal dynamics and party organisation. There were other currents that reflected contemporary radical rejections of organisational power combining fashionable ideas of decentralisation and flat structures of empowerment with the localism, particularism and non-intellectual instinctive approach of many republicans. Building the party, according to Laurence McKeown, should draw on the experiences of the 'republican community' in gaol where 'Hierarchical elitist type structures of leadership had to be replaced with a more democratic decentralised form whilst still ensuring discipline'.³⁴⁷ In discussing the gaol experience there was a tendency towards a degree of idealization of the internal culture of the 'republican community' which can also be seen in some accounts of the evidently open and democratic culture of Sinn Féin and its leadership beyond Long Kesh.³⁴⁸ This culture,

³⁴³ For example, J. Rice and E. O'Connor, 'Organisational Tasks', *Iris Bheag* 11, 1988 discuss the need for a 'full-time' party membership with 'responsibility, accountability and discipline' in democratic centralist terms taken straight from Lenin's *What is to be done?*

³⁴⁴ L.C Shinnors, 'The current state of Sinn Féin-a viewpoint', *Iris Bheag* 22, 1989 describes a widespread decay in organisation and activism in many traditional republican areas in the Twenty Six counties as a cause of poor electoral results.

³⁴⁵ Republican POWs H5, 'Bad Language', *Iris Bheag* 5, 1987.

³⁴⁶ D. Morrison, 'Bad Language', *Iris Bheag* 4, 1987.

³⁴⁷ L. McKeown, 'Building the Party', *Iris Bheag* 18, 1989.

³⁴⁸ For example, Ken Livingstone, in M. Collins (ed), *Ireland After Britain*, London 1989, 17-19.

it can be argued, was a significant illustration of a discursive shift within Provisionalism that went beyond mere style and spin. An apparent openness and even blandness in public style and image reflected a discursive framework of underlying political flexibility and dialogue very much in tune with the mood of the times. Far from being flexible, in reality it was often rigid and authoritarian masking an increasing sense of inner exhaustion, lack of political self-confidence and the hollowing out of the Provisional project in the 1990s and 2000s.³⁴⁹

The Broad Front: Ourselves Alone?

Republican attempts to theorise the changing political and military situation lead directly to the discussion on Broad Front strategy, engagement with other political forces and increasingly a debate on the nature and purpose of republicanism both as an ideology and a movement. In this sense Provisionalism did have something of a Janus character looking back to elements of its own tradition and peering into the future to try to discern the outlines of a new politics and strategy that could work in the changed circumstances. This search for a strategy might have something of an instinctive or unconscious character with the movement blindly stumbling and tentatively feeling its way in the dark, reacting to events. However it could also be a very conscious and creative process shaped by the leadership as indicated by the evidence of discussion and analytical debate in *Iris Bheag*.³⁵⁰

These characteristics and problems were not unique to Provisionalism-increasingly all types of political movements internationally in the 1980s were attempting to come to terms with changing circumstances-but the specific

³⁴⁹ For an alternative view of the gaol culture, its possible impact on Republican politics outside and indeed, the nature of the internal regime of the Republican movement in general see A. McIntyre, 'Inequities, internal politics and repression' in F. McGarry (ed), *Republicanism in Modern Ireland*, Dublin 2003.

³⁵⁰ For example, arguments that Leinster House and Stormont were at 'best platforms of propaganda and at worst institutions of national and class betrayal' indicate a willingness to think the unthinkable about taking part in an 'internal' settlement as part of the new phase of struggle in the late 1980s. See L. Gorman, 'Pan-Nationalism or an Anti-Imperialist Front', *Iris Bheag* 13, 1988. The internal magazine *Iris Bheag* began in 1987 as a 'means of exchanging ideas and developing Sinn Féin's policies and strategies by discussion', *Iris Bheag* 1, 1987. It reflected the political level and interests of a section of activists and was used by the leadership to float potentially controversial ideas; certainly ideas raised in the magazine internally found their way into the public discourse of Provisionalism. However, editorials frequently commented on the relatively small number of contributors and the somewhat narrow range of topics discussed. It ceased publication in 1990 and was replaced by the *Starry Plough/An Camcheachta*, which was more of a public magazine generally expounding the leadership line, or, more infrequently, some tightly controlled and structured 'debate'. The change in format and aim between the two magazines was itself reflective of a wider shift in the politics of the Provisionals.

combination of military-political elements in its theory and practice perhaps made the crisis more acute for republicans than for most groups.

The strategic background to the Broad Front can partially be said to lie in both the Hunger Strike and prisons campaigns and further back in some of the assumptions of the republican struggle. These were a vanguardist belief that the republican movement represented the historical will of the Irish people and that military-political activity, sometimes the propaganda of the deed or agitational witness could mobilise the sleeping republican consciousness of the population. This element in the strategy could both be quietistic in bearing witness and awaiting the tide of history to impel the masses to revolution or it could stress the role of subjective agency in rousing the nation to fulfil its destiny, as was the dominant nationalist reading of 1916-23. The historical parallels were not simply comparative and justificatory, but could be said to inform some elements of strategic thinking.

Other implicit themes in both the public discourse and internal debate turned around issues of agency and the passive /active role of the republican movement in an historicized process of change. At the heart of the debate was the role of the military – political instrument and the debate on the nature of republican politics that explicitly rejected any conception of the traditional passivity said to characterise positions like abstentionism:

We have a 'vision', we put it before the people, we expect them to support it and believe in it because it is a 'noble' ideal... When we see that armed struggle is not enough we, with inevitable reluctance, involve ourselves in some political/social/cultural activity to attract others to 'give support' to our cause-a sort of mutual exchange-even if it is a nuisance! [Consequently] ... What is the role of the Republican Movement? Is it go 'gather support' for its policies or to make a revolution in Ireland?³⁵¹

One explanation of the republican failure to historically break out of its base constituency and replicate the popular support of 1918 was the role of constitutional politicians and the betrayals of Fianna Fáil and the SDLP in particular. The nature of Fianna Fáil and constitutional republicanism had proved an analytical stumbling block for republicans since the 1930s. Two themes were to constantly re-emerge during the

³⁵¹ L. McKeown, 'Gathering Support for Ideals or Building Revolution?', *Iris Bheag*, 1988.

next seventy years: was Fianna Fáil within the broad republican family, and if so, should republicans orientate towards the leadership or the base of the party?

The Broad Front strategy of the Hunger Strike period did represent a departure from the approach of the immediately preceding years in that it increasingly focused on the humanitarian or the broader nationalist mobilisation rather than a strict support for the IRA's armed campaign and in the elections of that period succeeded in mobilising a wide range of emotions and currents.³⁵² The Broad Front of the Hunger Strike period had historical precedents in republican strategy, for example, participation in civil rights. But what was to be distinctive was that the strategy was now to be elevated to centre stage in a strategic sense and that the prime movers were to be the republican movement themselves. From what could be considered in republican strategic terms limited campaigns over extradition or the Single European Act the focus of the tactic was now applied to the central objective of the republican movement, British withdrawal and reunification.

The Broad Front was an excellent example of how a concept could be hollowed out and shift meaning, and in doing so shift the balance of the wider military-political framework. The explanations for this initial process could be a pragmatic evaluation of the successes of the electoral strategy during the Hunger Strike period and in the succeeding elections in Northern Ireland combined with a sense of isolation and containment on the military front.

The Limits of Agency

The implicit assumptions of the strategy were that the republican movement at that stage was not strong enough to achieve its goals and would require allies. This implicitly meant a significant scaling down of republican ambitions and claims to be the leading force in the national revolution. It also indicated a diminution in the Provisionals' sense of agency and ability to impose their will on the situation. With the further development of this strategy towards diplomatic manoeuvring and rapprochement with governments and parties, acting either as 'facilitators' or partners Sinn Féin ceased to be self-reliant or 'ourselves alone' and increasingly became dependent on external agencies and forces. Underlying the whole discussion is a growing sense of impotence to change the status-quo, a severely curtailed concept of

³⁵² Danny Morrison, interview with author, 6th January 2004.

potential and a declining belief in the ability on the part of republicans to either intervene in or shape history. A movement whose whole raison d'être and discourse was governed by the idea of making history was increasingly seeing itself as a group being made by history as an external and more powerful force.

Provisionalism was shifting from active political agent, determining force and subject to the passive victim of history and an object at the mercy of the state, which was reflected in its underlying discursive framework and politics of recognition and supplication. Initially this might be posed as a bloc of classes and progressive social forces starting from common, limited objectives but it would supposedly evolve into a firmer grouping with revolutionary, mobilising aims and objectives under republican leadership.³⁵³ As it developed in practice, however, it remained at the stage of limited and immediate objectives in a context defined and governed by the diplomatic manoeuvres of the leadership and the demands of governments and forces external to republicanism.

There was a common analytical framework within the Provisionals that sprang from an analysis of the isolation and containment of republicanism. This shaped both their orientation to the community, which saw republicans working with disparate forces as a means of building alliances at local level, and the Broad Front with other nationalist parties at national level. The central focus here was the success of the Hillsborough agreement in stemming the electoral rise of Sinn Féin and the nature of nationalist perceptions of the success of the agreement and its possibilities for future progress.³⁵⁴

The underlying assumption of this type of thinking was the limited base for the republican analysis of the irreformable nature of the northern state; the Provisionals analysis of Hillsborough reveals something of the cleft stick they found themselves in, both opposing the Agreement as a means of consolidating partition and claiming credit for the benefits that arose from it.³⁵⁵ These objective analyses of the political failure were frequently linked to a subjective failure in the organisation's focus resulting in 'an imposed isolation stemming from Republican elitism',³⁵⁶ which again carried with it coded implications for the strategic approach:

³⁵³ Tonto, 'The Internal Conference-Some Reflections', *Iris Bheag* 1, 1987.

³⁵⁴ D. Morrison, *The Hillsborough Agreement*, Dublin 1985.

³⁵⁵ Dennis the Menace, 'Needs of the Struggle', *Iris Bheag* 4, 1987.

³⁵⁶ Dennis the Menace, 'Needs of the Struggle'.

The bulk of our 'political' stagnation as an organisation is 'internal' with no relevance to anyone other than ourselves. Our concentration on localised community issues whilst ignoring or failing to project our policies...to mainstream issues. By defining our constituency too narrowly has led to us being involved in marginal politics and being portrayed as a marginalized party, single issue and not relevant on major political issues.³⁵⁷

Electoral, municipal and community based- politics were to bring these differences out and in turn be reflected in the debate about the movement's direction. The picture of political activity that emerges is of a localised movement with limited political discussion and activity beyond commemorations and agitation around largely local issues with the occasional campaign on a national issue such as extradition.³⁵⁸ Elections acted to galvanise supporters and provided a periodic focus, but much political activity revolved around fund raising, paper sales and organisational business meetings.³⁵⁹ To some critics this introverted and limited political culture was a 'breaking mechanism' and a product of the old abstentionist Sinn Féin that could be overcome by openness and democracy.³⁶⁰ However the development of electoral politics and especially the increasing involvement of Provisionals in local government seems to have reinforced rather than swept away many of these elements of republican political culture such as localism and was to prove significant in the development of a politics focussed on the themes of community and communal mobilisation.

The Broad Front in practice

The Broad Front discussion neatly dovetailed with the development of talks with the SDLP and the first signs of a shift in the Provisional leadership's strategic approach. Republican engagement with other parties was not unique nor was the use of the terminology of peace and stability. Likewise, the argument that republican strength had made the SDLP take account of Sinn Féin was an extension of Morrison's earlier arguments about the origins of the Hillsborough Agreement. In discussing the 'latent

³⁵⁷ Dennis the Menace, 'Needs of the Struggle'.

³⁵⁸ G. Fleming, 'May 14th Workshop', *Iris Bheag 11*, 1988 reports that there was a lack of activity by cummain, that most Sinn Féin departments were not functioning, that the movement's main links with the 'base' were through advice centres and that this resulted in clientalism rather than raising the people's political awareness.

³⁵⁹ Interview with Patricia Campbell, January 17th 2004. See also Women's Department Report of activity in Co. Clare, *Iris Bheag 13*, 1988 which gives a picture of one activist's weekly round of involvement in a residents' association, community co-op, sports clubs, producing a Sinn Féin newsletter, distributing *An Phoblacht*, attending 'boring meetings' and selling Easter Lilies.

³⁶⁰ J. Monaghan, 'The Breaking Mechanism', *Iris Bheag 25*, 1990.

potential of the Republican struggle' the Provisional leadership drew on the evidence of the 'politicisation' of the plain people of Ireland and the acceptance by the SDLP of the validity of Sinn Féin's electoral mandate.

This deployment of the idea of legitimisation of the republican position by reference to the mandate of the ballot box was a development of what had been previously a subsidiary position. The main discursive frame legitimating the republican campaign had been linked to the historic right of resistance to oppression and self determination: the language of the electoral mandate increasingly came to the fore as did the idea of engagement with 'mature' conventional politics³⁶¹ and participation in a debate within a common framework with 'fellow nationalists'. However, the quasi-revolutionary rhetoric of resistance and militancy co-existed alongside the more sedate language of dialogue and exploration which pointed towards the outlines of a new discursive framework. This transitional phase can be seen in the following statement issued following the Hume-Adams talks in 1988:

...the dialogue in itself will enable both parties to develop some understanding of the other's viewpoint. Nationalist opinion...accepted the meeting with a degree of equanimity...Sinn Fein's objective of keeping the National Question on the political agenda has been brought to a new level of discussion The talks provided a useful opportunity...to put forward Sinn Fein's criticism of the so-called gradualist approach...in relation to prolonging the struggle for national liberation...our proposals for Freedom, Justice and Peace were presented for examination and comparison with the analysis of our political opponents³⁶²

At this stage the Provisional analysis of the SDLP saw the party as central to a British strategy of stabilisation and that as a product of what republicans criticised as its gradualist politics it was prepared to work within the framework of the Hillsborough Agreement. The republican leadership's critique of Hume's position as a 'stages process' is interesting since in 1988 the Provisionals still argued that Britain had a vested interest in Northern Ireland and that the SDLP's focus on 'aspirations', equality 'within the Northern state and 'the nationalist tradition' relegates 'the right of self-determination of the Irish people as a whole' to the purely cultural and emotional rather than the political sphere.

³⁶¹ An Theachtairacht, 'Broad Front-Democratising the National Struggle', *Iris Bheag* 16, 1988.

³⁶² Mitchel, 'Talks about Talks', *Iris Bheag*, 7, 1988.

The other thrust of the critique is directed at the internal focus of the SDLP's analysis which stresses that the conflict results from a clash of different national aspirations and identities rather than the imperialist model, favoured by republicans, which stressed Britain's ultimate responsibility. However, what was significant in the hollowing out of this discourse was the description of the class basis for the SDLP's position and a shift in the republican definition of the political terrain. The Provisionals had always characterised the SDLP as a party of the Catholic middle class who were prepared to co-operate with British counter-insurgency, but during the immediate post-Hillsborough period republicans also began increasingly to argue that the fortunes of the SDLP and Sinn Féin were intimately interlinked, both in the 'objective' sense that the SDLP's 'bargaining leverage ... with the British and Irish relates ... to the relative strength of the republican movement' and in the electoral sense that the two parties were rivals for a newly emerging 'nationalist vote'.³⁶³

This was related to the increasing deployment of the idea that despite these political and class base differences both parties were part of a wider nationalist community and increasingly competing for support from the same constituencies rather than being irreconcilable enemies representing fundamentally oppose class interests.³⁶⁴ Indeed some criticism was made of SDLP strategy because it did 'not envisage any form of Pan-Nationalist alliance' with the result that 'the potential political power arising from a possible unified approach, made up of Sinn Féin and the SDLP is decimated'.³⁶⁵ The SDLP's support for Hillsborough acted, in this analysis, to accelerate the 'continuous and ongoing confrontation between the two main nationalist parties. This in turn divides and weakens the political negotiating power of the broad nationalist community'.³⁶⁶ The stress on the cross class 'whole nationalist community' rather than its internal divisions also becomes increasingly more dominant in the analysis of the Provisional leadership: likewise the slogans of Freedom, Justice and Peace, whilst rooted in Provisional discourse of self-determination could also be related to elements of the SDLP's analysis and in turn be located in those elements of nationalist political culture that stressed the communal framework of justice and **nationalist** as opposed to national rights.

³⁶³ Art Rooney, 'Analysis of the SDLP Position re: Hillsborough', *Iris Bheag* 9, 1988.

³⁶⁴ POWs H5, 'A Pan-Nationalist Alliance?', *Iris Bheag* 11, 1988.

³⁶⁵ Art Rooney, 'Analysis of the SDLP Position re: Hillsborough'.

³⁶⁶ Art Rooney, 'Analysis of the SDLP Position re: Hillsborough'.

The discourse of the 'equality agenda' also has something of a transitional character indicating movement from an argument that posits that 'the six county state was founded on inequality' and that 'as equality cannot be achieved for all citizens within [that state], the otherwise admirable objective of reconciliation becomes meaningless as a result' through to a proposition that is willing to test the possible limits of achieving a degree of equality within the partitionist framework, whilst still arguing for the ultimate goal of unity.³⁶⁷ How this was capable of being achieved even within the existing discursive framework of Provisionalism can be seen within positions held by those critical of the practicality and theoretical correctness of the 'Pan-Nationalist Alliance' and were sceptical of the effectiveness of a 'narrow nationalist strategy'. By distinguishing different tendencies within the SDLP, it was argued by some critics of the emerging position, republicans could detach a soft underbelly of 'Green' nationalists by driving a wedge into the party which would be a better strategy than 'an alliance with people who do not even recognise the desire for national self determination as legitimate.'³⁶⁸

However, this orientation towards the SDLP was common ground between critics and supporters of the Pan-Nationalist alliance and a site where increasingly the 'Broad Front' of republicans and rank-and-file nationalists came to be transmuted into the diplomatic strategy and closer co-operation of the party leaderships as exemplified by Hume-Adams. Here an apparently common discourse of the broad front was being practically and politically posed in radically different ways. Likewise on the other site of transformation around the testing of the limits of Hillsborough this could be interpreted either as a recognition that the Agreement had shifted nationalist expectations and so had to be exposed as reformist by increasing the level of demands on it or by de facto working within its confines and increasingly using conventional electoral politics, local government and communal mobilisation to increase the level of benefits for the nationalist population.³⁶⁹

As one avowedly socialist republican argued, the broad front could be interpreted in a variety of ways:

Ideologically speaking I wouldn't have had a great problem with the Pan-nationalist front if it moved the republican movement that bit nearer its

³⁶⁷ Art Rooney, 'Analysis of the SDLP Position re: Hillsborough'.

³⁶⁸ POWs H5, 'A Pan-Nationalist Alliance?', *Iris Bheag* 11, 1988.

³⁶⁹ POWs H5, 'A Pan-Nationalist Alliance?'

destination...as a socialist I see Nationalism as a bourgeois ideology. I was just prepared to be more pragmatic about it to move the situation forward. There were some acrimonious debates at the time, which reflected deep-seated republican positions.³⁷⁰

The hollowing out occurred when the bloc of classes and progressive forces began to elide towards a diplomatic and political orientation towards the party leaderships and governments. The thinking behind the strategy had probably been around in some form since the Hunger Strike when the issue of participating in Leinster House and holding the balance of power had been raised.³⁷¹ It was also raised by opponents of ending the abstentionist policy who saw participation in the southern parliament as implying political horse-trading as opposed to using the Dail as a revolutionary platform.

Following the published material and reports of discussions we can discern some of the central tensions in the republican socialist project that had been identified in the 1930s by the Republican Congress and in the 1960s by the Officials. At the heart of these debates was the relationship between socialism and nationalism in the republican project, along with the concomitant issues of strategy and tactics.³⁷² Was, for example, 'the national struggle ...an aspect of the socialist struggle'³⁷³ or could republican aims be simply defined as 'national independence and to be free of the political control of British Imperialism...at this stage we cannot lay down any conditions about what sort of republic it will be'.³⁷⁴ What was frequently conducted as a pragmatic debate around tactics was in fact a now open, now concealed struggle for the soul and direction of Provisional republicanism. As one of the first published contributions to the debate argued:

The discussion raises the question of whether we in Sinn Fein see ourselves as the leading edge of Irish nationalism-republicanism being the more politically advanced form of nationalism or whether we see ourselves as a socialist party...Is the Republican Movement a broad movement of all classes who see unity and independence as their goal, a movement broad enough to mobilize

³⁷⁰ Mickey McMullan, interview with author, April 13th 1998.

³⁷¹ For example, see a 'comm' from Bik McFarlane to 'Brownie' (identified as Gerry Adams) on the implications of the electoral successes during the Hunger Strike period and the future development of republican electoral strategy. D.Beresford, *Ten Men Dead: The Story of the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike*, London 1987, 334.

³⁷² Penfold, 'The Capitalist Class and the Irish National Question', *Iris Bheag* 7, 1988.

³⁷³ M.McMullan, 'Contradictions: 6 and 26 Counties', *Iris Bheag* 10, 1988.

³⁷⁴ Eoin Bennett, quoted in Penfold, 'The Capitalist Class and the Irish National Question'.

the majority of the Irish nation? Can our socialism allow us to see nationalist parties such as Finna[sic] Fail or the SDLP as in some sense our allies?³⁷⁵

Although as yet in an undeveloped form the germs of the peace process political strategy could be seen in these debates concerning the social bases of republican support. Nationalism could be identified either as a potentially progressive force in its potential for anti-imperialism or as an essentially Catholic –Hibernianism representing middle class elements whose ‘interests inevitably made them neutral to partition and open to collaborate with British rule’.³⁷⁶ The dangers for the Provisionals were theorised around the potential differences between the ‘Pan Nationalism’ and the ‘Anti-Imperialist Front’ which were seen as antithetical opposites. It was perceptively argued that Pan-Nationalism would be a repudiation of the ‘anti-imperialist struggle for the sake of ineffectual posturing’ and that ‘there cannot be any pan-nationalist alliance between FF, SDLP and SF unless the latter was to abandon it’s [sic] support for revolutionary armed struggle’.³⁷⁷

‘Ruling the Party with the ethos of the Army’

Given the slender nature of the Provisionals’ theoretical resources and the limited participation in the political debate, a leadership that was intent on ideological change had a free rein. They were able to hollow out existing ideas and develop new meanings from within the existing discursive framework and in this way represent a new departure as the continuation of the existing position.³⁷⁸ By the 1990s what was happening was the hollowing out of an increasingly empty shell or a reworking of an increasingly threadbare tradition whose threads and loyalties were stretched to breaking point thus giving both the public rhetoric and private discourse of the Provisionals a stale and meaningless flavour. The repetitious language and jargon of the peace process as spoken by republicans was an illustration of this process. Not only language, but also discourse appeared to have lost all meaning for them. Having evacuated one position in reality their politics were increasingly based on inviting the electorate to colour in the spaces of a new one. Throughout the peace process republican leaders used the language of ‘open-ended dialogue’ and talked about

³⁷⁵ TippEx, ‘Should S.F. bring down Charlie Haughey?’ *Iris Bheag* 1, 1987.

³⁷⁶ Silver, ‘National Self-Determination’, *Iris Bheag* 6, 1987.

³⁷⁷ Silver, ‘National Self-Determination’.

³⁷⁸ This hollowing out process also involves ‘utilising the energy and sacrifice of a different struggle in pursuit of an entirely new project’. A. McIntyre, ‘Inequities, internal politics and repression’, 193.

developing politics in a 'spirit of openness'.³⁷⁹ As we have seen the political debates initiated by the Provisional leadership in the 1980s had a similar *leitmotif*.

Sympathetic observers commented on both the democratic style and politics of republican leaders:

I have not heard a single sentiment from the people I've met in Sinn Fein that should not come from a genuine socialist party... If you sit and watch Gerry Adams in a group of people, he does not dominate it. He lets others talk, he hears a consensus emerging, he doesn't try to provide charismatic dominating leadership. I've never been to a Sinn Fein Ard Fheis... But others have expressed surprise at how every one queued before the microphone, waiting to speak. What was remarkable, they said, was that when somebody had made the point that Gerry Adams wanted to make, he left the queue and returned to his seat. There are few male politicians who would behave in that way.³⁸⁰

Not all observers are as sanguine about the internal democracy of Provisional republicanism. To some republican critics 'Provisional democracy is an oxymoron... There is no such conception as a loyal opposition in republicanism'.³⁸¹ The development of Sinn Féin during the 1980s from IRA support group to a political party with an impressive electoral machine has been well documented. The nature of its internal dynamics, especially the relationship between the political and military wings of the republican movement has become a real political issue during the peace process. Although some attempts have been made to theorise the political sociology of republicanism and whilst recent accounts of the IRA correctly conclude that the distinction between the IRA and Sinn Fein at senior levels is a convenient and transparent fiction and that the two are intimately connected and intertwined, the exact relationship and balance of power between the military and political wings remains unclear.

As part of the Long War strategy developed in the mid 1970s, Sinn Féin was to be 'radicalised' by politically aware and educated IRA Volunteers: the party would then become a transmission belt for the mobilisation of the 'republican base' that would support the cutting edge of 'the armed struggle' and the 'republicanisation' of the nationalist population. In the 1980s as Sinn Féin's base and membership grew IRA Volunteers at all levels, from local cumann to Ard Comhairle and Revolutionary

³⁷⁹ G.Adams, 'We Are Totally Committed To A Real Peace Process', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, September 12th 1991.

³⁸⁰ Ken Livingstone in M. Collins (ed) *Ireland After Britain*, 17-18.

³⁸¹ Note of a conversation with A. McIntyre, April 4th 1996.

Council, formed a vanguard cadre defining and directing the politics and activity of the broader republican movement.³⁸² For example, all major decisions and changes adopted by Sinn Féin had in effect to be first approved by an IRA Army Convention or the Army Council. Indeed the major constitutional and political decisions taken by Sinn Féin were invariably preceded by such pre-emptive ratification making the relative distribution of power between the two wings of the movement clear.³⁸³ IRA Volunteers operating under military discipline and a form of democratic centralism acted as a caucus, ensuring that the 'Army Line', as defined by the leadership, would usually overwhelmingly prevail throughout the movement.³⁸⁴ Thus, as one former IRA member has noted, 'the Party is ruled by the ethos of the Army'.³⁸⁵ Within the IRA itself this political culture and the bureaucratic centralisation of decision making was strengthened by the IRA's cellular reorganisation in the 1970s.³⁸⁶ Thus during the peace process it was likely that 'that there would have been some discussion and debate around...the TUAS strategy. But the idea of genuine consultation is slightly different in the IRA. It is more someone coming from the strata above to explain the leadership's position...'³⁸⁷

The military-political movement that had developed in the 1980s was thus something of an organisational hybrid that did not correspond to the forms of conventional party structure as defined by political sociology.³⁸⁸ But a case can be made that it did have some of the features of a modernist political party with a mass base of support, a core of activists and a hierarchical relationship between leadership and base. But these rational-bureaucratic elements also sat uneasily beside a political culture drawn from conspiratorial militarism and a Defenderist ethos, which stressed loyalty and collective solidarity. These strands merely reinforced other themes in nationalist political culture generally which acted to curtail political discussion and

³⁸² See E. Collins, *Killing Rage*, London 1997, 219-232 for details of how this relationship worked on the ground.

³⁸³ For example Sinn Féin's decision to end abstentionism was preceded by an IRA Convention that allowed Volunteers to consider the question and hence vote for the leadership's position on taking seats in Leinster House at the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis.

³⁸⁴ For example, see Moloney's account of the Sinn Féin decision to end abstentionism. E. Moloney, *A Secret History Of The IRA*, London 2002, 287-297. During the 1998 Sinn Féin Ard Fheis the author witnessed the IRA's Adjutant-General and a senior Army Council member 'lobbying and persuading' IRA Volunteers to vote for the leadership's position on the Good Friday Agreement.

³⁸⁵ Interview with A. McIntyre, May 30th 1999.

³⁸⁶ Tommy McKearney quoted in A. McIntyre, 'Provisional Republicanism: inequities, internal politics and repression', 193.

³⁸⁷ Interview with T. McKearney, May 30th 1998.

³⁸⁸ The balance between the military instrument and political control also posed analytical problems for strategic studies of the Provisionals. See M.L.R. Smith, *Fighting for Ireland?*, 178.

theoretical development within the framework of republicanism. Organisationally Provisionalism thus could be said to incorporate some of the otherwise usually contradictory characteristics of cadre and ralliement parties.³⁸⁹ It was a distinctive political culture and structure that would have some significance for the development of the movement's politics in the 1980s and 1990s. It also resulted in particular strains and tensions which were seen in the presentation of the TUAS strategy in the spring of 1994.³⁹⁰

Unity at all costs

There were sound tactical reasons, rooted in the need to preserve the unity of the republican movement, for the Adams leadership to use a language that bridged the old positions of armed struggle and revolutionary mobilisation with the newer forms that reflected a discourse of diplomacy and pragmatic accommodation.³⁹¹ This language fulfils a number of different functions and is directed at a number of different internal and external audiences with the result that during the peace process some confused signals were sent out. Republicans became increasingly adept at reading the signals and placing them both in the context of the internal dynamics of Provisionalism and the movement's relations with external forces such as Britain. TUAS, like *Towards A Lasting Peace In Ireland* in a different way, does that by using the language of struggle to mask an entirely different discursive framework. As a member of Sinn Fein's Ard Comhairle put it:

TUAS was a sop... They wanted to convince IRA Volunteers, who had come from a very militaristic tradition, that their usefulness and their role in the struggle for Irish freedom was as relevant in 1991 as it was in 1916 whereas the reality was that in the 1990s things were completely different and there

³⁸⁹ The ralliement nature of 'movements' is clearly applicable to Provisionalism whilst the existence of some alternative local centres of power within the IRA and the role of different tendencies within the leadership could be defined as cognate to the functions of notables in the cadre party structure.

³⁹⁰ This strategy is variously defined as 'Tactical Use of Armed Struggle' or 'Totally Unarmed Strategy'. The political significance of the different titles is obvious and was much commented upon at the time. A paper with the acronymic title 'TUAS' was circulated amongst members of the IRA in the period leading up to the first IRA ceasefire in 1994. The very ambiguity of its title indicates something of the tactical approach to the Provisional leadership in managing its own activists and supporters. It appears that the 'Tactical' title was the one used within the republican movement itself. Copy of paper in author's possession.

³⁹¹ For an echo of this concern for unity that might reflect discussions within the Provisionals in the early 1990s (possibly influenced by the history of the IRA since the Treaty?) and the fratricidal impact a ceasefire might have on the Republican movement see a review of Ronan Bennett's screen play 'Love Lies Bleeding' in A. McIntyre, 'Escape-from fantasy to fact', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* September 30th 1993.

was a need to be more pragmatic. I am convinced that the leadership realised that you don't ensure the primacy of politics by dismantling the military machine and creating a political machine. If you don't bring the thought processes and the ideology of the military machine with you then you will not succeed because you will leave behind a rump that may eclipse you...³⁹²

If the political balance within the Provisionals influenced the tactical approach and limited the Adams leadership's freedom of manoeuvre other structural, cultural factors and subjective factors played a part in this process of hollowing out the politics of republicanism. For example, when faced with intellectual criticism of the strategy Adams would play upon 'his status and charisma rather than the force of argument. Basically he was saying "... if he wasn't given the necessary latitude to do as he saw fit then he would resign and they could get someone else"'.³⁹³

Whilst the general parameters of the peace strategy were already emerging in the late 1980s it is probable that not even Gerry Adams and his closest supporters were aware of exactly where and how the strategy would lead. Thus the Provisional positions that we see developing in the period 1987-1994 are a combination of the possibly unforeseen implications of the Broad Front strategy's attempt to overcome containment and isolation as well as a pragmatic reaction to external forces, events and fundamental changes in the context of politics. It is not necessary to discern the individual motives of the republican leadership beyond the type of Provisional *raison d'état* and political imperative for 'unity' that Tony Catney and others including a former Chief Constable of the RUC have identified. But the style and formation of the strategy were characterised by uncertainty and pragmatism that reflected a deeper crisis at the heart of the Provisional project for both supporters and opponents of the leadership. As one former Sinn Féin Ard Comhairle member has argued:

The leadership of Adams and company is epitomised by its pragmatism not by its politics. Politics obviously played a role but now pragmatism is the order of the day. I understand the reasons for that and the world we have to live in...in some ways the strategy is being made up as they went along. There were clear objectives to get from A to B but with little notion of how to deal with eventualities in between. It was very dependent on personalities, and a lot was left to chance. The objective was to end the isolation of Sinn Féin, develop a mandate for Sinn Féin...and a degree of support via the democratic process. The specifics were worked out as events unfolded.³⁹⁴

³⁹² Interview with Tony Catney April 15th 1998.

³⁹³ Interview with Tony Catney April 15th 1998.

³⁹⁴ Interview with Tony Catney, April 15th 1998.

This pragmatism has always been close to the heart of Provisionalism. As an explanation of thought processes and the rallentando of republican politics in the late 1980s it is probably a more coherent explanation of the pattern of debate than the usual delineation of positions around the opposite poles of 'hawks' and 'doves'. The assessment of the historical experience of contacts with the British, an evaluation of the relative success and failure of the Provisionals' current strategic balance of armed and political struggle and changes in the international patterns of politics all played their part as the shift developed in the 1980s.³⁹⁵ As a Derry republican Eamon Mac Dermott puts it:

Many people were quite happy with building broader alliances and uniting Republicanism and Nationalism, the SDLP, Dublin and so on. In the 1970s we really didn't have the opportunity, it was more them and us, if you're not for us you're against us. It was also part of our own personal development, realising that a relatively small group of people couldn't change the world...there was also the almost sub-conscious impact of broader events, with De Klerk talking to Mandela, Arafat in the Middle East, the feeling that things were possible. It was never really very dynamic to have things set in stone and to say that this will never change...the European dimension is important too...We have got some political space now...Republicans have always tried to adapt, although we haven't always got it right.³⁹⁶

Other republicans stressed that Provisionalism itself as an ideology and mode of politics had limitations that facilitated and possibly produced the revisionism represented by the peace strategy. From a Marxist perspective that was increasingly marginalized within the 'broad republican family' it was argued that:

The problem is that the term Irish Republicanism is sufficiently elastic to take in more than is good for us. We are not sufficiently critical or reflective, and this obstructs the elaboration of a coherent revolutionary theory...Prominent Republicans can say one thing in New York...something different in Belfast and still a different thing in London depending on the audience...where the hell is the theory? If it isn't opportunism then its only a short step away, but

³⁹⁵ Interview with Mickey McMullen, April 13th 1998. He discussed the impact of events in Eastern Europe and the development of the nation state within the European Union on Provisional politics. John Hume stressed similar themes in the 1980s and 1990s: 'The nation state has outlived its usefulness... We are now living in a post-nationalist world in Western Europe', quoted in 'Peace Envoy with a short spoon', *The Guardian* October 9th 1993.

³⁹⁶ Interview with Eamonn Mac Dermott, October 15th 1998.

we haven't developed the analytical or ideological tools to construct a critique of where we are heading...³⁹⁷

Thus in a sense, given certain environmental conditions, this type of fundamental shift in position and outlook was always implicit and possibly inevitable in this type of republicanism. These structural explanations move away from the ideas of betrayal and individual sell-outs. Instead the stress is on the Adams' leadership's sense of direction and agency, the range of political choices that they saw available to republicans and above all the sense of the limited number of possibilities that were open to any political project in the 1990s- 'realising that a relatively small group of people couldn't change the world....'³⁹⁸ Having embarked on a strategy to end republican isolation by developing the broad front that necessitated compromises the Adams leadership accepted the logic of that type of politics and consistently followed it through to its logical conclusion.

Although it is likely that elements of the Provisional leadership have been attempting to end the war for some time and that many republicans could sense the unfolding pattern of events toward a ceasefire, the ideological success of Gerry Adams does not simply rest on his tactical skills and abilities to use charisma or manoeuvres to win key votes and decisions.³⁹⁹ The Adams' leadership's power base rests on a relationship with the activists and 'the base' that has something of the existential and organic about it, almost essentialist in terms of Provisionalism. His relationship with the ranks of Provisional activists and supporters reflects the dynamics of the movement's social psychology. The political and media pressure on Sinn Fein representatives in the aftermath of Enniskillen illustrates the power of these connections:

The most glaring example of the influence of the leadership was after the Enniskillen bomb in 1987 with local councillor Peter Corrigan in the news. He was a blubbing... mass and couldn't string two words together. Adams appeared on the lunchtime news and says the bombing was tragic... and that the IRA were wrong. They interviewed Corrigan on the six o'clock news and he was transformed into an articulate Sinn Fein

³⁹⁷ Interview with Tommy McKearney, May 30th 1999.

³⁹⁸ Interview with Eamonn Mac Dermott, October 15th 1998.

³⁹⁹ Interview with Tommy Gorman, October 7th 1997 on his feelings that 'the war was running down in the late 1980s'. Likewise Tommy McKearney expressed similar views that the leadership felt the war was effectively over by this period. Interview May 10th 1999. Anthony McIntyre's 1992 paper *Armed Struggle: A Strategic Imperative* (written under the pseudonym Susini) in arguing for the political necessity of an armed campaign may also have reflected these moods and a sense that 'the war was over'. However senior republican Brendan Hughes was unaware of any 'peace strategy' in the late 1980s or attempts to end the armed campaign during that period. Interview August 11th 1998.

representative. He couldn't say that immediately after the event: it took Adams to set down the benchmark.⁴⁰⁰

Even republican critics recognise this quality: 'my reading of the situation is that, like everyone else Adams and others were searching for ways of achieving overriding objectives. Gerry had an answer when the rest of us hadn't really articulated an alternative'.⁴⁰¹ In almost a bonapartist way the leadership embody the characteristics of the movement, reflecting the ranks and at the same time standing above them. The nature of the republican leadership also says a great deal about the movement itself: by their leaders ye shall know them. A member of Sinn Féin's Ard Comhairle in the early 1990s was clearly aware of the complexities of the relationship between the leadership and activists:

The transformation of the thinking in the Republican base and the IRA over the last ten years has been phenomenal. There is no doubt that ten years ago if you had said 'let's return to Stormont' or 'implement a ceasefire' you would have got kicked to death, whereas now they seem the most logical and practical steps and the most realistic way forward... It just seems that it's clear that this leadership is the very best that we have had, it has more influence, more sway than it has a right to have and they are intelligent enough to recognise that fact.... Given this enormous influence the leadership had the scope to radicalise and transform in any one of a number of directions.⁴⁰²

Drawing on and developing these themes of the power and influence of the leadership within the internal politics of Provisional Republicanism more critical approaches have described a deeper sense of exhaustion with the ideas of the political and indeed with activists' engagement with the world. The Adams project can be said to reflect the exhaustion not only of Provisionalism, but also of Provisionals as individuals. On that basis new forms of politics that are closed and limited to a narrow pre-determined agenda reflect an apparent dominant consensus about what is possible or indeed desirable in an era of retreats and the scaling down of political aspirations. This culture goes beyond the simple closing of ranks natural to a conspiratorial guerrilla movement and has become a device used by the leadership to steer

⁴⁰⁰ Interview with Tony Catney, April 15th 1998.

⁴⁰¹ Interview with Tommy McKearney, May 30th 1998.

⁴⁰² Interview with Tony Catney, April 15th 1998.

discussion away from fundamental issues so that 'debate does not take place in any structured or constructive fashion'.⁴⁰³

Others have attempted to explain the new forms of republican politics in terms of power structures and regimes of truth, which 'ensure that there is no effective intellectual opposition...[Adams] wants people as vote getters not thinkers and in that sense of discouraging debate, Provisionalism is increasingly authoritarian'.⁴⁰⁴ Increasingly Provisional Republicanism can be defined less as political party as such but as a 'bureaucratic structure' that acts as a pseudo-state and uses its political and social power to police dissidence and exert hegemonic control over its constituency. This represents a significant shift in the nature and function of the movement's internal regime and adds a qualitatively different dimension to the relationship between the leadership and the base outlined above. If this view is accurate then this pattern must impact on the development of the ideology and functions of Provisional Republicanism within the Northern Irish polity.⁴⁰⁵ It also locates the movement firmly within the general crisis of political organisations and ideology throughout the Western world. On this evidence it would represent for the Provisional leadership both a crisis of political disengagement within the movement and alienation without amongst its traditional electoral base in the nationalist community.

⁴⁰³ Interview with Tony Catney, April 15th 1998.

⁴⁰⁴ Interview with Anthony McIntyre, May 30th 1999.

⁴⁰⁵ For example, see A. McIntyre 'Provisional Republicanism: inequities, internal politics and repression', in F. McGarry (ed), *Republicanism in Modern Ireland*, 193

Chapter VI-State strategies in economy and society: laying the foundations of the Peace Process in Northern Ireland?

The aim in this section is to outline some of the main themes of British government economic and social strategy and to suggest how these policies, along with other aspects of economic and social change might have contributed to shaping the wider context in which Provisional republicanism developed. The argument that Provisionalism's trajectory was directly or indirectly influenced by British policy in the political and military arenas is widely accepted.⁴⁰⁶ Likewise a growing body of research actively investigates the conflict in the context of Northern Ireland's political economy as well as its impact on social change, with particular reference to the emergence of a new Catholic middle class.⁴⁰⁷

Direct causal relationships between social and economic factors and political change are perhaps less easy to gauge. Without suggesting too reductionist and mechanical connection between the economic base and the political superstructure, it can be argued that social and economic factors at the very least shape the parameters of possibility for political actors.⁴⁰⁸ Thus what needs to be considered is the potential impact on ideological and political practice of conscious state strategies acting in conjunction with processes of social and economic change.

The operative term here is *conscious*, as a case could be made that both British governments and republicans did not passively reflect the social and economic currents around them, but devised strategies in an attempt to shape them to their own advantage. In particular, the operation of the British government's social and community policy impacted upon Provisionalism's 'community politics' strategy at the level of both ideology and praxis, noticeably in the way particular strands of identity politics were to develop within the movement's repertoire. Like dogs and their owners, perhaps oppositional movements and governments eventually grow to resemble one another, but as ever in Northern Irish politics, it is illuminating to situate the discussion within a set of wider comparisons that sees state strategy and

⁴⁰⁶ For example A. McIntyre, 'Modern Irish Republicanism: The Product of British State Strategies', *Irish Political Studies* 10, 1995 and R. English, *Armed Struggle: A History of the IRA*, Basingstoke 2003, 310 quoting Tom Hartley on the influence of British policy on republicanism's development.

⁴⁰⁷ P. Hadaway, 'Cohesion in Contested Spaces', *Architects' Journal* November 2001.

⁴⁰⁸ P. Hadaway, 'Cohesion in Contested Spaces'.

republican response as part of broader international patterns rather than simply products of a unique Northern Irish *sonderweg*.

Northern Ireland: the politics of a post-industrial society?

The nature and significance of social and economic change in western societies since the 1970s has been the subject of a wide ranging critical debate that has attempted to theorise the depth and quality of what Harvey has described as ‘a sea change in the surface appearance of capitalism’.⁴⁰⁹ One widely accepted approach is to describe this process of change as a shift from Fordism to post-Fordism, that is from economic and social organisation based on mass production, manufacturing standardised products for mass consumer markets, to more ‘flexible’ systems of production, de-industrialisation and the rise of new service industries.

Social and political changes are attached to these new forms of production, as Post-Fordist theory matches the decline of the skilled male working class with the emergence of new groups of flexible (casual or part-time) workers, located within disparate work places, alongside economic organisation focused on delivery of financial services and the rise of multi-national companies. In the post 1945 era of consensus, the role of the state was to regulate relations between capital and labour, using Keynesian management to stabilise the economy. Economic policy as typified by the Reagan /Thatcher era in the 1980s, on the other hand, aimed to reduce levels of both government spending and regulation, although the ambition to ‘roll back the state’ was always contingent upon government’s need to restructure the labour market. These economic changes did not end social inequalities or class tensions, but rather shifted the discursive framework away from traditional Fordist conceptions of class, on one hand fuelling moral panics around the threat of the underclass⁴¹⁰ and on the other forging new social divisions within the working population. Consequently, Hutton (following Galbraith)⁴¹¹ describes the ‘30-30-40 society’ of the

⁴⁰⁹D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernit: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Oxford 1989, 189.

⁴¹⁰ Much of the discussion of the rise of Sinn Fein as an electoral force in the early 1980s was implicitly conducted through this frame of reference. Similar themes mixed with racial discourse also underlay assessments of urban rioting in Britain in the same period. See, for example C. Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy 1950-1980*, New York 1984 and *The Emerging British Underclass*, London 1990. For a counter view on the relationship of class and race in social policy see K. Malik, *The Meaning of Race: Race, History and Culture in Western Society*, Basingstoke 1996, Chapter 7.

⁴¹¹ W. Hutton, ‘The 30-30-40 society’, *The Guardian* January 21st 1995.

disadvantaged, the marginalized and the insecure, and the privileged.⁴¹² It is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider the broader implications of these social theories of class, politics and social structure, but they obviously inform our understanding of the social context of Northern Irish politics, as well as influencing the discursive framework and ideology of political actors at all levels. Coulter, for example, sees these types of structural change having profound effects on Northern Irish society, for even before this radical reconfiguration of international capitalism, which ‘buffeted Northern Ireland with considerable force’ he argues that:

capitalism ...has created an intricate sequence of hierarchies that oversee the allocation of material and figurative resources in the province. The manner in which these seemingly distinct systems of privilege interact generates many of the nuances and dynamics of contemporary Northern Irish society.⁴¹³

A Workhouse Economy

In many ways post- industrial Northern Ireland, with its fragmented working class, preponderance of service industries and flexible working practices, presents an almost textbook case of a post-Fordist economy with one notable exception- the explicitly interventionist role adopted by the British state, although paradoxically, the relatively interventionist role of the state has acted to strengthen many of the ‘flexible’ features associated with the (Northern Ireland’s) reconfigured economies. Likewise there is a strong case that high levels of public spending and the expansion of the public sector have had significant effects both on patterns of social change, such as the growth of the middle class⁴¹⁴ as well as the broader structures and frameworks of politics in Northern Ireland.⁴¹⁵ Denigrated as a ‘workhouse economy’⁴¹⁶ in the 1980s and for much of the 1990s, the state played, and indeed continues to play the decisive role in the region’s economic and social life. State intervention is evidenced directly through high levels of public expenditure and transfer payments, such as social security

⁴¹² W. Hutton, *Britain and Northern Ireland: the state we're in-failure and opportunity*, Belfast 1994.

⁴¹³ C. Coulter, *Contemporary Northern Irish Society; An Introduction*, London 1999,5.

⁴¹⁴ M.McGovern and P. Shirlow, ‘Counter-Insurgency, De-industrialisation and the Political Economy of Ulster Loyalism’, in M. McGovern and P. Shirlow (eds), *Who Are ‘The People’? Unionism, Loyalism and Protestantism in Northern Ireland*, London 1997,176-198.

⁴¹⁵ M. Tomlinson, ‘Can Britain Leave Ireland? The Political Economy of War and Peace’, *Race and Class* 37:1,1995.

⁴¹⁶ P.Teague, (ed), *Beyond the Rhetoric: Politics, the Economy and Social Policy in Northern Ireland*, London 1987,8.

benefits and indirectly through support for business development and investment. The recent growth in private sector investment fuelling Belfast's 'regeneration' has been largely underpinned by pump-priming and strategic support by the state.⁴¹⁷

This has given the economy of Northern Ireland something of a dualist character with the continued decline of traditional, manufacturing employment, accompanying the growth of public sector and related employment alongside the expansion of retailing and other service employment.⁴¹⁸ Whilst only an unreconstructed, reductionist Marxist would see immediate causal relationships between the economic base and the socio-political superstructure, there is a case that interventionist economic and social policies implemented by successive British governments have had a significant impact on shaping Northern Irish society and politics.⁴¹⁹ Generous levels of public expenditure per capita compared to the rest of the United Kingdom have already been noted, where, for example, the British State in the late 1990s provided 40% of employment in Northern Ireland.⁴²⁰ Similarly, through a range of direct and indirect interventionist measures, the state and its agencies provided practical and financial assistance to private companies, thus generating employment and profits in Northern Ireland's private sector. These Keynesian policies have not only 'conferred considerable affluence upon a broad section of Northern Irish society'⁴²¹, but have also strengthened the more consumptionist elements of a post-Fordist economy within retailing, urban development and regeneration, entertainment and the 'cultural industries'.

Belfast's economic development during the 1990s is a visible embodiment of these changes, largely resting upon 'the growing purchasing power of the province's professional and business classes'.⁴²² Much discussion of British policy has described this brand of 'Thatcherite Keynesianism' in terms of an ongoing strategy of containment and conflict management that uses economic and social change as instruments of political normalisation.⁴²³ By the 1990s, however, as large parts of Northern Ireland integrated into the new economy, it was becoming clear that,

⁴¹⁷ R. Needham, *Battling For Peace*, Belfast 1998, 267-270.

⁴¹⁸ S. Wichert, *Northern Ireland since 1945*, London 1999, 218-220.

⁴¹⁹ F. Gaffkin and M. Morrissey, *Northern Ireland: The Thatcher Years*, London 1990, 63-95.

⁴²⁰ C. Coulter, *Contemporary Northern Irish Society*, 65.

⁴²¹ C. Coulter, *Contemporary Northern Irish Society*, 66.

⁴²² C. Coulter, *Contemporary Northern Irish Society*, 66.

⁴²³ K. Bean, 'Defining Republicanism: Shifting Discourses of New Nationalism and Post-Republicanism', in M. Elliott (ed), *The Long Road To Peace in Northern Ireland*, Liverpool 2002, 138.

although generally strengthened by the 'Peace Dividend' and the 'Peace Process',⁴²⁴ these economic forces had developed an independent dynamic, with all that implied for existing political and social relationships.

This dual economy has other contradictory tendencies in its impact on the character of both the middle class and working class populations. The social and political implications of new patterns of social mobility leading to the emergence of a new Catholic middle class have been widely noted.⁴²⁵ The impact of Direct Rule, supporting British social, educational and equal opportunities policies on the development of this class, has been considerable. Likewise for the relatively privileged mainly Catholic working class (following Hutton), Direct Rule has directly and indirectly improved employment opportunities and opened up the potential for social mobility. Unemployment levels have fallen from the high levels of the 1980s, and although unemployment black spots remain they are localised. While nationalists are still more likely to be unemployed than unionists, and areas with high levels of unemployment still tend to be predominantly nationalist such as West Belfast, Derry, and Strabane,⁴²⁶ the percentage of nationalists within the workforce continues to increase.⁴²⁷

Of particular significance to the development of nationalist-republican politics is the impact of this economic and social restructuring on levels of inequality between the two ethno-religious communities. Although the evidence points towards little change in relative position in terms of an index of inequalities since the 1970s⁴²⁸, nationalist communities enjoy a disproportionate sense of confidence and expansion in the emerging post-industrial economy.

State Strategy: Linking security and economic policy

Described by one former Northern Ireland Office minister as 'the third arm of the British government's strategy...the...economic and social war against violence'⁴²⁹ was a significant if little known theme in British policy in the 1980s. In the somewhat

⁴²⁴ P. Neumann, *Britain's Long War: British Strategy in the Northern Ireland Conflict 1969-98*, Basingstoke 2003, 174-176.

⁴²⁵ F. O'Connor, *In Search of a State: Catholics in Northern Ireland*, Belfast 1993, Chapter 2.

⁴²⁶ Unemployment in Northern Ireland by area: 1996-7. Source, *Northern Ireland Annual Abstract of Statistics*, Belfast 1997.

⁴²⁷ Religious Composition of the Monitored Northern Ireland Workforce. Source, *Northern Ireland Annual Abstract of Statistics*, Belfast 1997.

⁴²⁸ Coulter, *Contemporary Northern Irish Society*, 83.

⁴²⁹ Needham, *Battling For Peace*, 1.

unlikely guise of a vulgar Marxist, Tom King stressed a causal link between economic deprivation and political violence, arguing that:

We all know that better security and economic policies are interlinked. There is no future for Northern Ireland as an economic wasteland, no future for Northern Ireland through terrorism and no future in a political vacuum, we need action on all fronts.⁴³⁰

Another minister presented the connection between political strategy and social policy even more directly: 'Without their goodwill we would have found progress hard if not impossible...the bait caught the herring.'⁴³¹ This description of the Springvale Project explicitly connects the British government's use of economic and social opportunity to the political end of undermining support for the IRA. Thus British government economic and social policy in West Belfast, with its motivation of 'drawing them [the republican movement] into the net'⁴³² and making Sinn Fein a 'part of that very different part-public, part-private partnership which was the essence of our long-term solution,'⁴³³ would appear to confirm the view that the state had a deeply considered and carefully calculated strategy to use regeneration as a means of ensnaring the republican movement within conventional politics. Likewise it presupposes that the republican leadership were easily netted by the lure of funding and employment for west Belfast.⁴³⁴ A more realistic assessment perhaps, is to assume that both parties were aware of the others' motives and that in the case of the republicans any hooks that were being taken had been swallowed long before 1990.

The aim of this section is not to interrogate the state's position in detail but to assess those elements of its strategy that influenced the development of specific aspects of Provisional politics in terms of community and social development. The degree of conscious development and the extent of a total state strategy have long been debated, amongst republicans and other anti-state radicals, as well as by analysts more sympathetic to British policy. Suffice to say that neither the British government nor the Provisionals stood aloof from broader political currents.

⁴³⁰ Quoted in F.Gaffkin and M. Morrissey, *Northern Ireland: The Thatcher Years*, 62.

⁴³¹ R. Needham, *Battling for Peace*, 206-207 describing his strategy for the Springvale project in 1990.

⁴³² Needham, *Battling for Peace*, 207.

⁴³³ Needham, *Battling for Peace*, 208.

⁴³⁴ However, Needham himself appears to contradict that impression by his references to republican scepticism about British motives, *Battling for Peace*, 207-208.

A consistent strategy?

My starting point rests on a view of British social and economic strategy developing throughout the late 70s and early 80s as an ad hoc mixture, closely reflecting (and in turn influencing) policy models for dealing with social disorder, alienation and social exclusion already operating in post industrial cities in Britain and the United States. These 'shared visioning' models of urban planning, employed in racially divided Detroit and Baltimore, or in riot torn Brixton and Liverpool 8, were based on ideas of community development and economic regeneration as motivators for social cohesion and progress. Although agencies of the state appeared to develop policy within clear guiding principles, implementation in the Northern Irish context was often erratic, being subject to a variety of contradictory influences,⁴³⁵ causing analysts who posit a polycentric theory to doubt the existence of a unified rational state actor.⁴³⁶ Republicans frequently referred to a unified total state strategy as part of a Machiavellian counter –insurgency campaign, integrating all aspects of life from housing and planning through to education and employment.

Whilst there is evidence of a degree of co-ordination and shared purpose, there are also frequent examples of political objectives clashing with social and economic aims, and indeed circumstances where all three conflicted with the operational demands of the military. A recent account of British strategy argues that there was little that could be considered a grand design, stressing instead Britain's managerial and pragmatic approach, in which social policy was implemented within existing parameters of the tradition of strategic conflict containment.⁴³⁷ Economic policy significantly provides an exception where there is evidence of an earlier tendency towards more conscious integration within military and political strategy, and a greater continuity of approach within strategic state intervention.⁴³⁸

By the mid 1980s some broad trends are becoming apparent as economic and social policy were being consciously deployed as 'instruments' within the British government's strategic tradition as a means of securing 'peace through prosperity'.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁵ Needham, *Battling for Peace*, 191,320-321 on problems and conflicts between security and social/economic policy.

⁴³⁶ Although strategy and policy are clearly linked this statement is less about the broader motives of British policy in Northern Ireland than a consideration of its implementation in particular fields.

⁴³⁷ Neumann, *Britain's Long War*, 174-176.

⁴³⁸ Neumann, *Britain's Long War*, 179-188. Despite this Neumann argues convincingly that it took until the 1980s for the strategic value of the economic instrument to be fully recognised.

⁴³⁹ Neumann, *Britain's Long War*, 35.

With differing emphases, but still reflecting much of the thinking of the Welfare State consensus, London governments linked social deprivation and unemployment to political division and violence. In broad terms there was continuity in policy throughout the period in terms of action and expenditure aimed at creating and maintaining employment, alongside the development of social infrastructure, leisure facilities and housing. At the height of the Thatcher period when the minimalist state was the order of the day in the rest of the UK, a senior minister could argue that ‘Thatcherism didn’t exist in Northern Ireland...It was the one part of the United Kingdom where Keynesianism was still rampant’.⁴⁴⁰ But internal pressures and the need to link economic policy to strategic, political objectives also meant that this ‘Containment Keynesianism’ has to have a sharper focus and a quite different character to the ‘bread and circuses’ approach of the 1970s.

Shaping the terrain: rebuilding the city

By the late 1980s, ‘there was a consistent effort to make economic and social policy responsive to the objective of British government strategy’.⁴⁴¹ British objectives were broadly focussed on attempting to restore ‘prosperity, pride and normality’ using ‘familiar UK models of urban regeneration’⁴⁴², with a central focus on ‘rebuilding Belfast’⁴⁴³, as the cockpit of the troubles. For example, the Belfast Urban Plan 1989, reflecting the shift from manufacturing to service industries, focused on the development of retailing, leisure and tourism, as key elements in the city’s transformation to a post-industrial economy. Spearheaded by the Laganside Corporation, local equivalent of Britain’s Urban Development Corporations, the project with its emphasis on city centre regeneration, riverside reclamation and ‘yuppification’, paralleled developments like Salford Quays and London’s Docklands. Informed by the ‘trickle down’ theory of urban development, in which the regenerated city engenders economic activity and enterprise, the Belfast Urban Plan was designed to place Belfast within a contemporary post-industrial, post-Fordist framework. Urban regeneration strategy could also serve a political project beyond mere rebuilding, just as it had in Detroit, Baltimore and Toxteth.

⁴⁴⁰ Lord Prior quoted in P. Neumann, *Britain’s Long War*, 37.

⁴⁴¹ Neumann, *Britain’s Long War*, 174.

⁴⁴² Hadaway, ‘Cohesion in Contested Spaces’, 40.

⁴⁴³ Needham, *Battling for Peace*, 166-183, 232, 318.

On a micro –level, ‘it could be argued that the image of a tribal city could be ameliorated if the residential part of Inner Belfast became less visibly divided into the two sectarian blocs by the inclusion of ‘Yuppie’ settlements, which act to ‘neutralise’ more sections of the urban core’.⁴⁴⁴ Likewise ‘an improvement in the fortunes of the city centre’ might well become a ‘factor in building a shared sense of civic pride, security and enjoyment among people whose attitudes, shaped by separated experience, may well be mutually antagonistic’, in effect ‘radiating a sense of citizenship outward to a divided population’.⁴⁴⁵ Similar themes of normalisation were reflected in social policy at both the macro and micro levels, across the region and in specifically targeted areas. For example, social and economic policy initiatives such as Making Belfast Work (1988) looked beyond directly economic impacts, emphasising the importance of harnessing the ‘goodwill and enthusiasm of all the community’.⁴⁴⁶ This initiative had a particular focus on the regeneration of ‘Republican West Belfast’, containing as it did, ‘concentrations of both violence and deprivation’⁴⁴⁷, and consequently being seen as the key battleground for the hearts and minds of the nationalist population.

The battle for hearts and minds in the nationalist community

Sinn Féin’s electoral growth from 1982 initially encouraged the British government’s focus towards strengthening alternative centres of authority within the nationalist community, such as the SDLP and Catholic Church. Rather than attempting to draw the Provisionals into mainstream politics by developing links and partnerships with community groups identified with republicanism, the focus was on pushing these groups to the margins. Government support for church lead initiatives like the Flax Trust in Ardoyne, reflected the British view that republicans were still beyond the pale and needed to be contained rather than be brought into the circle.

On one side were Sinn Féin’s advice centres, republican-inspired employment initiatives, like the Black Taxi service, and the network of community, cultural and social groups that constituted a republican civil society, especially in West Belfast; on the other were the SDLP and the Catholic Church using its traditional parochial and

⁴⁴⁴ F. Gaffikin and M. Morrissey, *Northern Ireland: The Thatcher Years*, 133.

⁴⁴⁵ Hadaway, ‘Cohesion in Contested Spaces’, 40.

⁴⁴⁶ Gaffikin and Morrissey, *Northern Ireland: The Thatcher Years*, 140.

⁴⁴⁷ Gaffikin and Morrissey, *Northern Ireland: The Thatcher Years*, 140.

catholic social networks, linking with local businesses to develop an alternative focus for both economic and social action, and politics. This battle for political and social influence had been simmering since the early 1970s, but in the post Hunger Strike period it assumed a much sharper character with the electoral successes of the Provisionals. This internal battle for hegemony within the civil society of the Catholic community was joined by the British government at both a macro and micro level.

To both the British government and the Provisionals, West Belfast symbolised a ‘conjunction of political/military resistance, deprivation and discrimination’⁴⁴⁸, meaning the project of Making Belfast Work had to imbue programmes of economic and social development, education and training, health and environmental action with an explicitly political rationale and direction. Even non-republican commentators saw these approaches as problematic. In particular the ACE programme was criticised as a ‘gravely flawed training scheme...used as an official instrument to favour some ‘respectable’ organisations and demote others’⁴⁴⁹, while educational programmes were seen as an instrumentalist attempt to control and diminish ‘the substantial local experience of self-organised community education in West Belfast.’⁴⁵⁰ In this campaign of normalisation the role of the Belfast Action Teams in building links on the ground was highlighted as significant by government and republicans alike.⁴⁵¹ As Needham argues:

It was a vital part of our strategy to talk to and underpin those who lived in terrorist dominated areas; it gave us access to them and opportunities to wean them away from violence...we were able to support discretely those antagonistic to republicanism.⁴⁵²

Here the general aims of community regeneration were appended to a specific political agenda informed by the belief that economic and social progress made political accommodation easier and therefore undermined support for republicanism by providing, for example:

⁴⁴⁸ Gaffikin and Morrissey, *Northern Ireland*, 146.

⁴⁴⁹ Gaffikin and Morrissey, *Northern Ireland*, 143.

⁴⁵⁰ Gaffikin and Morrissey, *Northern Ireland*, 143.

⁴⁵¹ Needham, *Battling for peace*, 188-190.

⁴⁵² Needham, *Battling for peace*, 190.

the SDLP and their leader with the proof they required to show their people that cooperation with a British government could bring results and that economic and social improvement could bring opportunities denied then by violence and deprivation. We also observed that the IRA were finding that a bomb in Derry brought a very much stronger reaction from their own community than one in Belfast city centre, and if we could halt the bombs in the north-west it would become more difficult to justify destroying 'economic' targets elsewhere.⁴⁵³

This degree of subtlety was not always apparent in all aspects of British social and economic policy, and there were some glaring contradictions at operational level, which helped to make 'community issues' central to republican politics from the mid 1980s. The political battle over vetting, for example, by sharpening the focus on the community sector as site of contestation, enabled the Provisionals to consolidate their self and communal image as defenders of the specific communities of resistance and to mobilise groups of activists around this issue.

Fair Employment and the changing discourse of politics

The Fair Employment Act 1989 was another significant development that directly shaped not only the framework of British political and social policy, but also that of republicans and other community activists. From the 1990s, community projects were increasingly operating within a funding environment, where the language, discursive framework and operation of the act ultimately determined ideological context and content. The 1989 act not only mitigated against previous policy frameworks that had emphasised an approach to discrimination as an individual issue, rather than a structural product of group/collective discrimination, but also was in marked contrast to the Thatcherite emphasis on individualism then predominant in Britain. Perhaps the most significant feature of the Act was its explicit enshrining of the discourse of communal conflict into legislative form. However perhaps because politicians and policy makers were aware of the zero-sum game that characterised Northern Irish politics, they were reluctant to acknowledge the 'sectarian logic' that flowed from the dominant discourse of the conflict as a communal one between two traditions.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵³ Needham, *Battling for Peace*, 196.

⁴⁵⁴ Neumann, *Britain's Long War*, 174.

The Fair Employment Act was informed by recognition that inequality between the 'the two traditions' was the source of legitimate grievance and therefore needed to be addressed as prerequisite for political stability. This analysis of inequality was structural and intrinsically linked into the functioning and reproduction of the traditions as well as open discrimination. This analysis, which reflected much of the sociological common-sense that theorised communal conflict in structural terms, was also congenial to nationalist political culture that was not only organised around the idea of the communal, but saw political advance in those terms.⁴⁵⁵ In this sense the underlying premises of the Act could be satisfactorily interpreted both through pre-existing frames of nationalist political culture and through emerging themes of identity politics, which drew on structural and contextual explanations of identity, such as the dialectic between self and other. The influence of the MacBride Principles and the American experience of positive and affirmative action can also be seen here.⁴⁵⁶

In this sense the Fair Employment Act represented a convergence between British policy makers and nationalist and republican politicians who increasingly drew on the discourse of group rights and positive discrimination as an antidote to historic injustice and communally structured wrongs. There were undoubtedly contradictions in the working of the Act, especially the difficulty of acting upon the logic of communal rights whilst maintaining the principle of individual merit and avoiding charges of partiality. However the general operation of the Act with its sectarian orientated monitoring procedures, and concomitant encouragement for social engineering by funding application among community and public bodies, ensured that the discourse of communal identity became encoded into both the private and public sphere. Increasingly it became hard to think outside the tickbox.

This was further reinforced by British policymakers' focus on relative deprivation between nationalists and unionists in the 1990s. There was now an acceptance that this discrimination was 'the fundamental structural issue facing any government' and that the dominant theme of policy should be to eradicate inequality

⁴⁵⁵ J. Ruane, and J. Todd, *The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland: Power, Conflict and Emancipation*, Cambridge 1996, Chapter 6.

⁴⁵⁶ For example, see R. Needham quoted by Neumann, *Britain's Long War*, 143-144. It is important to stress that while the elements of affirmative action were not adopted, the underlying justificatory arguments were central to the Fair Employment Act and to the resulting policy and practice.

of opportunity and relative disadvantage.⁴⁵⁷ Significantly for the structuring of community policy initiatives that flowed from the Fair Employment Act, combined with a new focus towards 'Targeting Social Need', the new framework of positive discrimination towards areas most affected by poverty would target resources towards the nationalist minority. The new focus on reducing 'differentials between the two communities' was also reflected in the changing nature of political discourse in the 1990s, where positive achievement was measured against evidence of a reduction in the sectarian gap of advantage/disadvantage between the two communities.⁴⁵⁸

Provisional discourse: a product of British state strategies?

The question that Needham's analysis raises is the extent of the state's strategic role in defining the terrain of politics and social life in Northern Ireland and thus shaping, both directly and indirectly, the nature and trajectory of the Provisionals. The question also touches on the Provisionals' willingness to engage with the state and allow itself to be drawn into conventional community politics. Critics of this process of accommodation to the state within the republican movement have frequently focussed on the development of British social and economic strategy as a means of buying off communities and corrupting republicanism through material blandishments. The individual psychology and impact of such policies is hard to gauge.

But perhaps more significant politically has been the impact of British policy on political and social impact discourse. For perhaps more important than its actual benefits to community development on the ground has been its impact on political practice as Provisionals became involved in mainstream politics as councillors and community representatives, embracing new frameworks of thought and practice and language. Policymakers did not impose these patterns of thinking. Frequently they were pre-empted by funding applicants or advocates acting on behalf of a particular historically wronged communities, certainly enthusiastically adopted, especially when they could be related to pre-existing communal culture and communal identity in terms of victimhood, winning justice and righting historically shaped wrongs. This conscious adaptation to externally developed funding culture was to have a deeper impact on the republican movement's frames of political reference and action.

⁴⁵⁷ P. Brooke speaking in the House of Commons March 5th 1992, quoted in Neumann, *Britain's Long War*, 175.

⁴⁵⁸ Neumann, *Britain's Long War*, 176

Chapter VII-Charting the shifting discourses of Provisionalism-Community

The Discourse of Community

At a vital stage in the Peace Process, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* headlined a report of a speech by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in the following terms: 'Mayhew's rhetoric targets republican community'. The article went on to discuss British 'propaganda tactics', in terms of a strategy of directly 'speaking to an identifiable republican community, or in Brooke's words, the terrorist community...'.⁴⁵⁹ The use of 'community' as a term to describe the Republican Movement was not only a reflection of the Provisionals' own discourse of community, but also its salience as an organising concept in contemporary politics generally. More significantly, the changing discourse of community illustrates shifting patterns of republican politics and strategy, marking a wider hollowing out from within of meaning and significance. Community was a keyword⁴⁶⁰ for Provisional republicanism, but it was not simply a discursive theme or an idealised concept. Communities, made up of real people and located in real places, were the sites in which the Provisional Republican movement was initially created and later transformed by a combination of external agencies and its own attempts to develop a politics that answered to the needs of a changing world.

As an ideal and a reality, the discourse of community is central to understanding the development of the Republican Movement. As the movement's discourse of community began to shift from one grounded in ideas of 'resistance communities' to one that reflected more mainstream political themes, this was to be a significant marker of a fundamental break with the past. But as in other areas of Provisional politics this process of hollowing out did not represent a clean break, but rather revealed itself unevenly through an uneasy juxtaposition of old language and new meanings. Along with the deployment of other themes drawn from identity and cultural politics, community acted as a unifying and mobilising concept in a period when the Provisional project was subject to strains and challenges from within and without. The practical value of these keywords for the Provisionals lay in their familiarity and apparent naturalness within the common sense of the nationalist

⁴⁵⁹ H. MacThomas, 'Mayhew's rhetoric targets republican community', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, January 21st 1993.

⁴⁶⁰ See R. Williams, *Keywords*, London 1976.

population; as such they were able to give meaning and substance to political uncertainties generated by the peace process in the 1990s.

The aim of this section is not to outline the sociology and politics of the nationalist community as such but to discuss the development of political and ideological ideas of community within the discourse of Provisional Republicanism. Broader issues of class, community and nation will, of course, be touched on in so far as they influence the development of this discursive framework. In Chapter 1 the nature of Provisional politics was outlined within the thematic framework of identity, community and nation. In discussing the underlying shift in the movement's politics it became clear that Provisionalism, as both a coalition of forces and a combination of ideological elements, could be most accurately assessed by using the defining frames of civic and ethnic nationalism.

Furthermore, these frames of reference were cognate with cultural political polarities between the politics of universalism and the politics of difference, between assertion and recognition. My central premise is that Provisionalism encompassed all of these ideological elements in varying degrees but that the specific balance and configuration shifted according to circumstances, dictated by external and internal dynamics as well as through the conscious action of political actors. In other words, the new politics of Provisionalism being implicit in elements of the old, as the Provisional's national project abated some of these pre-existing elements of cultural identity became more predominant within the movement's political configuration. Provisionalism's embrace of the new discourse of cultural identity was not simply a passive response to external pressure, but a conscious attempt to counter the particular crisis of republicanism and, arguably, of politics in general. Frequently revealing itself through a crisis of meaning, the political crisis, which faced republicanism increasingly, moved its leadership towards discovery of a discourse that could hold the movement together and continue to engage its electoral support base. The discourse of identity, cultural politics and community appealed both to the new *zeitgeist* of communitarianism and the classic repertoire of nationalism. Thus it is in this broad context that community can be considered.

Not simply a collectively imagined concept or even a psychic space, community is also a real location inhabited by real people, and therefore may be considered as a site of contestation around issues of political, social and territorial control. One useful approach in assessing the formation of concepts of community on

this battlefield between an anti-state insurgency and the state is to frame the discussion in terms of conflicts both between a dominant hegemony and an emerging counter-hegemony, and between the state and civil society.

Community and Counter Hegemony

Significantly the concept of hegemony was to re-emerge initially in left-wing discourse from the mid-1970s in an attempt to theorise the failures of radical transformative politics in the West, especially in the aftermath of 1968. In his stress on the complex political relationship between force and consent and on the significance of the cultural terrain as a determining influence in shaping radical political projects, Gramsci's ideas of hegemony and counter-hegemony can be usefully applied not only to the idea of 'the nationalist community' itself and to the place of that concept in the discourse of Provisionalism, but also in assessing the strategies of state and other political actors who were contending for hegemony and influence within the nationalist population.⁴⁶¹ Robson, following Salamini's and Femia's reading of Gramsci's 'anti-economism' and stressing his willingness to consider approaches other than a reductionist view of class, argues that 'wherever power exists, opposition to it will emerge' and considers 'community' as a potentially counter-hegemonic project by pointing to the value ...within Western civil societies of understanding and recognising the ideological needs of [subaltern groups]...as well as those unsophisticated ideas located within their traditions, their culture and their consciousness. In this sense, it is not necessarily a class-consciousness, or a working class culture, but one located within their own communities and informed by a variety of influences such as land, religion, myth and folklore.⁴⁶²

Certainly this reading of the counter-hegemonic value of community could be applied to its development by sections of the nationalist population in Northern Ireland. Likewise the discourse of civil society in all its various meanings has relevance to this discussion of the political value of community. The definition of civil society is problematic, especially when posed in the communitarian language of stake-holding and in New Labour ideas of social partnership and the attempt to balance conflict and consent as the basis for managed social change. Posed in this way 'civil society' is another attempt to provide legitimacy for political projects and

⁴⁶¹ A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, London 1971, 416-418.

⁴⁶² T. Robson, *The State and Community Action*, London 2000, 36-37.

societies that face the challenges of disengagement and alienation. Significantly, the discourse of communitarianism and civil society is used by both British governments and Provisional republicans as a common frame of reference and as a shared *lingua franca* for political life. The mutual exhaustion of their ideological and political projects may be read in the stale platitudes of partnership and process.

Other readings of 'civil society' also have resonance for Northern Ireland. In the 1980s civil society was defined as an intermediate layer providing a transcendent element that could ensure democratisation in societies undergoing transformation and transition in Eastern Europe and Southern Africa. Civil society, standing apart from and independent of the state and the status-quo, appeared to be a pre-requisite for political and social harmony in a time of instability. Partly as a product of the discrediting of the great ideologies of left and right and the exhaustion of the forces of the old politics of class, and partly as an attempt to reengage with some of the collective aspects of public life that were the preconditions of political democracy, civil society was deployed to fill some of the void left by the evacuation of the previous positions of left and right.

This discourse was influential in the Northern Irish context in several ways. Governments supported community initiatives as mechanisms and structures to develop this 'civil society' at all levels; the Civic Forum established under the Good Friday Agreement encapsulated this approach. The discourse of the community sector as a potentially neutral third force providing a transcending cross-community sphere of activity that could potentially transform the established communal blocs became widely influential.⁴⁶³ In this sense it was *community* against communalism.

But in deploying these new concepts of community and civil society from the late 1980s, republicans revealed not only their ideological shift and adaptation to the status-quo, but also the pragmatic flexibility and limited theoretical coherence of their position. The Provisionals increasingly appealed to the discourse of community and civil society to explain their contemporary positions in terms of transition and empowerment within the status-quo. Belief in the transforming power of the 'resistance community' had been replaced by an idea of the transcending reconciliation of civil society, but the political language remaining largely unchanged

⁴⁶³ See, for example, A. Pollak (ed.), *A Citizen's Enquiry: the Opsahl Report on Northern Ireland*, Dublin 1993.

provided an ideological smokescreen. The language of community, already familiar within republican discourse as well as a significant frame for the political culture of the nationalist population as a whole, was given additional resonance and prestige by the contemporary experience of civil society and nation building in Eastern Europe and South Africa.⁴⁶⁴

Defining the Catholic Community

Definitions of the nature of the nationalist community were contested. From their inception the Provisionals had attempted to establish their own political dominance against alternative definitions advanced by other contenders for influence such as the Church, the SDLP and the state. The Catholic Church, given its social and cultural power, its parochial and educational networks and its role, as a unifying force, was a formidable opponent for any counter-hegemonising project. For Republicans the Church became an even more formidable opponent as it fought for influence on the economic and social terrain. According to one critic, the Catholic Church was ‘...transformed into a business empire’ and in conjunction with the Catholic business class became part ‘of the murky world...of British policy...[in] a course of action promoted by Britain’s chief military strategist General Frank Kitson’.⁴⁶⁵ To republicans Church sponsored employment projects and community activities were in direct competition with those organised by the community, thus serving the twin purposes of reinforcing clerical power and supporting a collaborationist agenda that increased the powerlessness and dependence of communities.⁴⁶⁶ The interchangeability of the terms Catholic and Nationalist was a measure of the difficulty that republicans faced.

The nature and degree of this contestation is problematic. The difficulties in defining the character of the nationalist community have their roots in the social and economic stratification of the population; in particular whether social distinctions around class and locality undermined the unifying and homogenising impact of the

⁴⁶⁴ ‘Irish and South African experiences compared’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* March 25th 1993 and ‘Straight Talking in Derry’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* September 10th 1992 report meetings where direct comparisons are made between nation building, inclusive dialogue and community development in Ireland and South Africa. Comparisons with Eastern European events are made in ‘For transformation in the ‘90s’, *IRIS*, August 1990.

⁴⁶⁵ O. Kearney and D. Wilson, *West Belfast-The Way Forward?* Belfast 1988.

⁴⁶⁶ ‘Interview with Des Wilson-Destroying Community Development’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* September 22nd 1988.

discourse of 'the nationalist community'. The evidence that emerges from the 'resistance communities' is that communal identities of class, place and ideology intersected and were consciously fused together by republicans to create a counter-hegemonic discourse that allegedly spoke for the subaltern groups against the outside forces of both the state and the socially and politically dominant classes within the Catholic community.⁴⁶⁷ This counter-hegemonic discourse developed many of the features of a moral economy⁴⁶⁸ especially when it drew on pre-existing elements and shared some common themes and unspoken assumptions with the dominant nationalist discourse, but both as a conscious creation by the Provisionals and as a mere reflection of the common-sense of the ghettos there was a fault line within both the reality and the apparently hegemonic concept of the nationalist community. Rather like the medieval ideal of Christendom, the Catholic form of community was more honoured in the breach than in the observance.

Social and economic divisions in the nationalist community

The concept of community was underpinned by a particular socio-economic structure. In retrospect it was seen as a relatively coherent community in contrast with contemporary divisions, especially the growth of the new Catholic middle class.⁴⁶⁹ The nationalist community supported a complex class structure, not a uniform ghetto culture: 'West Belfast then was a community with a complete class structure of its own. You didn't feel you were in a ghetto because you had a complete mix the whole way down...'⁴⁷⁰ There was a nostalgic identification of working class communities with 'companionship and community'⁴⁷¹ that could be mobilised for the political projects of a republican community alongside widespread, unspoken assumption and a sense of solidarity-'a sense of togetherness' one middle aged nationalist put it.⁴⁷² In what was largely a poor community for many years, wealth naturally tended to be associated with the Unionist ruling class. Wealth raised assumptions of having sold

⁴⁶⁷ C.de Baroid, *Ballymurphy and the Irish War*, London 1999 and The Ardoyne Commemorative Project, *Ardoyne: The Untold Truth*, Belfast 2002 provide good examples of this discourse as it developed in 'resistance communities' in nationalist areas of Belfast during the Troubles.

⁴⁶⁸ In a sense similar to that defined by E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present* 1971.

⁴⁶⁹ For a discussion of new Catholic middle class see F.O'Connor, *In Search of a State: Catholics in Northern Ireland*, Belfast 1993, Chapter 2.

⁴⁷⁰ Commentator and SDLP activist Brian Feeney quoted in O'Connor, *In Search of a State*, 23.

⁴⁷¹ Interview with middle class Catholic from the Malone Road, O'Connor, *In Search of a State*, 23.

⁴⁷² O'Connor, *In Search of a State*, 19.

out and of becoming a Castle Catholic...’ since Catholic society offered few satisfactory middle class status symbols’.⁴⁷³

While the actual degree of discrimination and segregation within Northern Irish society is contested, a body of literature depicts a Catholic community with a distinctive socio-economic structure that was both homogeneous and heterogeneous. But over the course of the period 1971-1991 these patterns were disrupted and amended by a range of ‘external’ factors such as economic restructuring, the growth of the public sector, central government policy and the growth of the community sector as well as by new ‘internal’ dynamics within the community itself. The socio-economic characteristics of the Catholic population in this period are well established: Catholics were more than twice as likely to be unemployed as Protestants, especially in the long-term categories. There were correspondingly lower levels of educational achievement at each level. The social profile was generally weighted towards the working class and lower groups, with a pattern of representation in particular occupational groups and under representation in managerial and professional categories. Most of the middle class and professional groups were involved in servicing their own community or mediating on the behalf of that community to external agencies and the state. There were also distinctions within the community between the respectable, lower middle class identified with money, respectability, the clergy and Irish culture and the rest of the population.⁴⁷⁴

The place of Catholicism as a unifying signifier within this culture is far from clear and combines contradictory elements that can be related to class, social and political divisions within the nationalist community.⁴⁷⁵ In many ways it could be argued that the Church represented a ghetto Catholicism, heavy on devotionals and the public symbols of the Faith, but uneasily co-existing alongside an *a la carte* Catholicism, declining mass attendance and challenges to the political, social and sexual authority of the Church. Whilst processes of secularisation have certainly taken place, Catholicism has remained an important cultural influence, a ‘natural’ mode of expression, and an underpinning element of communal common sense, even for lapsed Catholics. As such the degree of religiosity of the nationalist population was to

⁴⁷³ See also the identification made by republicans between class, wealth and support for the SDLP. H. Mac Thomas, ‘Ripples around a political vacuum’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, September 10th 1987.

⁴⁷⁴ O’Connor, *In Search of a State*, 21-25.

⁴⁷⁵ See M. Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster: A History*, London 2000, 431-432.

impact on republican politics and ideas of community, both consciously and subconsciously. The parish and the community were to leave a deep imprint on the community politics of the Provisionals.

Community and nationalist political culture

Recent historical and political research has generally supported a view of 'community' as an important concept within the northern nationalist tradition, locating it as probably the central arch of the nationalist political framework.⁴⁷⁶ The dominant approach has been to define the characteristics of the northern nationalist community in terms of a communalist social organisation with the church playing a central role in defining and maintaining the northern Catholic identity. The church was hegemonic and dominated the religious, educational socio-cultural and political activity of what was in many ways a self-contained and self-sufficient society. This communal and political role was frequently defined as 'a state within a state' with the church as the de facto chief source of authority and social coherence. As a result of this interpenetration of religion and politics, nationalism was often understood as an extension of Catholic communalism and an expression of communal culture and practices rather than an autonomous political project.⁴⁷⁷

Rather than being seen as incipient rebels the mood of many northern Catholics historically could be defined in terms of quietist and introspective passivity, the product of a sense of abandonment and alienation from the northern Irish State.⁴⁷⁸ The concept of a distinctive community was reproduced through a range of structures and mechanisms. These produced a political and social culture that would not only shape the forms of Provisionalism, but also would in turn be used and reconstituted by republicans in their attempts to establish hegemony over their base. The shared organisations, activities, kinship and social networks of the Catholic community were vital mechanisms for the transmission of a communal culture, but it was the nature of that culture with its shared values and assumptions that was to be most significant.⁴⁷⁹ These values stressed an almost organic self-conscious sense of community and its transcendence of internal class divisions, linked to a strong sense of communal

⁴⁷⁶ For the historical context and the development of a determining idea of community see Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster*, Prologue xxxiii - xxxviii and Chaps 5-8.

⁴⁷⁷ B. Purdie, 'The Irish Anti-Partition League, South Armagh and the abstentionist tactic 1945-58', *Irish Political Studies* 1986, 67-77.

⁴⁷⁸ Elliott, *Catholics*, 395-402.

⁴⁷⁹ J. Todd, 'Northern Irish Nationalist Political Culture', *Irish Political Studies* V 1990, 34.

solidarity, where community needs prevailed over individual rights, and splits and betrayal, especially in the face of the enemy, were a cardinal sin.⁴⁸⁰ Explicitly nationalist groupings attempted to portray themselves as the representatives of the whole nationalist community, mobilising voters with a combination of traditional rallying cries, through representational politics and, where practicable, clientalist interest group politics. These communalist themes were grounded in a mythology and a system of meanings that placed the community within an essentially hostile political environment in which the state was structurally antipathetic to the nationalist community as a whole. Todd has defined this in terms of 'deep memories of dispossession and pogrom'.⁴⁸¹ This mixture of myths and memories produced a folklore that shaped an allegedly common historical culture that married the nationalist experience in Northern Ireland to the wider national story and defined the Stormont regime as illegitimate. However, like all nationalisms these politics had a Janus-like character. While the common political culture expressed a desire for reunification as the long-term solution to the nationalist community's problems, this was frequently electoral window dressing. In practice, nationalist political culture largely represented accommodation within the framework of the Northern Irish State.

The politics of 'the whole nationalist community'

Throughout the Troubles, the Church and the SDLP drew an almost pathological distinction between constitutional nationalists and the men of violence; likewise republican discourse, at least until the late 1980s, distanced the Provisionals from the middle class collaborators of mainstream nationalism. In the late 1980s, an increasingly persuasive view of northern nationalist political culture stressed its underlying unity and homogenising framework, a reflection perhaps of on-going political shifts within nationalist politics and the development of the Provisionals' 'broad front' strategy during that period. It was argued that as a 'rich and flexible conceptual structure', northern nationalist political culture allowed the expression of 'divergent interests and... [could] accommodate very different political tendencies'. Certainly there was a case for arguing that constitutional nationalism and republicanism were both located within the shared familial framework of nationalist

⁴⁸⁰ Todd, 'Northern Irish Nationalist Political Culture', 34-35.

⁴⁸¹ Todd, 'Northern Irish Nationalist Political Culture', 31.

commonsense and ‘unspoken assumptions’.⁴⁸² This complexity of meanings has been seen as being constituted in the inter-related concepts of nation, community and justice, enabling radically different readings of these concepts within the common framework of nationalist political culture.⁴⁸³

In particular what needs to be considered is how far Provisionalism initially operated within this framework of ‘community’ and whether it was able to break through the limits of this political culture and develop in a qualitatively different direction. In order to fully understand the development of the discourse of community, we need to consider the various elements that contributed to its formation and how this culture was reflected in the politics of the nationalist community. Republicanism as an electoral and organised political force was weak, as patterns of nationalist politics varied throughout Northern Ireland with regional/local, class and religious factors all coming into play. However, the concept of a nationalist community is a problematic one in that different trends and tendencies are apparent. West of the Bann, Nationalist and Unity candidates had mobilised Catholic voters in frequently highly polarised elections with elements of a sectarian headcount. In this rural nationalist tradition there was a degree of ambivalence around party labels or indeed attitudes to the armed campaign, although distinctions between ‘republicans’ and ‘nationalists’ were sometimes blurred by communal mobilisation at election time.

In Belfast, communal politics emphasising unity and solidarity were important, but class divisions, for example, gave rise to different political patterns associated with the emergence of Labour /Republican Labour politics. Issues of class were to have greater salience, influencing the character of electoral battles within the nationalist community as much as the issue of mobilising that community against the external forces of unionism. Given the importance of Belfast as the cockpit of Provisionalism these patterns were to have some later significance. If a republican community could be said to exist it was largely as a family –based sub culture rather than an autonomous political group. The specifically republican electoral constituency was limited in Belfast and when it did develop had to be created and mobilised from either completely new elements or shaped from existing political patterns.

Civil Rights having presented a challenge to the political and social establishment of the nationalist community as much as it had to Stormont, the creation

⁴⁸² Todd, ‘Northern Irish Nationalist Political Culture’, 31.

⁴⁸³ Todd, ‘Northern Irish Nationalist Political Culture’, 33.

of the SDLP was something of an attempt to restore nationalist unity, although around a position somewhat to the left of the nationalist party and with initial claims to non-sectarianism. During the 1970s the SDLP absorbed most of the elements of 'constitutional nationalism' and despite tensions between its 'green' and red wings, successfully established an electoral hegemony over significant sections of the nationalist community. By 1974 the SDLP was able to represent itself as the voice of the minority community and participate in the Sunningdale power sharing administration as such. At grass roots level it could draw on a network of councillors and political structures inherited from its component parts, alongside the support of the church, the nationalist media and the social leaders of the nationalist community. Its position as the political voice of the nationalist community seemed unchallenged, when even militant republicans appeared to accept de facto its legitimacy or at the very least to tolerate it as an electoral expression of nationalist opinion. If this communal and representational tradition was powerful, it was not entirely uncontested at a community level.

The communalisation of politics hid potential antagonisms within the nationalist community which mitigated against the development of a community based alternative to constitutional nationalism and reflected the divisions within the nationalist population in rural and urban terms. For example, lower turnout and voter apathy in West Belfast indicated an electoral potential amongst non-voters, while the presence of unity, independent and semi-republican candidates in rural areas with their tradition of polarised elections and high turnouts offered republicans opportunities to build a base.⁴⁸⁴ Despite the unifying forces of the Protestant 'other', the Catholic Church and its education system, the GAA, and the appeal to solidarity within a common 'Irish' cultural and political framework, the nationalist population

⁴⁸⁴ The turnout in West Belfast in the February 1974 Westminster election was 73%; in October it was 67%. Both were in line with the average turnout (70%, 68% respectively) in the Northern Ireland constituencies. The contrast with the marginal seats of Mid-Ulster (82%, 79%) and Fermanagh-South Tyrone (87%, 88%) is instructive. In west Belfast Albert Price stood as an independent and was generally regarded as gaining a 'republican' vote of 12%. Other candidates who might reflect a 'republican' vote were in Mid-Ulster where Bernadette McAliskey gained 27% of the poll as an independent: whilst in Fermanagh-South Tyrone F. MacManus polled 26% as a Unity candidate in February 1974. Although larger, the rural 'republican' vote was also more diffuse and could range from old-style nationalists to socialist republicans. The electoral history of Republican candidates in Northern Ireland had been chequered; republican success in rural Mid-Ulster and Fermanagh-South Tyrone in 1955 (in effect standing as nationalist unity candidates) was offset by relative failure in urban Belfast where varieties of Labour candidate, albeit with a 'republican/nationalist' tinge were electorally dominant in nationalist areas. The Sinn Fein candidate lost his deposit in the 1964 Westminster General Election. Details in S. Elliott, *Northern Ireland Parliamentary Election Results 1921-1972*, Chichester 1973 and B. Mitchell, *British Parliamentary Results 1950-1964*, Cambridge 1966.

was at once more homogeneous and yet more divided than the blanket terminology of 'community' might suggest.

Republicanism and communal common-sense

The power of nationalist folk memory was most evident in republican evocations of the historically sanctioned idea of the nationalist community under attack from Loyalism and the state in the early 1970s. Historical parallels and historically shaped frames of reference could be drawn from this common culture of intimidation and state repression, providing invaluable elements and images that added to the legitimacy of republican arguments and actions.⁴⁸⁵ Predominant within the communalist culture of the nationalist population, these elements shaped the reaction of some significant sections of that population to events in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Provisionalism successfully managed to take these elements and rework them into a new story of community oppression and resistance, which appeared to grow naturally from the old. Thus the Provisional trope of community, clearly recognisable within the historically sanctioned political culture of Northern Catholics, was simultaneously reworked by republicans. Conscious stress on ideas of historical continuity thus enabled new political forms to emerge from the shape of the old. Although Republicanism was 'historically ambivalent to Catholic communalism', republicans were historically placed within the catholic communal framework, by both friends and enemies.⁴⁸⁶ This ambivalence may be evidenced in Northern Catholic attitudes which, O'Connor argues, expressed a combination of semi-derision and sceptical admiration towards the IRA, the boys: 'there was a strong, if flattering and inaccurate, image of the IRA as a bulwark against loyalist attack'.⁴⁸⁷ This theme of defence was repeated so frequently in both standard histories of the republican movement and sympathetic articles and pamphlets as to become a truism.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁵ O'Connor, *In Search of a State*. A theme that emerges in interviews on the role of the IRA in the tellingly entitled Chapter 4; The IRA-'I don't want them to be the bad guys.'

⁴⁸⁶ For example, E. Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* London 2003,81 who places the Provisionals within a 'Northern Catholic tradition that went back nearly two hundred years' or Socialist Republican Peadar O'Donnell who criticised the Belfast IRA as sectarian in the following terms; 'We haven't a battalion of IRA men in Belfast; we just have a battalion of armed Catholics'. Quoted in R. Munck and B. Rolston, *Belfast in the 1930s; An Oral History* Belfast 1987,184.

⁴⁸⁷ O'Connor, *In Search of a State*, 109.

⁴⁸⁸ Typical of this latter genre is R. Quinn, *A Rebel Voice: A History of Belfast Republicanism* Belfast 1999,165 who describes the defence of St Matthews Church as 'the classic example of the traditional role of the IRA in Belfast defending Catholic areas against hostile Protestant attack...It sent a clear message...that the new Provisional movement was of and for the people'.

Whether it was historically true is beside the point; the idea of the IRA as the traditional and historically sanctioned defenders of the nationalist population was a central theme in Provisional conceptions of community, reinforced, both by repetition and by reference to contemporary events.⁴⁸⁹ The political consequence of this sense of communal unity and solidarity can be seen in the way that the Provisionals began to assume a hegemony over sections of the nationalist population, as the terms 'republican' and 'nationalist' came to be interchangeable through the 1980s, thus eliding a previously mutually irreconcilable hostility between constitutional nationalism and physical force republicanism. Gerry Adams' views on what he defines as 'Group Catholic Thinking',⁴⁹⁰ surely echo a significant strand in these thought processes:

the togetherness of fighting it and the pride in who you were-that you were standing up to all this oppression...and sticking together as a community very tightly... You felt that you were part of a struggle or a revolution or change, part of history...there was a great surge of going for it-the feeling...that we're so united and so strong now that nothing can break this wall that we've built around ourselves, a powerful sense of solidarity and sense of communal purpose.⁴⁹¹

The Resistance Community and the moral economy

Despite the powerful influence of this communal culture it is unsatisfactory to locate Provisionalism as ideology and practice entirely within its boundaries. The republican conception of community was developed as a consciously created strand in their politics. It drew on both pre-existing elements of nationalist common sense and political culture, and influential external ideological and cultural formations to create new forms and representations of community going beyond established communal

⁴⁸⁹The defencelessness of the Belfast Catholic population and the 'traditional' defender role of the IRA were central to the founding mythology of the Provisionals. For example, the initial statement by Provisional Army Council December 28th 1969 described the military run down of the IRA by the previous leadership as '...undermining ...[its]...basic military role...The failure to provide the maximum defence possible of our people in Belfast...against the forces of British Imperialism ...is ample evidence of this neglect'. Quoted in Quinn, *A Rebel Voice*, 150. See also, as an example of a constantly recurring theme, M. Armstrong, 'It was the people that asked for the IRA', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* August 13th 1987.

⁴⁹⁰'About 80% of Northern Catholics... are only one generation away from the land or the ghetto and it doesn't take a lot to concretise their views...there's a tendency in this state for some aspects life to remind you where you came from.' O'Connor, *In Search of a State*, 87.

⁴⁹¹ Quoted in O'Connor, *In Search of a State*, 87.

frameworks. The community as defined by the Provisionals was a collective subject, an actor in history with conscious aims and direction. The fact that Provisionalism was rooted in the commonsense of the nationalist ghettos and was, in the last analysis, unable ideologically to transcend its origins seems to support the argument for a deep underlying continuity between Provisionalism's discursive framework and that of the rest of the nationalist family. However, as with other areas of republican ideology these developments represent a continuous and evolving dialectic between existing traditional frameworks of thought on the one hand and, on the other, the conscious development of new forms of ideology and politics in response to externally imposed changes and new political –military imperatives.⁴⁹²

In one sense the Provisionals had limited control over this wider political terrain, although belief in their agency and ability to shape history would override that reality until the mid 1980s. It was only as their options narrowed that the Provisionals returned to some of these established patterns of nationalist discourse, mixed with the newer cognate strands of identity politics and marking the revision and the defeat of a specifically 'republican' project. Significantly it was around both the discursive ideal and the political reality of 'community' that the creation of a new, post-republican Provisionalism was to take place.

Republicans initially deployed the language of community as part of the attempt to establish hegemony and mobilise support for the guerrilla campaign in what they regarded as their base areas. Being the product of an insurrectionary current that arose during the crisis of 1969-71, the Provisional movement initially reflected the developing moral economy and commonsense of its main constituency within the nationalist population; as one British military source argued in the late 1970s, 'the Provisional IRA is essentially a working class organisation based in the ghetto areas

⁴⁹² 'It is a remarkable ideology that can express its revolutionary claims one week in a thinly veiled religious and mystical form and the next in a style and reasoning much closer to Lenin and Mao than Aquinas'. F. Burton, *The politics of legitimacy: struggles in a Belfast community*, London 1978, 75. Burton's contemporary participant observation of Provisionalism in Ardoyne explores these tensions and examines the social basis of Provisionalism through an exploration of the social consciousness of Northern Catholicism. He thus situates republicans within the Catholic *weltanschauung*; my interest, however, is how far they expand the boundaries of their politics and attempt to establish hegemony over sections of the nationalist population by creating new conceptions of community, the radical *gemeinschaft* of the resistance community, both from within and beyond that communalist world view. Burton's research covers the early 1970s and I would suggest that this hegemonisation increasingly takes on a different form from the early 1980s.

of the cities and in the poorer rural areas.⁴⁹³ This widely shared and arguably accurate view was to become significant in the development of the republican project, both at its inception and throughout its later incarnations.⁴⁹⁴

Born in the crisis of communal polarisation, 1969-70, the character of its founding moment was reflected in the strength of a Defenderist current within Provisionalism. This current reflected in turn the sense of community amongst the movement's base, with the Provisionals regarding themselves and being regarded as communal defenders against both the state and Loyalism.⁴⁹⁵ The experience of many republicans in this period was primarily one of being drawn into military activism in response to these needs and then finding an ideological shape in Provisionalism that best reflected the reality on the ground.⁴⁹⁶ Thus for many republicans, their sense of community was a 'natural' reflection of their experience at this time, being further reinforced by elements of a pre-existing nationalist commonsense.⁴⁹⁷ Representing the commonsense of their source communities there was little need for Provisionals to explicitly define or articulate it ideologically.

However, in their own discursive theory and practice the Provisionals began to assess the nature of their support base and to define the community they represented. As a battle for hegemony was joined, the very meaning of community itself was to become more and more contested. A potent intersection and mutual reinforcement of themes of place, class and community was essential in this process.⁴⁹⁸ This

⁴⁹³ Glover Report, quoted in S. Cronin, *Irish Nationalism: A History of its Roots and Ideology*, Dublin 1980, 339-357.

⁴⁹⁴ For example, location of riots, 'terrorist -related incidents' and home addresses of prisoners confirm the view of a working class war. Likewise R. White and S. Cronin confirm this impression in their interviews and surveys. Cronin, *Irish Nationalism*, and R.W. White, *Provisional Irish Republicans: An Oral and Interpretive History*, Westport 1993.

⁴⁹⁵ See, Burton, *The politics of legitimacy*, Chaps 2 and 3. Also author's interview with Mickey McMullan, April 16th 1998 and Brendan Hughes, August 12th 1998.

⁴⁹⁶ Interview with A. McIntyre, May 30th 1999.

⁴⁹⁷ As Burton argues, '...The particular ideology of Provisional Republicanism has been able to fuse the social consciousness of Catholicism into a political practice...The IRA has managed to activate, from the favourable social structures of the Catholic communities politics of civil rights through national liberation...' Burton, *The politics of legitimacy*, 128.

⁴⁹⁸ As such this was not unique to Northern Ireland or the late twentieth century. For example the identification between political position and place in the Sections of French revolutionary Paris, Kronstadt in the Russian Revolution and Red Clydeside in the 1920s. Just as important culturally and probably as influential in Northern Irish terms were the representations of British working class communities during the 1960s in popular culture and art e.g. the Tyneside plays of Tom Hadaway. Specific local characteristics continued to be used for political mobilisation and as a signifier of political identity in Britain throughout our period e.g. the Militant Tendency in Liverpool and the mining communities during the miners strike 1984-5. The key difference in Northern Ireland was that this class/communal identity had a very real national dimension that enabled this experience to be generalised as part of a wider national political movement against the state.

conjunction could be expressed in a wide range of quite localised sub –cultures giving a very particularistic focus and loyalty, a sense of pride and collective identity to your ‘village’, whether it be urban or rural.⁴⁹⁹ The emotional power of these sub-cultures and their usefulness for political mobilisation even into the 1990s can be seen in republican accounts of local events, involving state repression and sectarian attacks. For example the following description of the February 1992 murders in the Lower Ormeau Road, set in the context of ‘the tragic history of a besieged community’, describes the area as ‘a small enclave’, ‘a diminutive collection of narrow streets’ in which the human tragedy of a contemporary atrocity is linked through communal connections to previous attacks and deaths. The tragedy is interpreted as communal, not individual, where ‘sectarian attacks on the beleaguered community in the Lower Ormeau Road are ‘part of an ongoing 20-year campaign by Loyalism to hammer the community into abject submission. There is nothing new about them. They have failed. They will continue to fail.’⁵⁰⁰ The suggested response to the attacks also reflects this collective sense of what can be clearly defined in this case as a resistance community:

As the state will not withdraw its sectarian forces some limited but practical measures must be taken... The community can only protect itself... People should work together as a community to secure their houses, watch their places of leisure and entertainment... To the entire community of the Lower Ormeau Road we extend our condolences. Hold firm.⁵⁰¹

These strands became central to the republican project of attempting to establish political hegemony by defining and creating class-based resistance communities. The resistance community was both a means of mass political mobilisation and of creating a revolutionary vanguard, situating the base for the republican project at the intersection of class, community and nation within the

⁴⁹⁹ Identification with the area or townland was an important factor for both urban and rural Republicans. Similar patterns and a sense of rootedness can be found in all nationalist areas from Ballymurphy to Co. Fermanagh. Note of conversation with Mick Mellanophy, Sinn Féin activist during the 1970s in Kinawley, Co. Fermanagh, 10th August 2004.

⁵⁰⁰ A. McIntyre, ‘The Lower Ormeau Road-A Community In Grief’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 13th 1992.

⁵⁰¹ A. McIntyre, ‘The Lower Ormeau Road-A Community In Grief’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 13th 1992. Interestingly a local Sinn Féin leaflet distributed in the Lower Ormeau Road area wrote about the 1989 Hillsborough Stadium Disaster in similar communal terms and identified with the sufferings of a similar working class community (copy in author’s possession).

Provisionals' developing republican socialist framework. One such resistance community, Ardoyne, was defined in the following way:

Ardoyne is a small community in Belfast, which has borne more than its fair share of suffering in the past 20 years of conflict. This week its people came together to remember their dead and to rededicate themselves to the struggle for lasting peace in their community and their country...the staunchness of the ordinary working class community of Ardoyne and of many another community like it across the Six Counties is a shining example to all the oppressed sections of the Irish people. Neither occupation, criminalisation, extradition, imprisonment nor even assassination can defeat them. They are the real stalwarts of freedom.⁵⁰²

What was being created here was an imagined community of the classic nationalist type, except that the nation was being defined as the overall context for the community rather a mere patchwork of communities. The characteristics of the individual locales were significant and the struggle was definitely rooted in the streets of the locality, but at this stage the nation rather than the region or the community was still regarded as the arena of emancipation.

Whilst localism and regionalism were important signifiers of nationalist identity they also reflected the perceived oppression of the nationalist population within the confines of the Northern Irish state. Thus to republicans, the Irish Dimension was more than a cultural identity, it was a means of political liberation drawing fellow nationalists throughout the rest of the island into play as a counter-balance to unionist strength in the north. In order to hegemonise its base the Provisionals had to create a framework for the imagined resistance community that reflected significant elements of the existing communal culture, self-image, and organisational forms.⁵⁰³ This community was portrayed as organic and coherent, created by the conditions of exploitation and oppression; as such it was comprised not only of the working class and other excluded groups in general, but by geographically

⁵⁰² 'Stalwarts Of Freedom', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* March 30th 1989. This statement not only indicates the theme of the resistance community as used in the late 1980s, but also shows the discursive shift that was being undertaken, hollowing out the concept from within.

⁵⁰³ C. de Baroid, *Ballymurphy and the Irish War*, London 1990, 30-31 discusses the deep-seated anti-authoritarian culture that had developed in Ballymurphy even before the onset of the troubles and its impact on the area's later political development.

specific groups.⁵⁰⁴ Its local identity was a defining characteristic with an overlapping of place, class, and historical and political elements to create a sense of community.⁵⁰⁵ A good example of this imagined community is expressed through the symbolic function of Free Derry Corner, which was said to embody the characteristics of resistance to British rule. It was appropriated by republicans, both to establish a legitimating continuity with the civil rights movement and the uprising of 1969, and to physically mark the idea of a resistance community. Thus it was described:

Free Derry Corner was a symbol of the future, more than a symbol of the time that it was put up there...the British Army might walk our streets...[but] the people are still free in their minds, the one thing they can't enslave is your thinking'.⁵⁰⁶

Other features of these idealised communities were their defiance, their militancy, their high level of political consciousness as opposed to mere sectarian communalism⁵⁰⁷, their capacity for resistance against overwhelming odds and their untapped social and political revolutionary potential.⁵⁰⁸ The resistance community was as much a state of mind as a place.⁵⁰⁹ This was reflected in a popular republican culture and folklore that constantly reinforced and reinvented the tradition and

⁵⁰⁴ S. O'Malley, 'Only the rivers run free', *An Phoblacht* October 25th 1984, argued that Catholic women, in contrast to Protestants, had a sense of closeness born from the nature of 'community' in nationalist areas and from the political oppression they faced.

⁵⁰⁵ See Brownie, 'Ghosts', *An Phoblacht* June 27 1981 which captures this sense of place and the intersection of past and present with a nostalgia that mourns both the passing of old communities through re-development and fallen comrades from the early part of the Troubles. The Lower Falls is 'a rubble-scattered wasteland filled with ghosts'.

⁵⁰⁶ Jim Wray quoted in S. Delaney, 'Symbol of Resistance', *An Phoblacht* February 25th 1982. Eamonn McCann offers a different account of how the symbol was radically altered and then annexed to the Provisional conception of a resistance community. E. McCann, *War and Peace in Northern Ireland*, Dublin 1998, 149-152.

⁵⁰⁷ See J. Sosa, 'Ardoyne under a microscope -review of F. Burton's' *The Politics of Legitimacy*', *Republican News* January 13th 1979 which criticises the idea of communalism and argues that Burton 'doesn't understand the politics of the Republican movement which are anything but sectarian'.

⁵⁰⁸ De Baroid, *Ballymurphy and the Irish War*, 27 describes the 'the pool of energy' released in Ballymurphy by the events of August 1969: he quotes Gerry Adams as saying 'If anyone was ever to ask me what makes a revolution...I would say, go take a look at what happened in Ballymurphy'. De Baroid, *Ballymurphy and the Irish War*, 31. Likewise Adams argued that 'the British government can never beat a consciously risen and hostile section of the Irish people'. Quoted in 'Panic Ploy Flops', *An Phoblacht* September 19th 1983.

⁵⁰⁹ An important subtext that runs through Danny Morrison's *West Belfast: the population portrayed in the novel seem almost to be animated by a genius locus, a habitus that shapes their politics and lives*. See D. Morrison, *West Belfast*, Cork 1989. A similar sense of past and place is also evident in rural areas: see, for example, T. Harnden, *'Bandit Country': The IRA and South Armagh*, London 1999.

emphasised the identification between republicans and the community.⁵¹⁰ This was to be especially important for the young as the Troubles extended over several generations and the early heroic periods of the 1970s and 1980s started to fade into legend. Although this was an imagined community it was based in a reality of considerable local support for and involvement in militant republicanism in these base areas. Wall murals identifying local prisoners and plaques commemorating significant incidents reinforced this sense of local connection and wider identification. Given the numbers of people who have passed through the IRA and their wider family and communal links it would be an unusual family in the nationalist areas that had no links, no matter how tenuous, with the republican movement.⁵¹¹ These communal connections waxed and waned, but most observers argued that the Hunger Strikes 1980-81 illustrated the power of this sense of community as it marked 'a uniquely close identification between the nationalist population...and ...physical force republicanism', bringing thousands on to the streets 'by their umbilical cords'.⁵¹² Less positively and controversially is a strand in the discourse that emphasises the special and uniquely tragic victimhood of the Catholic population within a nationalist reading of Irish history as a moral tale of oppression.⁵¹³

These themes in turn may be related to a particular Catholic view of the world that emphasises suffering, sacrifice and martyrdom. It is not necessary to accept that republicanism is the product of a Persian cult of blood sacrifice to see the impact that Catholicism would have on this sense of community and republican sense of the individual and collective self.⁵¹⁴ As O'Connor describes it, victimhood becomes a major aspect of the republican sense of legitimacy in which 'republican losses blend into a wider picture of a community victimised through the ages'.⁵¹⁵

⁵¹⁰ This collective memory is represented in de Baroid, *Ballymurphy and the Irish War*, 27 and The Ardoyne Commemorative Project, *Ardoyne: The Untold Truth*. It is also reflected in the features sections of local nationalist newspapers such as *The Andersonstown News*.

⁵¹¹ Estimates vary on numbers of IRA and republican activists. Figures from private information from former member of IRA GHQ Staff.

⁵¹² O'Connor, *In Search of a State*, 101-103. See also P. O'Malley, *Biting At The Grave: The Irish Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair*, Belfast 1990.

⁵¹³ S. Howe, *Ireland and Empire*, Oxford 2000, Chapter 6 is an excellent survey of this intellectual connection. O'Malley, *Biting At The Grave* discusses the impact of this strand of thought on the politics of the Hunger Strikes as a central theme in his account.

⁵¹⁴ Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster*, 474-476. Author's interview with Danny Morrison 5th January 2004 who describes the 'natural' use of Catholic imagery as a reflection of communal culture during the Hunger Strikes. However former Republican prisoner, hunger striker and atheist Tommy McKearney adamantly denies any sense of 'iobairt fola' about what he describes as 'the tactic of hunger striking'. Interview, May 30th 1998.

⁵¹⁵ O'Connor, *In Search of a State*, 99.

Whilst acknowledging these elements in the commonsense of the nationalist population, what is more significant is the changing balance within Provisionalism's configuration reflecting a deeper reorientation from active agency and engagement with history to a more passive sense of victimhood and dependence on external forces. As this shift occurs the strands of victimhood become more predominant in the discourse and more appropriate to a politics of persuasion and pleading. They were always present in nationalist political culture, but in a changing world what was once marginal comes now to the fore. Above all these base areas were seen as ghettos, a term of abuse that was appropriated as an identity and turned back as a positive badge.⁵¹⁶

The characteristics of ghettos were their segregation, imposed exclusion from the dominant society, alienation and the underclass, stigmatised like Ardoyne and Ballymurphy, powerlessness and vulnerability along with a family-like kinship and social network.⁵¹⁷ As such, the nationalist ghettos of west Belfast and Derry could act as metaphors for the position of nationalists within the Northern Irish state. In this sense they reflected the idealised characteristics of the Provisionals themselves and, as such, reinforced the idea that the Provisionals were not just a political movement that had arisen from within the Risen People, but were organically part of it.⁵¹⁸ They were both an integral part of the community and its most conscious political elements.⁵¹⁹ The trope of the Risen People was both rooted in place and in island-wide sense of a community apart.⁵²⁰ In part drawn from republican tradition and in part from a sense of political awakening after civil rights this also drew on a wider revolutionary tradition that stressed the revolutionary potential of the masses if either provoked to action by 'objective' circumstances or stimulated by the subjective factor of

⁵¹⁶ The concept of the ghetto probably entered Provisional discourse through contemporary media usage that implicitly compared events in Northern Ireland with the USA, such as civil rights, rioting and the emergence of the Black Power movement.

⁵¹⁷ See, for example, Burton, *The politics of legitimacy*, Chapter 3, *Republicanism: the IRA and the community* and G. Adams, *Before The Dawn: An Autobiography*, London 1997 for an account of the political importance of these social networks.

⁵¹⁸ A point made not only in IRA statements, but also by the appearance of, and reported reception by the crowd, of IRA Volunteers at Republican rallies. See, for example, 'Soldiers of the People', *Republican News* February 24th 1979.

⁵¹⁹ B. Rolston, 'Changing the Political Landscape: Murals and Transition in Northern Ireland', *Irish Studies Review*, 11 2003.

⁵²⁰ Along with the Phoenix image this theme taken from Pearse's poetry and Christian imagery was widely used to exemplify the awakening of resistance and a sense of 'never again', both in the sense of the perceived defencelessness of the nationalist population and their oppression under Stormont

revolutionary leadership.⁵²¹ This linked the resistance community to the republican tradition of agency and heroic sacrifice, which could awaken the sleeping revolutionary nationalist consciousness of the people.⁵²²

Thus, it was argued by republicans that the struggle also had a transformative effect on the consciousness of the 'ordinary nationalist people welding them into a cohesive revolutionary force; those same people have learnt to rely on themselves and in them is the strength to continue the resistance in support the prisoners'.⁵²³ The power of this theme continued to be prominent in Provisional discourse until the 1990s. For example, Danny Morrison illustrated the character, unifying bond and revolutionary role of the Risen People in 1987 when he proclaimed at a march commemorating and linking the 1981 Hunger Strikers and the IRA Volunteers killed at Loughgall:

You people are the risen nationalist people. You people are the conscience of Ireland and we are not going to stop until we have finished our task...Like the Hunger Strikers we are brothers and sisters in struggle and we're going to win, Victory!⁵²⁴

The revolutionary process was seen as a dialectic between events and the people that forges a vehicle for liberation, 'the Republican Movement, itself shaped and formed by the way things are...'⁵²⁵ It is portrayed as a courageous and indomitable resistance; 'the People were never cowed or conquered. After each battle the People rose up again, wiped off the blood and buried their fallen comrades... and went into battle again.'⁵²⁶ Along with this characterisation of the resistance community came a stress on the continuity of the contemporary republican struggle with those of the community as a whole. However, specific sections of the

⁵²¹ A theme developed, for example, in comparisons between the civil rights movement and the Provisionals. 'The demands of the protesting people are different today than ten years ago... Then our eyes were closed, today our eyes are open... the IRA ... are the inheritors of the struggle which began... on October 5th 1968', E. McCann in a speech quoted in, 'Today our eyes are open', *Republican News*, October 14th 1978. McCann's political differences with the republican movement make this formulation in traditional republican terms all the more remarkable.

⁵²² D. Morrison, 'Bodenstown Address', *An Phoblacht / Republican News* June 27th 1981. 'The present generation of Irish youth... have shown all the qualities of the past generations of freedom fighters- courage, heroism, discipline, commitment, and above all, self-sacrifice.'

⁵²³ 'Defiance', *An Phoblacht* August 8th 1981.

⁵²⁴ J. Plunkett, 'Brothers and sisters in struggle', *An Phoblacht / Republican News* May 14th 1987

⁵²⁵ D. Morrison, 'Bodenstown Address', *An Phoblacht* June 27th 1981.

⁵²⁶ 'Easter Message', *Republican News* April 9th 1977.

community, it was argued, embodied its essential characteristics and were frequently held up as models, for example, the defiance and the militancy of the youth:

Throughout the past seven years, and especially since the beginning of the struggle for national liberation the youth of Belfast have excelled themselves by their bravery and steadfastness. Taking the example set by Oglaiġ na hEireann the young men and women of the Occupied Counties have helped bring Britain to her knees.⁵²⁷

Likewise a similar role and identification was given to women as a key component in the resistance community especially around prisoners' issues and the Hunger Strikes. The role of women as activists, protestors and the heart of the community mixed a number of themes which drew on disparate influences ranging from Catholic religious and popular culture, 'traditional' gender roles within working class communities as well as contemporary feminism and leftist rhetoric which echoed the presentation, with obvious differences, of the images of miner's wives during the 1984-5 strike.⁵²⁸ As one picture caption put it '...it is nationalist women who have provided the backbone of all agitational political campaigns in the north...'⁵²⁹

The community and the mandate for struggle

These concepts of the resistance community were ambiguous since they contained contradictory ideas of a particularist communal identity alongside universal concepts of class and nation. The potential divergence in this discourse was overcome in a variety of ways. In practical terms the discourse of community was deployed to define the sea in which the guerrillas of the IRA swam. The idea of the resistance community was thus both a theoretisation of the base of Provisionalism and an attempt to broaden the hegemony of the movement. Tropes of class and community intersected so that the Provisionals' imagined community was essentially working class or the rural poor/small farmers. But the conflict was not defined at this stage by the Provisionals as purely sectional or recognitional; the particular situation and oppression of these groups was linked to a wider national and social project of emancipation. Not only

⁵²⁷ 'Defiance' [picture caption], *Republican News* January 15th 1977.

⁵²⁸ Sometimes these influences were literally cross-fertilised by the presence of miners support groups, women's groups and British leftists on Republican marches.

⁵²⁹ 'Women's Struggles', *IRIS* November 1981.

were issues of class and national oppression brought together in the idea of the resistance community, but the strategy for victory also focussed on this definition of community. The resistance community was defined as the vanguard of the wider struggle, the advanced sections whose oppression made them most responsive to the republican socialist message.

The development of this theme was dialogical and developmental in that the Provisionals drew on existing elements of communal consciousness and broadened them out to both work with the grain of nationalist communal thinking and to take it further to its more militant conclusions.⁵³⁰ During the founding moment of Provisionalism this representation of community was quite unself-conscious⁵³¹, but it became increasingly a conscious theme in Provisional propaganda and political - military activity.⁵³² In this sense some sections of the Belfast Provisional leadership drew on the existing communal commonsense and elements of a pre-existing republican tradition, albeit one mediated by developments in the 1960s and from this combination consciously structured new political forms. This process was significant in revealing some underlying assumptions within republicanism about the nature of political action and agency as well as pointing towards elements of continuity and change within the discursive framework that would prove to be significant in the future. Three emerging strands can be discerned in this period.

The first represented a degree of continuity between Belfast Provisionalism and the pre-1969 IRA. Community activism and agitational politics had been key features of the leadership of what would become the Officials, which in turn had fed into and had been influenced by the Civil Rights movement.⁵³³ A Stalinist theoretical

⁵³⁰ There was, for example, little within nationalist communal culture that made the development of the Provisionals 'automatic' or 'inevitable'. The Provisionals drew on a tradition of communal defence, but extended that to a guerrilla offensive against the British army. Although rooted in the Defenderist tradition and retaining some of its distinctive features this had to be transcended initially to develop into a national project of democratic self-determination. The discussion here is how far they remained within this tradition and whether it eventually overwhelmed them, reasserted itself. Note problems of initial Provisional campaign and nature of civil rights movement

⁵³¹ See, for example, the stress placed on communal defence and identification as an explanation for involvement in the Republican movement by individual Provisionals. Interviews with Tony Catney, Anthony McIntyre, Brendan Hughes, Danny Morrison, Mickey MacMullan and Tommy Gorman for this thesis and White, *Provisional Irish Republicans*.

⁵³² Gerry Adams, in particular, seems to have been aware from an early period of the importance of a community orientation and radicalisation as a means of building support in Ballymurphy. See Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, London 2002, Chapter 3. Likewise the identification of the ghettos, as the 'Republican People', was a key theme of the Long War strategy. See for example 'Secret', *An Phoblacht* May 12th 1979. .

⁵³³ The impact of Communist and other Leftwing politics on the strategy of the Officials is well-established in the literature; just as significant was the resulting agitational activity around housing,

schema for the development of the Irish Revolution, which adapted the Leninist model of the preconditions for revolution, had been influential in shaping the Officials approach to agitation.⁵³⁴ Some of the pre-69 Belfast republicans had been involved in community politics and agitation and it is hard not to see that experience not having some influence on their political practice.⁵³⁵ Indeed there seems to be a common pattern between the Official and Provisionals emphases on community activism that remained in place after the split in 1970.⁵³⁶ The mobilising relationship between community activism and the wider political project was common to both groups, although in the case of the Provisionals the military instrument was to predominate. Some leading Provisionals were to later argue that ideas for the political development of the republican movement existed in the early 1970s, but pressure of events precluded their development.⁵³⁷

The second strand was the broader influence on Provisionalism of the styles and ideologies of agitational politics of the new left internationally. Theoretically the politics of the left saw the working class as the agency of change and that the problem of political mobilisation was one of revolutionary consciousness. Agitational politics and 'mobilisation' were the means to raise the consciousness of the population and to create the subjective factor that would propel revolutionary change. Agitation around social issues would be steps along the revolutionary way. Even for non-revolutionaries the politics of community activism and direct action could be seen to be empowering and mobilising both in their general sense of active citizenship and political engagement and as a means of securing particular objectives. As a style and

economic issues and ground rents. The experience of the production of local newsletters, the organisation of protests and 'street politics' in general was to have a similar and related impact on the style of Provisional politics in the 1970s and 1980s.

⁵³⁴ For a discussion of this thinking see, H. Patterson, *The Politics of Illusion; A Political History of the IRA London 1997*, chap 4. In Official thinking the Army and the Party appear to be conflated as agents of revolution which may have had repercussions for later Provisional political strategy and organisation. For suggested continuities between the Officials and the Provisionals see English, *Armed Struggle*, 82.

⁵³⁵ Gerry Adams gives a flavour of this type of activity in Belfast and the general radical influences on younger Republicans in Adams, *Before The Dawn*, 64, 73-93.

⁵³⁶ The origins of these strategies of political activism became an issue in the leadership struggles in the late 1970s and early 1980s; Gerry Adams et al arguing that the 'politicisation' of the movement was a result of their leadership and explicitly criticizing the traditionalists for militarism. This view has become something of an orthodoxy in the media. The evidence for this approach is not entirely compelling.

⁵³⁷ See R. Ó Bradaigh ideas on a political movement model of different layers of supporters which has some similarities to the later Provisional model and the Provisional discussion on the need for Sinn Féin to act as an effective political party in the early 1970s in A. McIntyre, *A Structural Analysis of Modern Irish Republicanism 1969-73*, Unpublished PhD. Thesis, Queens University Belfast 1999, Chap 4, especially 173-177.

practice of politics it was associated with the demonstration, publicity, the petition and direct action to draw attention to grievances that established power would have to address. In many ways it was encapsulated in the student movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement and in its revolutionary form the events of 1968. As one republican remembered it in 1979:

Housing Action Groups, Direct Action, Tenants Associations—all new terms to me in 1968. People were coming together, discontent was in the air... And revolution was in the air. Street fighters were to be seen in Paris, Berlin, Cleveland and Newark and they looked the part. Masked and hooded, long-haired and angry, filled with wrath and fury, longing to pull down the establishment. Barricades, burning... students and workers, the old left and the new, ready again to show the world that the Internationale still meant something and that Imperialism was not having it all its own way...⁵³⁸

This style of politics was significantly different to traditional republicanism in its underlying assumptions rooted in the role of the working class as an agency for political change. Traditional republicanism stressed the role of the instrument—the movement—as the lever of change with the implication that the population were relatively passive objects to be acted upon and directed. In almost a Fenian sense the task of the republican movement was to perfect its instrument and strike when the moment was right.⁵³⁹

Vanguardism

The fusion of this agitational, mobilising style of politics with elements of traditional republicanism represents another essential strand in Provisionalism, its eclecticism and willingness to experiment with tactics and strategies. The key point is that this was a creative process not the mere replication of tradition. As if to illustrate this eclecticism the Leninist idea of the revolutionary vanguard was wedded to the cognate

⁵³⁸ K. Gallagher, 'Revolution was in the air', *An Phoblacht* August 4th 1979. Already in 1979 the events of 1968 were becoming mythologized and Civil Rights were being interpreted within an international frame of reference. 'The revolution' was as much a style of politics [and fashion—'they looked the part'] as a reality. As such it was comparable to the French style that influenced nineteenth-century revolutionaries across Europe.

⁵³⁹ 'Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation... and through her open military organisations... having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment...' The Proclamation of the Republic, Easter 1916. Text in L. de Paor, *On the Easter Proclamation and other declarations* Dublin 1997, 10.

idea of Fenian conspiratorial militarism. The deployment of community is an example of this pragmatic pattern, which forms a key part of Provisionalism's genetic code. A similar adaptation was the development of a republican socialist analysis during the 1970s. Within this framework the deployment of community and community politics, both ideologically and in terms of political activism, became increasingly central to the republican project. Initially this was a pragmatic response to break the movement out from isolation, but increasingly it took on a dynamic of its own, feeding back in turn into the ideological and political development of republicanism during then 1980s. The Brownie articles, the Staff Report and Jimmy Drumm's Bodenstown speech have been widely recognised as defining expressions of the new Provisionalism among the northern radicals. Ideas of mobilising the base and a hegemonic definition of community lay at the heart of this approach. The language of the Brownie articles, among others, and the Staff Report give an impression of intellectual coherence and developed revolutionary strategy. The reality was more eclectic and pragmatic; the actual development of community politics on the ground, more partial and limited in scope. This stress on community predated the electoral successes of the Hunger Strike period and was initially designed to be a supplement to the armed campaign. In many ways it began as an eclectic and entirely pragmatic strategy, but when married to electoral successes it was to acquire a potency and significance for republican politics and strategy beyond the initial expectations and aims of its originators.⁵⁴⁰

This conjunction of Leninism and Fenianism is evident in the role given to the IRA and the community as vanguard. The definition of the community was broadened to exemplify 'The People' as its vanguard; in turn the IRA was the vanguard of the vanguard- 'the most **politically** [author's emphasis] progressive, with implicit faith and conviction in the capability and conviction of the republican leadership to overthrow British imperialist occupation'.⁵⁴¹ Themes of defiance, resistance community, the ghetto and the Risen People were central to this discourse. Implicit within these themes was the potential revolutionary subjectivity of the population and the need for revolutionary agency.⁵⁴² Typical of this approach were a

⁵⁴⁰ Interview with Danny Morrison, January 5th 2004.

⁵⁴¹ 'Organise', *Republican News*, December 4th 1976.

⁵⁴² The Gramscian idea of the counter-hegemonic project seems to have been a direct influence on this strategy. Interview with Danny Morrison, January 5th 2004.

series of articles around the People's Councils, active republicanism and republican strategy:

The Volunteer is in everyday contact with the ordinary people whom he is fighting to liberate...He is in fact an ambassador of republicanism and must propagate republican philosophy...Apart from the practical reasons involved for the necessity for support it must be remembered that these people are our fellow countrymen and women and their cultivation and education is, like ours, a prerequisite for the success of the revolution...The purpose of the war is not [sic] merely to destroy, but to build alternative structures [the People's Councils]...by radicalising and changing society we are automatically cementing gained ground and ...widening our base.⁵⁴³

These activist politics were designed to consolidate and develop the 'politicisation with in [sic] the Nationalist ghetto areas' and through the creation of People's Councils to begin the process of decolonisation.⁵⁴⁴ In this reading the community was both a site of resistance and a structure for the creation of a dual power challenge to the state.⁵⁴⁵ As one leading republican expressed it: 'I think people have to depend on themselves. People who are unemployed in West Belfast must organise themselves into whatever structure they desire, to learn about what creates the type of society we are living in now and to organise against it'.⁵⁴⁶ Even reformist structures such as the incident centres established during the 1975 truce could be utilised for the revolutionary project, indicating the pragmatism of the Provisionals as well as perhaps pointing towards the elements of later strategies of engagement with the state.⁵⁴⁷

The last strand was an older tradition of communal political mobilisation. Alongside the more prominent prison and hunger strike protests of the late 1970s and

⁵⁴³ Solon, 'Revealing Revolutionary Relations', *Republican News* July 30th 1977. The explicitly Maoist tone of the comments on the politicising role of the IRA was also to be found in the Staff Report and the later Green Book which quoted directly from Mao's guerrilla writings.

⁵⁴⁴ *Vindicator*, 'Power to the People', *Republican News* January 15th 1977.

⁵⁴⁵ These themes are also developed in a series of influential articles during this period by Brownie such as, 'Active Abstentionism', *Republican News* October 18th 1975, 'The Republic; A Reality', *Republican News* October 29th 1975, and, 'Active Republicanism', *Republican News* May 1st 1976 as well as letters and editorials in the paper such as 'Organise', *Republican News* December 4th 1976, 'Reader Slams Republican Interview', *Republican News* February 28th 1976 and P. Mac Dermott, 'Movement Must Mobilise Workers in Mass Movement', *Republican News* April 10th 1976.

⁵⁴⁶ Gerry Adams, quoted in J. Plunkett, 'Springhill Dole Conference', *An Phoblacht March* 10th 1983

⁵⁴⁷ Tom Hartley, who was later to be significant in the development of Provisional political strategy, specifically linked the incident centres to the dual power concept: he argued that the nationalist population were 'turning to Incident Centres as local Parliaments', in 'Interview with the Director, Republican Press Centre', *Republican News* January 31st 1976.

early 1980s there was also a thread of this form of community politics.⁵⁴⁸ This reflected both elements of continuity with pre-1969 practice and with the needs of building support for the armed campaign.⁵⁴⁹ The development of these community politics reflected a number of frequently contradictory elements and themes. The revolutionary challenge presented by the People's Councils was stillborn and although the issue was raised subsequently, Provisional practice from the late 1970s onwards was increasingly reformist and agitational in character. This reflected both the fact that the Provisionals as a whole were increasingly on the defensive during this period and that the social movement that had given birth to them in the 1969-1972 period had receded. As such, the People's Councils would inevitably reflect a limited base of support. Significantly the revolutionary rhetoric of mobilising the base and undermining the institutions of the state remained,⁵⁵⁰ but the practice was increasingly a mixture akin to the community politics of traditional clientalist nationalism and the activism of Ken Livingstone's GLC.⁵⁵¹

The development of community activism was not purely a product of the events of the late 1970s. It could be argued that an older clientalist tradition of nationalist local government representation was reflected in aspects of the advice centres which might act to mediate between the population and state institutions; in this sense what republicans were doing was adding a republican gloss to old-fashioned constituency work. If that type of clientelism was a well-established part of Northern Irish nationalist politics⁵⁵², the idea of this type of community activism was not.

⁵⁴⁸ Note the success of communal mobilisation during the Hunger Strikes, such as the participation of rural GAA clubs in demonstrations, 'Report of Coalisland H-Block March', *An Phoblacht* February 23rd 1980.

⁵⁴⁹ The development of newsletters and local leaflets, and even the success of *Republican News* itself reflect this emphasis.

⁵⁵⁰ S. Boyle, 'The need to be involved on all fronts', *An Phoblacht* October 4th 1980 refers to a discussion on 'the need to stimulate popular self-organisation rather than emphasise demands on the state.'

⁵⁵¹ See 'Sinn Féin in London', *An Phoblacht* July 28th 1983 where Sinn Féin's community politics are described as 'leading people away from dependency and patronage' and M. Armstrong, 'Belfast welcomes GLC leader', *An Phoblacht* March 3rd 1983. Gerry Adams' review, 'Citizen Ken', *An Phoblacht*, May 20th 1984 is positive about GLC local government politics and Livingstone's role in particular.

⁵⁵² For examples of nationalist local government clientalism see P. Devlin, *Straight Left: An Autobiography*, Belfast 1993, 74-76.

Chapter VIII-Embracing the state

Green Ken, Red Gerry?

The clear relationship that republicans enjoyed with sections of the British left continued to be a feature of their politics into the 1990s.⁵⁵³ As suggested above, the ideological traffic appears to be bi-lateral with a degree of mutual influence on the politics of both groupings. It could be argued that this classification is merely 'guilt by association' and that the similarities are superficial matters of style and image. Furthermore, the relationship might simply be a marriage of convenience with reciprocal benefits of 'revolutionary' credibility on one side and enhanced electoral status on the other. However, a case can be made that the relationship went beyond mere style and that the ideological framework and underlying approach of Sinn Féin's community politics can be sited within the same political and cultural framework as that of Livingstone's GLC and the broad ideological currents of the Bennite Labour Left in the 1980s. The degree of conscious influence is problematic and changed in character during this period reflecting the changing political circumstances facing both parties. But in raising this connection, the intention is not just to locate Provisionalism within the wider ideological and political currents but also to specifically site some of the most significant strands of its ideology and political practice within a particular discourse of left wing politics. This would help to explain some features of its ideological trajectory and place Provisionalism's development centrally in the wider context of a discursive shift in radical politics after 1989. This strand of left politics was very much a product of the post-1968 currents of the 'new left'.

Early Provisionalism has been widely recognised as an eclectic mixture of forces and ideological currents and it is clear that many of the younger 'northern radicals' were influenced by the style and phraseology, if not the more arcane theoretical arguments of the politics of the left. Even in later years they continued to

⁵⁵³ For example, Troops Out Movement delegations, demonstrations, Sinn Féin speaking tours in Britain, debates in the letters page of *An Phoblacht* on arcane aspects of British left policy towards Ireland and a diplomatic offensive directed at potential Labour opinion formers were evidence of this approach.

argue that these broader currents of international new left and protest politics were to have been significant influences on their early development. New left politics were an extremely eclectic mixture that emphasised the revolutionary role of new social forces, such as students and women, while privileging spontaneity, participatory democracy and decentralisation over the bureaucratic hierarchies of traditional left politics, trade unionism and, of course, the state which had been a focus of social democratic politics in Western Europe. The coherence and stability of this project was questionable; indeed there can be a case that such an eclectic and inchoate current can not really be defined as a political project at all, and yet the influence of this new leftism on a generation of activists was to be significant.⁵⁵⁴ A sympathetic commentator argues that these new ideas of democracy and self-organisation entered the 'political bloodstream' resulting in a politics that 'envisaged radically different state institutions, involving new, more vigorous forms of democracy and more responsive forms of social administration'.⁵⁵⁵

One of the results of these new influences on left Labour politics in Britain was the 'most ambitious...experiment in participatory democratic government...[in] the Greater London Council between 1981 and 1986'.⁵⁵⁶ This experiment, combining elements of community empowerment and identity politics, replaced the class-based concepts of traditional labourism and social democratic redistribution of resources with an idea of London as a patchwork of diverse communities and cultures, brought together in a rainbow coalition which highlighted and indeed privileged diversity.⁵⁵⁷ These new approaches raised questions of political agency and mobilisation similar to those initially encountered by Sinn Féin at the outset of its 'politicisation' project in the early 1980s and perhaps even more strikingly at its emergence as a significant force in local government. These questions also resonate with the historical debates within radical and socialist politics between revolutionaries and revisionists about the repressive nature of the state and whether the 'bourgeois state' could be utilised as an instrument for the 'emancipation of the working class'. Echoes of these radical positions also fused with strands in the republican tradition that refused to recognise

⁵⁵⁴ See T. Ali and S. Watkins, *1968: Marching In The Streets*, London 1998 for the mood and wider impact of the events. For a less celebratory assessment of the period see J. Heartfield, *The 'Death of the Subject' Explained*, Sheffield 2002, Chap. 7.

⁵⁵⁵ H. Wainwright, *Reclaim The State: Experiments In Popular Democracy*, London 2003, 5.

⁵⁵⁶ Wainwright, *Reclaim The State*, 7.

⁵⁵⁷ K. Livingstone, *If Voting Changed Anything They'd Abolish It*, London 1988.

the 'partitionist states' and sought their overthrow rather than their reform.⁵⁵⁸ The terms of the debates within the Provisional movement and theoretical documents published on electoralism, community politics, the broad front and revolutionary strategy, show that for many republicans these were more than questions of mere historical interest. As one contributor to the debates on electoral strategy was to pointedly remark:

Experience on the 6 County [and surely the 26 County councils] has shown us how quickly the contradictions arise while participating in any part of the system and how small our potential for making real change is. It also shows us starkly where rhetoric and being 'anti' falls flat on its face in double time when it is not and perhaps cannot be matched by suitable action.⁵⁵⁹

This fusion of community and identity politics was embodied in Ken Livingstone's policies at the GLC, but as a position it went beyond individual preference and exemplified a developing trend in left politics during the 1980s. The fusion of these strands in the policies of the GLC and in British left politics generally certainly had a direct influence on aspects of republican politics but it was the strength of Livingstone's personal interest and public statements on Irish politics that reinforced this ideological connection. Livingstone himself made the comparison in the following terms:

I was struck by the similarity in the position of what you might call the new radical Left in the Labour party and the radical Left in Sinn Féin. I had no doubt that in different circumstances, if I had been born in West Belfast, I would have ended up in Sinn Féin. Equally if Gerry Adams and Danny Morrison had been born in London, I'm sure they would have ended up supporting some Left current in the Labour party...⁵⁶⁰

Livingstone situated his politics and those of Sinn Féin within the ideological framework of an international current among the radical decentralised Left that had rejected vanguardist positions and was attempting to win popular support for radical policies. In particular he argued that Sinn Féin rejected a charismatic macho,

⁵⁵⁸ This was reflected in Provisional terminology which was influenced by these themes. 'Reformism' was applied to the SDLP's policy of participating in an 'internal settlement.

⁵⁵⁹ Fixit, 'Mainstream Politics', *Iris Bheag* 3, 1986.

⁵⁶⁰ K. Livingstone in M. Collins(ed), *Ireland After Britain*, London 1989, 17.

domineering style and instead sought consensus and a collective leadership. He cited Gerry Adams' personal style of politics as evidence of this:

...clearly a lot of thinking has gone on in Sinn Féin over the last few years: there has been as much a change in style as in policies of the leadership. They have the confidence that wider support creates, and confidence is a key part of political leadership.⁵⁶¹

Identity and Community Politics

Identity politics informed the practice of the GLC beyond the more notorious cases of 'loony left political correctness' and the creation of the Ethnic Units⁵⁶² by fusing concepts of community, localism and identity. This involved a new form of decentralised power because it 'delegated council resources to **democratic community and voluntary groups** [my emphasis], involving them in decision making rather than merely 'consulting them'... The GLC did not seek simply to 'take hold of the reins of state' and steer it in a benevolent direction, as traditional reformers had done',⁵⁶³ but rather adopted a transformatory and emancipatory project in which the local state acted as an agency for releasing the hitherto repressed potential of the population defined in terms of identity politics and communities. The Irish as a defined ethnic and cultural group figured strongly in this political project and provided models for a developing pattern of identity politics that could be grounded and related to the wider themes of a pluralist and multi-cultural city of ethnically defined communities. As a perceived identity rooted in national and cultural oppression, Irishness was to be celebrated as well as becoming a basis for both political mobilisation and policy making. For example it was argued that:

For a long time Irish people have felt a need to hide their Gaelic culture and not to assert themselves. But one of the good things about the GLC, that by raising the issue of Ireland and funding Irish groups, there seems to be a real coming together of the Irish community and a real resurgence of confidence and a real realisation that this is a culture that has every right to stand equally and be considered alongside English culture. We

⁵⁶¹ K. Livingstone in Collins (ed), *Ireland After Britain*, 17.

⁵⁶² For example the GLC sponsored a number of Irish activities including the Irish Unit and Terence Mac Swiney lectures. See, for example, Greater London Council, *Terence MacSwiney Memorial Lectures 1986*, London 1986.

⁵⁶³ Wainwright, *Reclaim The State*, 8.

...established a...group representing Irish pensioners, who, like the black pensioners, aren't looked at in terms of **their own special needs** [my emphasis].⁵⁶⁴

These strands of cultural politics, community empowerment and local government practice were to increasingly find their way into republican thinking during the late 1980s. However even if the GLC had not existed, the application to community development and local government policy making of the kind of republicanism exemplified by Gerry Adams and Danny Morrison would undoubtedly have produced something similar to Livingstone's style of identity politics. These connections were not made simply as a consequence of direct political interaction, but because aspects of the new cultural political agenda were congenial to pre-existing republican discourse reflecting a specifically nationalist reading of Irish history defined through community and identity.

Above all they appeared not only to address the immediate political problem of mobilisation, but increasingly the more fundamental, existential crisis of republican ideology and politics. As Jim Gibney argued in 1989 many people in 'the republican community' have been 'spitting...on a war of positions between the Republican forces and the British forces'. He continued:

I don't believe that the political philosophy that has emerged from the struggle...has the capacity any more to motivate people. The anti-imperialist community in this country, before it's too late, have got to produce a liberating...ideology which is capable of motivating people again, which is capable of bringing people out of the apathy which they are sunk under, under the type of society that we're living in today.⁵⁶⁵

The State and Community politics

The reformist versus revolutionary debate was replayed within Provisionalism over several years in the late 1980s and although there were few explicit defenders of the reformist position, it was that tendency in terms of approaches to the state, local government and the community that was to eventually win out in practice if not in

⁵⁶⁴ K. Livingstone in 'Green Ken; an interview with GLC leader', *Irish Dissent*, (n/d 1986?).

⁵⁶⁵ J. Gibney, 'A Liberating Philosophy', *Socialist Republic*, August /September 1989. This speech was possibly part of a kite-flying exercise by the Republican leadership as part of a wider internal discussion about the future development of the movement as reflected in *Iris Bheag* and other discussion documents such as McIntyre, *Armed Struggle: A Strategic Imperative*.

theoretical debate.⁵⁶⁶ As Wainwright has recognised in a global context, the debate around local popular democracy touches on deeper questions of political agency and subjectivity with particular reference to the role of the party, both in Leninist or social democratic terms, and the degree to which political actors facilitate either the activity or passivity of their constituency or, in Provisional terminology, their base.⁵⁶⁷ Her comments on traditional social democratic approaches to the state and popular political mobilisation seem apposite both to the development of the Provisionals' community strategy and more generally to the 'tiredness' of conventional politics and the sense of disillusionment felt in most contemporary political projects:

...the predominant conception was of the state as an agency for change operating *on* [her emphasis] society, effectively from above, like an engineer fixes a machine. The role of the labour movement, the mass supporters, was to get the social engineers into place so that they could deploy the instruments of state. Implementation of policy was seen as a technical matter, best left to the experts.⁵⁶⁸

The shift from the revolutionary idea of dual power to community politics was reflected in internal debate within the Republican Movement that linked themes of community and electoral politics to the wider strategic issues of the broad front. This, however, was only an echo of a much deeper revision in underlying aims and legitimating discourse that saw the peripheral move to the centre of republican politics. A growing focus on localism and the communal reflected a scaling down of ambitions as the Provisionals' national project of transformation shifted towards a more limited representational role of petitioning within the political and social framework of the status-quo.

The models for this new style of community activism were manifested in the development of Sinn Féin's network of advice centres and in campaigns around housing, especially in Belfast.⁵⁶⁹ These developments could be seen as a direct consequence of Sinn Féin's success in the Assembly election in 1982, as well as being part of a consciousness raising exercise amongst a population that lacked confidence

⁵⁶⁶ See M. Ó Mullieor's account of Belfast City Council for examples of these debates on the 'practical' policies that were increasingly adopted. M. Ó Muilleoir, *Belfast's Dome of Delight: City Hall Politics 1981-2000*, Belfast 1999, 172-175.

⁵⁶⁷ Wainwright, *Reclaim The State*, 9-12.

⁵⁶⁸ Wainwright, *Reclaim The State*, 11.

⁵⁶⁹ S. Delaney, 'Housing in Belfast: Building Community Confidence-Interview with Sean Keenan', *IRIS*, December 1984, 32.

to fight the state on housing issues. The political impact of small numbers of Sinn Fein activists was out of all proportion to their size, reflecting the prosaic reality of the politicised 'risen people', where the tenants and community groups were 'insufficiently advanced in terms of strength and consciousness to challenge for control over planning'.⁵⁷⁰ Activists were pragmatic in their expectations:

We have to be realistic and accept that a housing campaign is set against a background of apathy, demoralisation, in areas of massive unemployment. Campaigns start small and gradually build up. But we have been taking people through the processes...It's a process of politicising people and building up their confidence in themselves.⁵⁷¹

From the outset of this move towards community activism there was an awareness among republicans of the dangers of 'reformism', with the possibility that republican activists might act as a 'pressure valve for the British administration'. However, the stress on the power of revolutionary will and conscious agency within Provisionalism was cited as sufficient grounds to prevent a process of incorporation. Sinn Fein councillor Sean Keenan argued that their 'revolutionary outlook' and use of 'everyday issues as an educative and mobilising strategy' would prevent a sell-out.

...It's up to the people themselves to fight their own battle-we're only there to assist them if they need it. The Housing Executive has...tried to use us as a buffer between itself and tenants, but we've refused to fall into that trap.⁵⁷²

The activities of Sinn Fein's community activist network and its advice centres were frequently cited as significant factors in the party's electoral success. For example, the 'Lurgan Resistance Centre' acted as a focal point for 'popular resistance to British rule providing advice, propaganda, prisoner issues, social events, social security and benefits'.⁵⁷³ This style of community activism was to be taken up in Sinn Féin propaganda which stressed the importance of 'principled leadership' and 'a proven record of real representation' in local government against accusations of SDLP capitulation and inactivity. These themes however betrayed a much deeper revision in

⁵⁷⁰ Delaney, 'Housing in Belfast', 33.

⁵⁷¹ Delaney, 'Housing in Belfast', 33.

⁵⁷² Delaney, 'Housing in Belfast', 34.

⁵⁷³ P. Hayes, 'Lurgan Resistance Centre', *An Phoblacht* June 7th 1980 and M. Armstrong, 'All in a day's work', *An Phoblacht* March 31st 1983 which illustrate these activities.

underlying aims and legitimating discourse, where, for example, in local government the active subjectivity of the political project was replaced by the idea of the activist as mandated delegate. The role of the party's elected representatives was thus defined as being:

a representative of the local people who have elected them.... our policies must be geared to avoid a conflict of interest, Party -v- People. If that occurs we become just another political party using the people instead of a Political Party being used by the People.⁵⁷⁴

However, neither Sean Keenan's revolutionary optimism about the possibility of avoiding reformism nor the SDLP's pessimism about the political effectiveness of its electoral rival's advice centres was entirely shared within republican ranks. Indeed the movement's ongoing debate around community issues and political mobilisation is revealing as an illustration of some of the processes by which Provisionalism as an ideology and a political force was being hollowed out from within. Much of the internal discussion linked electoral and community politics to wider questions of 'broadening the base' and development of 'the broad front' strategy, which was becoming in itself a coded language for strategic shifts within the Republican Movement.⁵⁷⁵ Contributions to the debate frequently demonstrated uncertainties around the wisdom of the strategy, some being openly critical of ideas of community politics and arguing, for example, that the movement's methods were 'indistinguishable from Fianna Fail's'.⁵⁷⁶ Critics predicted that mere representational politics would mean that:

Clientalism becomes inevitable in the absence of a clear difference in the political positions of the parties. If Sinn Fein does not go to the local electorates on the basis of politics, then we too will inevitably become clientalist.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁴ Education Department/ Background Reading Document on involvement in the local community, October 1987, *Iris Bheag* 3, 1987.

⁵⁷⁵ This theme was a constant topic in internal conferences, Ard Fheiseanna and speeches at commemorations from 1986 onwards. For examples see M. Mac Diarmada, 'Broadening The Struggle', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* May 29th 1986, 'Education Through Commemoration', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 11th 1988, 'Broadening The Base' *An Phoblacht/Republican News* June 30th 1988 and 'Ard Fheis Report-Towards A Mass Base', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 3rd 1989.

⁵⁷⁶ Tuck, 'More Than An Election Party?' *Iris Bheag* 2, 1987.

⁵⁷⁷ Nanoon, 'Community Work Plan', *Iris Bheag* 4, 1987.

A common criticism was that electoral politics, focussing on the role of the elected representative at the expense of the collective subjectivity of the community, simply reinforced the powerlessness of communities. In this sense, the electoral mandate was defined as passive and potentially disabling for 'the base', imprisoning them in conventional politics rather than empowering and mobilising people for real change.⁵⁷⁸ Likewise the political project as embodied within the advice centres, was limited by its inability to either 'generalise the struggle' or 'politicise those we come into contact with' and thus break down what republicans argued was a sense of powerlessness in nationalist communities:

...we have achieved nothing more than can be had from Citizens' Advice Bureaus [sic] From the outset we tried to ensure that we were not ...a buffer between the state and the people. Can we honestly say we have not?⁵⁷⁹

Similar criticisms focussed on weaknesses in the role of local councillors, the degree of political activism and the emerging bureaucratic structure of the organisation, all pointed to Sinn Féin's development as a conventional party at all levels rather than the revolutionary project portrayed at Ard Fheiseanna.⁵⁸⁰

Electoralism, local government and the community

Many republicans and other commentators believed that Sinn Féin's electoral strategy was a crucial element in the transformation of Provisionalism into a conventional political movement. Certainly the pressures of electoral politics had a significant impact, but the argument that local government and parliamentary seats were the sole cause for the injection of constitutional responsibility into Provisionalism misses some of the deeper shifts that were taking place. As we considered in an earlier section there was already a strong tradition of electoral participation within Republicanism.

⁵⁷⁸ D. Mc Dermott, 'Is our electoral strategy consistent with revolutionary politics?' *Iris Bheag* 12, 1988.

⁵⁷⁹ J. McQuillen, 'The Politics of Work In Advice Centres', *Iris Bheag* 12, 1988.

⁵⁸⁰ McQuillen, 'The Politics of Work In Advice Centres', *Iris Bheag* 12, 1988.

See also, Co. Meath Supporter, 'A Strategy To Re-Launch Sinn Féin', *Iris Bheag* 27, 1990 which blames the 'non-democratic authoritarian ethos of the party' for its failure to develop local initiative and leadership.

Likewise many republicans were wary of the dangers of electoralism and afraid that these electoral interventions might lead towards a Fianna Fail style of slight constitutionalism. This debate had been a feature of the discussions around abstentionism and the long running debate around electoral and broad front strategy in the late 1980s. In assessing the Provisionals' local government strategy an attempt is being made to situate the theory and practice of its approach within a framework of underlying tensions between themes of universalism and particularism, as reflected in the politics of recognition and the politics of assertion. These ideas, further reflected in the emerging republican representational discourse of mandate, community and state, can also be located within the similar ideological framework of localist and social democratic views of the state encountered in British Left Labour politics. The concepts of representation and mandate go to the heart of the definition of democracy, but even more so to structures of political subjectivity and a defined political project. Put simply, historically revolutionary projects rooted in the Enlightenment aimed to lead the people towards some transcendent goal, frequently justified in teleological terms and emphasising the role of the collective universal subject -the nation or the class- in shaping history. Reformist politics, being evolutionary and representational, stressed the importance of the mandate of the people rather than the justification of history. The revolutionary subject being replaced within the dynamic core of politics, gives rise to a less assertive project that aims, democratically, to represent rather than lead.

Despite republicanism's limited theoretical traditions these themes did emerge as the movement re-evaluated its politics and strategy in the 1980s. In the section 'Making History' we saw how tensions arising within Provisionalism's justifications for the armed struggle were resolved by reference to a variety of historical experience, not least the specific experience of the nationalist population in Northern Ireland, which presumed a right of resistance on behalf of oppressed nations. The semi-theological arguments rooted in the Second Dáil had no real place in the politics of pragmatism that characterised mainstream Provisionalism. The concept of revolutionary mandate contained within the universalist idea of the nation, becoming ossified into a kind of theological tradition had gradually petrified into the passive political practice of traditionalists. However, its replacement in 1986 by an appeal to the mandate of living people took place within a liberal democratic rather than revolutionary framework. Implicit within the debate on abstentionism was the

replacement of the degraded revolutionary subjectivity of the Second Dáil with the representational particularism of Leinster House. Thus these purely representational ideas of mandate actually emerged during the national debate around abstentionism in 1985-86, at the same time that Sinn Féin's local government representation in the North was starting to grow and, significantly, just as links with the localist activism of Livingstone's GLC were being developed. Sinn Féin's attempts to provide 'principled leadership' were influenced by the political balance of the various councils and legal-administrative frameworks of local government in which its representatives sat. Restrictions placed on Sinn Féin councillors in this context were explained as attempts to nullify their election 'on a popular vote':

Politically and judicially...every law and procedure has been employed by the British administration...and by the loyalist councillors to **marginalize, exclude and disenfranchise the councillors and their electorate** [my emphasis]. By their very presence in council chambers Sinn Féin councillors **exposed** [my emphasis] the sectarianism of those bodies and the state itself and showed how the SDLP had been acquiescing for years, never **challenging the status quo** [my emphasis].⁵⁸¹

Appeals to a democratic mandate emerged clearly as a theme in the Provisionals' local government practice, as did their use of local council chambers as political platforms, offering a stage for revolutionary, mobilising rhetoric, while serving the more limited reformist purpose of exposing corruption and the lack of popular representation. In line with shifts occurring in other areas of republican discourse this rhetoric could often be deployed to both purposes at the same time without apparent tension.⁵⁸² Republicans believed they had been successful in 'introducing politics into the [council] chamber' as well as exposing the SDLP's 'alleged nationalism and perceived class politics [and] their pipe dream of partnership'.⁵⁸³ More political successes were celebrated in the arena of what might be called gesture politics, such as the revolutionary rhetoric of declaring apartheid free zones, the removal of Union Jacks from council property, and the tabling of motions

⁵⁸¹ P.T O'Hare, 'Advancing Under Attack-Sinn Féin In The Council Chamber', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* March 2nd 1989.

⁵⁸² In a rhetorical flourish one Provisional referred to councillors as 'tribunes of the people', perhaps not knowing that the ancient Roman tribunes' role was that of a veto on behalf of the plebs rather than the initiation of legislation and that its use throughout revolutionary history always carried this ambiguous connotation. Note of conversation with A. McIntyre, July 15th 2002

⁵⁸³ O'Hare, 'Advancing Under Attack-Sinn Féin In The Council Chamber'.

on cultural rights. Localist themes reflecting traditional characteristics of both nationalist politics and local government generally also emerged, expressed in attacks on municipal corruption [such as in Strabane]⁵⁸⁴ and the democratic deficit in local government in Northern Ireland.

Characteristically Sinn Féin continued to present itself as the party of principled and effective leadership contrasting its diligent activism and agenda setting enthusiasm with the SDLP's record of passivity and neglect. On the one hand, Sinn Féin, pressing for the democratisation of local councils, was stressing the need to 'defend their right and mandate to represent the nationalist/republican electorate', in terms almost reminiscent of the pavement politics of the Liberal Democrats in Britain.⁵⁸⁵ On the other, they were demonstrating a capacity to be pragmatic and responsible representatives of their community, increasingly defined as 'nationalist/republican' rather than the specifically republican resistance community of the early period. As one councillor put it: '...the loyalists and the council officials were genuinely apprehensive of Sinn Féin in the council chamber but within a short period of time they saw that we were genuine and reasonable'.⁵⁸⁶

This somewhat pious phraseology betokens a contradictory approach within the Republican Movement as a whole. Whilst attempting to undermine the state through armed struggle, Sinn Féin's elected councillors and community activists were simultaneously attempting to democratise it. Representing their community in its dealings with the state, arguing for resources and above all orientating their political practice towards an acceptance of the state as a potential as a source of power, Sinn Féin's political activists increasingly couched their arguments within the discursive framework of the state and above all began to see the state as, in the words of Wainwright describing British Labourist politics, an agency for change.

The significance of this shift rests on the conjunction of an instrumentalist view of the state as a potentially neutral means of political change with a representational idea of politics that no longer defines the resistance community in terms of its conflict with the state but as a community to be represented through processes of negotiation and mediation. The scaling down of even the rhetorical idea

⁵⁸⁴ 'Strabane Fighting Back', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* November 26th 1987.

⁵⁸⁵ O'Hare, 'Advancing Under Attack-Sinn Féin In The Council Chamber'.

⁵⁸⁶ O'Hare, 'Advancing Under Attack-Sinn Féin In The Council Chamber'.

of the revolutionary platform can be seen in the limited focus and bureaucratic objectives of Sinn Féin's local government strategy as enunciated by Gerry Adams in 1989:

...It seems that in fighting the elections Sinn Féin has consolidated our base, built middle leadership and proved our vote was not personation. The councillors have speeded up the politicisation of Sinn Féin and laid a solid foundation stone for those who inherit their roles.⁵⁸⁷

This tendency was strengthened by Sinn Féin's successes in Assembly, Parliamentary and Local Government elections throughout the '80s, which increasingly projected their elected representatives into the role of mediators between various external institutions of the state and the electorate/community. For example in March 1989 it was reported that Sinn Féin councillors had '...rightly received admiration.... from many quarters...and a grudging respect...from a hostile media and the government agencies, all of whom are in daily contact with Sinn Féin at every level'.⁵⁸⁸ Whilst the two ideas were initially defined as cognate, tensions between the implicitly limited, particularist strand of community with its specific sense of locality and the universalist democratic strand of electorate and mandate became apparent in the increasingly important context of electoral politics.⁵⁸⁹

Likewise the tension between the armalite and ballot paper, always a potential source of conflict between supporters of an armed struggle legitimated by the right of resistance and an electoral strategy that increasingly drew on the discourse of mandates, was informed by these particularist and universalist themes.⁵⁹⁰ In the wider nationalist population and electorate, as Morrison understood, there was a tension between those who sympathised with republican aims, but who would not vote for Sinn Féin whilst it justified 'armed struggle' and the much smaller core of the 'republican base' who gave uncritical support to 'the struggle'. In the broader military-political context it was increasingly the case that by the late 1980s it was less a conflict between the

⁵⁸⁷ O'Hare, 'Advancing Under Attack-Sinn Féin In The Council Chamber'.

⁵⁸⁸ O'Hare, 'Advancing Under Attack-Sinn Féin In The Council Chamber'.

⁵⁸⁹ For example see, E. Tracy, 'Council Commissioner moves in', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* April 17th 1986 as an illustration of the increasing use by Sinn Féin councillors from the mid-1980s of the idea of the electoral mandate and the themes of nationalist disenfranchisement and exclusion from democratic politics. The use of 'British Imperialist' courts to press these claims only serves to highlight the contradictions that are emerging.

⁵⁹⁰ Interview with Danny Morrison, January 5th 2004. 'There is a contradiction between the armalite and the ballot paper.'

bomb and the ballot box than that the bomb was failing to gain the Provisionals the momentum and the political leverage they desired. Electoralism was thus seen as a more effective option on pragmatic grounds rather than any moral conversion. The armed struggle was no longer producing the momentum required, and, despite the dangers inherent in 'reformist electoralism', many republicans were now willing to sacrifice the limited strategic benefits of 'armed struggle' for the cautious momentum of a popular electoral mandate.

Many Provisionals far beyond the ranks of the traditionalist supporters of abstentionism understood the dangers of electoralism, clientalism and reformism implicit in community activism and electoral politics.⁵⁹¹ Other 'accidental' elements contributed to these developments such as the recruitment of a new layer of Sinn Féin activists in the wake of the Hunger Strikes and the need to accommodate the activism of ex-prisoners who had been 'politicised' in gaol.⁵⁹² With the development of a supporting party apparatus and advice centres from this period, revolutionary mobilisation increasingly gave way to electoral participation, as a politicised electorate replaced the resistance community and principled local leadership predominated over the revolutionary vanguard. Reflecting the inchoate and unconscious nature of these changes, this was effectively a transitional process in which what were essentially new types of politics remained couched in old language, thus both obscuring and smoothing the process of change. In other words, the revolutionary discourse was being hollowed out from within.

Shifts within the discursive framework frequently reflected rather than shaped practice on the ground. Internally the movement was still committed to revolutionary armed struggle, but possible tensions between electoral participation and the IRA campaign were becoming increasingly apparent. Externally the terrain on which republicans conducted their politics was defined both by the state and powerful social and economic forces, all of which limited their freedom of action and acted as a real constraint and determining force on Provisional military-political praxis.

The shifting frames of local and community based republican politics are perhaps exemplified by the developing focus on municipal politics and the city as a

⁵⁹¹ Collins, E., *Killing Rage*, London 1997, Chapter 17.

⁵⁹² Interview January 6th 2004 with Patricia Campbell, Tyrone Sinn Féin activist 1980-84, and interview May 17th 2000 with Anthony McIntyre, former IRA prisoner and Sinn Féin advice centre worker, Lower Ormeau area of Belfast 1993-1997. For something of the character and abilities of these new activists see H. MacThomas, 'Sheena Campbell-a croppy who would not lie down', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, October 22nd 1992.

symbol of change and a site of contestation. This duality reflects all of the internal tensions and fractures within Provisional discourse as it is fundamentally transformed in the return to its representational and sectional communal roots. In communal terms it looks back to the resistance community and the city as a constricting and oppressive space. The institutions of the city, its local government and zones of public life appear exclusive and excluding. But republicans self-confidently portray the present and the future in markedly different terms. The city and the community are now joined together and united by the common name of 'Belfastman'. Just as the politics of identity see the nation as an assemblage of traditions, so republicans may now portray the city as a collection of communities.

Whereas the resistance community was outside and hostile to the city and its government- so much so that as late as 1990 republicans were calling for either a separate West Belfast council or a cantonal system that would 'end forever discrimination against the Catholic ratepayers'⁵⁹³ – by 1993 Sinn Féin's local government strategy situated the nationalist community firmly within the city and focused on the need for nationalist engagement in the government of the city and policies that would serve the interests of all the people of the city.⁵⁹⁴ As Sinn Féin councillor Mairtin Ó Muilleoir argued in 1993 in an appeal to unionists and other political opponents '...it is necessary for us all to work together and make common cause on the issues which unite the working people of this city Belfast'.⁵⁹⁵ This was a significant stage in the development of a policy that would culminate in the election of a Sinn Féin Lord Mayor and full participation in the official civic life of the city.

Nowhere is the political symbolism and significance of the changing republican definition of community within the city as opposed to resistance community against the city made more plain than in two events held in 1995. Republicans began to explicitly identify the city and the state as being potentially capable of serving all communities symbolised by a demonstration in front of Belfast City Hall under the slogan 'Our City Also'. Its significance for republicans was explained thus:

⁵⁹³ 'Boundary Review Prompts Call for Restructured Council', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* August 30th 1990.

⁵⁹⁴ 'Sinn Féin drive to democratise City Hall', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* January 14th 1993.

⁵⁹⁵ M.Ó Muilleoir quoted in *Fortnight*, January 1993.

Look at [Belfast] City Hall, which we've never seen as ours. But it's just as much ours. Just because there's a Union Jack flying over it doesn't mean it isn't ours, and we've started to express and deal with what is ours, where before we were totally distanced from it.⁵⁹⁶

Martin McGuinness used similar terms when he told '1500 Republicans assembled at the Ulster Hall that this building, just like our City Hall, is our Ulster Hall also.'⁵⁹⁷

The pseudo –state and the community

The contradictions in this discourse were revealed by issues of law and order, and approaches to problems of anti-social behaviour and punishment, which both reflected and challenged this concept of community, while pointing up some of the contradictions in the Provisionals' imagined community. Republicans were increasingly aware of the disaffection of sections of nationalist youth from politics, both as 'practical political problem' and a reflection of the fragmentation of the resistance community. The conscious rejection of the republican movement by significant numbers of young people would, it was argued, undermine the struggle, because republicanism 'rests on community solidarity'. The young want 'no heavy political commitments and they see the movement as too disciplined and perhaps too traditional'.⁵⁹⁸ Ideas for overcoming this alienation were initially rhetorical or informed by a traditional emphasis on punishment. School 'refuseniks' were to be supported by innovative projects like the community education initiative in Conway Mill as it was argued that '...the only way forward is through an increase in community militancy against this repression. When we refuse to be labelled failures we assert our worth and power as nationalist people'.⁵⁹⁹

The debate and the resulting policy reflected some of the wider political trends in republicanism during this period. The proximate causes were the perceived high

⁵⁹⁶ Brendan Hughes quoted in J. Stevenson, *We Wrecked The Place: Contemplating an End to the Northern Irish Troubles*, New York 1996,182.

⁵⁹⁷ Quoted in A. McIntyre, 'The Bridge Trimble Won't Cross', *Parliamentary Brief/Northern Ireland Brief*, December 1995, and xvi. In the same article *An Phoblacht/Republican News* is quoted as describing the Ulster Hall as 'the tabernacle of unionism'. I am grateful to Brian Kelly for showing me his unpublished paper on 'The role of tradition in republican discourse' which contains some of these references.

⁵⁹⁸ P. Harrison, 'The Hoods-a candid and controversial assessment', *An Phoblacht* November 12th 1981.

⁵⁹⁹ G.Heggarty, 'Crazy Joe's School; Educational Challenge', *An Phoblacht* December 10th 1981.

levels of crime, armed robbery, sexual assault, drug addiction, hooliganism and vandalism in nationalist areas. As such these concerns reflected similar social issues in urban areas throughout the world. What gave the Provisional response its significance was its analysis of the nature and causes of the problem and the contradictory policy and action to deal with the perceived 'epidemic'.

This analysis flowed from the concept of crime as a community sickness, an enemy within that threatened to undermine 'the magnificent resilience and community spirit' of the nationalist areas. Rather than see the 'hoods' as an underclass and an excluded group they were defined as part of the community, albeit a hostile element. The causes of crime and anti social activities tended to be analysed in terms of poor social conditions, poverty and unemployment as well as a 'totally abnormal political and social environment'. Thus far the approach was consistent with the approaches of leftist, community activism in terms of previous analyses of the nature of community. The offered 'solutions' also reflected some of those earlier themes, while also acknowledging the complexity of the real relationship between republicans and the broader nationalist population. The favoured approaches were based on ideas of community mobilisation, organising meetings and demonstrations that would 'influence' offenders and draw the community together in the campaign. Rising crime rates alongside an exaggerated fear of crime were becoming a feature of life in urban working class neighbourhoods throughout the UK in the 1980s, and in this sense it was possible to link Belfast's experience with broader social experience, so much so that many claimed to see the growth of a 'hood culture' and crime panics as a signifier of normalisation.⁶⁰⁰ Thus the '...the problem is not one of 'policy' or for any outside body to address themselves to. It is the responsibility of the community and the solution must come from within the community...'⁶⁰¹

This conception of 'community' was implicitly authoritarian, presupposing a general will that could be mobilised through 'marches against rape' or putting pressure on the pushers.⁶⁰² These anti-crime responses and activities were as much a reaction to communal pressure as a positive policy⁶⁰³: 'they are forced upon us by an oppressed community which can do without being oppressed from within by those

⁶⁰⁰ 'No Go Areas For Hoods', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* January 19th 1989.

⁶⁰¹ All quotations from 'Plan To Combat Vandalism', *An Phoblacht* January 5th 1984.

⁶⁰² J.Plunkett, 'March Against Rape' and 'Anti-Drug Action Demanded', *An Phoblacht* March 1st 1984. The Concerned Parents Against Drugs Campaign in Dublin was frequently cited as an example of this form of communal mobilisation.

⁶⁰³ 'Belfast IRA take action against gangsters', *An Phoblacht*, June 14th 1984.

...whose only interest is ...selfish'.⁶⁰⁴ They were posed in terms of empowerment through implicit direct action: 'If women come together and fight, we can make our homes and our streets safe for ourselves and our children'.⁶⁰⁵

The development of republican community politics was a process of formalisation of what had been an informal system that dated from the very origins of the Troubles. In part this process reflects the origins of the Provisional movement itself from within the insurrectionary social movement of sections of the nationalist population and their emergence from within the communal and civil society of the population. A series of protest movements around internment, state repression and the prisons might often have had autonomous origins being built on pre-existing structures, but would increasingly fall under the hegemonic control of the republican movement. At this stage however, the relationship between the community and the movement was not a simple one of control and command, being much more responsive and dialogic.⁶⁰⁶

Civil Society

Although linked to a hegemonic project, characterised as giving a political and military voice to the oppressed of Ireland by embracing the small struggles going on around them, uniting all strands of rural and urban discontent into a surging wave of republicanism,⁶⁰⁷ this project could only be successful because a civil society and network existed in the nationalist population.⁶⁰⁸ There was also an awareness that this was a contested territory and part of a wider battle for hearts and minds between republicans and other sections of nationalist opinion, such as the church and the SDLP, as well as with the British government. The Provisionals' strategy was consciously informed by an understanding of Britain's so-called total strategy of

⁶⁰⁴ 'IRA statement on crime', *An Phoblacht* September 27th 1984.

⁶⁰⁵ 'Action against sex attacks', *An Phoblacht* February 23rd 1984.

⁶⁰⁶ A. West, 'Notes From A War Zone', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 25th 1988. This review of J. Conroy, *War as a way of life*, New York 1987 realistically discusses the problems of anti-social behaviour and the complex power relationships within nationalist working class communities.

⁶⁰⁷ 'Easter Message from the Leadership of the Republican Movement', *An Phoblacht* April 12th 1980.

⁶⁰⁸ Examples of this civil society are community and tenants groups, credit unions, cultural and educational projects, such as the Irish language schools and the Shaws Road Gaeltacht. There is also a strong republican popular culture that reinforces these themes of music, drama and visual art, for example, Brownie, 'Ireland Live On', *An Phoblacht* September 12th 1981 and J.Plunkett, 'Belfast Exposed', *An Phoblacht* October 20th 1983.

containment Keynesianism.⁶⁰⁹ Despite this awareness of the wider aims of British governments' economic and social policies, the Provisionals increasingly found themselves fighting on this terrain and responding to an agenda shaped by British strategy. As argued above, social and economic development was to assume a growing importance in the strategic options open to British governments and a combination of conscious policy and 'natural' economic and social change was to not only shape the terrain that the Republican Movement operated on, but was to directly influence their strategic and policy options. One of the ways this was to occur was through the impact of these changes on the wider nationalist population, its emerging civil society and most specifically on the core constituencies of the republican base.

To fully understand this we need to return to the nature of the nationalist community by the mid-late 1980s as reflected in the patterns of social and economic change outlined above and the emergence of a Catholic middle class. Likewise the containment of the Provisional campaign and the electoral impact of Hillsborough in apparently placing a ceiling on the Sinn Féin vote all pointed to stabilisation if not the stagnation of the republican project. In the 1990s republican critics of the leadership's strategy argued that Sinn Féin's electoral politics were becoming increasingly focused on the Catholic middle class and that in the search for the votes of the 'new money' the core republican constituency was being left behind.⁶¹⁰ Furthermore it was argued that this process had been underway since the 1980s. Whilst this may reflect republican strategy in the 1990s and 2000s it is something of a misreading of the politics and indeed the sociology of the nationalist population in the earlier period. Many contemporary commentators attributed the electoral rise of Sinn Féin in the aftermath of the Hunger Strike, especially in Belfast, to the movement's ability to mobilise new groups of voters from amongst the previously politically alienated and from what would be regarded as the socially excluded and marginalized.⁶¹¹

It is certainly true that some of Sinn Féin's electoral successes were in areas of social deprivation, but it would be wrong to argue that their constituency was a solely 'lumpen nationalist' vote or attribute their vote to any simple connection between

⁶⁰⁹ S. Boyle, 'RUC Attempt to gain credibility in Nationalist Ghettoes', *An Phoblacht* September 6th 1980, P. Dowling, 'Preserving Privilege', *An Phoblacht* February 17th 1979 and C. Dowd, 'Pacification programme', *An Phoblacht* August 26th 1979.

⁶¹⁰ Interview with Tony Catney, April 15th 1998.

⁶¹¹ There was a clear correlation between Sinn Féin electoral success in the 1980s and indices of social and economic deprivation, for example, the Lower Falls area.

poverty, repression and resistance, as they increasingly recognised.⁶¹² For example, after the 1987 General Election republicans argued that despite being described as a law unto itself:

West Belfast is far from being a Sinn Féin seat. High unemployment and poor housing breed apathy, not political motivation. And recent rioting and hijackings antagonised many people around the Falls Road. The Sinn Féin victory is therefore due in no small measure to a very good election team, which had done its homework well in advance of the elections.⁶¹³

The significant features here are the social distinctions within the nationalist working class and the shifting republican definitions of community away from simple resistance communities to something that is more nuanced and recognises the complexities within the nationalist population, especially in electoral terms where these distinctions can have significance for political mobilisation. Republicans identified the SDLP with the respectable and the Catholic middle class, but from the mid 1980s as votes became more important within the balance of its political project Sinn Féin pursued those votes. As Moloney commented in a contemporary report, republican definitions of class and community were quite subjective and linked as much to political identification as to sociological categorisation.⁶¹⁴ These shifts were reflected in quite small changes in style and public presentation –sometimes seen as a rowing respectability or de-militarisation of the movement⁶¹⁵–which however apparently trivial reflected a deeper movement in the political psychology of the Provisional leadership and a concomitant shift in their discourse and definition of community, which in turn was indicative of a reshaping of the fundamental assumptions of their project.

Community networks and activism

Although not originally designed to support electoral politics the development of the community network and activism was to prove significant in terms of mobilising voters and building a base; it became an important precondition for further political

⁶¹² Paxo, 'A Question About Enniskillen', *Iris Bheag* 5, 1987.

⁶¹³ H. Mac Thomas, 'Sinn Féin Vote Solid', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* June 18th 1987.

⁶¹⁴ E. Moloney, 'Election Notebook', *Irish Times* May 14th 1985.

⁶¹⁵ Collins, *Killing Rage*, Chapter 17 and interview with Patricia Campbell, January 6th 2004.

developments⁶¹⁶, which ran naturally in tandem with participation in elections. During the early 1980s the level of this type of activity seems to have increased and is given increased prominence in republican newspapers⁶¹⁷ attracting comments by reporters and opponents. Apart from mobilisation of collective activity this activism drew republicans into closer involvement with the state and its institutions and representatives at all levels from Housing Executive and Social Security officials through to Junior Government Ministers and EEC Commissioners.⁶¹⁸ There was also an increasingly practical orientation to these political engagements with state. Seán Keenan, a Sinn Féin councillor in Derry for example called for the appointment of a Commissioner by the British government to maintain vital services in the face of unionist boycotts during the campaign against the Anglo-Irish Agreement.⁶¹⁹

This community mobilisation was frequently linked to wider themes of empowerment. One frequent contributor to *An Phoblacht* argued that 'Oppression and struggle are indivisible-they happen at every level from the street to the nation'. This close connection between national and community struggle was developed further by reference to a defence of what were referred to as *indigenous communities* that turned around issues of Land, Language and Culture.⁶²⁰ The relationship of this empowerment to the defeat of British government strategy shows the shifting framework of republican expectations. In Strabane, republicans argued that British strategy was to 'sap the community's morale, destroy its strong communal spirit and punish it for its support for the republican struggle'.⁶²¹ But the community fought back and developed a new sense of community pride and solidarity. But although the town's sense of itself was still portrayed as republican the discursive frame was much less militant when the hoped for results of the campaign were that 'the statutory bodies [were] taking heed' of social problems and recognising the legitimacy of the town's grievances. The argument continued in this vein: 'People are looking up and realising that they are the community-and saying we can't sit back and hope [that the

⁶¹⁶ For example, comments on strength of Sinn Féin's activist network by SDLP leadership, quoted in 'SDLP; Organisationally collapsing, financially broke and politically bankrupt', *An Phoblacht* October 3rd 1981.

⁶¹⁷ At least one page in *An Phoblacht* during this period was devoted to community issues, housing and employment.

⁶¹⁸ J.Plunkett, 'Housing action in West Belfast; Batling against bureaucracy,' *An Phoblacht* March 10th 1983, and 'Moyard protest at Stormont', *An Phoblacht* December 2nd 1982.

⁶¹⁹ E. Tracy, 'New Crisis for community groups', *An Phoblacht* August 14th 1986.

⁶²⁰ B. Anson, Letter-'Turf Lodge Flats', *An Phoblacht* April 10th 1979.

⁶²¹ 'Strabane Fighting Back'.

government acts]. We have to get ourselves together, organise ourselves, and **tell them what we want done** [my emphasis].⁶²²

Community, identity and working with the local state 1985-1995

The other important contextual theme is the success of normalisation and the stabilisation of conflict. This was not just in military-political terms—the containment of Sinn Féin post Hillsborough and the IRA's campaign, but in the wider and more significant social and economic sense. It was in this subsoil of community that Provisional politics were being shaped by both external forces and by their analysis and response to those factors. Normalisation could be seen on the macro-level of almost global economic and social forces, but it is easiest to assess by considering the increasingly salient connection between the British State and the nationalist population through the framework of community politics was around the distribution by the state of resources and benefits. In this sense Northern Ireland under Direct Rule can be considered to have operated within the political and social parameters established by the Keynesian and post-Second World War Welfare state consensus, Thatcherism notwithstanding.

A significant theme in the politics of that consensus in Britain was the Butskillite idea that politics were now essentially non-ideological and that government was essentially concerned with management and stability, with the distribution and shaping of resources. The role of political actors and interest groups such as class-based parties and trade unions was to bargain and advocate within the consensus over policy direction and resource allocation. The politics of the British post-war consensus gave a central role to the state as a provider and distributor of resources and strengthened the ideas of corporatism.

Some of the central themes of this post-war consensus could be easily transposed to Northern Ireland despite the obvious differences between 1950s Britain and 1980s Northern Ireland: however, given the predominant role of the state in Northern Ireland's social and economic life these relationships and connections would assume an even greater importance in the politics and life of the region. For example, British government strategies of normalisation argued that the roots of the conflict were social and economic or at the very least that conflict management had a

⁶²² 'Strabane Fighting Back'.

significant socio-economic dimension. Such corporatist models of resource allocation by the state, along with the other underlying assumptions of the post-war consensus about social bargaining between the state and subaltern interest groups would come to be related to the analytical frames of the 'Two Traditions' model. In turn this analysis of the nature of Northern Ireland's conflict would help to shape consociational forms of governance and contribute to government strategies of resource allocation and social and economic development for both the nationalist and unionist communities.

The state had a disproportionate importance in the nationalist community generally and amongst the most deprived groups in particular given the levels of unemployment, state sponsored employment and welfare benefits.⁶²³ But it was the impact of the state in general and the success of its normalisation agenda in particular in the 1980s and 1990s that was to most directly impact on the politics of Provisional republicanism. The dependency culture of the most deprived was just an extreme tip of an iceberg of connection that included most of the nationalist community (and quite wide sections of the unionist population too).

Community groups and intermediate NGOs and quangos had become conduits and channels for resource allocation with elected representatives acting as supplicants and advocates on behalf of their constituencies, sometimes deploying arguments and evidence or political mobilisation of various kinds. This was a common pattern in Western societies and drew politicians at all levels into direct bargaining and negotiating relationships with the state. Politics thus became focused on the state and its policies, with even oppositional politicians being drawn in to the process. In the same way that local councillors acted as mediators between their constituents so republican politicians in general 'naturally' adopted a similar mediating role within a wider arena when they bargained and argued for resources for the nationalist community in dialogue with the state and its agencies. It was the advice centre role writ large and reinforced the clientalist attitudes and practices of existing local politics.

⁶²³ See for example figures on levels of child poverty and benefit take-up in West Belfast taken from British government figures cited in the Falls Community Council's *West Belfast-Some of the facts behind the Issues*, Belfast 1987.

Pragmatic Adaptation?

The idea of community was seen as a natural one and did not initially indicate a major discursive shift. But in claiming to speak for a specific republican constituency within the broader nationalist community, both within Northern Ireland and throughout the whole island this particularist and localised definition of community implicitly represented a narrowing of republican politics and a considerable scaling down of ambition and self-definition. If we place the discussions around the broad front and the development of Hume-Adams and the Irish Peace Process strategy in this context of community the shift of focus becomes clear. If republicanism is merely a representative force of a particular community from whence it derives its mandate and it co-operates with other elements from within the broad nationalist community on the island such as the SDLP and Dublin governments then its universal, national democratic claims have given way to simple representational and particularist demands. Thus community becomes not just a site of compromise, but a defining illustration of it. This process of adaptation was not a trick or a simple process of being bought off by state expenditure.

Republicans were quite aware of what the process entailed, but as all the alternative options began to be closed down from the late 1980s onwards forms of participation and bargaining, which had been established as local, government and community practice now became central to their national project. The Provisionals own pragmatic tradition, which had enabled them to abandon apparently fundamental shibboleths such as abstentionism, made this pragmatic adaptation to the dominant conditions relatively easy. But the movement had really little option to do otherwise by this stage since all levels of public life had absorbed this culture. The emerging structures of a civil society, especially amongst the nationalist population community groups were entirely geared to seeking and being sustained by UK and EEC funding and support. The paradox of this development was that it rested on the strength of those elements and structures of a republican and nationalist civil society, which provided the political constituency for Sinn Féin. The social networks, which had initially provided the supporting frameworks of the resistance community, had now become forces for stabilisation and a channel for normalisation and integration.

The psychological change implicit in these developments was assisted by the new self-image of the nationalist community, which was self-confident and politically assertive, reflecting collective nationalist advance under Direct Rule and

the Peace Process. But the advance was corporate and integrative rather than transformative. The apparent communal strength was in fact a weakness and undermined the republican political and transformative project. It was a subtle shift which would affect wide sections of nationalist population-especially the republican base- and draw them into engagement. Returning to Richard Needham's fishing analogy the process of hooking the republican movement was more subtle than that and involved republicans themselves being willing to jump onto the hook. The processes of thought underlying this process are far from clear, but the development of the discourse of community and its implementation in all areas of the public arena is an important facet especially as it was a common language not only for republicans and nationalists but for policy makers and political actors. It was also a discursive framework that shaped the underlying assumptions of all political actors and in that sense was something of an ideological base that shaped the superstructure and increasingly shaped the ideology and actions of republicans.

Likewise, communitarianism could have a dual purpose of reflecting the dominant ideologies of the state and its interventionist social policies of establishing cohesion and community stability and of re-engaging Provisionalism with a political project that appealed in discursive terms to the nationalist population in terms of community. The collective language of communitarianism was increasingly taken as a route by formerly radical political projects as a way to re-engage both with the idea of collective agency and to rebuild political relationships with increasingly disenchanted constituencies.

Most significantly, politics were structured around this supplicatory role and bargaining for resource allocation and thus became centred on resources allocated by the state. Political activity was consequently reactive to the state's agenda of social engineering and conflict management by funding application. For the Provisionals and their activist supporters it meant a shifting focus from overthrowing the state to negotiating and engaging with it for resources. Politics became *de facto* an argument around resources and their allocation: it meant an acceptance of the agencies of distribution rather a debate around who distributes resources or fundamental issues of policy direction.

Paying the pipers

One of the major sites of conflict that helped to both define and shape the significance of the idea of community and indicate shifting republican attitudes towards the state was around the issue of government funding. The campaign resulted from British government proposals to stop funding and supporting a number of voluntary and community projects that were deemed to be 'Provo fronts' or closely associated with republicanism.⁶²⁴ Both the groups directly affected and their supporters are revealing about the nature of the civil society that had emerged within nationalist areas, especially West Belfast.⁶²⁵ Groups either affected by the process or joining the campaign included the Falls Community Council, the Upper Springfield Resource Centre, the Divis Joint Development Committee, the Twinbrook Tenants and Community Association, the Shantallow Community Centre, Springhill Community House, La, the Falls Local History Group, Community Theatre, Conway Mill as well as various tenants' organisations, advice groups, and single-parents groups.⁶²⁶ The republican response firmly situated the policy in a wider context of a 'normalisation agenda', but also saw the campaign as a symbolic battle for both sides. Vetting, it was claimed, was a 'blatant attempt by the British government to control, through blackmail, community groups and self help schemes in the city [Derry]', which in turn was part of a conscious British strategy of controlling potential community resistance:

Britain, having recognised the extent of the dependency it created, is now attempting to impose political and social control through the manipulation of these schemes. Britain has always feared the development of a community dynamic, believing it to be inherently subversive to establishment interests in the six counties.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁴ J.Plunkett, 'SDLP back Brit vetting of community groups', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 6th 1986. The symbolic importance of the issue for the British government was revealed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Douglas Hurd who argued that '...some community groups, or persons prominent in the direction or management of some community groups, have sufficiently close links with paramilitary organisations to give rise to a grave risk that to give support to those groups would have the effect of improving the standing and furthering the aims of paramilitary organisations, whether directly or indirectly'. Parliamentary Report, *The Times* June 28th 1985.

⁶²⁵ Increasingly the geographical noun was becoming an adjective, reflected in its capitalisation and designation as a place apart. It is now possible to buy West Belfast t-shirts and it is used as an informal postal address.

⁶²⁶ J.Plunkett, 'Community Groups Hit Back', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 13th 1986.

⁶²⁷ Mitchel McLaughlin quoted in J.Plunkett, 'Community Groups Hit Back', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 13th 1986.

This reading of the British strategy as a formalised system of 'political apartheid'⁶²⁸ and a punishment for the republican electoral successes⁶²⁹ was central to Provisional attempts to maintain the ideal of the resistance community as a means of political mobilisation and to see the community as a battleground for developing a counter-hegemonic project. In this context the funding and vetting issues were less about resources and jobs as such, but about hearts and minds and alternative 'visions' of community.⁶³⁰ However, the form of the campaign also revealed a subtle shift in orientation as it combined the standard street politics of lobbying the Belfast City Council and conferences to mobilise support with the involvement of more mainstream community groupings such as the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action and meetings with EEC Commission representatives.⁶³¹ Its demands also indicated an implicit acceptance of the potential neutrality of the state as a distributor of resources and arbitrator in conflict. For example, the 'principles' that 'everyone should have access to public funds, providing such money is accounted for ...and 'that nobody should be sacked without having the opportunity to be heard'.⁶³²

Other campaigns in the late 1980s also drew the republican community into direct contact and engagement with the state. These campaigns around local and immediate issues involved lobbying for resources or presenting challenges to government plans in ways similar to community politicians in other parts of the United Kingdom. In taking part in a conversation with agencies of the state, such as the Housing Executive or the Department of the Environment, lodging formal planning objections or calling for independent inquiries into transport proposals, Sinn Féin's practice and rhetoric was increasingly conventional in its representational and mediational character.⁶³³

The intersection of a discourse that linked the community and the state can be seen in the increasing importance of local planning and economic and social development issues.⁶³⁴ The frame initially was of a community mobilising against the

⁶²⁸ Plunkett, 'Community Groups plan fight-back'.

⁶²⁹ Frank Cahill quoted in 'Grants withdrawal conference', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* May 8th 1986.

⁶³⁰ D. Wilson, 'Playing the ACE card', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* July 3rd 1986.

⁶³¹ 'Grants withdrawal conference', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* May 8th 1986.

⁶³² T. Ryan, 'Political vetting of community groups', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* July 3rd 1986.

⁶³³ See 'Black Taxis under threat' and 'Divis Residents Plan Future', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* March 26th 1987. As a symbol of the quite literal integration of the once oppositional into the mainstream of the city the new bus interchange in the Castle Street area of Belfast has provided facilities for the Black Taxis, thus integrating public transport and a former 'people's alternative service' into the same framework.

⁶³⁴ K. McCool, 'Derry's Debate', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* July 23rd 1987.

external agencies of the state and bureaucrats to defend themselves and advance their interests under the banner of 'community need not private greed'. Significantly this campaign was seen as corporate and sectional highlighting 'the continual neglect of the West Belfast area in comparison to the rest of the city', but in demanding that local people have 'an input into the plan'⁶³⁵; it was prepared to engage in debate and *de facto* accept the legitimacy of the state to structure the environment of the city. The alternatives were structured around demanding rights, of communities producing their own plans and highlighting the specific weaknesses of the consultation process for working class people.⁶³⁶

This language of demanding recognition ran through the responses to the government's proposals. Gerry Adams, for example, wanted the local communities to take ownership of the Plan by the Department of the Environment providing resources and expertise to community groups to enable them to contribute their ideas. 'Only in this way', he argued 'can the Belfast Urban Area Plan hope to have the support of and meet the needs of the people whose interests it is supposed to serve'.⁶³⁷ As the campaign continued the demands focussed on the need for 'for meaningful consultation' between the planners and 'those who will have to live with the consequences of their work' as part of a discourse of making power, in the shape of 'the planners,' ... 'accountable to the ordinary people of the city'.⁶³⁸

The tensions within republican community activism were illustrated by the attempts to link essentially liberal democratic frameworks with a revolutionary perspective. The underlying analysis of the social and economic problems lay in the history of structural discrimination and the colonial neglect of Direct Rule. The British strategy was designed to act as a palliative in that was a product of the 'struggle for justice and freedom':

We must... remember that if West Belfast gets all the attention, it is precisely because of the republican struggle and because the British believe their own propaganda and believe that a few more jobs will mean a few less votes for Sinn Fein, or a few less recruits for the IRA. The

⁶³⁵ P. Mac Diarmuid, 'The Belfast Urban Area Plan', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* April 30th 1987. Similar themes of structural discrimination were a central theme of community mobilisation around employment issues. See, for example, 'Obair analyses job scheme', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* November 30th 1989.

⁶³⁶ M. Connolly, 'Belfast's Future At Stake', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* July 30th 1987.

⁶³⁷ 'Belfast Urban Area Plan Protests Continue', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* August 6th 1987.

⁶³⁸ 'Belfast Urban Area Plan', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* January 21st 1988.

British have a history of using economic investment for political effect...⁶³⁹

At this stage many activists recognised the contradictions between community activism and revolutionary goals, but saw also that one could be transitional to the other in that even reforms had been the product of revolutionary struggle. One republican, critical of the Catholic Church's approach as 'collaboration and begging', argued for alternatives that merged a long-term revolutionary programme for popular change with short-term strategies of bettering the lives of oppressed people and building our confidence in the process of struggle.⁶⁴⁰ The Obair campaign was cited as a possible example of this dual strategy, but it too began increasingly to combine the language of struggle and revolutionary goals with an essentially lobbying approach. This critique of British strategy was made from within the paradigm laid down by the government and functioned in a manner which might have been regarded by earlier republican activists as justifying collaboration or begging. It was a good example of where the rhetoric language of revolution and struggle was deployed to hide the reality of a fundamental shift in practice and position.

The nature of campaigns had changed radically by the 1990s, moving beyond the resistance community to a wider cross section of the community including 'businesspeople, lawyers, community workers, trades unionist, elected representatives, managers and workers within government training and education programmes and people on the receiving end of those programmes'.⁶⁴¹ The rhetoric of the conference showed a clear positioning of the resistance community within a subordinate and supplicatory role in relation to the state. Alongside demand for 'a massive programme of public spending and public sector development...' from Gerry Adams came an increasingly perfunctory reference to struggle and pressure when what was surely meant was a lobbying process using a reasoned case for a revolutionary mobilisation:

⁶³⁹ H. Mac Thomas, 'Spouting the big lie for Britain', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* April 28th 1988.

⁶⁴⁰ Z. Hammet, 'No Big Deal', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* May 5th 1988.

⁶⁴¹ Attendance at a conference on British government employment strategy 'Making Belfast Appear To Work', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* June 7th 1988. Significantly invitations were extended to the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Economic Development responsible for the Local Economic Development Unit and the Industrial Development Board and the Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency.

The British government ...is not interested in jobs for West Belfast. It is simply responding to the political pressure the people of this area can mobilise in support of their case. It is important that we keep the momentum going.⁶⁴²

The essentially limited approach was now one in which politics was to be conducted by ensuring that the social issues of mass unemployment and structural discrimination were to be 'on the political agenda' by increasing the pressure 'for real action to deal with the reality of discrimination, poverty and economic neglect'. British responses were posed in terms of a lack of political will which can be influenced by 'the fight against the British apartheid system which has created and sustained these inequalities'.⁶⁴³

The activities of the West Belfast Economic Forum also illustrate this lobbying orientation and the developing relationship between republican civil society and the institutions of the state such as the training and Employment Agency and the Department of Economic Development and the International Fund for Ireland as part of its functions of 'monitoring the impact of government economic and social policies...informing an encouraging debate within local communities on current policies and future developments and 'its principle function 'of continuing to attend meetings with interested parties and government bodies to express concerns and to influence policy. This monitoring, almost bureaucratic brief reflected the ideas of civil society influencing and lobbying it was the epitome of pressure group politics and its relationship with the modern state. As Eileen Howell argued about the Forum's function and the reality behind government figures on unemployment:

This mass of disadvantaged people are the true reflection of the failure of government to tackle the problems of this area... We in the West Belfast Economic Forum will put meat on those bones and will **demonstrate this failure with hard facts and figures** [my emphasis].⁶⁴⁴

Another defining point was Sinn Féin's response to the government's consultation process and policy initiatives around fair employment in the late 1980s. The transitional nature of the rhetoric was apparent in its maximalist traditional

⁶⁴² 'Making Belfast Appear To Work'.

⁶⁴³ 'Demanding Real Jobs-Not Con-Jobs', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* August 9th 1990.

⁶⁴⁴ 'Still Not Working: West Belfast Economic Forum', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* May 23rd 1991.

republican analysis that the problem was an historical product of 'economic apartheid on which the state is maintained [and on which it was founded]' and its opposition to ostensibly reformist solutions 'within the confines of the Six county state or under the auspices of a British government'⁶⁴⁵ but the political practice and detailed policy proposals that were suggested to move the process forward was somewhat at variance with this approach. Political pressure was to be directed towards the British government:

until evidence of positive qualitative and quantitative effect is produced, until discrimination practices are eradicated and until equality of opportunity is realised...the ultimate criterion of any proposals is the actual effect of their implementation-they must lead to an end to sectarian discrimination in employment within tangible time-scales.⁶⁴⁶

The neutrally bureaucratic language of this demand is reinforced by a policy framework rooted in positive discrimination, contract compliance, monitoring and legal sanctions by statutory (that is British government agencies) to enforce the policy framework. This places the Sinn Féin proposals within the broad framework of the McBride principles and within the mainstream currents of nationalist opinion. Significantly, demands are made of British policy makers, which are at odds with the colonial analysis of British policy in the North. By demanding that Britain 'dismantle the system of economic apartheid' and that it recognise its 'historical responsibility...to tackle this historic /structural problem' it appears to implicitly suggest that Britain could either act against its own imperialist interests or that in reality Britain was a potentially neutral factor and positive force for change.⁶⁴⁷

Drawing on some nostalgic elements common to both the radical Provisionals and the emerging communitarian discourse of the 1980s that vision could look at the same time back to an idealised past and forward to an empowering collective vision of the future. For example, one contributor to the debate on housing and community development in the Lower Falls area of Belfast argued for 'an imaginative interpretation of what Gerry Adams has described as 'the ethos of the old Pound

⁶⁴⁵ 'Setting the criteria-Tackling discrimination: Sinn Féin proposals', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* October 22nd 1987.

⁶⁴⁶ 'Setting the criteria'.

⁶⁴⁷ 'Setting the criteria'.

Loney' and what Jim Faulkner portrayed as a 'future community of a new Pound Loney' '. But in so describing a 'living, vibrant community' the writer highlighted:

the British government's capacity to brutalise people to such an extent that, in despair, they either lose their imaginative faculties or lose their confidence in them, before going on to call for a built environment 'based on the culture of the people'. A rich tapestry reflecting the life of an un-subdued community.⁶⁴⁸

The successful campaign by the Divis Residents' Association for the demolition of the Divis Flats and the development of an alternative housing plan for the area was also evidence for republicans of the active collective subjectivity and potential of the community showing that 'the residents-the real experts- can create and dictate their own environment.'⁶⁴⁹

The community sector and civil society in the nationalist community

One of the most significant features of the controversy over vetting in the late 1980s was what the campaign revealed about the nature and depth of civil society in nationalist areas. It also illustrated not only a growing political orientation towards the state and campaigning around the allocation of resources by then state, but also the material and psychological importance of those resources for the groups concerned. The symbolic importance of the issue becomes clear when the actual numbers of posts affected by the process and by Belfast City Council's refusal to vote funds to community/voluntary groups is considered. In Belfast there were threats to 14 major community/voluntary groups with 50 permanent and 150 temporary jobs affected along with 33 groups dependent on council for running costs.⁶⁵⁰ The frames of the debate, taking place within boundaries established by the funders and the regulators, also acted to increasingly legitimise the state. Republicans were well aware of a possible counterinsurgency agenda by the state and in campaigning around any 'community' issues constantly stressed the hidden British agenda⁶⁵¹ or an open

⁶⁴⁸ B. Anson, 'Changing Divis' Mala Poist, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* April 24th 1986. Anson was a professional English architect who contributed to republican debates on planning, housing and community development issues.

⁶⁴⁹ E. Tracy, 'Fighting for the future', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, October 9th 1986.

⁶⁵⁰ J. Plunkett, 'Community Groups closure threat', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* April 3rd 1986.

⁶⁵¹ For example, see discussion of the Belfast Urban Area Plan in terms of British counter-insurgency strategy, 'Belfast Urban Area Plan', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* January 21st 1988.

vindictive anti-nationalist bias.⁶⁵² Republicans supped with the British devils with long spoons indeed. My main interest here is to consider the terrain on which these contacts and transactions took place and to suggest some possible relationship between the discourse of community, the reality of community in nationalist society and political shift within Provisional republicanism.

The vetting debate and the related community campaigning revealed a vibrant and extensive civil society in the nationalist areas of Northern Ireland ranging from formally constituted structures like Irish language schools and credit unions through to tenants and residents groups and cultural organisations. The existence of this network reflected both the historical social culture and traditions of Northern Irish Catholics as a people apart and the contemporary experience of the Troubles. This nationalist civil society was much wider than the political and cultural groupings associated with particular political parties and many of the structures were consciously communal and collective in the Catholic tradition, embracing all shades of nationalist political opinion, such as the GAA or credit unions. Others could be associated with particular groupings, such as the republican movement or the Church, and have either an explicit or implicit agenda. In general, nationalist civil society was a zone of contestation in which republicans and others struggled for influence as part of a wider political agenda. The battle between the Church and the republican movement is the most well known and highlights the fact that behind the communal solidarity lay a pattern of political and social division. Nationalist civil society was much wider than voluntary groups. Economic and social interests underpinned its structures. This again represents continuity with traditional patterns within the nationalist community where a middle class of professionals had developed to meet the needs of Catholics and to mediate to a certain extent with the 'external' world.

During the 1980s and early 1990s that business sector had developed so much so that commentators could remark on the vibrancy of the nationalist community, its developing confidence and level of economic activity within the community, especially in comparison with the equivalent Protestant areas. As the disputes over funding and vetting revealed many sections of the voluntary and community sector were part of that economic structure providing jobs for a whole range of community workers and services such as training for the population at large. An example of the

⁶⁵² 'Strabane Fighting Back', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* November 26th 1987.

scale of this activity is provided by the largest group in the late 1980s, Cathedral Community Enterprise that provided 500 jobs with an annual government contribution in 1988 of approximately £ 3million.⁶⁵³

This civil society was the context in which the republican movement operated and as its members and supporters were an integral part of these communities these contextual factors would have a predominant influence on their politics and approaches to social activism. As we have seen the republican project had been in the late 1970s one of establishing counter hegemony to that of the state and the church within the nationalist community. Despite some key base areas, the patterns of electoral success-although these again were contained to core areas by the mid-80s and the successful mobilisations around the Hunger strike, this republicanisation project had had only partial success, as the internal discussions around broad front politics, electoral strategy, councillors and advice centres had proved. The ideas of the late 1970s had a definite hegemonising project of creating an alternative dual power society under republican leadership.⁶⁵⁴

Now the battleground was to be a civil society that was both the product of wider social and economic change, partly shaped by the state and alternative powers within the nationalist community such as the church and a product of the historical patterns of nationalist culture. A republican project would now have to work through this medium rather than establishing its own hegemonic structures of power with the consequence that it would both shape these structures if it gained influence over them, but also it would be shaped by them in turn. This was not a deterministic dialectic that stressed that compromise was necessary or inevitable, but it meant that as the movement became to engage for influence and power by relying on democratic discourse and the ideas of popular support in the community reflected by an electoral mandate it would be held to account and would see itself as being held to account by the base, even if this was mere rhetoric. It meant that the structures of community were decisive in shaping the ideology and political activity of the Provisionals from the mid-1980s.

This poses a number of related questions about the nature of political power, the structures and nature of 'the republican movement' and wider issues in political

⁶⁵³ T. O'Dwyer, 'Destroying Community Development', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* September 22nd 1988.

⁶⁵⁴ Interview with Danny Morrison, January 5th 2004.

sociology on the role and function of political parties. Paradoxically both the British government and the Provisionals had seen the structures of civil society as potential areas of influence in similar ways, to the British government some community groups were Provo –fronts, whilst to the republicans they could be Leninist transmission belts for establishing hegemony. What both conceptions shared was a relatively static and formalistic view of political and social consciousness, which saw the population as relatively passive objects to be subordinated.

Case studies of civil society

The literature of political sociology does provide us with some analytical tools to assist us, but we need to be clear on two areas. Firstly, the relatively autonomous nature of the community and structures of civil society need to be stressed. Some were strongly influenced by the Provisionals and given the nature of the shared political culture and commonsense of the nationalist population a degree of ideological sympathy would be inevitable. As we have seen the Provisionals were rooted in the common political culture of the nationalist community; but this relationship was dialectical and the community in a myriad ways could exert influence on the republicans themselves. The subject /object relationship is not nearly as clear in the final analysis as the Provisionals or the British government would like to pretend.

Secondly, the Provisionals cannot be easily classified within the main frames of political party organisation as we have seen in the opening section on social movement theory and the nature of the institutionalisation process. What is clear is that within both the broad nationalist community and the more geographically limited micro societies of particular communities such as Ballymurphy and Ardoyne, a degree of influence existed, both in the sense of activists and broad groups of supporters within the framework of the ralliement /movement as well as in broader currents of the population. Electoral results might reflect the level of this base, but in terms of determining structures of power and ideological influence we need to look at these community and social networks. This is not to suggest that in these micro–societies we are merely encountering Provo-fronts-the reality is more complex than that; indeed by seeing civil society as a site of contestation the argument is that the Provisionals are as likely to be defeated in the battle of ideas in that they will adapt intellectually, reflecting their ‘political’ and structural adaptation to the wider status quo as determined by the state and society. The significant point about this process of

adaptation is that it is occurring when the superior force of the state is itself exhausted and lacking in confidence. Thus the Provisionals were adapting not to a morally confident and superior power, but to a hesitant and uncertain structure characterised by the state's practical and ideological inability to enforce total surrender or defeat on its former rival. In other words, the process of adaptation was taking place within the context of mutual collapse and ideological exhaustion.

The importance of the community and voluntary sector as a segment of society in the nationalist community is clear, given the patterns of employment and the significance of the state both as a provider of benefits and as a founder of projects. But this sector had a number of other attractions for the Provisionals as a movement, as well as individual republicans and broad currents of sympathisers. As well as being a site for the contestation of power and influence in the Provisionals' wider political project the ideology of community and voluntary activity carried with it transformative and radical overtones which were ideologically consensual and could be made congruent with republican discourse. As we have seen, the language of empowerment and the community, rooted in communitarianism, was particularly appealing to former radicals who did not want to abandon their project of transformation, but could no longer use the language of power, or see the working class or the republican movement as a force capable of transforming the world. In that sense, the rhetoric of community and communitarianism in general were palimpsests of more radical ideologies either lying below the surface or being consciously or unconsciously hollowed out by activists. You could continue to be active in the community and voluntary sector without being seen or seeing yourself as someone who had 'sold out'.

Other factors such as the availability of employment for former prisoners and the challenge of undertaking practical and intellectual activity opened up opportunities for both an individual and collective sense of meaning and purpose. Given the numbers of former prisoners and republican activists of high intellectual calibre it is no surprise that these organic intellectuals gravitated toward the sector. However, it would be wrong to simply identify these projects with ex-prisoners and republican activists as evidence suggests increasingly that the sector represents a broad cross-section of nationalist opinion.

A small case study might illustrate how this process might occur and why it is significant in explaining and situating the shift in republican discourse. Some

hegemonic models suggest a direct subject/object relationship between subaltern groups and the state and the dominant bloc. To a certain extent both the Provisionals and some critics and theorists of counter-insurgency take a similar view of the subject/object relationship. But Gramscian views of hegemony are subtler and see a degree of internalisation and dialogic interaction as a means of shaping and defining the discursive framework and the commonsense of the mutually contending parties. It also means that discursive shifts can be detected not just at the level of the obviously political, but also at other discursive levels.

Whilst the base /superstructure model is unduly mechanistic and reductive, in discussing the elements of nationalist commonsense and the expression of basic assumptions in other areas of politics some of the patterns of a paradigm shift can be seen. My focus on the community and voluntary sector flows from the following: that as large political questions and ideas receded, the republican project began to embrace the peripheral, marginal and small scale objectives as the only things that were achievable. The community and the activity of the micro-society fitted this scaling down perfectly. Simultaneously, the language of partnership and conflict resolution and management provided models for the peace process and a common origin for the consociational discourse, which flowed from these themes.

The Upper Springfield Development Trust.

A brief history of community development in the Greater Ballymurphy /Upper Springfield area will illustrate the pattern. From the 1960s and throughout the Troubles there had been community organisations operating in the area such as the Ballymurphy Tenants Association. Their functions had been seen in terms of collective representation, self-help and a concept of community development largely generated within the community itself.⁶⁵⁵ Other groups such as the Springhill Community House and the Upper Springfield Resource Centre had a more 'political' approach which linked educational and social development to an explicitly political agenda such as economic development. There was some dialogue and contact with the state, but distance and independence were highly prized and emphasised. In terms of

⁶⁵⁵ The following sections are based on A.P.White, *The role of the community sector in the British Government's inner city policy in Northern Ireland*, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Queens' University Belfast, 2000.

their operations and approach, with varying degrees of emphasis, groups like these could be fitted in to the resistance community frame.

The turning point appears to be the late 1980s with the creation of mechanisms such as the Belfast Action Teams in 1987 and the Making Belfast Work initiative in 1988 whereby the voluntary/community sector could access government resources, on the basis of innovative and worthwhile projects. The government was keen to use the voluntary sector in Northern Ireland, as it has been in Britain, as a means of delivering economic development because it is cheap and it encouraged the self-help ethos of the New Right. This very much followed British models of urban policy developed by Michael Heseltine and focussed on partnership and what would be defined as the communitarian stakeholder model. These programmes and similar programmes such as City Challenge were organised through five partnership boards consisting of statutory agencies, local councils, the private sector and the voluntary /community sectors. By 1993 this partnership approach culminated in the development of the Upper Springfield Development Trust (USDT), a local partnership drawing funds from Making Belfast Work and the EU to the tune of £6.9 million. The partnership drew in local community leaders, statutory agencies and business people to implement a 'programme of initiatives focusing on many of the underlying causes of deprivation as a means of positively transforming the entire social and economic life of the area'.⁶⁵⁶ Although initiatives like the Upper Springfield Resource Centre and Springhill House continued to operate autonomously, the main focus had shifted towards the USDT, which took on a significant social and economic role in the Greater Ballymurphy area. With a salaried staff of around sixty people it was to become one of the largest employers in West Belfast. The ethos of the Trust reflected the contemporary language of community empowerment, with its mission to tackle economic and social obstacles to individual development through the provision of education and training. For social and community activists, bodies like the USDT provided a platform for activism, while shaping the political and social agenda at micro/community level.

This discursive framework was very much in tune with the mood of the times, having been described as 'the language of communitarianism merged with the language of American management speak, very New Labour in style, with its

⁶⁵⁶ *Upper Springfield Development Trust Annual Report 2004*, Belfast 2004, 2.

references to stakeholders, partnerships, mission statements and social inclusion'.⁶⁵⁷ Given the range of community programmes that a body like the USDT would undertake, covering employment, training, health, parenting, childcare, restorative justice, culture, public art and sport, its functions went beyond mere fundraising and project coordination, becoming almost a form of embryonic local government. This role could be seen most clearly in its function as a mediator between the community and other centres of power. As Hadaway argues:

The USDT is very mission-oriented and focused and is able to embed these approaches into the communities that it operates in, for example by translating the ideas of the Good Friday Agreement into projects on the ground. Drawing power and authority from the community base it uses its advocacy function both to represent and define the community to external authority.⁶⁵⁸

For critics of this discourse and embryonic power structure it can appear that government funding regimes and the needs of the 'pacification agenda' have imposed an ideology and a practice of community activism on formerly anti-establishment radicals. But the origins of individual project workers from within the sector and the growth of these hybrid structures as a whole from the community movement point towards a different process taking place. The direct involvement of community groups on the boards of projects such as the USDT rules out any simple command model of social engineering by funding application or of the imposition of an alien ideology by main force. It is a process of engagement with and an internalisation of the hegemonic discourse of communitarianism, which betokens an ideological shift beyond mere compliance to ensure the continued operation of the project.⁶⁵⁹ The parallel between this process in the community sector and the republican project at both a discursive and structural level is striking.

As with the explicitly political framework of the peace process some activists are aware that the discourse and practice of community development is not neutral and could serve different agenda than those of community organisations. But significantly this process is still posed in terms of engagement and dialogue with the

⁶⁵⁷ Interview with Pauline Hadaway, 9th August 2004, Arts Project Co-ordinator, USDT 1997-99

⁶⁵⁸ Interview with Pauline Hadaway.

⁶⁵⁹ In the community sector this internalisation takes some hybrid forms and can appear somewhat instrumentalist. For example in terms of Belfast community arts practice it has been argued that the cultural agenda was seen in largely economic terms even before British government funding regimes made it de rigueur, making it a *trahison des artistes* rather than a *trahison des clerics*. See P. Hadaway, *Meaning Over Form*, Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Ulster 2003.

state and its discourse, so that the agenda of community development is part of the 'battleground between the state and radical community groups'.⁶⁶⁰ This struggle takes place on the field of language and both sides subvert language and shift meanings as part of a power struggle at a discursive level. The wider political implications of this battle of definitions are clear:

People have always seen the potential for reformism and surrender in this engagement. We are aware of its limited nature, but its too simplistic and deterministic to talk in terms of surrender to a dominant agenda. It is active, testing the cracks in the other position. There is a battle of discourse, we regroup and respond to new ideas and challenges and see how we can take community activism forward.⁶⁶¹

These themes show the interpenetration of culture and politics. They also see politics as being increasingly conducted within a common discursive framework where centres of power can be held to account using their discourse as a standard of, say civil or human rights, rather than as a contestation between different meanings. Concepts of process and dialogue rooted in language have agreement rather than confrontation as an aim and indeed as a logical outcome of communication.

⁶⁶⁰ Claire Hackett, former Monitoring and Evaluations Officer, USDT and Local History Project Worker, Falls Community Council. Interview 2nd September 2004.

⁶⁶¹ Hackett interview.

Chapter IX-Working with the state; Britain and the persuaders

Britain: Joining the persuaders

In the Provisional Republican analysis of the conflict in Northern Ireland Britain occupied the central place. Both as an historical account of the origins of the conflict and as an assessment of current British strategy the Provisional characterisation of Britain's role remained consistent in essence throughout the 1970s and much of the 1980s. As we have seen there were differences of emphasis within this analytical framework and indeed assessments of Britain's immediate policy objectives, for example the possibilities of British withdrawal from Northern Ireland in 1974-5 and the nature of the British relationship with unionism in the wake of the Hillsborough Agreement.

This analysis was rooted in traditional nationalism which saw Britain as a colonial power with clearly defined selfish economic, political and strategic interests in Ireland as a whole: partition, both in historical and contemporary terms, was a result of those interests and illustrated that British imperialism wished to continue to dominate the island-either directly in the six counties or through its junior partners in the neo-colonial regime in Dublin. The patterns of international politics in the 1970s and 1980s, the Provisionals' identification with Third World liberation movements, and the use of forms of Marxism during the movement's socialist republican phase all combined to strengthen the influence of this imperialist analysis on the strategy and politics of the movement. Anti-imperialism had been central to Provisionalism since its inception and was a key uniting theme linking the disparate ideological and strategic strands of the movement. During the 1980s wider intellectual currents of post-colonialism in Irish society were to have an impact both on the Provisional analysis of British imperialism and its subsequent revision during the development of 'the peace strategy'.

These currents impacted in various ways and could be made to appear cognate with both traditional themes in Irish cultural nationalism and with contemporary post-colonial analyses.⁶⁶² Drawn from cultural studies, literature and history assessed Ireland as a post-colonial society and considered the impact of that historical and contemporary fact on Irish society, identity and politics. The significance of the

⁶⁶² For example see, *Is Ireland A Third World Country? Conference Report*, Belfast 1992.

overlap between post-colonialism and anti-imperialism was not just on a common focus on the role of British imperialism but on the increasing emphasis on discourse and identity as opposed to ideas and structures as determinants and battlegrounds. This process of the acculturation of politics saw debate in terms of conflicting discourses and anti-imperialism as a cultural and social-psychological process rather than simply a political and economic transformation. From differing standpoints post-colonial discourse such as the literary criticism of Said, the counter-hegemonic praxis of Fanon and Memmi and the liberating pedagogy of Freire were all to influence this current. Although ultimately rooted in the conception of imperialism as a structure of domination post-colonialism's focus on the ideological superstructure and the imprisoning nature of discourse could have direct effects on an analysis of political conflict shifting the battle from the plane of structures and real interests to that of discourse and competing readings of identity. This is not to argue that there is a simple relationship between intellectual currents of post-colonialism and the emergence of particular political positions. But the style and patterns of the Provisional analysis of Britain's role does bear some imprints of these new frameworks as well as the marks of the old.

Indeed it is the shifting and unstable balance within the political configuration of Provisionalism between the universal and the particular, between the politics of assertion and recognition that makes the patterns of emergence of what are new, if initially somewhat hybrid and contradictory, positions from within the shell of the old so difficult to fully characterise. This can be analysed as an intellectual and ideological problem requiring the conscious attention of republicans as well as an issue of political power and the internal management of oppositional challenges for the Provisional leadership. It is also a pattern of development that takes place at different speeds and at different levels of the movement. In doing so this process reflects the political and military culture, history and structures of Provisionalism. Thus we can characterise Provisionalism itself as in transition during the period 1987-1994, with some elements of their politics clearly defined and others immanent, if implicit. What is now clear is that a decisive shift takes place during this time and that it only becomes apparent with the development of the peace process. Provisional republicanism moves from the wall with some faltering steps to join the dance, but the choreography and choice of partners will only emerge as the tempo of events increases.

Imperialist self-interest

At one level the dominant analysis of British strategy was publicly intact at least until 1992. Writing in 1986 Gerry Adams argued that 'the British government and army...retain complete authority over the affairs of the people of the six counties and dominate the affairs of the people of the 26. They have never brought peace; rather, in pursuit of their own interests they have created and fostered bitter division'.⁶⁶³ This familiar theme was to be repeated throughout the peace process, especially as a challenge to the SDLP or the British government. This assessment of British imperialism's political, strategic and economic interests set firmly in both an historical and contemporary context seemed so much part of the commonsense of Provisionalism and so vital a working assumption for its strategy as to be irremovable. In many ways it was a fixed irreducible position and in rhetorical terms has remained a constant theme over the last ten years. However, whilst the reality of Britain's current and past imperialist role could not be altered, its future functions could and it is in the area of the contradiction between the negative imperialist self-interest and positive disinterested persuasion that the future development of Provisional politics was to lay. Within the shifting patterns of republican analysis republicans saw Britain's role as central to the future of Northern Ireland as it linked a number of factors determining the pace of political change. As one republican commented in 1992 when this orientation towards Britain had been established as the main theme of the Provisional peace strategy:

The British are, of course, the key. The unionists' veto hangs on the British government's willingness to allow them to exercise it. The British together with Irish nationalists would have the power to convince unionists to adopt a more positive approach to their future in an Irish context.⁶⁶⁴

This Provisional analysis of Britain's potentially positive role and how she might be persuaded to become a persuader is illustrative of deeper levels of change in the thinking of the movement's leadership. The broad themes of this approach were established by May 1987 in the Sinn Féin document *A Scenario For Peace* that stressed 'national self determination' as opposed to the thirty-two county socialist

⁶⁶³ G.Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, Dingle 1986,88.

⁶⁶⁴ H.Mac Thomas, 'Wielding the Unionist veto', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* June 11th 1992.

republic as the goal of the movement.⁶⁶⁵ The use of this terminology of national self-determination was not a new departure: it could be related to the democratic discourse that historically underpinned republicanism and as a phrase had been used in contacts between the Provisionals and the British government in the 1970s. The significance of its deployment was that it enabled a shift in position to occur whilst keeping up the appearance of continuity with republican tradition and the discourse of national liberation. It was, in particular, a good bridge to constitutional nationalism since it could embody potentially mutually hostile readings of the goals and means of the national project within an ostensibly unifying discourse rooted in a common nationalist and democratic tradition. As Mitchel McLaughlin was to argue in 1989:

Irish self-determination is a principle to which every person domiciled on this island can subscribe. Between them Sinn Féin, the SDLP, Fianna Fáil...represent almost 80% of the Irish nation. They have received their mandate from the people...because they have placed on record their support for national independence.⁶⁶⁶

Another discursive realignment is the increasing emphasis on Britain's 'positive role' placing

The onus on the British government to ensure the transition to a united and independent Ireland. The shape of that society is a matter for the Irish people. Only when Britain recognises that right and initiates a strategy of decolonisation along these lines will peace and reconciliation between Irish people and between Britain and Ireland be established.⁶⁶⁷

These emerging patterns could be seen at a variety of levels from the very beginning of the public dialogue between Sinn Féin and the SDLP in 1988. The elucidation of the Republican position was increasingly related, both explicitly and implicitly, to testing SDLP positions on British neutrality and considering the strategic implications of an analysis of British intentions.

'Healing the divisions on this island'

A similar pattern of discussion, megaphone diplomacy by speeches and secret contacts between republicans and the British government was also developed from the

⁶⁶⁵ Appendix to G.Adams, *A Pathway To Peace*, Cork 1988,84-92.

⁶⁶⁶ M.McLoughlin [sic], 'Twenty Years On', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* January 5th 1989.

⁶⁶⁷ M.McLoughlin [sic], 'Twenty Years On'.

late 1980s.⁶⁶⁸ The SDLP had consistently argued that since the early 1970s Britain had been effectively neutral on the north. Since the power-sharing executive in 1974 the party had stressed that Irish unity would and could not be prevented by the British government. Its analysis of the conflict was internal in the sense that the dynamic for unity lay in those who favoured reunification persuading those who did not. At this stage the SDLP and the republican analysis were diametrically opposed. For example, a fundamental weakness of the Anglo-Irish Agreement for the Provisionals was that its logic meant that '...the Irish people, and in particular six-county nationalists, must trust governments in Dublin and London to *'heal the divisions on this island'* [emphasis in original], while politically, militarily, economically and culturally things remain as they are'.⁶⁶⁹ The position of republicans during these public and private discussions was that Britain's role in the conflict was central. The overarching significance attached to this strand and the direct connections between this analysis and the reorientation of Provisional politics can be seen in the following statement issued after the initial phases of the discussions had been concluded:

Unionists depend on Britain's guarantee for their privileged situation and on Britain's will to keep the border for their numerical superiority. Sinn Féin argues in its document that Britain has no intention at present of withdrawing from Ireland, in which it maintains a presence for strategic, economic and political reasons. Sinn Fin's aim is therefore to broaden the demand for national self-determination in order to increase the pressure on Britain to leave.⁶⁷⁰

Given that the British presence is a 'fact of life' as far as the Provisionals are concerned the 'pressure' is seen within a strategic calculus that includes 'the necessity for an armed struggle...[and] a freedom struggle which encompasses a proficiency in the art of politics'. Ideas of dialogue and political engagement with the British are explicitly excluded at this stage: 'there is no republican who believes that the British government can be talked out of Ireland'.⁶⁷¹ Yet the possibilities of constructive ambiguity around the demand for national self-determination, a negotiated British withdrawal, British disengagement and 'a British government ...[adopting] a strategy

⁶⁶⁸ For example by making submissions to the Hillsborough Review in November 1988 indicating an orientation to 'mainstream' politics. See, 'Peace Demands Launched', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* November 24th 1988.

⁶⁶⁹ 'A Reply to Mr. John Hume', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* July 13th 1986 which attacks this analysis, with especial focus on partition as a symptom rather than a cause of 'division'.

⁶⁷⁰ H. Mac Thomas, 'Sinn Féin / SDLP Dialogue', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* March 31st 1988.

⁶⁷¹ P. Arnlis, 'Talking To The SDLP', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* July 14th 1988.

for decolonisation' also coexist alongside this apparent rejection of 'dialogue'.⁶⁷² Self-determination itself is more open-ended and allows for a degree of ambiguity around both the means of exercising that right and the nature of a post-colonial settlement especially when the root cause of the conflict is linked in republican discourse to 'the British government's denial to the Irish nation of its right to national self-determination'.⁶⁷³ Significantly for the development of the Provisionals' position, this theme of self-determination was of a sufficiently universal character for wide sections of nationalism, including the SDLP and Fianna Fáil to regard it as a 'shared political view' and a potentially common framework for 'the broadest possible alliance' to develop a 'strategy to establish peace and justice in Ireland'.⁶⁷⁴ The dominant theme here still relates to the vanguard role of the Republican movement as a catalyst for change and to the wider conception of revolutionary agency and subjectivity to enforce the universalist demands of self-determination, but the use of the terminology of negotiation and strategy could also point to a less active and central role for the republican movement in the process. Although framed polemically in the context of a public debate with the SDLP some strands in republican thinking even at this stage point towards a discursive shift:

The British government must be persuaded to take up the democratic option and relinquish its last colony...we are calling for an intensive international and diplomatic offensive against British claims over Ireland. The Dublin government and the SDLP should admit that the Hillsborough Treaty is, from an Irish standpoint counter-productive and, if they really believe in an alternative to armed struggle, could demonstrate to oppressed nationalists in the North the efficacy of political agitation and lobbying.⁶⁷⁵

The title of one Sinn Féin position paper during this period, *Persuading The British-a joint call*, rhetorically points towards what will become one of the main themes of the Provisionals' peace process strategy in the 1990s. It goes on to argue for a joint call from Sinn Féin and the SDLP to the London and Dublin governments to 'consult together to seek agreement on the policy objective of Irish reunification

⁶⁷² R. Mac Auley, 'Sinn Féin/SDLP Talks-Mala Poist', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* August 18th 1988.

⁶⁷³ 'Sinn Féin Statement At Conclusion of Sinn Fein / SDLP Talks', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* September 8th 1988.

⁶⁷⁴ 'Sinn Féin Statement At Conclusion of Sinn Fein / SDLP Talks'.

⁶⁷⁵ 'A Bulwark Against Unity', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* November 24th 1988.

...outlining the steps...to bring about a peaceful and orderly British political and military withdrawal from Ireland within a specified period'.⁶⁷⁶

The discourse of national self determination and the stress on processes of decolonisation and disengagement also carries with it another implicit shift from a political project that attempts to shape the future of Ireland-the thirty two county socialist republic-to the more limited goal of self-determination. Both the socialist republic and self-determination are based on varying degrees of political agency and the subjective domination of the political and social environment. The socialist republic, however, represents a fundamental political and social project whereas self-determination limits the subjective agency of republicanism to 'allowing' the Irish people to determine their own future as part of a process in partnership with London, Dublin and constitutional nationalism. In this context the debates within the republican movement during the late 1980s on the strategy of the broad front and the relationship between socialism and nationalism were reflections of this scaling down of the Provisional project. As well as echoing the fault lines in republican socialism since the 1930s there is an implicit and barely articulated but ever-present debate within Provisionalism with both the ghosts and the living reality of the Official IRA/Workers' Party.

No Military Solution

During the period 1988-1994 the public evolution of the Provisionals' position is frequently contradictory and subject to a series of pressures and tensions. These positions are being elaborated for different audiences and for different reasons. The accounts that have emerged since that time confirm the rather confused and partially developed nature of the Provisional leadership's position towards Britain as it was publicly enunciated. The elaboration of the Provisional position was carried out in public through articles, position papers and speeches and in private through intermediaries and direct contact with the British government. The public response of Republicans to the British government's stated positions seems to mark the unfolding

⁶⁷⁶ 'Sinn Féin /SDLP talks: Review and Analysis', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* September 22nd 1988.

and development of a position already implicit in the ideas of the Sinn Féin/SDLP dialogue in 1988 as well as in *A Scenario for Peace* and *A Pathway To Peace*.⁶⁷⁷ For example, in an interview with journalists the Secretary of State Peter Brooke explained that there could be no 'military defeat' of the IRA and compared previous British Governments' stated opposition to talking to terrorists with the pragmatic reality of negotiation. He argued that if:

The terrorists were to decide that the moment had come when they wished to withdraw from their activities, then I think that government would need to be imaginative in those circumstances as to how the process should be managed...I hope that the British Government on a long term basis would be sufficiently flexible, that if flexibility were required it could be used...⁶⁷⁸

The republican response shows the different levels of understanding and different audiences that needed to be reached during the peace process. For some sections of the republican movement the message the leadership wished to relay was the reassuring one that 'The British Government has admitted that it cannot defeat the IRA...' and that 'Brooke good as admitted that the British government would have to talk to republicans in the future as in the past'.⁶⁷⁹ For others who were confused by rumours of secret contacts and ceasefires there was the line that interviews and speeches of this type were part of a psychological campaign by the British to 'demoralise the republican base'.⁶⁸⁰ But the main political thrust delivered by Gerry Adams was directed at the British and prepared the republican base for future contacts when he argued that it was:

morally imperative that the British government enters into dialogue, the objective of which should be the resolution of this long conflict...Britain holds the key to peace...The British government must be made to face up to that responsibility and to create the conditions for permanent peace.⁶⁸¹

These early examples give a good flavour of the linguistic style and political themes of the republican position during the peace process. They also point to a number of tensions in the presentation of the strategy, which reflect both the internal

⁶⁷⁷ G.Adams, *A Pathway To Peace*, 84-92.

⁶⁷⁸ Text of Interview in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* November 9th 1989.

⁶⁷⁹ 'Britain holds the key to peace', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* November 9th 1989.

⁶⁸⁰ H. Mac Thomas, 'Spotlight on British strategy', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* November 9th 1989.

⁶⁸¹ 'Britain holds the key to peace'.

balance of forces within Provisionalism and the transitional and developing nature of the republican analysis of Britain's role. IRA statements, for example, balance a number of themes, which link to both the language of struggle and the possibilities of the peace strategy. The IRA's armed campaign, it was argued, meant 'that Britain is fast running out of options and must soon face the inevitable by taking the steps necessary to resolve the conflict and grant peace and stability to the people of Ireland'.⁶⁸² But the predominant political concepts are those of process, movement and transition reflecting to some extent the discourse of the 'official' Brooke-Mayhew talks and strands, which are taking place at the same time as the initial contacts between the Provisionals and the British.⁶⁸³

The therapeutic discourse of persuasion

It is the increasing use of the therapeutic terminology of conflict resolution and dialogue and a stress on these political methodologies that marks the confirmation of a discursive shift in republican analyses of Britain's role in Northern Ireland.⁶⁸⁴ The following phrases from an interview with Gerry Adams in 1991 illustrate what was to be a dominant pattern throughout the 1990s. In referring to his call 'for an open-ended dialogue...in a spirit of openness and a 'desire to see the tragedy of the conflict brought to an end.' Adams criticises what he describes as:

attitudes [which] serve only to perpetuate the suffering. They are the products of closed minds and are not in any way the characteristics of real leadership, which would...be prepared to seize an opportunity to develop a peace process...A real opportunity does exist to build a new future for the people of this island, but it requires political courage and flexibility, qualities which have never been very obvious traits in...British colonialism and unionism in Ireland.⁶⁸⁵

By drawing on the language of persuasion, dialogue and conflict resolution the issues as presented by the leadership seem to move from the realm of power, fundamental clashes of ideologies and politics as conventionally understood to the

⁶⁸² "Britain 'fast running out of options' ", *An Phoblacht/Republican News* January 2nd 1992.

⁶⁸³ For an example of the Provisionals 'intervention' in, and orientation towards, the Brooke talks process and developing themes of an alternative Irish peace process see H. Mac Thomas, 'Call for a new peace process', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* August 29th 1991 and G.Adams, 'Our support remains solid', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* September 5th 1991.

⁶⁸⁴ 'Call for Euro agenda on North', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* December 5th 1991.

⁶⁸⁵ G.Adams, 'We Are Totally Committed To A Real Peace Process', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* September 12th 1991.

kingdom of discourse, conflicting readings of conflict and problem solving as a process of healing. The translation of this terminology into the republican discourse can be seen by a variety of reactions to the Brooke speech in 1990. Rather than a rejection of it as part of a British propaganda war Gerry Adams effectively entered into a public dialogue around the terms and indeed within the parameters set out by the Secretary of State in his speech:

If, as Peter Brooke implies, the British government is no longer bound by strategic or ideological considerations to the Union and the sole factor involved is unionist consent, then an opportunity to advance the situation does clearly exist. Brooke's claim that the British government is neutral is contradicted by its proactive defence of the Union and partition. Nevertheless his claim is a challenging one which deserves to be tested. If Britain is neutral then they are open to persuasion that they should shift the massive resources and energy presently put into maintaining partition ...and direct them instead towards some alternative arrangements.⁶⁸⁶

The language of individualised psychotherapy seems to be transferred to the collective public sphere of politics and society. Provo-speak becomes psycho babble. For example, referring to the Brooke speech which argued that 'the British government has no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland; our role is to help, enable and encourage'⁶⁸⁷ [which in themselves seem to refer back to republican discourse] leading republican Jim Gibney saw the British role as potentially positive in terms of conflict resolution and a healing process. It also seemed to ooze an almost benevolent British imperialism as a neutral mediator and initiator of progress and to implicitly accept some aspects of the arguments that the conflict in the North was an internal one between the people of Northern Ireland:

We opened our minds to his words. We dared to hope that he would be the first British Secretary of State who would begin the healing process between all the Irish people and ultimately between Ireland and Britain by starting the disengagement process.⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁶ 'Are The British Really Neutral? Sinn Féin response to Brooke's statement', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* November 22nd 1990.

⁶⁸⁷ Text of speech printed as part of 'Are The British Really Neutral?'

⁶⁸⁸ Speech by Jim Gibney at the 1992 Sinn Féin Ard Fheis, quoted in B.O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Féin 1985 to Today*, Dublin 1993, 213.

This reflects the underlining tensions in politics between the strands of the universal, the public and the particular, the private: it is not unique to Provisionalism and during this period the language of peace processes internationally adopted this therapeutic discourse of conflict resolution with varying degrees of sincerity. Given the Provisionals' fundamental critique of the legitimacy of British rule in Northern Ireland this discourse is all the more surprising and illustrative of a deeper exhaustion and existential collapse of the Provisional project and republican political subjectivity and agency.

Although these themes are implicit in the positions of the late 1980s their clear emergence is the product of a number of factors such as the internal dynamics and political culture and structure of the republican movement. Another theme is to regard the peace process a mutually dependent dialogue and to see positions evolving in relation to each other: in that sense it really is a dialogue and a process, with the various parties feeding off each other. Faced with common problems of collapse and defeat they rely on each other for support. The Provisionals' ideological evolution during this period should not be seen in isolation and is part of a wider process. Although then published materials and speeches give the impression of a reactive approach it is not as simple as that. The political cultures and style of Provisionalism have a great influence on the secrecy and the crab-like manoeuvres, but there is also a sense of the leadership feeling their way, trying to make sense of developments and developing a politics that has some meaning in relation to both the past and the future. That is why in terms of the shift in Provisional discourse this focus on Britain is so significant.

One of the underlying themes of this shift is the declining belief within the Provisional leadership in the republican movement's ability to shape and determine events as an historical agent. Instead the role the republican leadership sees for itself is as a partner in a process, attempting to persuade Britain to become a persuader for the republicans' own historical project, no longer trusting in its own abilities to shape events or to mobilise the political force to be a decisive subjective factor. In approaching the British in this way there is an assumption of potential neutrality, but above all a view of politics that ceases to stress the subjective and makes republicanism subject to more powerful external forces, the very antithesis of the movement's self images as historical agent. The Provos no longer claim to call the

shots. In their increasingly diplomatic manoeuvres and attempts to manage the status quo an increasing reliance on forces and factors more powerful than themselves the Provisionals are not unique and fit into a general schema of peace processes and the pattern of development of other liberation movements. For example Mitchel McLaughlin talked about a new international 'atmosphere of support for the democratic rights of nationalities' stressing the role of powerful states moving with the tide of history when he referred to how 'the situation in Eastern Europe has moved with tremendous speed over the last four months. At the heart of the change has been the acceptance, by the Soviet government, of the right of those individual nations to decide their own futures'.⁶⁸⁹ Likewise the process of British disengagement was implicitly compared to events in the Middle East, South Africa and Eastern Europe in terms of 'nation –building' which interwove the process of reaching out to 'all the existing political forces in this island' with the 'principle of self-determination'.⁶⁹⁰

Politics for a different world?

To many contemporary commentators the revision of Provisionalism that culminated in the production of *Towards A Lasting Peace In Ireland* in 1992 was evidence of a sea-change in the basis of the movement's thought and action. It was also recognised by the Provisionals themselves and publicly emphasised as part of the political positioning during the initial stages of the peace process. In what was soon to be the official Provisional version of the movement's history the peace strategy was the product and the logical outcome of a process of 'politicisation' and the development of a mass political movement during the 1980s and 1990s. As a way of describing and explaining the discursive shifts in the Provisionals' ideology and strategy these new positions were characterised as part of a maturing process and an evolutionary movement away from simplistic slogans and inflexible dogma to realistic programmes and practical policies.⁶⁹¹

These themes were reflected in internal educational programmes and increasingly in the public discourse of the peace process where expectations were being scaled down and cherished positions hollowed out from within in a manner reminiscent of New Labour in Britain. The development of these positions was

⁶⁸⁹ 'Ard Fheis Report', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 8th 1990.

⁶⁹⁰ M. McLaughlin, 'The tenacity of the oppressed', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* May 10th 1990.

⁶⁹¹ J. Gibney, 'It is our job to develop the struggle for freedom-Bodenstown Address', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* June 25th 1992.

certainly linked to an apparent transformation of the Provisionals' internal political culture. Certainly these arguments about the nature of the republican tradition and its negative aspects were part of this realignment.⁶⁹² For example, Sinn Féin Ard Comhairle member Jim Gibney seemed to characterise republicanism as a tradition-driven paradigm when he asserted that some republicans were deafened by the 'deadly sound of their own gunfire' and questioned whether republicans are not 'trapped inside a complex web of struggle from which they can't or don't emerge...hostages to an immediate past ...' In placing the development of the republican position in the context of 'a different world to the one that existed in the mid-'60s' and understanding the impact of the 'more recent changes sweeping across the globe' these arguments seemed designed to prepare the Provisional membership for a dramatic shift in position.⁶⁹³

The schema presented in *Towards A Lasting Peace In Ireland* does represent a different type of politics in that the republican movement does not present itself as a government in waiting- 'We know and accept that this is not 1921... We're not standing in the airport lounge waiting to flown to Chequers or Lancaster House; we have no illusions of grandeur' - and in its timescale for, and characterisation of, the process of British disengagement as defined by the Provisionals also appears to depart from previous revolutionary scenarios.⁶⁹⁴ The distinction between 1921 and 1992 was a telling one and in marked contrast to the attitude of previous Provisional leaderships in their dealings with the British government.⁶⁹⁵ Its most important departure from previous positions was explicitly stated as resulting from the knowledge and acceptance that:

...the British government's departure must be **preceded by a sustained period of peace**[my emphasis] and will arise out of negotiations...such negotiations will involve the different shades of Irish nationalism, and

⁶⁹² D.Morrison, *Then The Walls Came Down: A Prison Journal*, Dublin and Cork 1999,302.

⁶⁹³ J. Gibney, 'It is our job to develop the struggle for freedom-Bodenstown Address'.

⁶⁹⁴ J.Gibney, 'It is our job to develop the struggle for freedom-Bodenstown Address'. Whilst this is true in terms of the specific schema it could be argued that from the late 1970s the Provisionals had effectively accepted that there would be an intermediate period between British withdrawal and the thirty-two county socialist republic. Likewise the debates over abstentionism 1985-6 and the issues surrounding the relationship between socialism and nationalism raised in the broad front debate in the late 1980s also implicitly ruled out an immediate republican government after British withdrawal.

⁶⁹⁵ Interview with Ruairi Ó Bradaigh, February 15th 2002. He discussed the 'negotiations' between an IRAdelegation (which included Gerry Adams) and the British government in 1972 at Cheyne Walk, Chelsea in terms that stressed the parallels with 1921.

Irish unionism engaging the British government either together or separately to secure an all-embracing and durable peace process.⁶⁹⁶

In defining the product of the negotiations as a **peace process** rather than a definite political structure such as a thirty-two county republic and linking British disengagement to a long period of transition, this statement points towards a more flexible and potentially indeterminate form of politics. It is a style of republican discourse and language that was to become increasingly familiar during the 1990s. In its stress on process and movement the themes of action and definite objectives become increasingly lost; the peace process becomes the project and ambiguous ideas of reconciliation, national democracy and self-determination which, although resonant with precious discourses, have the potential to be interpreted in various ways, some of which are radically different than these previous positions. Without a definite goal – the republic-it is quite difficult to assess whether the target has been reached.

Trasformismo and passivity

This political ambiguity was a politically useful approach and a means of maintaining the formal unity of the republican movement. But it went beyond a mere pragmatic device to shift the goal posts as a means of avoiding charges of betrayal: the ideas of process, transition and flexibility are redolent of a fundamental conception of politics that has shifted from a definite, clearly defined project achieved by action and conscious activity to a more passive idea of negotiation, fluidity and open-ended development in constant formation but never quite being solidified into structures and definite ends. This represents a process of *Trasformismo* in which the particular and the local replace the universal and the general as the goals and the boundaries of Provisional politics. Thus the more passive pre-determined objects of community and tradition replace the active coherent collective subjects of the nation and the political movement. Increasingly republicans see their politics as becoming constrained and as the product of a process defined externally by more powerful political actors and impersonal social forces. For the Provisionals the politics of the peace process are not

⁶⁹⁶J. Gibney, 'It is our job to develop the struggle for freedom-Bodenstown Address'. The pattern of this speech follows that of previous public statements marking a departure in the Provisional position. Bodenstown is a public statement of the republican leadership's position and Gerry Adams often floated kites by using a third party to test reaction. 'Don't listen to what Adams says because Adams never uses himself to break new ground. He always uses someone else.' Tony Catney, Interview with author, April 27th 1998.

only the politics of retreat from the meta-narratives of nation and class they are also a retreat from conception of agency and conscious domination of their environment.

This style of politics was to mark the peace process as a whole and was not just confined to the Provisionals. Indeed this sense of fatalistic passivity, loss of historical confidence and sense of self-limitation, and ideological exhaustion could even be said to characterise unionism and, despite their successes in reeling in the republicans, the British state too, given that they had not completely stamped their authority over the polity and had only succeeded in containing rather than defeating the Provisionals. But it had its particular usefulness for the movement's leadership, especially in these earlier stages of the peace process, as it provided a meaningless language and an obfuscatory discourse to both smooth and mask the Provisionals' transition from radical and transformative to accommodation and adaptation politics.

A close examination of *Towards A Lasting Peace In Ireland* will reveal these patterns, especially as it marks the end of a transitional phase in Provisional politics. It also shows the process of hollowing out and the development of new positions from within the old. Thus the document is both a tactical sleight-of-hand by the Provisional leadership and a reflection of a continuing work in progress in terms of the revision of Provisionalism's ideology and strategy. As a conception of politics it carried echoes of earlier Provisional critiques of constitutional nationalism:

What we have again and again with 'constitutional nationalism' is this almost dizzying transposition of means and ends in which the end, the supposed object, is dropped, lost sight of, or indefinitely postponed in favour of concentration on some set of day-to-day means. But this shouldn't surprise anyone since what's called constitutional nationalism is little more than a tradition of problem solving. It is an ideology of 'Means'.⁶⁹⁷

Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland

This document, adopted at Sinn Féin's 1992 Ard Fheis, brought together all of the main strands that had been emerging since 1987 and attempted to produce a coherent position that brought together the themes of dialogue, conflict resolution and national reconciliation, London/Dublin co-operation as an agency of change and 'the need for

⁶⁹⁷ K. Currie, 'Strengthening Partition—the development of constitutional nationalism', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* June 17th 1986.

a real peace process'.⁶⁹⁸ Particularly in its definition of Britain's contemporary and future role in Ireland the document marked a clear change in position from the politics of the mid-1980s and was to provide republicans with the basic strategic and ideological framework for the rest of the 1990s. As such it was a public reflection of the secret contacts that were revealed in *Setting The Record Straight*⁶⁹⁹ as well as a development of republican responses to British speeches and policy statements from 1989 onwards. In that sense it was much more than 'a significant refinement of Sinn Féin's analysis of the conflict and the means by which it would be resolved', although for reasons of internal republican politics that was how it had to be presented.⁷⁰⁰

The important features of the new Provisional position were as much in the language and tone of the document and subsequent statements developing the position as in the actual political demands that are raised. The neutrality of Britain is not explicitly stated or accepted by Sinn Féin, but the role envisaged by the document for the British government does carry with it at least an assumption that in the future Britain could be neutral. Indeed if Britain were to carry out the facilitating and persuading role indicated in *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland* her position would have to go beyond mere neutrality and become a pro-active partner, along with Dublin and 'the international community' in a decolonisation process. The theorisation and political delineation of Britain's current and future role as defined in this document and as developed in the political dialogue throughout the peace process of the 1990s was a marked departure from the 'Brits Out' position of the mid-1980s or even the peace strategy indicated in *A Scenario for Peace in 1987* in terms of its definition of British interest, function and timescale.

How far this represented a departure can be seen in the position adopted by Sinn Féin during their talks with the SDLP in 1988. During those discussions republicans specifically considered the issue of British neutrality and their role in Ireland in terms of the articles of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. In language that was to echo in some degree their own position in the 1990s the Provisionals rejected the SDLP position because:

⁶⁹⁸ 'Republican Struggle Remains Vibrant', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* July 9th 1992.

⁶⁹⁹ *Setting the Record Straight—a record of communications between Sinn Fein and the British government October 1990–November 1993*, Dublin 1994.

⁷⁰⁰ T.Hartley, 'A Strategy For Peace', *An Camcheachta/Starry Plough* February 1994.

the SDLP do not actively recognise the British as the problem. Whether they all believe it or not, the SDLP abide by Article One of the Hillsborough Treaty: Britain is the honest broker, the referee, who will gracefully bow out as the opponents agree amongst themselves that Britain should do... Sinn Fein [argued] that agreement between the people on this island will only be found in a national context and in the circumstances of a British disengagement.⁷⁰¹

In the developing Provisional positions of the early 1990s there was not a specific repudiation of the imperialist analytical framework that was traditionally at the core of republican analysis of the conflict and was deployed as a means of maintaining internal republican unity during crisis periods of the peace process or explaining particular problems with the British government. Elements of this discourse continued to be used, albeit with some refinement and toning down of the harsher criticisms of British Imperialism. Increasingly this type of language appeared to be the rather hollow rhetoric of a parliamentary game rather than the driving analytical force of a political position. As such its decreasing use and relegation to a rhetoric device reflected a transitional process in Provisional politics. What is significant in terms of the discursive shift within Provisionalism is that if Britain is being called upon to facilitate and persuade then the working assumption must be that it is capable of such a function and that its role may be structurally colonial (itself a shift from the view that Britain was intentionally imperialist) but that functionally it could change, thus implicitly acknowledging the neutrality of the state as an instrument of political change.

The significance of the terminology of persuasion goes beyond mere technical discussions of the practicalities of 'decolonisation' and suggest a potential for active partnership and political engagement. The change in function given to the British state thus illustrates a fundamental discursive transformation from a revolutionary world view rooted in an Idealpolitik composed of a mixture of Third World Marxism and communal nationalism to a realpolitik that may theoretically reject the British state as illegitimate but pragmatically is prepared to work with what is rather than transform it.

This thesis has attempted to show what has been an uneven and contradictory process of political and ideological transformation. Given both the internal political

⁷⁰¹ H.Mac Thomas, 'Sinn Féin/SDLP Dialogue', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* March 31st 1988.

dynamics of the republican movement and the nature of political contestation in the external political environment no clear statements can be made, although a series of signposts indicated the distance travelled. In 1992 the signposts contained within *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland* were written in the everyday banal language of liberal democracy and 'normal' politics, but the direction was clear. The underlying assumptions were those of problem solving and a common framework of discourse and understanding, of potential partnership and co-operation in a 'search for peace in Ireland [which] is everyone's responsibility'.⁷⁰² At a fundamental level this represents the replacement of a conception of politics as concerned with issues of conflict, power and clashes of fundamental ideology with the themes of persuasion, dialogue and reconciling discourse. The previous framework had defined Britain as part of the problem, if not the fundamental cause of the conflict. The peace strategy now placed the British state at the heart of the solution. For example in discussing the 'failure' and the 'inability' of the Dublin and London governments to produce a 'solution' Gerry Adams situated himself within a conventional liberal democratic discourse when he argued that 'by any objective international standards the conflict in the North represents a failure of the normal political process'.⁷⁰³

Using this language of pluralism, movement and a self-consciously objective and responsible tone *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland* argues that Britain has a central role in the process of change in Northern Ireland:

Britain created the problem in Ireland. Britain has the major responsibility and role in initiating a strategy, which will bring a democratic resolution and a lasting peace. This must involve, within the context of accepting the national right of the majority of the Irish people, **a British government joining the ranks of the persuaders** [my emphasis] in seeking to obtain the **consent of a majority of people in the north** [my emphasis] to the constitutional, political and financial arrangements needed for a united Ireland.⁷⁰⁴

Re-unification remained the ultimate goal and focus of republican strategy, but the concepts of process and persuasion allied to the emerging terminology of consent carry with them the implication of a transitional and developmental approach towards British disengagement preceded by a period of dialogue and persuasion. Decolonisation was evidently to be a longer and rather more involved process than the

⁷⁰² 'Division and coercion underpin British rule', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, July 30th 1992.

⁷⁰³ 'Sinn Féin maps road to peace', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 20th 1992.

⁷⁰⁴ *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland*, Dublin, 12.

simple acts of ratifying political change by hauling down a flag at midnight and seeing soldiers depart from Belfast Lough.⁷⁰⁵

This facilitation role was grounded in the British state's historical responsibility for the conflict, its close political connections with Ulster Unionism through what was defined as 'the British bestowed unionist veto' and its *de jure* function as the responsible government of Northern Ireland. This focus on the significance of the British state's role and its relationship with unionism ties together within a unifying structure the two other emerging particularist themes of community and identity. Whilst rejecting what it refers to as 'current fashionable propaganda' that removes the causes of the conflict from Britain and blames instead 'divisions between the Irish people' the Provisional focus on Britain's *de jure* and facilitating functions becomes increasingly conjoined in republican analyses with an 'acknowledgement that peace in Ireland requires a settlement of the long-standing conflict between Irish nationalism and Irish unionism' as the themes of identity politics more into the mainstream of Provisional discourse.⁷⁰⁶

Consent and reconciliation

The changing balance within republican analyses between the imperialistic responsibility of Britain and the need for national reconciliation between nationalism and unionism is developed thus:

...Britain's refusal to accept the principle of self-determination for the Irish people has been and remains the root cause of conflict in Ireland. Irish national unity has been consciously and deliberately fractured in the interests of the British... The unionist veto, the corner stone of Britain's arguments for staying in the six counties is a denial of democracy... The unionist veto is, in fact, the gerrymander perpetrated by a British government...⁷⁰⁷ Withdrawal of the unionist veto will open the possibility of constructive dialogue with the rest of the Irish people.⁷⁰⁸ If there is to be movement towards conditions in which debate about national reconciliation can take place the British –bestowed unionist veto needs to be removed. If in the interim a British government recognises the failure of partition and its six county state that would help create the conditions for dialogue.⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁵This was increasingly and publicly recognised by republicans during this period. See, for example, Gibney, 'It is our job to develop the struggle for freedom-Bodenstown Address'.

⁷⁰⁶'Sinn Féin maps road to peace', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 20th 1992.

⁷⁰⁷'Peace based on democratic rights', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* July 23rd 1992.

⁷⁰⁸'Division and coercion underpin British rule', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* July 30th 1992.

⁷⁰⁹*Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland*, Dublin, 15.

By linking Britain's responsibility for Northern Ireland with the themes of national self-determination and national reconciliation through dialogue within a 'democratic' context this strategy had profound implications for republican approaches towards the unionist population as well as undermining the *raison d'être* and direction of the existing Provisional military-political strategy. As we have seen the imperialist analysis of the British presence as developed by the mid-1980s justified armed struggle on the grounds of strategic utility and the right of oppressed nations to resist external aggression.

The main political demands were formulated around the idea of forcing British withdrawal within the lifetime of a parliament with a combination of the IRA campaign and the electoral strategy as a means of achieving this objective. However by 1992, whilst not openly acknowledging British neutrality as defined by Peter Brooke, the function of persuasion and the removal of 'the unionist veto' now allotted to 'British Imperialism' implicitly changes the political focus of republican analyses and politics away from the universal categories of the nation towards the particular and culturally political forms of winning the consent of the unionist community through positive dialogue and reconciliation by drawing on, amongst other factors, Britain's good offices as a persuader. This function of persuasion, however, does have its roots in an assessment of the political relationship between the British state and unionism, which suggests that unionists are capable of being persuaded to exercise their consent in a particular direction. Thus unionism's political autonomy is seen by republicans as in some sense limited by this presumed relationship with Britain. The schema also seemed to apparently downplay the significance of a distinct unionist sense of political and cultural identity, which would also not be so easily amenable to persuasion.

The roots of this analysis actually lay in the underlying thinking of the traditional core republican assessment of the relationship between British Imperialism and unionism; however instead of seeing a forced British withdrawal as **forcing** the unionists to accept reunification this new position replaced the element of force with **persuasion** to achieve the same end. The strategy of persuasion thus represents something of a transitional phase in the development of republican analyses of both the British state's functions in Northern Ireland and the nature of the unionist community. Despite the schematic origins of this idea of persuasion as we will see in

our consideration of the changing republican assessment of the Protestant community, in practice republicans began to articulate their politics through a particularist discourse of identity and community which moved considerably from these earlier positions. Likewise, the potential ability and willingness of the British state to act as an instrument of the republican project represents both a retreat from Provisionalism's sense of its own potency as an historical agent and a practical recognition of the self-limitation of its politics by the 1990s.

As with other areas of republican politics during this transitional period the evolution of the movement's position on Britain was subject to a variety of internal and external pressures, not least of which was the bargaining process and public positioning of both the British government and the Provisionals leading up to the 1994 ceasefire. This megaphone diplomacy was to be a feature of the subsequent politics of the peace process and on both sides genuine reservations and assessments of the other party's bona fides and motives were mixed with a repetitive rhetoric that was designed for the consumption of their respective constituencies.⁷¹⁰ During the intense public diplomacy of 1993-4 the Provisionals continued to express reservations about Britain's long-term intentions in Ireland. Historical experience, both in the earlier twentieth century and during the 1970s and Hunger Strike period were drawn upon to strengthen the criticisms of British policy and on occasions of the position of the republican leadership in perusing the peace strategy.

Even the most conciliatory of statements about British policy were frequently linked to a sub text that stressed Britain's strategic aims as essentially pro-Unionist and designed to stabilise the conflict by isolating republicanism through a total counter insurgency policy that included political, economic and social and military as well as psychological elements.⁷¹¹ The specific political balance at Westminster in which John Major's government relied on Unionist votes along with links between the Conservatives and the multi-nationals, investment interests in Northern Ireland and the historical /political connections between Conservatism and Ulster Unionism were also frequently produced as reasons for republican suspicion of British motives.

⁷¹⁰ By way of contrast see 'Britain can pursue path to peace-IRA', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* January 7th 1993, which is directed at Volunteers and stresses the IRA's capability of 'sustaining armed resistance' as part of the peace process with M. McLaughlin, 'Ceasefire should not be precondition for talks', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* September 10th 1992 which has a consciously politically constructive tone.

⁷¹¹ G. Adams, 'The Republican Struggle Is The Force For Change', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* October 15th 1992.

Reading the development of Provisional politics during this period is difficult, but underneath the attacks on 'securocrats' and the contradictory textual analyses of the secret contacts between Sinn Fein and the British government a consistent desire for engagement on the part of the republican movement emerges.

Chapter X-Identity and the acculturation of politics in Northern Ireland: the cases of nationalist culture and the Protestant identity

This section attempts to analyse the development of Provisional politics around the themes of identity and community by considering two quite apparently disparate areas of activity and ideology to illustrate how a particularist politics of recognition and accommodation began to assume a greater significance in republicanism's ideological configuration during the 1980s and 1990s. In both cases the underlying strands that connect cultural activities and practices and the ideologically defined concept of 'community' illustrate a much deeper shift in how republicans understood the world and how they acted to change it. Allegedly non-political cultural activities such as the promotion of the Irish language and the West Belfast Festival have always had a political dimension for both supporters and opponents alike.⁷¹² But it is the way that these cultural-political activities embody new forms of Provisional politics that is most significant. Although related to the older Irish nationalist forms of cultural identity it was in the new patterns of the acculturation of politics, the stress on identity as recognition, and a discourse drawn from concepts of multi-culturalism that this cultural continuation of politics by other means was to be so influential in Provisionalism.

This process is not limited to republicanism. Indeed in advancing this argument the assumption is that these patterns and processes are not only the framework for politics and much else in the public (and private) sphere in Northern Ireland, but are also dominant in public life and discourse in the forms of multiculturalism and identity politics in Western societies generally. The social and economic context for these developments has been the decline of the so-called Fordist economies, de-industrialisation and the rise of the service economy along with the concomitant decline of the traditional, organised working class and class based politics. Likewise, the decline of the nation state and its replacement by the

⁷¹² The politics of the Irish language as a signifier of difference and a factor in the formation of an imagined national community date back at least to the end of the eighteenth century. The West Belfast Festival is of less ancient lineage, but the disputes over its funding by, amongst others, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland also focused on both a long-established view of the politicisation of 'Irish' culture and the newer discourses of cultural politics and the cultural left. Although more explicitly 'political' the 'vetting' issue in the case of the Irish language group Glór na nGael also turned around the old and new definitions of the politicisation of culture.

transnational body, the region, the community and intermediate bodies, such as non-governmental organisations, has seemed to shift power from centre to periphery.⁷¹³ In these 'new economies', where access to state resources remains vital for the marginalized and socially excluded, the functions of mediation and cultural politics may provide a focus of activity for those political actors seeking to appeal to such 'disempowered' groups.⁷¹⁴ As O'Doherty has convincingly argued, much of this cultural practice in Northern Ireland is politically motivated and designed to define and delineate separate communities for purposes of mobilisation or resource allocation. He criticises the patterns as follows:

The politician reads culture as allegiance and community as support. Public bodies have been trained by a political process into thinking and operating within these frames... The ossification of culture is a political project in Northern Ireland. It suits the basic model for describing our politics and our conflicts to include everything in the categories that political movements have established. That way, political movements feel entitled to take responsibility for wider areas of our thinking and to demand conformity...⁷¹⁵

Concepts of identity and community are, of course, deeply intertwined. Cultural politics were significant in both the historical and contemporary construction of the idea and the political reality of the northern nationalist community. However, the increasing use of the discourse of identity and community in Provisional analyses of the unionist population and the development of a politics based on making appeals to the state and international opinion on these particularist grounds is a more overtly political project of more recent vintage. Both of these facets of the new republicanism in practice share a common discursive and ideological framework. The developing use of communitarian ideology and the increasing salience of the idea of community for republicans as a means of defining the conflict in Northern Ireland is a significant departure. Provisionalism is thus based now on a politics of accommodation rather

⁷¹³ It has been argued that the notion of group empowerment within post-modern political arrangements is illusory. Barry, for example, argues that any society from which the notion of the objectivity of truth has disappeared can only function as a dictatorship: 'There is no way in which decisions taken by a majority can be accepted by the minority unless both sides occupy a common universe... (and) only by the exertion of absolute power could a set of common (if constantly changing) beliefs be established'. B. Barry, *Culture and Equality*, 2001, 21.

⁷¹⁴ British government strategies of containment Keynesianism characteristic of a post-industrial Northern Ireland and the pork-barrel nature of some aspects of politics in the region reinforce this theme. It is discussed further in K. Bean, *The New Departure: Recent developments in Irish Republican strategy and ideology*, Liverpool 1995.

⁷¹⁵ M. O'Doherty, 'A Bit of a Nuisance', in M. Carruthers, S. Douds and T. Loane (eds.) *Re-imagining Belfast: a manifesto for the arts*, Belfast 2003, 74-75.

than an ideology with the subjective aim of reshaping and transforming the world within which it finds itself.

In the introduction to this thesis these patterns of discursive shift within republicanism were linked to the debate around ideas of the end of ideology as applied to Ireland and situated within the context of a wider crisis in the idea of the political and of political subjectivity and agency. The specific features of this crisis in Provisionalism were the product of the containment and relative failure of the republican movement's political project and the relative success of British counter-insurgency. Other contextual factors also had an impact on this process of the acculturation of Provisional ideology and politics such as a wide range of structural changes to the social/economic terrain experienced both as impersonal forces as well as the result of a deliberate pattern of British government strategy.⁷¹⁶ There was a range of direct and indirect contact with the state through local government, the voluntary and community sector and other areas of social policy that would act as channels of defining communication.

Just as important as a source of ideological influence were contacts with other radical currents confronting similar ideological problems, which could have acted to strengthen these patterns in Provisional republicanism. A common feature of these radical projects was their stress on the politics of identity and community, which were frequently reflected in a multi-cultural discourse, which challenged a dominant repressive mono-cultural hegemony in the name of empowering subaltern and excluded groups based on class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and nationality. It is clear that individual republicans did attempt to consciously engage with and apply this new multi-cultural discourse to their political project in ways similar to those of other radicals.

⁷¹⁶ Whilst the exact relationship between British government cultural policy and counter-insurgency is unclear some of the disputes over 'vetting' and funding indicate that there was some relationship, if only at the level of 'value for money'. Undoubtedly more significant was the way that cultural practice and concomitant ideas of community and identity were shaped by funding regimes and the dominant discourse of community relations and multi-cultureless. Although artists and community groups frequently spoke in terms of the repressive imposition of these regimes and discourses in practice these ideas were willingly embraced and internalised both pragmatically to obtain funding and recognition, and most significantly because 'official' multicultural and community relations discourse was congenial and made cognate to existing (but increasingly tired and unserviceable) radical discourses of transformation and democratic inclusion. My contention is that a similar process of internalisation occurred politically as well as culturally, although this embrace was justified on a number of grounds (similar to the cultural milieu outlined above) including the idea that it was possible to shift the boundaries of the discourse and by using it as a site of contestation of meaning change the nature of cultural, social and political reality.

The strength of the appeal of this discourse for republicans was its cognate nature to pre-existing nationalist forms. There was also a general tendency for ex-radicals to interpret the world through identity and community as a way of making sense of the new situation. Their failure of nerve, loss of faith in the potential of transformative politics and what they perceived as the decline of universal subjects as forces that acted on the world all contributed to shaping these forms of politics. Thus the particularism of identity politics was a way of apparently re-engaging with the old universal categories of class and nation that had been seen as the motor forces of history but now in the changing political and ideological climate of the late 1980s and early 1990s were regarded as in a state of terminal stasis.

Alongside these external factors were a number of strands in the ideological structures and political culture of nationalism and republicanism that had a determining influence on the form that a response would take. Republicanism, like all forms of nationalism, has frequently displayed a tension between the universal and the particular, reflected in the conflicting politics of an assertive subjectivity and the politics of passive recognition. Other strands were positioned around the differing ideas of civic and ethnic nationalism reflected in a differing relative focus on the nation and the state. As we have seen, Provisional republicanism was a coalition between disparate and frequently conflicting elements of universalism as represented by ideas of the nation and democratic self-determination as well as conceptions of the universal class represented by socialist republicanism.

The elements of particularism with its sectarian overtones were to be found in northern nationalists' communalism as well as the Defenderist tradition. Cultural identity and a sense of Irishness were also factors, especially around the invented traditions of Irish nationalism and culture. As the opening sections have demonstrated these elements and strands were present, were used as signifiers and political mobilising points and ideologies and discourses of legitimation. The exact balance between these elements varied and oscillated around certain core strands according to external conditions. Historically the particularist seem to have predominated during periods of defeat and decline and to have been used to hold together an ideological formation that was faced with external challenges. The universal strands had something of a triumphalist character and were a product of advances and confidence in the republican project. The happy coexistence and indeed the mutual mobilisation and deployment of these themes can be seen in the Hunger Strike period where

communal culture was consciously used to both mobilise and link the struggle to particularist themes and the universalist elements of prisoner's rights and the struggle against the state. The Hunger Strike is a case in point where Provisional leaders were aware of these tensions and strains and sought ways to consciously mobilise and manipulate them.

Identity and Imperialism

The Provisionals had strongly attacked the view that issues of identity were central to the conflict in Northern Ireland from the earliest period of their ideological development. Their response to the SDLP's position was to argue that such an approach reflected the British analysis and that in focusing on peripheral issues it ignored 'the substantial and ongoing contribution which British domination has made in creating and sustaining our political crisis. Your concentration on the symptoms of the problem leads you [the SDLP] to blame the attitudes held by nationalists and loyalists as its cause'.⁷¹⁷ Constitutional nationalism was identified with the essentially passive politics of identity 'channelled into relatively harmless agitation for a few minor social /cultural changes. Coupled with the nonsense of unity by consent the national demand has become an aspiration to be achieved in some far distant future.'⁷¹⁸ The Provisionals thus defined the conflict in explicitly universalist political terms that made no concessions to particularist ideas of identity and tradition, or internal conflict:

Side by side with the notion of British 'neutrality' in the conflict goes the denial of the right to national self-determination. The problem is thus not presented as the problem of the interference of British power in Ireland but of relations between Irish people. And with Britain now 'neutral' the old British argument that they are in Ireland to keep the peace until the Irish sort out their differences is expressed in a new form by John Hume... [who attacks] nationalists and unionists for not sorting out their ancient quarrel while the brave new world of the European Single Market was on the horizon.⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁷ 'Sinn Féin/SDLP talks: Review and Analysis', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* September 22nd 1988.

⁷¹⁸ K. Currie, 'Strengthening partition-the development of constitutional nationalism', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* June 17th 1986.

⁷¹⁹ 'Hume toes the British line', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* November 9th 1989.

But these attacks did not mean that cultural and identity issues were regarded as unimportant in the Provisional worldview. Identity was always a significant strand in Provisional discourse, especially when it was countered as an antithetical form to British imperialism and cultural colonialism.⁷²⁰ Issues of identity around the Irish language and other cultural signifiers had been given prominence from the earliest period. In this sense Provisionalism drew on a nationalist cultural-political tradition that dated back to the cultural nationalism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries exemplified by the Gaelic League and Patrick Pearse. Ultimately, both in the discourse of the Cultural Revival and later republicanism, this idea of language revival is rooted in an idealist belief in the power of discourse to ultimately shape politics.⁷²¹

The nature of this tradition is a strongly contested one, but it has a sufficiently essentialist character to be of service to a political project that stresses difference and particularism. In its most fundamentalist expression it was argued that Ireland could not be truly free without being Gaelic. This strand of identity politics descended directly from Pearse and placed language and cultural identity at the heart of the conflict.

If the restoration of Irish is not going to be part and parcel of the revolution you can throw your hat at the revolution, for the Anglo-Americans will rule you in your mind and in your **heart** [my emphasis] and the destiny of this country will be to be joined in every way to the ...island to the east.⁷²²

The tensions between an essentialist cultural particularism and the universal idea of opposition to imperialism were partially resolved by combining elements of this identity discourse with contemporary anti-colonial theory.⁷²³ This reading of

⁷²⁰ An example of the intersection of contemporary ideas of cultural relativism and the acculturation of politics with quite an essentialist idea of 'Irish' culture [although dressed in post-modern language] is Robert Ballagh's conception of 'Irish Ways and Irish Art', *IRIS*, August 1990 where he argues that '...Irishness is not something that can be superficially imposed on a work of art...but rather ...is something that goes much deeper and is in essence difficult to define. It could be summarised as an attitude to life, or more accurately, a way of dealing with life...' He goes on to discuss a 'common sensibility' in Irish culture over the last two hundred years in the sort of language familiar to readers of Corkery's 'Hidden Ireland'.

⁷²¹ B. de Brún, 'Tíocfaidh Lá na Golden Donughters', *Iris Bheag* 22.

⁷²² D. Breatnach, 'Gaeilge is saoirse' - Mala Poist, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* January 28th 1988.

⁷²³ Politics and cultural criticism were frequently combined with attacks on 'Coca Cola culture'. See, for example, M. Ó Muilleoir, 'Coca Cola Culture' - Mala Poist, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* January 9th 1988.

cultural oppression and the importance of identity was reinforced by Fanonist ideas of resistance and establishing a counter hegemony to imperialism by recovering native culture and traditions and developing them.⁷²⁴ The culture of the resistance community, whether it is that of the Belfast working class or of Gaelic rural communities could be a focus for resistance.⁷²⁵ In this context the particularist localism of identity, if linked to the wider struggle against British imperialism was not seen as a diversion or a distraction. Culture in this politicised sense was seen as cognate with identity and resistance: like education, it was never neutral in class or national terms.⁷²⁶ The development of popular cultural forms such as community theatre and wall murals were seen as part of this pattern linking place, culture and political message.⁷²⁷

Culture is the ideas and attitudes of people; it is an indication of how we view things and it is our response to the environment in which we live. National culture is the reflection of the politics, economics, values, attitudes, aspirations and thoughts of a nation. It is the totality of our response to the world we live in.⁷²⁸

This relatively uncontroversial idea of culture as creation was, however, combined with an essentialist view of language as a structure of encoded meaning and thus implicitly with concepts of tradition and identity. In this definition of culture and identity the conscious subject who creates a new culture through interaction with other subjects and the world has become the mere passive carrier of a past culture, literally a prisoner with a burden.⁷²⁹ Gerry Adams, for example, defined language in such clearly essentialist terms:

⁷²⁴ The role of language and culture in Third World struggles for independence was a frequent theme in book reviews and analytical articles. See, for example, C Mac Aoidh, 'The cultural bomb', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* May 21st 1987 and J. Squire, 'Frantz Fanon', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* October 27th 1988.

⁷²⁵ For examples of the growth of the Irish language and its political significance see D.O Dufaigh, 'The Cultural Reconquest of Ireland', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 19th 1987 and 'West Belfast wins Glor na nGael', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* May 21st 1987.

⁷²⁶ This politicised idea of culture and identity was clearly influenced by left thinkers such as Paolo Freire. See, for example, J. Squire, 'The role of education in liberation', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* December 1st 1988.

⁷²⁷ See, for example, the discussion of the political role of wall murals in strengthening community identification with local IRA Volunteers and prisoners in 'The Art Of The Oppressed', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* May 19th 1988 and E. Mac Cormac, 'Revolutionary Peoples' Theatre', *Iris Bheag* 16, 1989.

⁷²⁸ G. Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, Dingle 1986, 137.

⁷²⁹ There were, however, tensions within Provisional discourse between this essentially 'ethnic' nationalism and the 'civic' ideas of democracy. This may have also reflected the class base of

There is no such thing as a neutral language, for language is the means by which culture, the totality of our response to the world we live in, is communicated: and for that reason the Irish language had to be destroyed...culture is filtered through it and when the language is lost everything it represents is also lost...It is the badge of a civilisation whose values were vastly different from the one which seeks to subjugate us. It is a badge of our identity and part of what we are.⁷³⁰

However, this passive particularism reflecting the ethnic strands in nationalism is balanced by anti-imperialism that sees identity as site of contestation between the coloniser and the colonised. If cultural colonialism was seen as a major part of the conquest then cultural resistance is a vital part of the reconquest. Significantly for the later development of identity and cultural politics within Provisionalism some republicans argued from a somewhat absolutist position that the survival of Irish was incompatible with 'imperialism' thus ruling out the ideas of cultural parity of esteem and official recognition of identity that was to become so central to republican politics in the 1990s. The destruction of language and culture were seen as fundamental attacks on identity and tradition, which in themselves were equated with both the concept and reality of the nation. Thus it was as an abstract fetishised idea that 'culture' becomes almost independently embodied in real people rather than developing as the conscious product of humanity.

In this reading, it is the attacks on the identity rather than the living human beings that constitute ethnocide. Although redolent of other tropes of victimhood this close identification of people and cultural identity paradoxically rejects the later 'pluralist' discourse of the Provisionals whilst at the same time providing the raw material for that later development of strands of the new forms of identity politics within republicanism.

The idea of an imperial regime now giving equality of treatment to the Irish tradition is a contradiction in terms. If it were so, we wouldn't have

Provisional support with some working class republicans suspicious of these identity politics. See for example debates about soccer as a 'foreign game' in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* June 12th 1986. and criticism of the 'racism' of Gaelic Games followers. Likewise although Long Kesh was 'the Gaoltacht' there was a certain amount of 'slagging' of Irish language enthusiasts who were nicknamed 'the Culture Club' (Private information, ex-IRA prisoner). The IRA Green Book also enjoins Volunteers to respect the language even if they do not speak it, indicating perhaps some unease with excessive revivalism. See also the arguments for letting Irish die in *Iris Bheag* 10 1989.

⁷³⁰ Adams, 138.

imperialism. Our demands, as part of the ongoing struggle have to be for complete equality for the Irish language...in order to make up for the ethnocide of hundreds of years.⁷³¹

In the explicitly political campaigning for the recognition of Irish by the British government the case for the language was increasingly developed within themes of community and identity. In demanding improved resources or an end to 'vetting' republicans and other activists were using the discourse of inclusion and making a case grounded in cultural politics. Support for education through the medium of Irish was demanded on the grounds of popular support for it from communities in West Belfast and because of the 'positive and assertive role the Irish language continues to play within the community...'⁷³² Arguments in defence of the language against criticisms of its marginal status and irrelevance as, in the words of DUP politician Sammy Wilson, a 'leprechaun language', drew on its relevance to contemporary life. In so doing it appeared to point towards a definition of identity linked to language that was less essentialist and rooted in tradition. These counter attacks on the cultures of dependency and the cultural cringe appears to reinstate agency and subjective creativity in the development of new cultures and forms of identity. As Gerry Adams argued:

We do not seek to recover the past but to discover it so that we recover the best of our traditional values and mould them to the present. Our national culture should reflect the combination of the different influences within the nation; Gaeltacht and Galltacht, northern and southern, orange and green.⁷³³

However, the increasingly dominant discourse of multiculturalism was to reinforce the more essentialist approach to identity. During the 1990s the overriding salience of these concepts as a shaping discourse for political debate, public policy and decisions in the public sphere around the allocation of resources were in turn to feed back into the cultural politics of Provisionalism. Politically this view places

⁷³¹ D.O Dufaigh, 'The Cultural Reconquest of Ireland', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 19th 1987. Rather contradictorily O Dufaigh then goes on to demand of the imperialist state a whole series of measures that would indeed amount to parity of esteem. As in other areas of Provisional politics, these contradictions reflect a deeper contradiction in the increasing orientation of republicans towards the British state.

⁷³² 'St. Patrick's Day Parades', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* March 16th 1989 and 'Hands Off Our Language', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* March 23rd 1989.

⁷³³ Adams, 139-140.

identity and culture at the centre of the republican struggle. In so doing not only does this accord with the traditions of cultural nationalism, but it also does so in a way that is consistent with the emerging patterns of multiculturalism and identity politics in the mid-1980s. In the introduction to the thesis the development of nationalist and republican identity politics in Northern Ireland was situated within the wider cultural-political frame of the 're-invention of Irishness' that was a feature of public life throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. The resulting cross-cultural currents of these new forms of Irish identity were most congenial to the new republican political project. They were a way of developing a new politics of identity based on the idea and hegemonic idealisation of the nationalist community. As O'Doherty defines it:

There is a new liberal, cosmopolitan Irishness, a little bohemian perhaps, which you can identify. You can see it in [An] Culturllann, the west Belfast arts and community centre, or the novels of Padraig Standun... This woolly, hairy Irishness seems to sit cosily beside the new Sinn Fein, and visualises republicans more easily in Aran sweaters than in balaclavas. If anything, Sinn Fein has softened to incorporate this strand.⁷³⁴

The flexibility of this frame of politics and its potential for development in contradictory directions was seen in the idea that the Irish language could be used as a medium for inclusion and the transcendence of communal difference. This republican discourse increasingly situates itself in the cultural politics of 'the two traditions', which are seen to have value culturally, but are still rejected as an explanation of political division. The pluralist theme that Irish was the common heritage of all in Northern Ireland begins to emerge in the late 1980s as its specific function as a medium of resistance began to be downplayed. Republicans stressed the historical role of Protestants in the language revival and argued that Gaelic was a culture not a weapon. The language of parity of esteem and recognition of identity increasingly began to supersede the discourse of cultural resistance. Moreover, it was an identity in which all can share.

As Ó Muilleoir argued:

There is also an urgent need for those people of the Protestant tradition in the North, our sisters and brothers in the Waterside, Shankill, Carrickfergus, and

⁷³⁴ M. O'Doherty, 'A Bit of a Nuisance', in M. Carruthers, S. Douds and T. Loane (eds) *Re-imagining Belfast: a manifesto for the arts*, Belfast 2003, 79.

Larne, to embrace the cultural revival. Your ancestors actually pioneered the revival in Belfast between 1790 and 1860 and your help is needed today.⁷³⁵

If Gerry Adams believed that identity and cultural issues were 'a crucial part of our political struggle',⁷³⁶ then when that political struggle cedes ground what is left is a politicised culture in place of politics and a debate over identity where there was once a struggle for power. Identity politics were thus not alien to the Irish nationalist and republican tradition, but their function had always been a supporting rather than mobilising one. However, the existence of this strand in republicanism was fortunate in that it provided a native tradition that could be pressed into service to meet the analytical and political needs of the post-ideological 1990s and was, moreover, a way of looking at the world that 'recovered' the best of a past tradition and moulded it to the political needs and intellectual currents of the present. Thus as with other areas of Provisional politics the apparently new positions of identity politics were hollowed out and created from within the debris and detritus of the old.

Identity politics and the West Belfast Festival: from carnival of the oppressed to festival of recognition

The development of the West Belfast Festival and its related cultural currents is a useful indicator of the changing patterns of cultural politics and identity within republicanism. It marks a further development of the character of the resistance community from activism and political mobilisation to passive witness and a structure for recognition. The tensions within identity politics are present in the way that the festival and the community are portrayed, both looking back as commemoration and looking forward as a celebration of a new form of identity. With its community focus, its relationship with the state and voluntary/community sector funding regime, and its stress on empowerment and recognition, the Festival becomes the embodiment in cultural form of the master-narratives of contemporary Provisionalism.

The origin and trajectory of the Festival run parallel with the emergence of identity politics within republicanism. As we have seen, by the late 1980s the resistance community was an established theme in Provisional politics. But the development of festivals and fleadhanna cheoil marked a significant change in the definition and image of that community.

⁷³⁵ 'West Belfast wins Glor na nGael', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* May 21st 1987.

⁷³⁶ Adams, 144.

The significant feature here was that the festivals were posed as a community response to a social problem- ‘anti-social elements using the traditional internment commemoration as an excuse to damage property and upset local residents’ -as well as demonstrating communal solidarity and the true nature of the communal identity when it was under challenge from internal division implicit in the existence of ‘anti social elements’. The wider political context of the festivals in this period was defined as being rooted in the ‘resistance which forced an embarrassed British government to end internment [it] should be remembered with pride and commemorated with dignity’.⁷³⁷ This political theme of resistance remained central to the festivals which not only marked internment but had ‘evolved into a celebration of the endurance of the nationalist people’.⁷³⁸ However within that collective identity as a resistance community other strands were emerging.

The earlier images of the community fighting the state and repression creatively and bravely remained a potent one, although increasingly it was an image that was itself the subject of nostalgic representation of the past rather than a real celebration of the present. The festivals now presented struggles of another kind against social limitation and exclusion. Increasingly the social as opposed to the purely political disadvantage was stressed in the descriptions of the communities’ activities at festival time. Culture in its widest sense becomes a field to express identity and communal creativity that had been held back by state oppression and social exclusion. In 1988 the West Belfast Festival was described as ‘an opportunity for local people to show to themselves and to the world, the breadth and depth of talent that exists within West Belfast. The array of exhibitions and activities added up to an immense outpouring of creativity...’⁷³⁹ The culture on display from the revolutionary murals and the ‘banned Belfast Exposed Exhibition’, through to Robert Ballagh’s lecture on the Irishness of Irish Art all reflected a political agenda and literally in the case of the photographs and the murals reinforced a particular image of the ‘West Belfast community’.

As the pattern of politics and republican activism changed, the overtly political resistance and communal mobilisation of the community was transformed into expressions of identity through cultural activity and a generalised conception of

⁷³⁷ Mairtin Ó Muilleoir quoted in E. Tracy, ‘Festivals Mark Internment’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* August 13th 1987.

⁷³⁸ ‘Celebrating Resistance’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* August 11th 1988.

⁷³⁹ ‘Feis An Phobail Beal Feirste Thiar’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* August 18th 1988.

'republican struggle', a portmanteau cliché that could incorporate everything from demonstrations, mural painting, writing or simply giving passive witness, through to the more obviously politically, militant street politics and armed campaign. As Gerry Adams commented in 1989:

Faced with decades of systematic religious discrimination, economic neglect and unprecedented military repression, the West Belfast community has invariably responded in a **positive, creative and dignified manner** [my emphasis]. Despite all that has been inflicted on the people of this area and despite the media distortions, the basic decency of our people remains undiminished.⁷⁴⁰ **The people of West Belfast personified the spirit of freedom and demonstrated that spirit to the world in a festival of music, poetry and entertainment** [my emphasis].⁷⁴¹

Identity and self-esteem

Looking back in 1994, the Festival's Development Plan linked the growth of the Festival to a specifically 'political' and community developmental perspective that reflected themes of identity politics, when it argued that the 'celebration would inevitably strengthen the self-esteem and identity of the West Belfast people'.⁷⁴² The Festival's aims were also directly focused on the area of intersection between self-help and community development, government social and economic policies and objective led-funding regimes. In situating the Festival at that connecting nexus, its pattern of development was to be similar to that of other community initiatives rather than a purely cultural phenomenon. Given the forms of cultural and identity politics this was inevitable as the community culture and wide range of self-help and community groups enabled 'people to work together to overcome their sense of helplessness and powerlessness, by addressing, in a positive manner, issues and concerns and tackling the problems which afflict them.'⁷⁴³

With its wider agenda of building self confident communities and empowerment through economic and social regeneration in West Belfast, the Festival shows how the formerly militant conception of the community as a centre of mobilisation and opposition to the state was being replaced with the politics of

⁷⁴⁰ 'Celebrating resistance', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* August 10th 1989.

⁷⁴¹ 'Celebrating The Resistance', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* August 17th 1989.

⁷⁴² *Feile An Phobail Development Plan 1994*, Belfast, 1994, 4.

⁷⁴³ *Feile An Phobail Development Plan 1994*, 5.

community development, self-help and partnership. The range of partner organisations, supporting structures and funding sources for the Festival as well as its aims, showed how the community now accommodated itself to and worked with the state and its agencies.⁷⁴⁴ As a source of revenue and indirect employment, the Festival had, by the early 1990s, become a significant factor in the economic and social life of West Belfast.

The turning point in this process of conscious communal re-branding were the events surrounding the deaths of two British servicemen at the funeral of an IRA Volunteer and the media portrayal, according to Gerry Adams, of West Belfast as being full of 'depraved savages'. Commenting on the power of international media attention and the limited power of counter-images, except for what Adams describes as community photographers such as 'Belfast Exposed', he argues that the festivals were a way for working class communities to confound their detractors by cultural and entertainment activities.⁷⁴⁵ By the early 1990s, the fusion of the past and the present in the form of the resistance community was complete. It presents a perfect example of how the rhetoric of the past with all its resonance of militant opposition could be used to legitimate the present and establish continuity with the heroic period of republican struggle. It flatters its constituency and by strengthening their sense of identity enables quite serious revisions and fundamental shifts in position to be portrayed as new phases of struggle or new ground to be contested.

The development of the identity of West Belfast was a significant example of a much wider process that was expressed in this rhetoric of struggle by a marginalized victimised community against the state. Significantly, the identity that was developed, although introverted and narrowly focussed in a parochial way, was also linked to the rest of the world and to other struggling groups. This reinforced not only a sense of solidarity with other struggles but also strengthened West Belfast's self identification as a politically conscious and mobilised resistance community comparable with groups in an apparently similar position, such as the townships of South Africa or the West Bank. Murals, the flying of Palestinian flags and solidarity visits reinforced the identity of resistance. This international solidarity actually represented a strengthening of a local communal identity whose target audience was much closer to home. The presence of international visitors at the Festival reinforced

⁷⁴⁴ *Feile An Phobail Development Plan 1994*, Belfast, 1994, 13-14, 27-33.

⁷⁴⁵ 'Seachtain Iontach', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* December 22nd 1989.

this self image- 'Basques, Bretons, Corsicans, English, Americans, Canadians, Norwegians, Swedes and Irish people rubbed shoulders in joy and common celebration' -and was markedly contrasted with the 'media censorship and state repression' which attempted to wreck the community's celebrations.⁷⁴⁶

The Field of Folk

The festivals and related political events such as set-piece demonstrations, commemorations and marches were illustrations of an attempted political mobilisation of that sense of communal resistance and identity through a discourse of struggle. The anti-internment marches in August established a commemorative and legitimating link with the past whilst the festivals themselves were expressions of simple communal joy and creativity in the face of what Gerry Adams called 'the unprecedented military occupation and massive social and economic deprivation'.⁷⁴⁷ The festivals and marches associated with them had become, along with the Easter commemorations and Bodenstown, the great set pieces of mobilisation and political theatre for the Provisionals. The anti-internment march, in particular, was used to describe a narrative of community and identity back to the very community that republicans claimed to represent. The almost ritual choreography and role of republican activists, the community as marchers and the forces of the state playing the part of a threatening chorus made these events a theatre of reinforcement, both on the march and in the presentation of the circumstances surrounding it. From the bored RUC men and Special Branch photographers through to the visiting Noraid and Troops Out speakers and the children's bands, each had their part to play in what had become a rather mannered performance. The spontaneous resistance and rioting of the carnival of the oppressed had become a rather stylised, closely choreographed ritual often performed with a perfunctory air of bored obligation.⁷⁴⁸

The manner in which the politics of identity were conjoined with concepts of place and community by a legitimating rhetoric of struggle and continuity with the past is well -illustrated by a report in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* of the August 1990 interment march. Both the manner and language of the article and the reported

⁷⁴⁶ 'The week that never was', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* August 16th 1990.

⁷⁴⁷ 'The week that never was'.

⁷⁴⁸ G. Winter, *A Country Camera 1844-1914*, Harmondsworth 1975, 56. 'Thomas Hardy...remarks that the genuine survival of a tradition can always be distinguished from the modern revival because in the latter the performers will appear enthusiastic, whereas in the former they will seem to be carrying out their annual task out of a sense of dreary obligation'.

speeches themselves provide us with a case study of Provisional politics as they are evolving in the early 1990s. The report is entitled 'A Vision of Freedom' and presents us with a picture of the demonstration as a field of folk⁷⁴⁹, 'a great army of dissent' and a community either participating or watching who together embody 'a spirit of renewal, a vision of hope and a message of defiance'.⁷⁵⁰ This almost sacred language is mixed with a commentary which situates the march in a particular locale [specific streets and places are mentioned] and in a wider political context where the outsiders, the forces of the state 'move into position' to control and intimidate the march and the community. The mutual hostility between the 'Crown forces' and the community is juxtaposed to the 'rapturous welcome' given to other foreign visitors from the Basque country, North America and Britain, with the Troops Out Movement delegation receiving 'their now traditional rapturous reception as people lined the roadside warmly applauded the solidarity being shown with the struggle for freedom'. Other references situate the march within a communal expression of identity and support:

...the central section of the march was reminiscent of the funeral cortege of Volunteer Larry Marley⁷⁵¹ with a solid wall of people filling the length and breadth of the road. Many at the march's head commented on more than one occasion: 'It's some size, it's the best march for some time.'

The speeches at the end of the march encapsulated the sense of collective identity that was literally manifested in the demonstration. The power relationships in Northern Ireland were illustrated, it was argued by Sinn Féin's Tom Hartley, by 'the People' marching both literally and metaphorically for Irish freedom surrounded by the 'the British army and the RUC, with their armour and their guns...to convince us

⁷⁴⁹ As used by Langland in 'Piers Plowman' the image represents society arrayed in its different stratifications but united as a whole by bonds of common and mutual obligation.

⁷⁵⁰ All quotations taken from 'A Vision of Freedom', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* August 16th 1990.

⁷⁵¹ The comparison with a funeral illustrates the attempt to situate the march within a recognised frame of communal activity and identity as well as demonstrating both the communal and political semiotics of republican funerals. Comparing the size and nature of a crowd at a demonstration with that at a funeral is a reflection of the particular characteristics of republicanism as a communal identity and the nature of urban Catholic culture where, despite secularisation, funerals still have a distinctive function. The funeral of Robert Mc Cartney and the vigil/protests surrounding it in February 2005 are part of a similar phenomenon: as such the communal mobilisation in the Short Strand/Markets area of Belfast has a politically significant resonance for the republican movement with the Hunger Strikes of the early 1980s. The funeral as demonstration or manifestation of popular feeling is not a peculiarly Irish affair as the death of Princess Diana and recent events in Iraq have illustrated.

that they are in charge...’ But the contrast between the **language** of struggle which establishes a verbal continuity with the past- ‘solidarity and remembrance of the imposition of internment ...in the occupied North nineteen years ago’-and the analysis of the current conflict is stark. ‘The struggle’ is defined almost in terms of a political malfunction in a normal liberal democracy rather than a fundamental conflict and denial of rights. Resistance to the state is now portrayed by this republican in terms of ‘dissent’ rather than revolution: ‘...in the politics of the Six Counties, there is no **consensus** [my emphasis] and the only way they can **manage political dissent** [my emphasis] and nationalist demands is by repression.’

The agency for change is defined here as this great ‘army of dissent...a great army of rebellion’ representing a broad cross section of the community showing all aspects of the struggle:

...Nationalists from all over the 32 Counties, families of the victims of the shoot-to –kill policy, families of the victims of plastic bullets, ex-prisoners, families, friends and comrades of the hunger strikers, political and community groups, the unemployed, the homeless and those forced to emigrate in the past and the first generation of native speakers raised in the naiscoileanna and bunscoileanna...

Hartley poses this as a series of identities and a flood of humanity that is, ‘held together by our vision of the Ireland we want.’ The contributing identities all contribute to a ‘culture, which will reflect its diversities, in our vision Ireland, will be a democracy, with a government accountable to its people’. The use of the militant terminology of struggle and armies appears somewhat formulaic and tired here. The new reality appears to be that it is the vision and spirit of nationalist people power, of a moral rather than a physical force that will triumph. It is the shades of the Velvet Revolutions of Eastern Europe that are summoned to Hartley’s side at Connolly House, not the Volunteers of Óglaigh na hÉireann. Pointing to the ‘massed armour and ranks of the RUC and British army’ he concluded: ‘All the bigotry you see behind you, all those guns and all that repression will tumble in the face of that vision’.⁷⁵²

⁷⁵² All quotations taken from ‘A Vision of Freedom’, *Phoblacht/Republican News* August 16th 1990.

Identity, the Protestant community and conflict resolution

As the peace process developed in the 1990s the modification of previously fundamental republican positions continued apace. Many commentators saw the most significant of these shifts in position occurring in republican definitions of the role of the Protestant community. From being defined as a peripheral by-product of British imperialism they had now been moved to centre stage in the analysis of the conflict in the north. Most striking was the Provisionals' adoption of the language and discursive patterns of the SDLP, which stressed the 'internal' nature of the political and military conflict as a result of a divided society within Northern Ireland. Central to this shift was an increasing focus on the nature of the Protestant population, its ideology and its relationship with Britain and the implications for republican analysis and military-political strategy of this 'new' assessment.

Unionists were understandably sceptical of this supposed change of heart and many saw the language of empathy and conflict resolution as so much window dressing to camouflage the real intentions of republicans. Even those of a more charitable disposition were unsure how far this change in language and political style really reflected a transformation in the republican discourse. The issue here is not to test the individual sincerity of republicans, but to assess how far the Provisionals' assessment of the politics of unionism can be aligned to a wider discursive shift within republicanism towards forms of identity politics. I hope to demonstrate that the forms of identity politics and communitarian analysis that are apparent in the theory and practice of community politics are also present in the Provisionals' description of the Protestant community. Likewise the analysis of the nationalist community's position within Northern Ireland also reflects these themes. Thus the shift is more fundamental than mere style or accommodation to a prevailing political fashion or the calculated trimming of clever politicians.

The first clear signs of some shift in the Provisional analysis of the nature of the Protestant community occurred as part of the discussion within republicanism around the broad front strategy, the talks with the SDLP in 1988 and the wider impact of the Hillsborough Agreement. As we have seen, republicans had previously attempted to characterise unionist politics and the Protestant community in terms of

social divisions and political differences in the broader framework of a limited historical and contemporary autonomy.⁷⁵³ As one ex-prisoner put it:

By the late 1980s there was a realisation that Unionism, while it is essentially pro-British, has its own agenda, which has to be dealt with. And we had to ask ourselves what if the British really have no selfish strategic or economic interest? If we take that seriously then we really should look at the nature of Unionism as the problem.⁷⁵⁴

The debate was limited in scope and range within the Provisionals, but significant in terms of the problems and challenges it presented for existing republican positions. It was especially interesting in the way it attempted to redefine and reassert the basic categories of Provisional thought. Attempts to resolve these intellectual and analytical difficulties were often inconsistent and contradictory, but increasingly they began to be situated within the frames of identity politics and to move from an analysis of power and structures to a discussion of discourse and the reconciliation of identities. Other strands in the debate were around the class nature of unionism and its relationship with Britain. Increasingly Unionism was being considered as a potentially pragmatic ideology embodied within a cross class alliance that rested not just on the forces of the state, but had a popular base. One leading Sinn Féiner explained this developing analysis of Unionism in this way:

We had this very simplistic view straight out of the textbooks that Unionism represented a comprador class...and it's just not true because it's so varied. Unionism is an ideology that harks back to the past but its not static...it can adapt just like any other ideology and it has done.⁷⁵⁵

The dominant republican focus remained on British Imperialism and its control over unionism. The unionist population's hostility to the Agreement has often been cited as a turning point for republican assessments of unionism. In a major assessment of the Anglo-Irish Agreement Danny Morrison argued that the '...loyalists instead of using intransigence as a bluff have elevated it to a holy principle' and that in analysing both the Agreement and the opposition to it

⁷⁵³ The structural links between unionism, imperialism and capitalism were central parts of the discussion. See L. de Poire, 'Close Shorts' and P. Ó Bradaigh, 'Loyalism and Capitalism' *Mala Poist, An Phoblacht/Republican News* August 11th 1988.

⁷⁵⁴ Interview with Eamonn Mac Dermott, August 14th 1997.

⁷⁵⁵ Interview with Tony Catney, April 15th 1998.

‘republicans must be prepared to question traditional perceptions which may be a hindrance’.⁷⁵⁶

Hillsborough and the Unionist veto

One of the key stages in this questioning was a greater stress on the autonomous nature of loyalism and the political dynamics of its opposition to Hillsborough. As an ideology unionism was portrayed in entirely negative terms; it was a ‘...frightening philosophy-the belief in a sectarian supremacy and an almost racial supremacy. It cannot be appeased...’⁷⁵⁷ The initial implicit shift in republican analyses was not so much in this definition of unionism itself as in Morrison’s argument that British strategy increasingly reflected a changing relationship between Britain and the unionists. In something of a mirror image of republican assessments of British strategy toward the nationalist community, British strategy toward unionism was now defined in terms of stabilisation: ‘British strategy has been to confront the loyalists, split the loyalists and produce a pragmatic leadership which will work an internal arrangement with the SDLP...’⁷⁵⁸

Similar issues around this characterisation of unionism emerged during the Sinn Féin/SDLP dialogue in 1988 when issues touching on the nature of the political conflict in the north, Britain’s role in the conflict, the means of exercising the right of self-determination and the strategy for achieving re-unification were discussed. The republican focus at this stage seemed to be entirely on Britain’s role as a colonial power. This meant a clear repudiation of the internal conflict analysis that regarded the cause of the Troubles as the product of a tribal battle ‘of two warring communities...[and that]...if nationalists manage to convince unionists of the merits of Irish unity, Britain will grant that demand’.⁷⁵⁹ The initial position papers were still couched in quite traditional terms, but it was clear by the end of the talks that the political implications of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the necessity for some form of political engagement with unionism was becoming a theme worthy of attention for

⁷⁵⁶ ‘New Sinn Féin Pamphlet on Hillsborough Agreement’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* May 29th 1986.

⁷⁵⁷ D. Morrison, ‘Hillsborough Holocaust’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* July 13th 1986.

⁷⁵⁸ D. Morrison, ‘Hillsborough Holocaust’.

⁷⁵⁹ H. Mac Thomas ‘Putting the Republican Viewpoint’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* January 14th 1988.

the Provisionals.⁷⁶⁰ Some republicans had already argued that there were possibilities of movement implicit in the Unionist opposition to Hillsborough and that this indicated a shifting relationship between Britain and the Protestant community. An editorial in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* expressed the view that:

If the loyalists can be broken on the heretical issue of power-sharing because of the pressures from the Hillsborough Treaty...then they most certainly can be **broken** [my emphasis] on the issue of self determination.⁷⁶¹

However, by September 1988 the aggressive phraseology of ‘breaking’ the unionist population had been replaced by the concepts of dialogue and persuasion involving both the British government and the Unionist population that were to feature so prominently in the later peace process. One of the objectives of republican political strategy should be ‘to persuade unionists that their future lies...[in a united Ireland] and to persuade the British government that it has a responsibility to so influence unionist attitudes’. One of the means of achieving this was a broad-based campaign directed at Britain alongside ‘a debate leading to dialogue...with northern Protestants and northern Protestant opinion on the democratic principle of national self determination’.⁷⁶²

It was in this context that republicans had previously explicitly rejected the idea of British neutrality and the SDLP’s view that it ‘was up to nationalists to bring about unity by convincing unionists that it is in their interests through promoting equality, then reconciliation and power sharing’. Although this rejected schema bears a remarkable similarity to the later pattern of the post-Good Friday Agreement institutions it had been regarded by Sinn Féin in 1988 as ‘a de facto recognition of a unionist veto’⁷⁶³ and, as such, was no basis for a joint nationalist strategy between republicans and constitutional nationalists. Thus the relationship between the Unionist population and Britain was still posed as a central problem in the strategy. Just as the ‘old’ position rested on British withdrawal ending the unionist veto and forcing the Protestant community to come to terms with the rest of the nation, so Protestant hostility to reunification was still posed as a product of a British bestowed veto.

⁷⁶⁰ For example in *Iris Bheag 6* there is an explicit call in the editorial for discussion on what it described as the ‘thorny question’ of republicanism’s relationship with the Protestant community.

⁷⁶¹ ‘New Tactics-Same Aim’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* June 25th 1987.

⁷⁶² ‘The Sinn Féin/SDLP Talks: Sinn Féin Statement’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* September 8th 1988.

⁷⁶³ Quotations taken from ‘The Sinn Féin/SDLP Talks: Sinn Féin Statement’.

Despite the different methods and the language of dialogue the significance of the schematic relationship between the Protestant community and Britain remained a central difficulty in this persuasion strategy until Sinn Féin signed the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. As Gerry Adams argued in 1990 ‘...it is unlikely that any sizeable section of working class Protestants in the North will desert the unionist parties while the union with Britain remains’.⁷⁶⁴ This situation was both the product of history and contemporary British policy and as such

...loyalism is, and remains, entirely Britain’s responsibility...It is the British who must deal with loyalism and who must convince those of the loyalist tradition that Britain doesn’t need them...It is Britain’s duty and it is in Britain’s interest to tell the unionist community that they must seek a realistic and just accommodation with the rest of the Irish nation.⁷⁶⁵

This definition of the nature of Unionism could also be linked to another long-term ideological thread in Provisionalism, which stressed the colonialist and supremacist nature of Unionist ideology and its aggressive stance towards nationalism: ‘Having been fed on a diet of “A Protestant Parliament for a Protestant People” in a state which was perceived to be, and was in reality, theirs to hold on to, any potential advancement by the rest of us is seen as a threat by them’.⁷⁶⁶ The intellectual problem posed for republicans by the politics of identity was that of transcendence: how could Protestants whose identity, culture and political position were bound up with Britain be persuaded that ‘Protestants future lies with the rest of us’.⁷⁶⁷

This problem had lain at the heart of the republican and separatist project since the eighteenth century and the Provisionals attempt to engage with it during the peace process threw them back to not only re-working and re-defining some existing elements of the republican tradition, but also quite consciously developing new themes and in the process shifting their position in a quite new way towards cultural politics. In this analysis Unionism was still a false consciousness; indeed was even more false in a sense given Unionism’s decline since the 1960s and the limited nature

⁷⁶⁴ G. Adams, ‘Presidential Address at Sinn Féin Ard Fheis’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 8th 1990.

⁷⁶⁵ M. McLaughlin, ‘The tenacity of the oppressed’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* May 10th 1990.

⁷⁶⁶ G. Adams, ‘Presidential Address-Sinn Féin Ard Fheis’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 27th 1992.

⁷⁶⁷ G. Adams, ‘Protestants future lies with the rest of us’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* May 20th 1993.

of its vested interest in the Union. Consequently it was argued by republicans, that 'Britain will dump them when it comes for the time for them to be dumped'.⁷⁶⁸ Thus the republican position in the early 1990s which regarded political movement and real dialogue as conditional on the removal of the Union still implicitly called into question the legitimacy of Unionism as a **political allegiance** as opposed to a cultural identity.⁷⁶⁹

However, as the cultural politics of the two traditions discourse became more significant within Provisionalism this distinction came to be elided. For example Provisional responses to the Brooke –Mayhew talks in the early 1990s explained their failure in terms of the illusion of the possibility of political progress when 'the political reality of the Six Counties...is ...that what divides people is **their ideology** [my emphasis] and the unjust power distribution of power in the North and between Britain and Ireland'.⁷⁷⁰

Desire and consent

Other aspects of the SDLP/Sinn Féin dialogue also point to the developing influence of the politics of identity within republicanism and the potential conflict between 'democratic' themes of self-determination by 'the nation' and ideas of consent and allegiance by distinct identities and traditions. Thus Sinn Féin nodded towards explanations of the conflict that drew on both the external and internal conflict models. The reference to traditions also plays up the concept of identity as a factor in current politics and in a future settlement, but at this stage unionism is regarded still in terms of being a national minority rather an autonomous cultural/political entity that must be fully engaged in an essentially internal political process. For example Sinn Féin's second position paper for its talks with the SDLP in 1988 stated the republican case within both a democratic and nationalist framework in the following terms:

Nationalists and democrats cannot concede a veto to unionists over Irish reunification. To do so would be to concede a veto on the exercise of national rights to a national minority and would flout the basic principles of democracy.

⁷⁶⁸ G. Adams, 'We are totally committed to a real peace process', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* September 12th 1991.

⁷⁶⁹ Adams, 'We are totally committed to a real peace process'.

⁷⁷⁰ H. Mc Thomas, 'Halfway house to nowhere', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* June 18th 1992.

But this rejection of any unionist veto was coupled with a formulation that implicitly recognised unionism as a distinct cultural identity and tradition that needed to be accommodated. The nation was thus not simply a civic structure for the exercise of democracy: it was collection of traditions and identities that both separately and collectively needed to be addressed in the development of its democratic structures. The formal civic nationalism embodied in the idea of national self-determination was now being linked to the ethnically based idea of tradition and cultural identity as a principle of political organisation. Thus to Sinn Féin it was now:

...**desirable** that unionists or a significant proportion of them give their support to the means of achieving Irish reunification and promoting **reconciliation** between Irish people of all **traditions**. It is obviously desirable that everything reasonable should be done to obtain the **consent** of a **majority** in the North to the constitutional, political and financial steps necessary for bringing about the end of partition...[my emphasis throughout].⁷⁷¹

The new identity elements that were starting to emerge in Provisional politics were both at the same time at variance with the democratic discourse of republicanism and yet in harmony with some of the communalist unspoken assumptions that were held by many Provisionals.⁷⁷² To many the language of reconciliation and the recognition of traditions and identities was contradictory and avoided the fundamental political nature of the conflict. As one opponent of the Adams leadership from the mid-1980s put it:

I never had any problems with Unionists' cultural rights...and at one level I didn't feel any great sense of difference because we spoke the same language and supported the same football teams...it was the political position. It was the democracy that was being stifled by partition and that as community we couldn't prosper...if one coherent thread in republicanism is the need for self-determination then there can be no accommodation between Irish republicanism and Unionism, it's a contradiction. You can come to terms with unionist perhaps, and within the frame of day to day living there has to be some kind of

⁷⁷¹ 'Sinn Féin/SDLP Talks', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* September 15th 1988.

⁷⁷² Some republicans saw the dangers in developing identity politics because it might strengthen existing sectarian attitudes. Interview with Mickey MacMullan, April 20th 1998.

accommodation, but in terms of political philosophy it's one or the other, the two cannot be reconciled...⁷⁷³

It was also possible however to link these 'new' analyses of unionism with previous patterns of Provisional thought and practice that did not simply 'reduce the political substance of unionism to its relationship with the British'.⁷⁷⁴ Significantly it can be argued that the former Éire Nua federalist programme implied sensitivity to Protestant identity and interests as well as ensuring that in a New Ireland all traditions would be respected.

The emphasis on a federal structure would have given Unionists a significant role in a nine county Ulster. It was a clear attempt to incorporate Unionists into a new arrangement...so a lot of things said now were expressed then, but perhaps in a less sophisticated way. Paradoxically, remember that the Éire Nua programme was subjected to a major critique by Adams and McGuinness who claimed it was a sop to unionism.⁷⁷⁵

Engagement with loyalists and unionists from the late 1980s also presented other intellectual problems for republicans and their definition of unionist identity. The increasing salience of identity and its place within Provisionalism as a frame for political analysis was criticized, as it seemed not to point towards the achievement of the movement's aims but rather was predicated on freezing the status quo. To this minority of critics the stress on reconciliation of identities missed the point and transformed a battle for political power in to a cultural debate. Socialist republicans, in particular, were suspicious of the way class politics, as they perceived them, might not find a space within the new cultural politics which, by stressing difference, elevated the particularism of identity over other universal points of contact.

I have no problem with their identity [Unionists wanting to be British], but what is unacceptable is that I should have to suffer as a result. My identity as a human being is far more important to me because I am not particularly nationalistic. To hold on to identity as a political ideology, when it imposes upon other people, I just cannot square that circle in a sense those politics that stress identity freezes these attitudes and obstruct

⁷⁷³ Interview with Tommy MacKearney, May 17th 1998.

⁷⁷⁴ Interview with Ruairi Ó Bradaigh, February 7th 2002.

⁷⁷⁵ Interview with Anthony McIntyre, April 17th 1998.

progress towards a common class identity, and that is to be regretted, but it is very difficult to get beyond identity.⁷⁷⁶

One influential approach towards the problematic of the Protestant population within the republican analysis had been the republican socialist tradition and practice which theorised the issue in terms of class and imperialism. As we have seen, issues of identity as such were not important in this analysis which argued, by citing historical precedents and theories of class consciousness, that Protestant workers could be won to an anti-imperialist socialist republicanism by common class interests, and that British withdrawal would open up new patterns of class and socialist politics.⁷⁷⁷ This was a rather crude historical materialism and understanding of the sociological patterns of Protestant identity which stressed the significance of breaking the link with Britain as a means of changing the ideology and culture of this population.

One contribution to the debate in 1988 based within that analytical tradition challenged some of the underlying assumptions that republicans had about their campaign and its impact on Protestants. He perceptively argued that republicans 'had avoided objective, clinical analysis of our relationship to the Protestants...because in some respects, their existence challenges our struggle'.⁷⁷⁸ The possibilities of a class based politics emerging from common socio-economic struggles between Catholics and Protestants were discounted because of the 'sectarianism materially embedded within that community' and the perception that the IRA campaign was inherently sectarian and perceived as genocidal by Protestants. It was this latter focus on republicanism's own limitations, such as its 'almost exclusive identification with the catholic community...[its] embodiments of Catholic culture' and republican failure to develop a socialist appeal that would encourage Protestants to 'recognise the mutual class interests which outweigh their marginal class privileges' that pointed towards reassessing why Provisional theory increasingly did not match political reality, even within the terms of its own discourse.⁷⁷⁹

In criticising this 'crucially inadequate...vague form of Socialist Republicanism' the debate was posed as being central to the future of republicanism.

⁷⁷⁶ Interview with Tony Catney, April 15th 1998.

⁷⁷⁷ Discussions within the Provisionals about this process were always implicitly conducted within the shadow of the movement's founding moment and split from the Officials.

⁷⁷⁸ J. Hope, 'Protestants and Republicans-Grasping The Nettle', *Iris Bheag* 12, 1988.

⁷⁷⁹ Hope, 'Protestants and Republicans-Grasping The Nettle'.

With its references to the Republican Congress and the experience of the Official IRA these ideas were still rooted in the type of socialist republicanism that has been dominant from the late 1970s, but in arguing for 'the building of links with the progressive minority of Protestants' and initiating 'a process of dialogue with that community at large'⁷⁸⁰ this debate was pointing towards some of the themes of the new republicanism of the early 1990s. In rooting its call for dialogue in the socialist republican tradition these arguments were both referring back to a familiar tradition and easing the theoretical transition forward by reference to a legitimating discourse based on the universal categories of class and nation. These transcendent categories were however in marked contrast to the position that actually emerged in the 1990s which was based instead on the particularisms of identity and tradition. These could not be transcended, but had instead to be acknowledged and worked with, problems to be pragmatically managed rather than resolved.

The Protestant community and the nation

The contradiction between the politics of assertion and the politics of recognition can be seen in the way that the Provisional describe the place of the Protestant community within the nation. The nation is still regarded as a universal category that includes all Irish people; the opposition to 'the Unionist veto' is posed in terms of this definition of the nation and in terms of democratic self-determination for the whole nation. But as Provisional discourse increasingly recognises and privileges strands of difference which are rooted in particularise and localism, the universal category of the nation is undermined. In terms of the Protestant population the use of the terminology of consent and agreement which was initially posed as desirable became increasingly important and the tensions between desirability and essential preconditions become blurred in practice.

Typical of the schema as an analysis and a set of historically influenced references was the following statement by Gerry Adams. Quoting the 1916 proclamation reference to the 'differences carefully fostered by an alien government which divides a minority from the majority' he argued:

⁷⁸⁰ Hope, 'Protestants and Republicans-Grasping The Nettle'.

National self-determination means that it is the people domiciled in Ireland who have the right to shape Irish society. A real peace settlement... will create a revitalisation of national morale and an irreversible thrust which will swamp the sectarian begrudgers and permit the merging of Catholic and Protestant working class interests, freeing in then process the Protestant tradition from its association from unionism.⁷⁸¹

But a change of focus is occurring here. Significantly, the force that will shift Protestant consciousness in this reading is not armed struggle, socialist revolution or British withdrawal, but the 'peace process' itself. The process of change has become the subject agent of change itself: the means have become the ends. This schema still bears some resemblance to the previous position in its belief that Protestant consciousness can change, but now the agency of that change is not republican subjectivity but the British state acting as persuaders and facilitators. It is a process, which involves a number of parties and historical forces, which shape the process of transition, but in such a way that its future direction is unclear and uncertain for republican goals. These appeals to diversity and the universal language of inclusion were based on themes of agreement and process. For example Gerry Adams argued:

Our definition of Irishness should not be narrow... We need to come to a sense that to be Irish is to be diverse. What is simply required is that we have a broad general allegiance to the people of Ireland.⁷⁸²

Identity crisis

Significantly, this politics of identity is also posed as crisis of identity and a product of self-doubt for unionists. As such it provides republicans with an opportunity to initiate dialogue, exploit divisions within unionism and start a process that would begin a radical transformation of existing identities and politics structured around the connection with Britain. Further elevating the discursive over the simply political, unionist self doubt is seen as the product of the history of unionist relationships with Britain. This pattern links back to the previous purely political analysis, which stressed the predominance of British interests, but now the politics of identity turn a political crisis into an existential drama. According to Adams, 'Unionists are the

⁷⁸¹ Adams, 'Protestants future lies with the rest of us'.

⁷⁸² G. Adams, interview in *The Irish Times* January 8th 1994.

human face of this very negative connection with Britain. At times my heart goes out to them. I know working class loyalist areas are leaderless. They were able to live to long in the shadow of the empire and the shadow of the Orange Hall'.⁷⁸³

This divided and disorientated identity is just as much a product of British policy as perceived Irish nationalist oppression. Both unionists and nationalists share a common historical and contemporary sense of victim hood at the hands of British imperialism. As Adams stresses 'it is the British government, which will decide the future of the union. Unionists know this and...rarely have had confidence in the British government'.⁷⁸⁴ Thus unionists are portrayed as 'the victims of a history made behind their backs' and consequently react to change as any rejected and betrayed members of an imperial outpost would, it was argued.⁷⁸⁵ This sense of victimhood and the characterisation of unionists as a people whose place in the world was uncertain was further reinforced by republican comparisons with South Africa and the failure of unionist leadership: 'unfortunately no leader has emerged to take them into the twentieth century, [they have] no De Klerk, to draw a parallel with South Africa', it was argued in a comparison that saw unionism being swept aside by the tide of history which was flowing in a nationalist direction.⁷⁸⁶

The possibilities of shifting Protestant consciousness also rest on a reading of the fragility and uncertain nature of unionist identity. The South African analogies deployed by republicans seem to point towards their belief in the possibility of an historic compromise because of what they defined as the fundamentally pragmatic nature of unionist identity of some sections of the unionist population. Indeed, republican political strategy throughout the peace process was predicated on the possibilities of a potential split within not only the unionist parties, but also the unionist population as a whole between pragmatists and fundamentalists.⁷⁸⁷ It was hoped that republicans might be able to do business with the former and along with other parties to the process isolate the latter, in the same way that republicans themselves had been isolated by the policy of British governments to build a coalition of the centre in Northern Ireland. For some republican politicians dividing the

⁷⁸³ Interview with Gerry Adams, *The Irish Times* October 2nd 1993.

⁷⁸⁴ 'Interview with Gerry Adams'.

⁷⁸⁵ M. McLaughlin, 'Protestantism, Unionism and Loyalism', *An Camcheachta/Starry Plough* November 1991.

⁷⁸⁶ Adams, 'Protestants future lies with the rest of us'.

⁷⁸⁷ Letter, Danny Morrison September 20th 2004. He refers to having conversations with other republican leaders in 1991 on these tactical issues.

unionists was the central aim of the whole strategy and explains the process of republican concessions and offers during the later 1990s.⁷⁸⁸ It was argued that:

When there is the necessity for change, they [the unionists] can change. There is a section of unionists-middle class professionals- who say that what is needed to safeguard and develop their property is state power and that if that can only come in a united Ireland then fair enough. Middle class unionists don't want a united Ireland, but they could live with it provided their quality of life was not adversely affected.⁷⁸⁹

This reading of the unionist population apparently defines the majority of the community as passive spectators who would remain as bystanders as their middle class leadership negotiate the union away with the representatives of nationalism. This was not only wishful thinking as the peace process unfolded, but it betrayed a declining belief on the part of republicans in the possibilities of real political engagement and subjectivity by not only the Protestant community, but the nationalist population as well.

Persuasion and pluralism

In Provisional usage during this period ideology, culture and identity were used as cognate terms and were seen as super-structural strands as opposed to structural factors such as the constitutional relationship between Northern Ireland and Britain. This discourse was at the heart of *Towards a lasting peace in Ireland* which was described as 'a significant evolution of republican thinking'⁷⁹⁰ and which acknowledged in cultural-political terms that 'a settlement of the long-standing conflict between Irish nationalism and Irish unionism' was at the heart of the peace process.⁷⁹¹ Thus in the cultural political practice of Provisionalism an identity could thus be regarded as legitimate if it reflected a 'genuine' culture, even if in political terms it was opposed to republicanism. This approach was frequently expressed by republicans in terms of empathy, engagement and an understanding of the social psychology of unionism.⁷⁹²

⁷⁸⁸ Conversation with Dara O'Hagan May 17th 1997.

⁷⁸⁹ Gerry Adams quoted in *The Guardian* December 4th 1993.

⁷⁹⁰ Adams, 'Presidential Address-Sinn Fein Ard Fheis'.

⁷⁹¹ 'Sinn Féin maps road to peace', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 20th 1992.

⁷⁹² For example, J. Gibney, 'It is our job to develop the struggle for freedom', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* June 25th 1992 discusses the view in the Protestant community that Sinn Féin's appeals 'cannot be heard above the deadly sound of gunfire'.

These approaches were most closely identified with the Derry republican Mitchel McLaughlin and could be said to reflect the specific political and military situation in that city.⁷⁹³ But McLaughlin was not operating within a personal agenda and it is likely that his more conciliatory style was deliberately deployed to reveal to unionists and the British government the softer side of Provisionalism whilst the hard cops like McGuinness could talk tough for the benefit of the IRA activists.⁷⁹⁴ Indeed there was some evidence of a degree of hostility amongst some IRA leaders towards McLaughlin and his ideas.⁷⁹⁵ McLaughlin's role in floating new pluralistic ideas, however, fits the pattern for the previous launch of new approaches through a mouth piece by the Adams leadership, although Adams himself also went on to use this pluralistic rhetoric as the occasion demanded such as in speeches at Ard Fheiseanna.⁷⁹⁶ Contemporary commentators were struck by how far this 'rhetoric of cultural diversity [was] more attuned to the European conflicts of the 1990s'⁷⁹⁷ and that in his calls for a 'vibrant discourse' with the Protestant community as a means of conflict resolution McLaughlin showed how far the Provisionals had travelled in a short time.

In terms of identity politics and the shifting Provisional analyses of the nature of the conflict it was the stress on empathy and a conscious distancing from the use of violence as a means of achieving political objectives that becomes most noticeable in the early 1990s. Indeed, violence increasingly becomes denoted not as a political instrument but as a symptom of a deeper conflict and a barrier to political progress as it perpetuates division and sectarian hostility. This approach suggests that the causes of the conflict are located in identities and cultures so deeply rooted that violence is not only ineffective and counter-productive, but that it is directed at the wrong targets, that it be akin to putting out a fire using petrol. Conflicts like this cannot be addressed with these methods. This personal distancing from violence portraying it as almost independent of the will and conscious action of the republican movement is also linked to the idea of dialogue and a mutual search for an end to the causes of violence, seemingly linking republicans with the men of goodwill in the Protestant community

⁷⁹³ E. Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, London 2002, Chap 13.

⁷⁹⁴ Note of conversation with IRA member, St. James area, West Belfast, April 27th 1999.

⁷⁹⁵ Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*. 369-70.

⁷⁹⁶ See, for example, Adams, 'Presidential Address-Sinn Féin Ard Fheis'.

⁷⁹⁷ R. Wilson, 'Beyond Ideology', *Fortnight* October 1992.

in a joint search to the solution of a mutual problem.⁷⁹⁸ McLaughlin linked these themes thus:

We cannot and should not ever try to coerce the Protestant people... We **understand** why there is conflict in our society... not only do we **understand** the IRA's use of armed struggle; we also **understand** why loyalists use violence and we **understand** why Britain uses violence [my emphasis].⁷⁹⁹

The linking of this issue of identity to an understanding of the nature of political violence is significant and goes beyond previous comments from republican leaders on the necessity for the IRA to be careful in its use of violence. That was posed as friendly advice between comrades engaged in a common political enterprise with a warning that the careless use of the armed struggle could be damaging to the struggle as a whole. This distancing is different and implicitly calls into doubt the whole basis and direction of the armed struggle. By rooting the conflict in identity and culture pluralist instruments of persuasion rather than military instruments of coercion are likely to be more effective. The politics of identity mean that the tools have to be fit for the purpose of dialogue. Self-determination is now to be achieved by 'national reconciliation' and 'the accommodation of difference between the various sections of the Irish people' rather through armed struggle and revolutionary politics.⁸⁰⁰ Semantics are potentially more powerful than semantics when politics are becoming battles of discourse rather struggles for power. These themes are encapsulated in the following position statement, which stresses that the Protestant identity is deeply rooted and that the aim of politics should be national reconciliation. Drawing on the an almost therapeutic language it argues that the Protestant community's

Whole history, aspirations, culture and sense of stability, have been formed, nurtured, and reinforced within a British political, intellectual and emotional environment. Despite the accumulated angers and resentments of the centuries, we as Irish nationalists must open our minds to the ideology, the fears and the beliefs of a community that has been part of our oppression. Of course, a reciprocal desire for peace and understanding is required from the Protestants in the North but Sinn Féin

⁷⁹⁸ For references to the importance of dialogue with Protestant Church leaders see, G. Adams, 'The Republican struggle is the force for change', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* October 15th 1992.

⁷⁹⁹ Quoted in R. Wilson, 'Beyond Ideology', *Fortnight* October 1992.

⁸⁰⁰ H. Mac Thomas, 'A significant nationalist statement' *An Phoblacht/Republican News* April 29th 1993.

has repeatedly stated that in a post-British Ireland and in the negotiation that would precede such an arrangement, republicans would be generous. That generosity will certainly be needed because someone somewhere will have to take that first step toward breaking the cycle of hatred and misunderstanding that has poisoned Irish society.⁸⁰¹

The historic compromise

The themes of identity politics thus became increasingly central to the republican movement's discursive framework and political practice. This framework had shifted to a post-colonial position that analysed the conflict in terms of the two traditions, accepted the legitimacy of unionism as an identity and stressed the idea of parity of esteem for all traditions. This approach discusses Britain's role in terms of conflict resolution, whilst scaling down the Republican movement's ambitions from leadership of the national revolution to simple representation of a section of the nationalist community. Other themes of post-modern discourse highlighting the fluidity of power and the elevation of the community were also present in the Provisional's political practice. These ideas are expressed in the ambiguous language of transition and flexible architectures of governance. The Good Friday Agreement is seen less as a defined blueprint for a particular model and more as an opening towards a political space with potential for growth and development.

Recent speeches by Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness focus on themes of identity, community and the definition of the Other, showing how far these themes of post-modern politics have entered into the common sense of Provisionalism.⁸⁰² In true contemporary fashion much of the significance of these speeches may best be understood as mood music and 'atmospherics', leaving the audience, quite deliberately, with a series of impressions rather than defined meanings. As leading Sinn Féin member Jim Gibney so candidly defined his party's methodology in a recent article: '...Give me the language of ambiguity. It has served the people of this country well over the last ten years. It has oiled the engine of the peace process. Long may it continue to do so'.⁸⁰³

⁸⁰¹ M. McLaughlin, 'Ceasefire should not be precondition for talks', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* September 10th 1992.

⁸⁰² The following extracts are taken from speeches and reports given at the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis March 2003 *Irish Republican News and Information* March 28th 2003.

⁸⁰³ *Irish Republican News and Information* March 28th 2003.

In post-modern discourse the nature of identity is seen not only as a positioning, but a positioning in relation to the Other. Identity is thus a dialogic, negotiated and provisional construction. Within this framework the modernist conception of a unified nation or indeed any other coherent subject, such as a universal class, with a unified sense of identity and ability to take action is no longer feasible. The central political problem is thus defined as the mediation and management of difference rather than its transcendence

Some of the key tropes of the modernist nationalist meta-narrative, dominant since the French Revolution are summed up in the 'natural' triad of nation-state-people. But post-modernism contests this construction of the nation. Its emphasis on disabled subjects and equally legitimate narratives of the nation is at the very least ambivalent about the coherence of the nation as a political and cultural form. In its most extreme manifestations the nation is disintegrated into a series of competing 'traditions'. The confident and historical modernist triad is thus replaced by the more tentative trinity, region-community-identity. Martin McGuinness reflects these patterns in his recent remarks on 'Unionism in a new Ireland' when he addressed issues around the nature of the Unionist Other and the framework of necessary dialogue:

...The Agreement was an historic compromise between Irish Nationalism and Irish Unionism. As such it can only work with the willing participation of both political traditions...Cherished positions have been re-worked and remoulded to facilitate changed political realities...Such realities require pragmatism from a progressive Unionism, which grasps the new realities and works them to the benefit of its constituency. A Unionism which takes ownership-co-ownership with nationalists-of the Agreement and its institutions. A Unionism that recognises opportunity in change and manages it rather than fighting it...I think it is now universally recognised that what is required is a unionist stamp on the Agreement. Only with such a brand of ownership can Unionist leaders sell the Agreement to their electorate.⁸⁰⁴

Echoes of this framework of dialogue can also be heard in Gerry Adams' Presidential Address to the 2003 Sinn Féin Ard Fheis:

The Good Friday Agreement is essentially about establishing a level playing field...[resulting in]... equality of treatment and the emergence

⁸⁰⁴ *Irish Republican News and Information.*

of a new inclusive society in Ireland...Implementing the Agreement means that all the symbols, the ethos, institutions and agencies of the northern state will have to be representative and reflective of all citizens there. There has to be parity of esteem and equality of treatment. Our responsibility, and the responsibility of all parties to that Agreement ...is...to make politics work. All parties have to strive to bring closure to all these issues in ways that are realistic and achievable...I...retain a confidence that if Unionism is liberated, like the rest of us, from the conditions of the past, they will rise to the challenge. [Referring to Alex Maskey's term as Lord Mayor of Belfast, he adds] ...In many ways his work is not only an effort to build a bridge out of the past. He is building a bridge into the future... We have a responsibility to reassure unionists and to guarantee their rights in concrete terms.⁸⁰⁵

The language and symbolic style of these speeches reinforces the argument that contemporary Republicanism largely understands and expresses itself within a post-modern framework. The same is also true for elements of Provisionalism's political practice and political organisation. The development of Provisionalism from a military-political movement with a conspiratorial tradition to a contemporary political party that increasingly distances itself from its military past and its armed present has been discussed intensively by politicians and academics. The comparison of Sinn Féin's reinvention of itself with the transformation of Old to New Labour under Tony Blair has become a commonplace in the everyday currency of politics in Northern Ireland.

This particularist stress would be reflected politically by the increasing use of the mobilising idea of 'the nationalist community' and the specific republican mandate rooted in popular and electoral support in Northern Ireland. This element had always been a powerful element in Provisional politics and could justify both 'slightly constitutional' politics and armed struggle on similar grounds of communal support and representation. From the late 1980s the idea of the 'electoral mandate' drawn from the northern nationalist population is used as a legitimating justification for republican participation in the peace process. Significantly these themes of communal representation rest ultimately on the same particularist grounds of the politics of recognition and difference as Unionist arguments for a distinctive Unionist identity used to justify opposition to reunification.

⁸⁰⁵ *Irish Republican News and Information.*

The mutually reinforcing nature of this communalist stress on identity was frequently revealed in the zero sum game of the politics of the last funding application or a competitive demand for resources between areas and communities where any 'potential advancement was even as a threat'.⁸⁰⁶ The limitations of this perspective were illustrated electorally where the politics of identity reinforced the idea of elections as sectarian headcounts. Despite the language of inclusion and appeals to non-sectarianism, the 1992 election results were still posed in communalist terms and linked to wider sectarian structures in Northern Irish politics. Gerry Adams' defeat was ascribed to 3,400 loyalists voting for the SDLP in the following terms:

It is fair to say that these 3,400 loyalists held a veto over who the largely nationalist constituency of West Belfast could elect as their MP: their tactical vote was motivated solely by the desire to stop Sinn Féin from representing that constituency. This situation is not new. In fact it has characterised the history of Ireland this century. In recent years unionists have exercised veto over political developments in many different ways.⁸⁰⁷

Thus one of the paradoxes of this inclusive pluralistic politics was a growing stress on the communal. In this sense Provisionalism was returning to its roots in the communal and representational politics of defenderism, which ultimately are situated in recognition rather than assertion and transformation.⁸⁰⁸ Irish republicanism has always been a product of a creative tension and a shifting balance within its politics between universalism and particularism. In a period of defeat and ideological exhaustion the Provisional leadership tilted the balance of discourse towards the particular, reflecting both the 'objective' political needs of their movement, the existing world view of many of their supporters and the base's own sense of tiredness.

This conjunction of elements assisted the process of hollowing out from within, but it was the leaderships' ability to draw on existing items in republicanism's ideological and discursive repertoire that made the process so successful.⁸⁰⁹ It was

⁸⁰⁶ Adams, 'Presidential Address-Sinn Féin Ard Fheis'.

⁸⁰⁷ H. Mac Thomas, 'Wielding the unionist veto', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* June 11th 1992.

⁸⁰⁸ Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, 80-84.

⁸⁰⁹ For example the language of 'struggle' was used to describe a range of political activities from street demonstrations and petitions through to participating in talks with British officials, which were described as another area of struggle. The obviously revolutionary connotations of the term are apparent as are the attempts to establish a political and moral continuity between slightly constitutional politics and armed struggle by using a revolutionary discourse to describe them both. See, for a small

hard to see the join between 'old Provisionalism' and 'new Sinn Féin' because in a very real sense there was not one. It was merely a reweaving of threads, reordering of elements and a recycling of ideas from within the tradition rather than a betrayal of the past or an imposition of alien ideas from without.

This fundamental tension within republicanism and nationalism remains in theory given that the ultimate aim of both is a united Ireland, but the recognition of Unionism as a tradition and the development of a nationalist politics of recognition within a Northern Ireland framework means that de facto the tension within Provisionalism has been resolved by the movement's participation in the post-Good Friday Agreement polity in favour of a politics of difference and recognition.

That this is the case is perhaps best illustrated by the partial and incomplete nature of areas of the discourse. In stressing the communal and representational function of republicanism and the increasing predominance of the particular at the expense of the universal the universal project of transcendence and unity through the nation and the broader republican project is now scaled down to negotiation on behalf of one particular and partial identity with another. But as the universal narrative of the nation cedes ground to the particular and local story of the community and the tradition then to even think in those terms bestows a degree of legitimacy on the category if not the tradition itself. However within the terms of the republican conversation with unionism for all its explicitly pluralist language of empathy, openness and engagement expressed in a desire to explore the identity and fears of the Protestant community there is still an implied problem of ends, means and aims. This was especially around the idea of consent and the unionist veto and the problem of consent and 'persuasion'.

Despite the therapeutic language, both the Republican and Unionist projects had apparently similar definite and yet mutually incompatible ultimate aims of either preserving the union or of reuniting the country. The aim of dialogue for both sides was not any form of pragmatic political arrangements: it was a particular form of arrangement, posed either as a transition to the future or a barrier in defence of the status quo. The major political and tactical problem for the Provisional leadership was

selection of examples, G. Adams, 'Presidential Address at Sinn Fein Ard Fheis', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 8th 1990, G. Adams 'Our struggle and party have never faltered', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 27th 1992 and G. Adams, 'The centrality of the republican struggle', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* February 25th 1993.

to convince their followers that it was the case that republican goals could be achieved by such a process of debate, dialogue and persuasion rather than the political structural change envisaged by the movement's traditional schema for the Irish revolution.

Making History, Inventing Tradition and Making United Irishmen: 1798 and Identity Politics; the uses of history⁸¹⁰

The process of the development of this new position is a good illustration of republican thought processes and illustrates the complexities of the relationship between the past and the present in contemporary Provisionalism. This reworking was the product of a number of contradictory intellectual influences and external political forces. But above all else it was a conscious project that, amongst other things, attempted an engagement with the Protestant community, if only on the plane of an imagined past and at the level of an idealised identity. The past was used here not only to justify and explain the present, but to also point towards a potential future. In terms of identity politics it illustrates the tensions within Irish republicanism between the universal and the particular, between the consciously constructed and the seemingly essentialist and the manner in which new identities and allegiances developed from within the old. Rather than simply seeing Provisionalism as a prisoner of history the process and direction of the re-definition of the Protestant identity within republican politics illustrates the range of external and internal currents and forces acting to shape the movement in the late twentieth century.

Whilst it is possible to identify key elements of a republican canon there is a question as to how far contemporary Provisionalism's reading of 1798 can be regarded as situated wholly within that intellectual framework. The development of identity politics around 1798 as part of a repositioning of the Protestant identity within Provisional discourse is just a further example of an essential pragmatics and intellectual eclecticism within republicanism. A will to power seems to justify the

⁸¹⁰ By which I mean that the Provisionals used a particular reading of history for quite explicitly ideological purposes as part of a revisionist project of their own. Thus, far from being slaves and prisoners of history they were, in fact, attempting to become its master. This view of Provisional historiography is counter to O'Brien's idea of the 'Provisional *imaginaire*' and his view that republicans have been 'captured' by history. In developing positions rooted in identity politics the Provisionals were quite cynical in their use of historical justifications. See E. O'Brien, 'A Nation Once Again: Towards an epistemology of the Provisional *imaginaire*', in F. McGarry (ed.), *Republicanism in modern Ireland*, Dublin 2003, 145-166.

relatively easy revision of the canon or the abandonment of cherished political positions en route to the newly defined objectives of the Provisional leadership.

The other historically conditioned theme is the distinction between Protestantism and unionism and the belief that in a 'future Irish democracy ...the radical and liberal traditions of Irish Presbyterianism would at last...get a chance of being recognised on its own merits'⁸¹¹ This theme of the rediscovery of Protestants' true Irishness and radical traditions is not only an echo of republican tradition, but it also points toward the construction of a new type of politics.⁸¹² In so doing it illustrates the tensions between the universal and the particular within republicanism and how it was possible to consciously weave a new form of identity politics from within these apparently universal themes and transcendent republican traditions. This process of inventing a tradition brings us to the place of 1798 in contemporary Provisionalism as both a symbolic reordering of Protestant identity and an historical illustration of how it might be achieved.

1798 had always been a central legitimating tradition for republicans. The rising was used to emphasise the universalism and enlightenment ideals that allegedly lay at the heart of republicanism. In stressing the progressive nature of the republican project it was argued that 'as a modern republican party Sinn Féin traces its ideological roots to the French revolution. And because it is a republican party Sinn Féin stands by the rights and sovereignty of the nation state.'⁸¹³ Wolfe Tone was identified as the founding father of republicanism and the Provisionals stressed the non-sectarian nature of their project, its social radicalism and democratic credentials by drawing on an historical tradition of Protestant radicalism that he exemplified. To republicans the ideas of Tone and 1798 were a living tradition that had:

Challenged the conservative and established order of [its] day by embracing new and revolutionary ideas, which centred around the international notions of liberating the oppressed, in Ireland's case Catholic peasants, Presbyterian tenant farmers and women. [Tone's] actions and his written legacy force us to examine our actions and our beliefs.⁸¹⁴

⁸¹¹ Adams, 'Protestants future lies with the rest of us'.

⁸¹² For an example of this 'traditional' view see F. Campbell, *The Dissenting Voice: Protestant Democracy from Plantation to Partition*, Belfast 1991. Chap.5.

⁸¹³ 'The Irish News, Europe and partitionism', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* June 18th 1992.

⁸¹⁴ Gibney, 'It is our job to develop the struggle for freedom'.

The idea of a creative dialogue with this living legacy was to be important in the development of new conceptions of Protestant identity and of the salience of identity in general as a means of political engagement. What is important here is not the disputed reality of 1798, but the use to which that invented tradition could be put by contemporary republicans. Nationalism and republicanism in general had observed 1798 through the distorting lenses of 1898 and these interpretations were still influential in popular republican imagery and readings of the rising.⁸¹⁵ Another strand in republican thought was also available through republican socialism. This was a radical reading of the united Irish project which stressed its radical democratic ideals and the proto-socialism of McCracken and Hope, along with Tone's alleged appeal to the men of no property which was to feed into the identity politics of the Provisional, paradoxically transmuting the universal values with which it was associated into something more particularistic. This radical reading was a popular seam to mine for a number of reasons. It related directly to wider political currents and universal enlightenment values making Irish republicanism seem part of a wider radical-democratic current. It also played to certain contemporary socially radical trends, especially posing radical enlightened values against aspects of Catholic nationalist tradition.

Likewise currents in Irish historiography and cultural studies that stressed the subaltern experience were also influential in shaping an alternative vision of 1798. Just as in 1898 an image of the rising had been constructed to fit the political needs of a conservative Catholic nationalist movement, by 1998 another image of a rising could be invented that meet the needs of a radical republicanism and socially critical ideologies. The Provisionals were part of that radical reinvention absorbing these wider intellectual currents and readings of 1798.

The conscious invention of tradition had always been a key feature of Provisionalism's ideological development; intellectually they were eclectic and quite open to ideas and influences beyond the borders of republican tradition. It was in this way that the Provisionals used 1798 not only as a founding myth and narrative of the origins of republicanism, but also to stress the ideological continuity and most significantly the 'lessons' for contemporary politics. The process was part of a wider

⁸¹⁵ Likewise Pearse's interpretation was a potent influence on the positioning of Tone within an apostolic succession of separatism and was frequently referred to in more traditionalist Bodenstown speeches. Significantly for our purposes the more 'secular' readings of Tone's legacy were stressed as part of the project of identity politics.

revision of Provisional positions, a pattern can be seen over the course of the 1990s and which becomes all the more apparent when their analysis of 1798 is compared to the more traditional reading of Republican Sinn Féin.

During this period of transition within Provisional discourse the tensions between the politics of assertion and the politics of recognition became more acute. One aspect of this ideological tension is the republican interest in the debates within Irish historiography concerning 'revisionism' and the critique of nationalist mythology. Republican interest appeared to go beyond a mere defence of traditional pieties.⁸¹⁶ The views expressed were implicitly related to the changing definition and balance within Provisional republicanism. For example revisionist views of 1798 were attacked as an explicitly ideological project that sundered the Universalist framework and the sense of continuous narrative in Irish history.⁸¹⁷ This defence of the universal meta narrative of the nation appeared to attack particularism and localism, but was in fact just another type of particularism based in the ideological categories of identity and tradition that was being deployed by the Provisionals as an historical auxiliary to **their** explicitly ideological project.⁸¹⁸

At the beginning of the 1990s Provisionals used this sense of history expressed in the language of legacy and inheritance to position themselves in relation to 1798. For example in an internal educational programme a series of catechism –like questions and answers elicited the following definitions; that the United Irishmen were an alliance of radical middle class Protestants and Presbyterians with a Catholic mass membership and that such popular support was gained by organising amongst those deprived of their economic and political rights. These echoes of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland were further reinforced by the programme's stress on the importance of cross-class alliances to resolve common political problems. Tone was portrayed as primarily anti-British and a recognisably 'modern' nationalist. The emerging political position of the republican movement was thus reflected in this

⁸¹⁶ 'Challenging revisionism', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* December 7th 1989 and P. Beresford-Ellis, 'Revisionism and the new anti-nationalist school of historians', *IRIS* August 1990.

⁸¹⁷ 'An exercise in revisionism', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, April 6th 1989 and A. Ó Snodaigh, 'The United Irishmen: The tragedy of their failure', *IRIS* May 1992.

⁸¹⁸ F. Lane, 'Bad History'-Mala Poist, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* October 12th 1989. This letter attacks Hoppen's definition of the causes of conflict in Northern Ireland for using the categories of 'tradition' and 'identity' which would themselves be commonplace coinages amongst Provisionals within a few years!

slanted presentation in coded language that used ‘the lessons of history’ to explain the ‘correctness’ of contemporary republican positions such as the broad front strategy by reference to alliances of disparate forces and the process of reaching out to the Protestant community. As the section on 1798 concluded:

The legacy left us was the republican tradition of separatism, secularism, anti-sectarianism and progressive nationalism. The lessons are that the republican programme must be relevant to people’s needs. Republicans should rely on their own resources and popular movements must be open and democratic.⁸¹⁹

By 1998 this emphasis was undergoing a transition in various ways. Firstly and most significantly in terms of identity politics, 1798 was now being cast in terms of dialogue, reconciliation and engagement with unionism and the Protestant community. Secondly the nature and tone of the commemorative activities reflected a change in the sense of structure and agency of the Provisional project. This too was related to the acculturation of politics, which could be seen in the dominance of ideas of heritage, reclaiming of tradition and folk memory. Lastly as an indication of the contradictory processes at work within republicanism were indications of the survivals of traditional republican attitudes and a sense of continuity with the past.

The 1798 rising also had a further value for the contemporary politics of republicanism in that it was a text whose central *leitmotif* of the unity of Catholic Protestant and Dissenter was firmly grounded in republican tradition, but whose language and meaning could also point towards the discourse of the future. In this reworking of ‘the ideals of 1798’ a number of potentially contradictory themes were united in a nuanced and complex discourse that attempted to hold traditional republican strands together with what was quite clearly a new departure. The Provisionals’ stress on national reconciliation and potential for common action for political progress implicit in the unity of Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter drew on the rebellious traditions of Northern Presbyterians—they had been rebels once and could be so again, but it also reflected a new, more accurate reading of Tone’s statement of ends and means. In searching for a new political space as the means of reconciling a divided people republicans were increasingly stressing the need to unite

⁸¹⁹ Sinn Fein Education Department, *The History of Republicanism-Part 1*, Dublin (n/d 1990?).

the people as a means of political change rather than seeing such unity as the end and aim of a struggle for power.

The traditional Bodinstown commemoration in 1998 was given added significance by the successes of the Good Friday Agreement, the Assembly election campaign and the sense amongst the Provisional rank and file that the tide of events was running in their favour. A close reading of Gerry Adams speech at the grave of Wolfe Tone shows some of these strands and how issues of identity were now at the heart of republican discourse.⁸²⁰

The speech places contemporary political developments within the context of the ideals of 1798 and in its stress on a universal 'democratic' as opposed to the particularist 'nationalist' reading seems to suggest that the ideology of the United Irishmen points towards the politics of transition, national reconciliation and equality for all traditions. By stressing the values of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' and other aspects of Enlightenment ideology Adams situated republicanism within the mainstream of modern politics. These ideals linked national democracy with social change and were, according to Adams:

just as relevant today as they were two centuries ago. These ideals, rooted in democracy and sovereignty, are the bedrock upon which modern republicanism is built and they are the political beacons, which will guide us in the time ahead.⁸²¹

Likewise the definition of the United Irishmen as a movement that 'brought together the disparate elements, the tributaries that flow into the river of the Irish mind and created a national consciousness' seems to stress a discourse of ideas of pluralism and diversity in contrast with the traditions of Pearse's gospel of separatism and a unified national identity. Thus 1798 was becoming a symbol of an historic compromise rooted in ideas of dialogue, transition and a discursive shift by all parties, analogous to the unifying project of the United Irishmen. Thus, it was argued:

⁸²⁰ G. Adams, 'Hope and history rhyme once more', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* June 25th 1998. The use of the lines from Heaney's poem as a title was something of a peace process cliché. However apart from situating the Provisionals in the main stream of politics the title's meaning was also a reference to 1798 itself and the potential that it demonstrated for a new type of identity and politics.

⁸²¹ Following quotations from G. Adams, 'Hope and history rhyme once more', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* June 25th 1998.

this phase of the process of transition is about taking the people out of a century which has been dominated by conflict into a new century...where **dialogue is the key instrument of change** [my emphasis]. We are seeking a partnership based on equality and justice for all the people of this island...our republicanism grows from the separatist roots of the mainly Presbyterian United Irish movement...we want to see the emancipation of Catholics, Protestants and Dissenters.

What remained an open question in this language of transition and the dynamics of dialogue was the direction of the movement, the degree of consent that was necessary or merely desirable for a future partnership and whether Unionists would be willing partners in such a process. The historic aims of republicanism in terms of ending partition and reunification were clear, but the stress on the unity of the Irish people in these readings of the United Irishmen could also be taken to mean something less than the traditional national ideal. As in other aspects of republican discourse there was a creative ambiguity around the nature of unity and the significance of identity in any new dispensation.

In stressing the democratic aims of the United Irishmen to 'attain a real democracy of which national independence and sovereignty would be an integral part' there is a significant shift from a simple nationalist discourse that sees the aim of the republican project in terms of simply breaking the connection with England. Here there is a more sophisticated frame of ends and means in which 'real democracy' that *ipso facto* includes national independence as the aim. As in Tone's reading (in the altogether different political conditions of the eighteenth century) the implication seems to be that breaking the connection with England is a means to that end of national democracy, not the end in itself.

The other significant shift in this discourse of 1798 is the means to achieve this real democracy-dialogue is the key instrument for change- is defined by Adams within Tone's schematic framework in the following way: 'To obtain real democracy it was necessary to unite all the people, to make friends with their enemies and cast off the manacles of religious sectarianism and "abolish the memory of past dissensions"'.⁸²² As we have seen, the Provisionals saw Britain as having a role in a process of persuasion and reconciliation, but in its focus on 'making friends with their enemies' the republican analysis now has a largely 'internal' focus on national reconciliation rather than an external focus on British withdrawal. As Martin

⁸²² Adams, 'Hope and history rhyme once more'.

Mansergh has argued ‘...the attempt over the last thirty years to bypass the means identified by Tone and regard it instead as an end product has been a failure’.⁸²³ It was recognition of that failure that Gerry Adams was now turning traditional republicanism on its head and attempting to bring it into line with Tone’s original conception.

This engagement with unionism, however, brings out the tensions within republicanism between a politics of recognition and a politics of assertion. The universal transcendent aim implicit in republicanism which Adams acknowledges in terms of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity and which he believes ‘we have to develop with others [represents] a truly Irish vision of our nation, one which is not distorted by prejudices and sectarianism which those opposed to independence have fostered and encouraged’ is also a return to a politics of recognition that does not attempt to really move beyond the particular to the general will. For all the rhetoric of a politics based on ‘equality, which will empower and improve the quality of life of citizens by being open, inclusive and democratic’⁸²⁴ the implication of this process of reconciliation in republican discourse is the negotiation not the transcendence of difference.

Thus underneath the calls for partnership and a politics of change some elements of the old positions remain that stress the integrity and indeed the immutability of the communal cultures. This continuation of political division becomes increasingly solidified in the discourse of cultural politics as tradition and identity. Thus ossified it becomes both an overarching framework of republican ideology and a pattern for normative political practice. The acculturation of republican politics thus maintains the distinctions between Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter rather than uniting them with the common name of Irishman.

1798 and nationalist cultural politics: the politics of commemoration

The presentation of republicanism in identity terms was also a significant feature of the Provisionals’ commemoration of the 1798 Rising in 1998. The commemorative culture had always been an historically important element in republicanism since the nineteenth century and the changing nature of its commemorative activities can be regarded as an indication of deeper shifts in political position. Commemorations were

⁸²³ Paper given at the Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool, February 4th 2004.

⁸²⁴ Adams, ‘Hope and history rhyme once more’.

initially designed to appeal to and maintain the commitment of the faithful, but they also acted as a public ritual and presentation of the movement to a wider world.⁸²⁵ The importance of this public image and the place of formal commemorative events was well understood by republicans; consequently throughout the Provisionals' history there had been frequent discussions on the political and presentational significance of commemorations and of the elements that comprised them such as the nature of colour parties, the degree of paramilitary involvement in commemorations and marches, and the degree of Catholic symbolism and cultural practices that should be incorporated in these events.⁸²⁶ Indeed, some republican critics of the Ó Bradaigh / Ó Conaill leadership had linked their critique of its military-political position to the strength of a commemorative culture within republicanism that seemed to glorify defeat and failure.⁸²⁷

As well as these directly political purposes commemorative activities have a number of social functions and multiple meanings to participants and observers.⁸²⁸ In connection with republican commemorations Dolan has pointed out that:

they are a chance to see who are remembered, how they are commemorated and the numbers of men and women who attend. There is a chance also to catch a glimpse of what republicanism might mean to the people these honoured martyrs were supposed to have died for. These types of commemorations argue for a more subtle reappraisal of the divisions and variations of republicanism beyond the higher and more documented echelons.⁸²⁹

The Provisionals' celebration of the 1798 rising gives us just such an opportunity. Beyond the social anthropology and semiotics of commemorations there were a number of politically important and new features in the nature of the Provisionals 1798 events. The contrast with the commemorations organised by Republican Sinn Féin is instructive and illustrates how the Provisionals were

⁸²⁵ J. Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army: A history of the IRA 1916-1970*, London 1970, 436.

⁸²⁶ For example during the Hunger Strikes some republicans objected to the saying of the rosary at protests (interview with Danny Morrison, January 6th 2004) Disagreements about the paramilitary nature of funerals and protests was also a feature of wider political discussion within the Provisionals, see E. Collins, *Killing Rage*, London 1997 221-226, and 'Bodenstown: a 26 County day out', *Iris Bheag* 2, 1987.

⁸²⁷ For example see M. McGuinness' speech during the debate on ending abstentionism at the 1986 Sinn Féin Ard Fheis, 'Sinn Féin Ard Fheis Report', *An Phoblacht* November 7th 1986.

⁸²⁸ D. Bryan, *Orange Parades: the politics of ritual, tradition and control*, London 2000.

⁸²⁹ A. Dolan, 'An Army of Our Fenian Dead: Republicanism, Monuments and Commemorations', in F. McGarry (ed), *Republicanism in modern Ireland*, Dublin 2003, 142.

diverging both from the republicanism's traditions and its patterns of underlying thought. Commemorations had traditionally acted as rituals of legitimating and occasions when the movement could renew and establish its continuity with the past as embodying the national vision and essence. As such, republicans had traditionally held aloof from mere politics and had not participated in broad commemorative or even protest activities with other groups. Consequently the participation of the Provisionals in the 1991 'Reclaim the Spirit of 1916' commemoration was politically significant and marked a phase in republicanism's engagement with wider nationalist forces.

Likewise in 1998 the Provisionals participation as just one element in activities organised by an umbrella group that includes mainstream politicians as well as broad nationalist –republican currents represented by radical intellectuals is politically and culturally significant.⁸³⁰ In that sense these events are not truly Provisional events in, say, the way Bodinstown is. That in itself is significant and illustrates how the Provisionals see themselves and indeed how they wish to be seen. Indeed there are few specifically Provisional events and those that do occur have a local and specific function.⁸³¹ Likewise the historical articles and coverage of 1798 in republican journals is relatively low-key. The reporting of the commemorative events in the republican press indicates that by their participation Provisionals are demonstrating a non-exclusive approach to politics and portraying their movement as part of a broad current of Irish life rather than a gathering of the elect in small country churchyards. The Provisionals present these commemorative events as a folk festival or pageant, which to republicans were part of a wider process of a national reclamation of memory.⁸³² This had almost therapeutic connotations of healing and of a coming to terms in a national sense with a great trauma. As an expression of identity the 1798 commemoration establishes a deep sense of continuity with the past and has a resonance beyond the boundaries of the traditional republican constituency.⁸³³ This

⁸³⁰ For example, see the examples of the broad intellectual and political currents represented in the commemorations illustrated by the contributors to M. Cullen (ed.) *1798: 200 years of resonance; Essays and contributions on the history and relevance of the United Irishmen and the 1798 Revolution*, Dublin 1998.

⁸³¹ For example, 'Wexford Pikes On The Border' and 'Large Crowd Remembers Edntubber Martyrs', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* November 12th 1998.

⁸³² See, for example, the Sinn Féin Youth Pageant at the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* April 28th 1998.

⁸³³ R. de Rossa, '1798-1998 The pikes are carried again' *An Phoblacht/Republican News* August 21st 1998 describes how 'History lives on....there is a spirit abroad ... which will not be crushed'.

reclamation and sense of continuity was frequently expressed in terms of emotional empathy and living tradition. There was also a shared sense of oppression and suppression of truth and heritage denied.⁸³⁴ This was expressed by one of the ubiquitous pike men who attended a whole series of events throughout the country:

In 1798 no one dared reclaim his or her dead-it meant death, torture. Today people are reclaiming their ancestors and their history. 1798 has swept the country...History lives on...I just know that we all had that goosepimple feeling as we marched up the hills...to the battle [re-enactment!] It's not a commemoration, it's a celebration. Everyone of the pikemen is thinking, were my ancestors here?⁸³⁵

The Provisionals portray these sentiments as part of a wider national mood of reclaiming the tradition of 1798 and making political connections with the contemporary world. As one republican wrote: 'The ideas of 1798 are more pertinent than ever'.⁸³⁶ There is a clear attempt to tap into this new mood and to show that it is compatible with the wider republican project, that indeed contemporary Provisionalism is not just the inheritor of the 1798 tradition, but that the 1798 tradition, as defined by republicans, is itself in tune with the current mood of the nation. The idea of reclamation is closely linked to forging an Irish identity and sense of rootedness. In this context there are attacks not only on the 'politically correct' revisionists who deny the radical traditions of 1798, but also on traditional Catholic nationalist readings that sectarianised the rising and denied Presbyterians a significant part in the rising.⁸³⁷ In this sense a reading of history is used to point towards a new identity that is rooted in the subaltern groups and unites all strands of the nation in a common history of exclusion.⁸³⁸ It is an identity of the outsiders who have been swept

⁸³⁴ As one participant commented: 'The youngsters today know nothing. 1798 is not taught in the schools. But now they all know. Every village has played its part, every parish has dug into its history...' R. de Rossa, '1798-1998 The pikes are carried again'.

⁸³⁵ R. de Rossa, '1798-1998 The pikes are carried again'. The nature of the commemorative events, with the pike men dressed in an ersatz traditional dress that owes more to the Quiet Man than to the Irish peasant of the eighteenth century, is an excellent example of the invention of tradition. In this case it is a 'popular' radical reading of 1798 that reflects contemporary preoccupations in a similar way that the original invention of the 1798 tradition in 1898 reflected the politics of that time. See, for example, C. Heaphey 'Dublin Remembers 1798', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* October 15th 1998.

⁸³⁶ J. McVeigh, 'United In Our Common Interest; Ideas More Pertinent Than Ever', in M. Cullen (ed.) *1798: 200 years of resonance; Essays and contributions on the history and relevance of the United Irishmen and the 1798 Revolution*, Dublin 1998, 81.

⁸³⁷ R. de Rossa, '1798-1998 The pikes are carried again'.

⁸³⁸ M O Riain, 'The final run from the 1798 presses', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* December 17th 1998 which features book reviews and comments on the 'politically engaged' nature of the historiography of 1798 which he links to the politics of the late 1990s.

aside by the powerful, past and present, but who are now joining together as their ancestors did in 1798.⁸³⁹ However amidst the enthusiasm for the ‘the mighty wave’ unleashed by the commemorations there was interestingly a degree of almost partitionist realism about the limitations and localism of these cultural politics:

...did these Wexford people make the connection...with the besieged and beleaguered people of the North still fighting for equality and freedom—those very same ideals which inspired their ancestor to such bravery? Did the pikemen think of Garvaghy road as the hair stood up on their heads in fear as they marched with their pikes to Vinegar Hill? For some, yes. But for most, no. It’s the love of their own land. Only for ’98 and for 1916 do we own our own land. It is gratitude for this which has inspired the Wexford pikemen and women, citizens in the republic of our own land.
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The hints of local patriotism implicit in this comment also point towards other strands in the republican invention of identity and tradition that is being constructed around 1798. These aspects still hark back to the idea of a continuous tradition of resistance, an almost contemporaneous sense of the past and conscious attempts to link the new styles of celebration and commemoration with a more traditional sense of the continuity of the struggle. For example, the experience of one of the Wexford pike men Bob Kehoe was highlighted as exemplifying this link because, it was argued, he had trod in the same steps as the rebels from Vinegar Hill who hoped to fight their way north by joining ‘a handful of men who went to Louth to join the fight in the ‘50s campaign, the Vinegar Hill column’.⁸⁴¹ In rural Fermanagh a memorial to ‘mark the bi-centenary of the 1798 rebellion, commemorates a continuity of resistance witnessed in Roslea from the United Irishmen, to the border campaign of the 1950s through to the current phase of struggle’; the speech at the unveiling of the memorial links 1798 to 1998 through a continuous narrative of struggle and oppression. It is a history of a single conflict involving local republicans and loyalist marches, Sir Basil Brooke and sectarian discrimination, and the threatening presence of the British military.⁸⁴² The nationalist politics invoked here are different from the cultural

⁸³⁹ For a sympathetic account of the importance of emotion, empathy and tradition in history and the writing of post-revisionist and nationalist history as a medium for constructing a new national identity linked to the traditions of 1798, see, ‘Irish history-writing after revisionism’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* September 3rd 1998

⁸⁴⁰ R. de Rossa, ‘1798-1998 The pikes are carried again’.

⁸⁴¹ R. de Rossa, ‘Many phases of struggle’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* December 17th 1998.

⁸⁴² L. Friel, ‘Roslea remembers its martyrs’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* October 8th 1998.

identity themes of the mainstream commemorative events. Here the pattern is very much that of the traditional rural republicanism, linked to a sense of place and a reading of history as an immediate and direct sense of oppression.⁸⁴³

This discursive framework is much closer in spirit to the traditional certainties asserted by Republican Sinn Féin who criticised the spin put on the 1798 rising by ‘people trying to turn the story of the 1798 rebellion into some kind of newly found cultural tourism product that is tied, in some strange way, with the peace process’.⁸⁴⁴ By way of illustrative contrast the Republican Sinn Féin Bodenstown speech and commemoratives events very much followed the traditional pattern. They were exclusively republican, placed a different stress on the historical continuity of the republican struggle and emphasised the need to ‘break the connection with England’. Mary Ward followed the older republican schema in stressing that ‘in common with Pearse [we] acknowledge the grave of Wolfe Tone as the shrine of revolutionary republicanism... we come here not just as an act of faith, we come to restate our programme’.⁸⁴⁵ Linking contemporary republicanism with the apparent failures of 1798 and 1916, Ward argues that ‘...in due course the euphoria will pass as the New Stormont fails to deliver and non-sectarian republicanism comes into its own again as the last hope for Liberty, Equality and Fraternity with the breaking of the connection with England. [We] will work and prepare for that day and be ready once more to give the lead’.⁸⁴⁶ In direct contrast to the national reconciliation of the diverse traditions stressed by the Provisionals as the inheritance bequeathed by the United Irishmen, the legacy of Tone and 1798 defined here by Republican Sinn Féin in its restatement of the fundamental truths of republicanism is one that is opposed to the ideology and political assumptions of the peace process.

⁸⁴³ Note of conversation with M. Mellanophy, August 15th 2004.

⁸⁴⁴ N.Ó Gadhra, ‘What aspects of ’98 do we fear to speak about?’ *Saoirse* June 1998.

⁸⁴⁵ M. Ward, ‘New Stormont must be removed’, *Saoirse* July 1998.

⁸⁴⁶ Ward, ‘New Stormont must be removed’.

Chapter XI-Some Conclusions

This thesis began as a project with a series of related questions about the nature of contemporary Irish republicanism. During the peace process of the 1990s friend and foe alike were understandably keen to understand the extent of the apparent transformation within the Provisionals. The pictures of Martin McGuinness and Bairbre de Brún at the cabinet table and the increasing sense of normality about Sinn Féin's participation in certain areas of public life in Northern Ireland during this period only strengthened the intensity of the questioning about the processes and the thinking that had led from guns to government. Like many another fact of life in Northern Ireland these questions haven't gone away: if anything the urgency of the inquiry and the need to understand has intensified with each new political crisis and each new stage of the peace process. Indeed, as the Leeds Castle talks seemed to hold out the tantalising possibility of a 'final' historic compromise between Sinn Féin and the DUP that would result in the restoration of devolved government and old enemies sitting together in government, and as the effective disbandment of the IRA seemed ever closer the need to make sense of these dramatic events beyond the sound bites of journalists huddled outside the wire of a conference venue became almost physical in its insistent intensity.

If the normal participation of republicans in public life has become almost taken for granted in some quarters, in others it remains a controversial and hurtful issue. For those who look at the Provisionals through the frame of thirty years of conflict or with a perspective influenced by personal tragedy these events and questions can be deeply troubling. For some republicans who see the abandonment of cherished positions that they suffered for and inflicted grief and pain to achieve there can be a sense of betrayal and even existential questioning about the purpose of the Provisional campaign. If, as many ask, the Belfast Agreement was Sunningdale for slow learners why did the armed struggle go on for so long? Could its prolongation be justified in any real way? As one argued:

I played a part in a struggle that I thought would change peoples' lives for the better...But what is paramount in my mind is that we also caused death and suffering as part of a wider movement, and for what?...I grieve over the death and destruction we have caused. Our investment was quite bloody. I might have been able to live with it if there had been genuine

revolutionary changes, not if it was about getting a couple of people into a Stormont government.⁸⁴⁷

Another point of departure is to look at the Provisionals through the frames of our current preoccupations with global terrorism and the uncertain fears of an unstable world. This sense of uncertainty has been growing since the late 1980s with the ending of post 1945 geo-political certainties and the emergence of new forms of politics and the apparent re-emergence of ethnic nationalisms and genocidal conflicts throughout the world. Within this context the IRA's campaign looks somewhat different than it did at the height of the Troubles in the 1970s. Then it was often presented as irrational and atavistic, part of a tribal conflict that was itself a throwback to pre-modern times and whose allegedly religious based hatreds were inexplicable to the rest of the United Kingdom, let alone the rest of the world. To some commentators the nationalism of the Provisional campaign was the harbinger of the future, a foretaste of what destruction these primordial forces could visit upon us if they were not safely contained. To others, groups like the Provisionals represented the death throes of nationalism and were born of shifts in underlying patterns of politics in which the morbid symptoms of the old were the herald of the new.⁸⁴⁸

After September 11th and the emergence of 'Al Qaeda' as a faceless and unknowable omnipresent threat the Provisionals have almost appeared as ordinary decent terrorists with rational and discernable aims, people we can do business with in contrast to these new irrational and fanatical men of violence whose aims and methods are incomprehensible. Whilst the Provisionals may not have yet become 'good terrorists'⁸⁴⁹ they are certainly 'our' terrorists. As such they are part of what we are in comparison with the unknown and unknowable dangers that lurk beyond the walls and almost certainly hide amongst us as an enemy within. In these lights Provisionalism seems almost domestic and certainly familiar in its methods. The events of 11th September 2001 and the resulting 'war on terrorism' had a profound effect on the range of available military-political strategies open to the Provisionals. The shifts in American politics, the political climate in the Western world generally engendered by these 'new fears' and the potential equation of the

⁸⁴⁷ Anthony McIntyre, interview with author, May 30th 1999.

⁸⁴⁸ A theme running through E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth and Reality*, Cambridge 1990.

⁸⁴⁹ Almost certainly not in the sense that Doris Lessing meant it in 1985 in D. Lessing, *The Good Terrorist*, New York 1985.

types of 'armed struggle' employed by the Provisionals with the nihilistic violence of radical Islamicists appear to rule out any return to the twin-track strategy of the ballot paper and the armalite for the foreseeable future, if ever again. The republican response to the Twin Towers attacks and the attempts to distinguish between their legitimate resistance campaign (increasingly portrayed as an historical and concluded series of events) and the terrorism of Al Qaeda was itself significant in revealing the fundamentally changed international political imperatives that now defined the strategy and politics of Provisional Republicanism.⁸⁵⁰

As my introductory review of the literature of Provisional republicanism indicated, attempts have been made to answer these questions about the nature and the extent of the transformation of the movement. Many accounts and analyses have contained valuable insights and suggested possible approaches to understanding what happened to the republican movement in the 1980s and 1990s to bring it to its present position. The account presented in this thesis considers the two themes of community and identity as a possible means of understanding a process of change within Provisionalism. The argument is that these themes are central not only to Irish republican politics, but to the dominant ideologies of the West in general. In considering the line of approach it appeared that this wider contextualisation was crucial. This was not a convenient way of forcing a unique movement or particular set of circumstances into a readily available analytical framework. If anything the reverse was true.

It would have been easier to accept some of the analyses on offer that simply ascribe what is happening within republicanism to a form of hero worship that lauds the clever manipulation of the Adams leadership or to dismiss the whole pattern of development as a product of a machiavellian British strategy. Even those more structurally based explanations which considered the transformation in Provisional ideology as a product of organisational bureaucratisation and structural incorporation by the British state seemed to be too deterministic and insufficiently rounded in approach. Likewise rather general references to the impact of a post -1989 *zeitgeist* and changes in world politics, society and ideology –as important as they are–tend to be described and asserted rather than explained.

⁸⁵⁰ For example see coverage of these events in *An Phoblacht* September 14th 2001 and following weeks to get a feel for the shifts and uncertainties in Provisional politics engendered by the new international political climate.

New Sinn Féin?

What had certainly been removed from the realms of serious consideration were those explanations rooted in a simplistic terrorist paradigm or mere repetitions of the lazy journalism that took the idea of an unbroken republican tradition as explanations for developments in the Provisional movement. It is true that elements of the Provisionals remain militaristic and unrepentantly violent as Joe Joe O'Connor's family can testify to.⁸⁵¹ But Provisionalism is now an umbrella term that includes the New Sinn Féin of Catriona Ruane and Mary Lou MacDonald as well as Bobby Storey and the alleged IRA Volunteers who attempted to abduct Bobby Tohill. Indeed, increasingly it could be argued that New Sinn Féin has become an even more powerful part of the movement than what will shortly become the New Old IRA. Even Bobby Storey now wears a suit for public appearances and book launches.

This thesis attempted to link aspects of republican ideology and structure arguing that the two were intimately connected and that developments in one sphere impacted on and in turn were reflected in the other. This was an attempt to consciously move from the mechanistic simplicities of base and superstructure and look in a broader way at Gramscian ideas of hegemony and agency. Above all the aim was to reinstate the idea of conscious agency in the field of politics and the analysis of social activity. The social movement theories of structural bureaucratisation explained the context and the terrain on which the process of change could take place. They would also explain the structural form of 'community' that they would take. But they need to be complemented by a consideration of the ideology of identity to fully understand why formerly militant anti-state insurgents were prepared to shift position and actively engage with a state that they had attempted to overthrow.

The New Defenders

Paradoxically, one of the answers to that question lay in elements of the tradition of Provisionalism and its representational function as a political-military movement drawn from a particular section of the nationalist population. In this sense Provisionalism was a tradition driven paradigm, but not as that term is usually

⁸⁵¹ Joe Joe O'Connor was allegedly shot by the Provisional IRA on 13th October 2000. Media reports suggested that O'Connor was a member of the Real IRA in West Belfast. See, for example, E.McCann. 'The Real IRA', *The Blanket* Winter 2001.

understood. It was rooted in a new variant of Defenderism and drew on the cultural roots and communal structures within those sections of its base. Moloney has demonstrated how this Defenderism could be easily translated from an insurrectionary military-political project into a slightly constitutional one whilst keeping its representational and defensive aims intact. By focusing on the idea and practice of community within Provisionalism it was intended to reveal those elements of continuity within the Provisional project. Thus the means may be different, but the aims remain the same.

The other contextual theme that the thesis attempted to explore was English's idea that:

The Provisionals embody the most powerful forces in the modern world history: the intersection of nationalism and violence, the tension between nationalism and the state, the interaction of nationalism and socialism and the force of aggressive ethno-religious identity as a vehicle for historical change.⁸⁵²

This accurate summary draws us towards some of the wider ideological implications of the development of the republican movement. If the Provisionals embody those forces-and they do-what happens to republicanism when those forces and the ideologies embodied within them are in crisis? If we face a general crisis of the political and a challenge to those ideas of nation, state and socialism that English argues Provisionalism contains, then when those ideas are challenged what happens to the Provos?

One approach is to be found in assessing the ideological framework of republicanism and seeing it as a site of ideological contestation. The elements of the taxonomy that have informed my approach here have been around the ideas of the universal and the particular, the forms of civic as against ethnic nationalism and the politics of assertion as opposed to the idea of recognition and adaptation. If we assess the shifting balance and configuration within republican ideology and political practice within these frames the patterns of change become clearly discernible. Those patterns can be ascribed to the external pressure of forces such as the state or social and economic forces. As the state defines the political and, in Northern Ireland's case, the economic terrain this model might suggest imposition and force, which is an

⁸⁵² R.English, *Armed Struggle: A History of the IRA*, Basingstoke 2003,xxiv.

appealing explanatory framework for republican critics of the Adams strategy since it accords with their military-political mindset and imperialist analysis of the conflict. But the process might not be as clear as that approach would suggest.

Exchanging Views

A recent illustration shows the patterns of the ideological shift in Provisional relations with the state. In 1987 *An Poblacht* editorialised about the IRA Volunteers killed at Loughgall:

The IRA Volunteers who died at Loughgall knew the tremendous risks they took and the massive forces ranged against them...they were politicised and highly motivated republicans committed to the armed struggle which is the only means by which the British government can be forced to break its stranglehold on political progress and peace...The Volunteers could have been arrested but it was never in the minds of the SAS to arrest them...Republicans do not complain about the way in which the British forces carried out their operation. Centuries of British terror have taught us to expect it. The illegitimacy of the forces which carried out the Loughgall killings is not simply in their actions there but in their very presence in our country. It has always been and always will be illegitimate and unacceptable.⁸⁵³

On 23rd August 2004 it was reported that relatives of one of the IRA members killed at Loughgall had had a 'very useful' meeting with the PSNI's Chief Constable. One family member commented afterwards: 'It clarified a number of issues we wanted dealt with and we will move on from there... We are just a family trying to get to the truth about what happened to my brother.' The police spokesperson described the encounter in similar terms: 'It was a useful meeting with an open two-way discussion. The Kellys raised a number of issues with the Chief Constable. He in turn offered his assessment of the decision to deploy the army against what he termed a dangerous gang.'⁸⁵⁴

These two reports, seventeen years apart, are a small but significant illustration of the shift in republican thinking that has occurred over that period. The first is defiant and unapologetic in support of the armed campaign, arguing that the 'murder' and illegitimacy of the security forces actions at Loughgall lay not in the act of premeditated killing by the SAS as such, but in their very presence as a foreign

⁸⁵³ 'Loughgall Martyrs', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* May 14th 1987.

⁸⁵⁴ S.O'Neill, 'IRA man's family calls Orde meeting "useful"', *Irish News* August 24th 2004.

occupation force in Northern Ireland. The second argues from a different set of premises entirely. The relatives' and police statements echo each other and seem almost to reflect in their language and therapeutic tone a joint search for truth as part of a process of reconciliation. The relatives do question the police force's ability to deliver the truth, but not because of any illegitimacy on the part of the state but because the PSNI are not deemed sufficiently independent. In 1987 republicans were engaged with a two-way exchange of fire with the police, but now the republican struggle has become a two-way exchange of opinion.

The implicit subtext in the republican position presented here is that the state and its servants should be accountable for their actions and that they should help the relatives to find the truth and move on. In contrast to the 1987 editorial this engagement with the PSNI accords the British state some legitimacy and moral authority. The relatives are attempting to judge the state and its servants by normal liberal democratic criteria not the revolutionary standards of an anti-imperialist armed struggle based on the legitimate resistance of the oppressed. Implicitly the bona fides and self-definition of the state as democratic are accepted and become a basis for discussion and political action by relatives and, by implication, the wider republican community. This small incident illustrates not only the changing style of republican politics, but also reveals some of the shifts in the underlying patterns of republican thought that have formed the subject of this thesis.

Belfast and Barcelona

Given the critical importance of the state and its institutions as an agency of British Imperialism to the theory and practice of Provisional Republicanism this growing engagement is not just the pragmatic contact of, say, community activists seeking funding for a project, but a qualitatively different view of the state shifting from an agency of repression on one level to a potentially neutral instrument to be at least pressured if not used positively as part of the republican project on another. This might be ascribed to individual experience of the custom and practice of working with the state can induce, wearing down the abrasive edges of a revolutionary project or the wider experience of layers of republican activists and public representatives 'who had become part of the city hall furniture'⁸⁵⁵ or the inevitable compromises of office in

⁸⁵⁵ M. Ó Muilleoir, *Belfast's Dome of Delight: City Hall Politics 1981-2000*, Belfast 1999, 177.

which relationships between British government ministers, senior civil servants and Sinn Féin become 'embarrassingly warm.'⁸⁵⁶ In advancing the new nationalist agenda that highlighted civic pride in identity, culture and the rights of citizenship the state might seem a natural partner.

If Mairtin Ó Muilleoir's model for Belfast really was Barcelona with its separate language, autonomous regional government, culture and media, and economy, as Tom Hayden suggests, then partnership with the state which this autonomous status implies was perfectly natural and inevitable, even if 'The Europeans are more used to proud, assertive nationalists and cultural diversity. [whereas] The Brits don't have any of that...'⁸⁵⁷ This phrase neatly encapsulates the way that the politics of transformation have been replaced by a politics of accommodation and recognition. It also points to how this process might work in practice. The sections on community and identity suggest ways that this might occur and the terrain and the mechanisms for the interchange of ideas to take place.

The process of institutionalisation discussed above might certainly be one means for this process to occur. There is a strong case that in terms of structures that provide the frameworks for ideological and political development this process of institutionalisation does assist the ideological shift. Likewise, the military-political culture of Provisionalism also acts as a channel for these processes. However we need to deepen the political sociology of Provisionalism by exploring more than the power relationships between leadership and base. Conceptions of hegemony and ideas in common-a form of Gramscian commonsense-along with leadership prestige are just as significant in explaining what is a psychological as well as a purely political shift. Power relations, either within the republican movement or between republicans and the state itself are only part of the story. The political psychological shift is most clearly evidenced in the approach of the Loughgall relatives. It is rooted not simply in a genetic predisposition of political parties to adapt or to become natural systems. It is about the evacuation of a fundamental set of positions and in republicanism's ability and sense of itself to define the situation-the problem of agency. As the TUAS document argued in 1994 that there was a straightforward logic:

⁸⁵⁶ Ó Muilleoir, *Dome of Delight*, 203.

⁸⁵⁷ O Muilleoir, *Dome of Delight*, ix.

At this time and on their own republicans do not have the strength to achieve the end goal. The struggle needs strengthening for other nationalist constituencies led by the SDLP, Dublin government and the emerging IA [Irish American] lobby, with additional support from other parties in EU rowing in behind and accelerating the momentum created.⁸⁵⁸

What is significant about this strategy is its reliance on other political forces and conjuncture factors, which are increasingly, defined as objective and defining features. Whilst it is true that the Provisionals, like all political organisations, had made their own strategic calculations with more than an eye to the dispositions of their enemies the success of the TUAS strategy, like the political rhetoric of *Towards A Lasting Peace in Ireland* before it, is now firmly predicated on the actions of others. Most significantly those others are no longer the revolutionary vanguard, but the states and political parties of the establishment.

The ideology and strategy that emerges from this politics of transformation is the result of a variety of factors. It is partly a reflection of the conscious engagement by the Provisional leadership with the external political realities of the peace process and the successful British strategy of containment, partly a reflection of the wider political and societal terrain, both locally and internationally, on which republican politics are developing and partly a product of republicanism's own internal structures and political culture. Thus the new forms of ideology and politics do bear some imprint, if only as a palimpsest, of these existing structures and forms, but the final shape of the defining characteristics of a political organisation are the product of a complex dialectic between internal and external forces, between determining structures and individual action. The development of the Provisional peace strategy was a good illustration of how this dialectic between the idea of passive structural and cultural determinism and the active creative subjectivity of individual republican leaders could ultimately shape ideology and action.

The changes in the broader political climate and the shift in the Provisionals' own sense of a constriction in their ability to shape events and complete their political project were at first merely implicit in the Broad Front strategy, but increasingly a diminished sense of historical agency came to the fore in their politics and was reflected in the pragmatic debates around the peace strategy. The Broad Front increased reliance initially on other parties as allies but then increasingly on states and

⁸⁵⁸ TUAS, unpublished IRA briefing paper, Summer 1994. Copy in author's possession.

governmental structures external to and formerly regarded as essentially hostile towards the republican movement. Initially this results in the politics of the Provisionals becoming the politics of arbitration and appeal to forces greater than themselves to carry out the republican project. It then shifts to the politics of defeat where republicans abandon their own goals and submit instead to the political agenda and management of the new status quo. Above all in its diplomatic incarnation this strategy shifted political agency and the dynamics for change far away from mass movements and political subjectivity of the people to the high wire machinations of politicians and experts operating at increasingly remote and rarefied levels. Ultimately this decoupling from republicanism's constituency base was to result in the types of popular political disengagement that have become common in Western polities.

The nature of political leadership, the significance of organisational dynamics and culture as explanations for different types of political leadership and the tensions between charisma and rationality in the exercise of political power has been at the heart of political sociology since Aristotle. The cynical phrase, 'I am their leader: I must follow them', contains a considerable truth in relation to Provisional republicanism and Gerry Adams. Adams and his immediate band of supporters appear to embody, in almost a Hegelian sense, the world-historical character and history of Provisionalism.⁸⁵⁹ Their own backgrounds and political development and experiences sum up and represent, and are presented as representing those of thousands of other republicans.⁸⁶⁰ Thus the leadership's power base rests on a relationship with the activists and 'the base' that has something of the existential and organic about it, almost essentialist in terms of Provisionalism. His relationship with the ranks of Provisional activists and supporters reflects the dynamics of the movement's social psychology: it is a complex dialectic between leadership as assertive dominance and leadership as reflective persuasion, between the chief and the teacher between the leadership and activists: Every party does get the leadership it deserves and leaderships thus reflect but also go beyond the characteristics and the thinking of the

⁸⁵⁹ This widely accepted view dates back to the early 1970s when British analysts recognised Adams' importance. It is also a recurrent theme in biographies, histories of the IRA, newspaper articles and implicitly Adams' own autobiography. Gerry Adams' own experience is unusual in that he has, apparently, never been a member of the IRA. However, one republican states that: 'Adams was even suspended from the IRA [whilst in Long Kesh] to prevent him from voting for the OC [Officer Commanding of IRA prisoners]'. Interview with Tony Catney, April 15th 1998.

⁸⁶⁰ 'The Adams and McGuinness double act has performed well, a kind of 'good cop/bad cop' team and they are held in high esteem by their own constituency'. Interview with Tony Cartney, April 15th 1998.

membership. The success of the Adams leadership rests on the social psychology of the activists and the broader sense not of simple war weariness but on the intellectual exhaustion of the Provisional project itself.

The immediacy of community: or follow my leader

Increasingly politics became focused on the immediate, the local and the management of the problem rather than its resolution or transformation. Instead of being a means of mobilising the base and challenging the state political action became focussed on building support, empowering the community and strengthening the mandate, which is a very different discursive framework from that of a revolutionary insurgency.

Community projects and issues cease in this pattern to be a side-show-they become the main event, not only because the state dictates that politics is now increasingly a series of debates and a funding application process rather than a real conflict and clash of arguments, but also because the Provisionals themselves willingly engage in the politics of advocacy. Thus the political process is the ultimate in pork barrel politics: It has become a bid for recognition and support conducted in the public arena where elected representatives bid on behalf of their sectionalised community for resources and access to those who apparently control the levers of state power. Thus republicans were not merely bought off. They work with what is—they have internalised these modes of thought and have recognised the realities of the new political landscape. The Provisional leadership accept the logic of their position and a situation which is rooted in the curtailment of the radical project with its the pervasive sense of defeat, and an acceptance of their inability to overthrow the state and transform Irish society. These politics and patterns of thought are not only an accurate description of the world republicans inhabit and work within: they are also the dominant discourse of the wider political world of North America and Europe which has seen the emergence of NGOs as political forces and the decline of political parties into pressure groups.

These symptoms of the end of the grand political and cultural narrative bring us back full circle to the idea of the 'end of politics'. Significantly, it is an analytical framework that can be related to earlier elements in Provisionalism and its strategies for political mobilisation and empowerment by the nationalist 'resistance community', but now these concepts have been hollowed out, their meanings inverted and the structures of Provisional politics turned back against the community it sought

to represent. Thus the radical appeal is now subsumed by one that benefits from a resonance with conservative elements drawn from a wide spectrum of the Provisional, Defender, Hibernian, Catholic and nationalist traditions.

Furthermore, these frames of reference were cognate with cultural political polarities between the politics of universalism and the politics of difference, between assertion and recognition. My central premise is that Provisionalism encompassed all of these ideological elements in varying degrees but that the specific balance and configuration shifted according to circumstances, dictated by external and internal dynamics as well as through the conscious action of political actors. In other words, the new politics of Provisionalism being implicit in elements of the old, as the Provisionals' national project abated some of these pre-existing elements of cultural identity became more predominant within the movement's political configuration. Provisionalism's embrace of the new discourse of cultural identity was not simply a passive response to external pressure, but a conscious attempt to counter the particular crisis of republicanism and, arguably, of politics in general. Frequently revealing itself through a crisis of meaning, the political crisis, which faced republicanism increasingly, moved its leadership towards discovery of a discourse that could hold the movement together and continue to engage its electoral support base. The discourse of identity, cultural politics and community appealed both to the new zeitgeist of communitarianism and the classic repertoire of nationalism.

Hollowing out the position: from Irish nationalists to British pressure group

Around the time of the first IRA ceasefire I commented that:

Sinn Fein cannot simply insert itself into a consensus and an identity represented by the northern state. Its politics cannot be merely oppositional...whilst it still continues to challenge the fundamental basis of the state...The politics of cultural identity and symbolic incremental change are unlikely to satisfy...important part[s] of the republican constituency in the long term...The republican struggle will continue in some form, but it remains an open question whether all the legion of the rearguard will follow the soldiers of destiny in a joint march towards 'slightly constitutional politics.'⁸⁶¹

⁸⁶¹ K. Bean, *The New Departure: Recent Developments in Irish Republican Ideology and Strategy* Liverpool, 1994.

That sweeping conclusion which has been generally undermined by events was really my starting point in investigating the development of Provisional Republican ideology and strategy from the 1980s. What I have attempted here is not to assess the degree of genuine individual transformation or the strength of a Damascene conversion to constitutional politics. The analytical tools of political science have their virtues, but the ability to see into men's hearts or make windows of their souls is not one of them. Such powers belong to the priest, the psychologist or, increasingly in the world of Northern Irish politics, the journalist. Running through this thesis have been a number of themes grouped around the poles of continuity and change. What has been established in the recent literature is the eclectic and diverse nature of Provisionalism as an ideology and practice of politics. The dynamic tensions within that politics can be theorised ideologically in terms of the universal and the particular, the politics of assertion and recognition, as I have attempted in my discussion of community and identity, or more generally in terms of tradition versus pragmatism.

These tensions always exist in political projects that aim to transform the status quo. They can lead us to the conclusion that some form of law of ideological conservatism or of a scaling down of maximum demands is inevitable as the gold of *ideepolitik* is transmuted into the base metal of *realpolitik* by the action of the grubby compromises of political life. This may explain the political trajectory of conventional liberal democratic politics-although I am not sure that it does-but it seems an inadequate explanation of a radical anti-state politics *a la* the Provisionals since here we are attempting to define a politics which apparently was outside the main frames of conventional discourse.

Provisionalism was always a site of contestation and its ideology and strategy were always torn between pragmatism and tradition, ideological and strategic republicanism. As its main dynamic was rooted in the northern nationalist population the defence of that population's political and social interest was at the heart of the project, both in the sense of defenderism and in the sense of speaking politically for sections of the northern nationalist population. In that sense the themes of community and identity are central to an understanding of provisionalism as they go to the heart of the project. As McCann has argued, the current politics of the Provisionals are

rooted in their origins and represent at a deep underlying level a degree of continuity.⁸⁶²

Postmodernism and post-republicanism

In the 1980s, as Sinn Féin moved on to new political terrain, it encountered a world in which many of the old political boundaries and organisational shapes were beginning to shift towards new, post-modern frameworks. These currents influenced the fledgling political party both as an external and internal dynamic. Republicanism's own tradition and party genetic framework, which stressed the role of leadership and disciplined control, elevated the emerging professional politicians over the membership. This tendency was reinforced by wider social, economic and political tides starting to turn in the direction of post-modernity. A late arrival in the conventional political arena, without a developed stage of modernist political organisation, Republicanism was thus born within a pre-modern organisational framework, but matured within the new politics of post-modernity. In contrast to the experience of long established, modernist political parties throughout the Western world, this did not cause any major dislocation or even awareness of disjunction within the movement.⁸⁶³ The pre-modernist ralliement with its chieftain/political leader, narrow, community focus and implicit clientalism, was able to evolve quickly and painlessly into a contemporary catch-all party of professional politicians and image-signifier manipulators.⁸⁶⁴ Its amorphous body of supporters, identifying themselves as a movement, gained both identity-related and material benefits from Republicanism's functions as political representative and mediator between the 'community' and the state.⁸⁶⁵ Consequently, Republicanism as a form of political

⁸⁶² E. McCann, 'The Real IRA', *The Blanket* Winter 2001.

⁸⁶³ Contrast this with the major political and organisational traumas many modernist political movements, such as the British Labour Party and Communist and radical left groups, faced in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union. Dragged kicking and screaming towards an engagement with and acceptance of post-modern forms of consciousness, many political currents disappeared or at best continued greatly weakened, as a result of the disjuncture between their theoretically existing politics and the actually existing world in which they functioned.

⁸⁶⁴ Some of these features of post-modern politics are reminiscent of the *trasformismo* politics of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Italy, whilst the charismatic neo-bonapatism of the period has its modern counterpart in Silvio Berlusconi.

⁸⁶⁵ This characterisation and the references to the literature of party organisation and function are discussed in my unpublished graduate paper 'The lava cools: Provisionalism's transformation from revolutionary insurrectionary movement to bureaucratic political party'. Panebianco developed the concept of identity benefits and party genetic codes as a means of explaining the evolution of political organisations in his discussion of Italian politics in the post-war period. A. Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organisation and Power*, Cambridge 1988.

organisation has become an almost perfect post-modern mix of traditions, forms and structures.

The growing hegemony of post-modern ideas throughout the developed world, not to mention the ease with which they have been assimilated into the fabric of Republican politics, has wrought significant change to the social and political character of Northern Ireland. In spite of the Republican leadership's relative success in preserving unity within the movement throughout a difficult and protracted process of negotiation and compromise, relations between itself and rank and file activists have not been unproblematic and have occasionally threatened to undermine its position at the negotiating table. Despite this success the Republican movement is not a monolith; the internal tensions and dynamics of its political organisation still require skilful manoeuvring and handling by the leadership.

In the context of a post-modern epistemology, the yielding up of fundamental doctrines, such as national self-determination, may actually have presented the Republican movement with fewer problems than, say, coming to grips with the complexities of culture and identity. While sectarianism continues to define almost every area of life in the Northern Ireland, standing 'shoulder to shoulder' with nationalist communities, while simultaneously showing respect for the cultural traditions of Loyalists will often require a degree of dexterity and flexibility that might daunt a professional contortionist. On the one hand the republican leadership is required to fulfil its role of defender and representative of community interest, on the other to behave as a responsible 'partner' in the project of participatory decision making and governance.⁸⁶⁶

With little sense of common ground and where appeals to universal, national or even majority rights must always be weighed in the balance of cultural sensitivities, the republican leadership will often find itself under fire for being at once too remote and too responsive to its community rank and file. A prominent republican activist from Belfast's Lower Ormeau perceived Sinn Féin's failure to mobilise significant support for local nationalists during the 1995 loyalist 'marching season' in the following terms:

⁸⁶⁶ Developing participatory politics, while recognizing the distinct rights of special interest groups, presents major problems for societies as historically divided as Northern Ireland. The experience of reorganizing Northern Ireland's social and political structures around multicultural principles of identity will inform a future paper, exploring manifestations of the contemporary politicization of difference in the north.

The Sinn Féin leadership didn't realise the significance of what was happening down here. They took their eyes off the ball by concentrating on the talks at Stormont. They're becoming men in suits and losing touch with what is happening on the ground.⁸⁶⁷

Criticisms of this type often focus on stylistic or trivial issues, but they are significant as part of a broader disquiet about the growing remoteness of Sinn Féin politicians. Rather than being only the disgruntled cry of the usual suspects-marginalised 'dissidents', they are more frequently heard within the 'broad Provisional Republican family'. This kind of criticism, reflecting a growing disengagement from the political process, arguably mirrors patterns of alienation and disenchantment that have been experienced throughout Western societies since the 1970s. They are in marked contrast to patterns of mass mobilisation during the 1980s, when Republican leaders frequently flattered their supporters in West Belfast by describing them as some of the most politicised people in the world. Throughout the 1980s, many media commentators described high levels of popular engagement in politics in Republican areas, evidenced in the culture of political murals and public support for meetings, demonstrations and political-cultural activities such as the West Belfast Festival. Examples of current local tendencies towards apathy rather than activism include a general decline in numbers registering to vote, especially in working class nationalist wards such as Lower Falls and Clonard and limited interest in recent Sinn Féin organised protests such as those against the British government's decision to cancel the spring elections in 2003 and the financial sanctions imposed on Sinn Féin in February 2005.⁸⁶⁸

To counter this apathy Sinn Féin has followed the recognisably post-modern pattern of attempting to refocus and reinvent itself around issues of public concern in order to restore electoral appeal, resulting in the rise of community, consumerist and issue based politics in nationalist areas. These campaigns, often socially conservative,

⁸⁶⁷ Gerard Rice, interview with author, April 16th 2003.

⁸⁶⁸ Around one hundred people turned out for a protest at Belfast City Hall against this decision. There were similar small street protests and white-line pickets against the financial sanctions in February 2005. These numbers are in marked contrast to past demonstrations of thousands campaigning for one man –one vote, the prison protests of the 1980s or even the demonstrations in support of Sinn Féin's inclusion in the talks process in 1995 (Observed by author and reported in *Observer* 1st June 2003). The concerns of the Republican leadership in this period were also reflected in Sinn Féin's campaign to encourage voter registration by setting up local advice centres: significantly this was complemented by a British government TV campaign.

not to say reactionary, seek to mobilise groups of residents and community representatives around local concerns, which focus on issues of crime, anti-social behaviour, parenting, environmental, health and public safety.⁸⁶⁹

In this sense Gerry Adams and Tony Blair share the same problems of legitimacy, fundamental to all politicians in the post-modern political era. Democratic political theory legitimates political action and authority by reference to the will of the electorate and political leaders (none more so than those of Sinn Féin) still base their legitimacy on appeals to their electoral mandate. Voter apathy, therefore, presents serious problems for the legitimacy and authority of politicians and indeed, in the long term, may undermine the whole conception of democratic politics itself. This crisis of leadership goes beyond temporary dissatisfactions with the integrity or ability of the current crop of leaders or local indications of boredom and indifference to the interminable crises of the Peace Process.⁸⁷⁰ In Northern Ireland's post-political climate, the crisis of leadership facing republican politicians may be of the same character as the crisis facing political leaders throughout the developed world. Resolving that crisis, whether in Northern Ireland, Britain or globally, may require more of a fundamental reconstitution of politics as a practice and universal framework of thought, than the simple re-presentation, reinvention and semantic legerdemain that postmodernism and post-republicanism are currently offering to a sceptical and increasingly cynical electorate.

⁸⁶⁹ Examples of this tendency are found in local Sinn Féin leaflets that focus on 'pavement politics' and IRA campaigns around, for example, teenage street behaviour in Beechmount. Leaflets in author's possession and Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast.

⁸⁷⁰ 'Everyone up here is disillusioned. Even the staunchest supporters of the Belfast Agreement have grown weary of the endless cycle of crises and crux negotiations...In pubs, taxi depots, and cafes, in-depth analysis focuses on the race for the English Premiership, not that for the peace deal. The strategies of Sir Alex Ferguson and Arsene Wenger arouse much more interest than those of Gerry Adams and David Trimble'. Suzanne Breen, *Irish Times* 25th April 2003.

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