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Terrorism and the Irish Republican Army

In order to critically analyse the term 'terrorism', it's vital to understand the definition. Violence, extremism and scare-mongering are words that come to mind for some. While they can be used to describe the act of terrorism, they don't define the atrocity. So, what is terrorism? Carr (2007, p.47) states that terrorism is individually defined by different US governing bodies that deal with it. Furthermore, some of the definitions contradict each other. For this reason, the term 'terrorism' is difficult to define. Nonetheless, the general understanding of terrorism is that it mainly entails violent acts, and tends to be inflicted on innocent civilians. Like terrorism, the term 'innocent' can be problematic also; there can be disagreements on what constitutes an innocent person. Carr states that "terrorism is, in its essence, a belligerent activity." He goes on to say "whatever one thinks of the tactic, it *is* a tactic, employed in conflicts between everything from rival clans to rival nations." In order to analyse the term 'terrorism', this essay will explore the IRA: a dissident group responsible for 'The Troubles' of Northern Ireland.

Following the Irish division of the north and south in 1921, individuals who fought for a united Ireland inspired the IRA's name. The Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) is a similar group which came to exist following Protestant discrimination towards the minority Catholics. In 1969, 'The Troubles' (as many Irish people refer to the period as) began due to the birth of the PIRA (The Age, 2005). According to the organisation, the 1998 Good Friday Agreement is said to have ceased 'The Troubles'; however, the IRA continued to exist during later times. The Northern Ireland Assembly was suspended by the British government in 2000 (and again two years later) as different groups had conflicting agreements of power-sharing. The Age also states that the IRA refused to decommission their weapons fully.

Regarding 'The Troubles', 1972 was the most eventful year of this period - it was kickstarted by Bloody Sunday. On 30th January, a civil rights march caused British paratroops to kill 26 individuals. Londonderry (the locations of the event) sat at the southern/northern border of Ireland. The area was nicknamed 'Free Derry' as it was absent of British rule; the British army lacked control over the fact the IRA carried weapons freely. Despite reassurance from both the IRA and PIRA that the march would remain non-violent, many eyewitnesses (out of around 150) claim that innocent civilians were shot by the British soldiers. (*Secret History: Bloody Sunday*, 1992) also mentions the following: Lord Widgery was informed by the soldiers that only those with guns and nail bombs were shot. This claim is disregarded by many Bloody Sunday witnesses. Of all those who died that fateful morning, only three were found with traces of lead pollution (a component of gun fire). Therefore, Lord Widgery assumed that Nash and Young *must* have been firing - he believed it was around the time they died. On the contrary, the forensic test used to detect the lead is heavily discredited on the grounds it cannot distinguish between lead from firing a gun, and lead contamination from the body having physical contact with someone who fired a gun. Moreover, the programme states that the bodies of Nash and Young were handled/driven to hospital by soldiers closely involved in the Bloody Sunday conflicts.

As aforementioned, Lord Widgery (the Lord Chief Justice) denied the wrongdoing of the paratroopers in the UK government's Public Inquiry. The "official memory of Bloody Sunday" serves the paratroopers' interests. The 'official memory' is backed by Unionist individuals in Ireland and the majority of civilians in Britain (Dawson, 2005, p.153). On the contrary, both the nationalist and Republican demographics of Ireland hold an annual Bloody Sunday commemoration to honour the lives lost. As

opposed to the 'official memory', they assert the innocence of the Bloody Sunday victims in order to challenge the narrative of Lord Widgery and the Irish Unionists.

Bloody Friday is another day of tragedy which fell in the same year. On 21st July, the IRA unleashed its biggest ever day of bombing. The 'car bomb' (IRA's latest weapon) is the main cause of Bloody Friday's mass destruction. The first explosion of the day was at 14:40 - unfortunately there was no warning. Part of the IRA's plan was combining hoax bombings with actual detonations. 9 year old Phillip Gault and his mother were directed from a bomb scare at Limestone Road to a bank. They stood near a car with a 50 pound bomb - the force of which blew Phillip 10 feet into the air (*Bloody Friday*, 2012). 18 bombings occurred in less than a hour. Around 150 IRA members were responsible for the Bloody Friday bombings; however, only three of them were convicted, one of which serving a jail sentence. The IRA apologised for the events on the 30th anniversary in 2002.

Four years after the jeopardies of Bloody Sunday and Bloody Sunday, IRA members struck once again. On 5th January, a masked gunman "stopped a van carrying textile workers home from work." On board were 10 Protestants and one Catholic - the latter individual was instructed to leave by the IRA. The gunman then proceeded to shoot the remaining Protestants on the basis of their religion (Horgan, 1974, p.). According to Horgan, "this massacre is widely described as one of the worst sectarian attacks of the Troubles." With the earlier connotations of terrorism in mind (violence, extremism), the Irish Republican Army arguably fit the majority of terrorism definitions. During 'The Troubles', the mass death tolls, fear and injuries inflicted by them are morally corrupt by the majority of people's standards.

In addition to the 'original' IRA (so to speak), there are a few sub-groups; each of which share the ideas, motivations and ideologies of the IRA. Throughout history,

there has been existence of the Provisional IRA, the Continuity IRA, “Oglaigh na hEireann (ONH)” etc (Tonge, 2012, p.219). The PIRA are said to have been birthed after the original IRA were “seemingly buried in 1962”. Tonge comments on some belief of the IRA rebirth dating back to the 60s; however, despite the existence of IRA support at this time, it never gained the required momentum to gain reputation as a dominant group amongst the nationalists of Ireland. For this reason, Tonge states that those predicting an IRA rebirth in the 60s “would have struggled to find listeners”.

Do the IRA have any links to external organisations? During their lifespan, there have certainly been links between the IRA and the political party Sinn Fein. Its name was inspired by the tale of a country servant - upon returning to the kitchen of his master in a worn out state and getting questioned by neighbours who witnessed his return, he would only respond with “sein fein sein fein”. “To his hearers it conveyed that family matters were matters for the family: but it was no mere evasion of a temporary or personal difficulty.” This tale refers to society and its subsequent groups, each of which experience their own strife. (Henry, 2010, p.40)

Sinn Fein is said to have made its political debut in 1906, accompanied by its political manifesto. Between 1910 and 1913, the Unionist and Nationalist demographics were active amongst other forces. The Irish Republican Brotherhood were a political body who wanted abolition of any links between England and the rest of the UK. Despite being a Republican movement, the Irish Republican Brotherhood prioritised revolutionary action over actual Republican values. As such, the IRB lost the support of a few members (Fenians). Throughout the sixties, the absence of Republican preaching had deemed Fenianism “practically dead in Ireland”. (Henry, 2010, p.89)

Until the declaration of the ceasefire, Sinn Fein had failed to gain much political relevance in comparison to the SDLP - a northern group of democratic nationalists. Furthermore, any Sinn Fein support lacked any bearing in the Republic. Three decades after 'The Troubles, Sinn Fein president Adams attempted to resurrect his image by integrating links with the PIRA (Alonso, 2016, p.530). Adams promised that the PIRA would cease to exist. As a result, the "peace process" became an "instrument of coercion" due to the looming threat of violent outbreaks.

According to BBC News (2001), the IRA have a few links with locations overseas. USA, Spain, Columbia, Libya, Bosnia and Slovakia are listed as countries with Irish republican interests. Besides from the motive of Irish independence, the IRA are said to have gained international support through their activity in a variety of conflicts (which stemmed from a political revolution rather than a desire for Irish independence). Three Columbian citizens were arrested due to suspected IRA links; though the article doesn't provide details of their actions, it notes that the presence of Irish republicans outside the UK "is nothing new". Columbian reports suggest the situation is more complex than "arms-for-cash" operations.

Whilst the 'original' IRA don't hold much relevance in modern society, the New IRA are seemingly living up to the violence, extremism and scare-mongering of their predecessors. In 2019, an Irish journalist was shot dead amidst a Derry protest orchestrated by dissident republicans. There's no certainty about the matter, but the New IRA were deemed the most likely suspects by police (BBC News NI, 2019). Similarly to the 1976 incident, a masked gunman was involved in Lyra McKee's killing. According to the article, eyewitnesses saw the gunman aim a handgun towards police officers at the scene. Lyra (reporting on the incidents) unfortunately stood near a "police 4x4 vehicle" and therefore got wounded. Lyra was taken to

hospital in a police vehicle; it's unsure whether or not she was pronounced dead after arrival. Regardless, her death united the leaders of Ireland's 6 most prominent political parties, as they collectively agreed to reject "those responsible for this heinous crime."

Considering the mass acts of violence and bloodshed by the IRA subgroups, the IRA certainly display terrorist tendencies. Since its formation in 2012, the New IRA have been responsible for a number of incidents. Members of the New IRA range from inexperienced youngsters to people who "are old enough to have been involved in violence during the days of the Provisional IRA." For this reason, the group is deemed the "most dangerous of the dissident republican groups" (Moriarty, 2019). In 2016, they killed police officers David Black and Adrian Ismay. David was shot during his work commute; Adrian suffered fatal injuries from a bomb that detonated under his vehicle. During the same year, a taxi driver was shot in an area north of Belfast. The shot sliced his leg artery and he consequently bled to death as a result. Again, as aforementioned, terrorist groups are typically violent, extremist and injure/kill innocent civilians. Throughout their history, the IRA and its sub-groups have shattered the lives of many through their merciless killings.

Less than a week ago, an anti-lockdown protest broke out in Dublin. The Garda Representative Association (GRA) stated the police lacked sufficient resources to deal with the unrest. Prior to the protest, no warnings about the event were issued. This left the gardai with no preparation for dealing with this mass gathering (Pollak, 2021). David McCarthy, an executive member of the GRA, "called on the Minister for Justice to meet gardai" and discuss the plentiful issues they face. With the current covid situation in mind, the mass scuffles that were broken up emphasise the importance of vaccination priority for frontline gardai, according to Pollak.

What other incidents are the New IRA responsible for? In August 2019, the Irish Republican border suffered a bomb explosion. Unlike other events (by the IRA, PIRA etc), there were no deaths following this detonation. Despite this good fortune, the intent of the bomb was made clear: to “kill police officers and British army personnel.” McKinstry (2019) backs this statement by commenting that the New IRA used a telephone warning (much like Bloody Sunday) with the purpose of directing officers to the area. This demonstrates their desire for harm. No sane person would want to injure or kill anyone; only a terrorist would. This affirms the argument that the Irish Republican Army and its sub-groups can be classed as dissident terrorist organisations, as they seemingly lack the moral compass that the majority of individuals have.

Horgan (1974) attempts to delve into the terrorist mind. Of course, no two minds are ever the exact same - while there are similarities regarding the ways different groups can think, the brain isn't a black and white organ. Therefore it's impossible to explain the psychology of terrorists with a one-size-fits-all approach. Nonetheless, Horgan notes that some terrorists exhibit psychopathic tendencies; psychopaths lack the impulse control and emotional regulation to deal with their feelings of aggression. As such, violence is often an outlet for psychopaths - some psychopathic individuals arguably lack morals as they may struggle to feel remorse for their actions. Obviously not all psychopaths are the same - not all of them are responsible for violent atrocities, and 'psychopath' is in no way a synonym for terrorist. Whilst they are separate things, however, it's reasonable to assume that some terrorists experience similar thoughts to those who are psychopaths. Whilst the IRA aren't necessarily a psychopathic group, violence has remained a prominent feature of their existence since the beginning.

Going back to the points raised at the start of this essay, terrorism is a term that's difficult to define properly. Not only are there many different definitions, the term can be problematic because it presents a grey area. Terrorism is an awful thing that tends to tarnish the lives of innocent people, but different people will have different opinions on what makes someone innocent. Despite this, many Irish citizens have suffered over a very long period, as a direct consequence of the IRA and its sub-groups. Whether they've died, lost a loved one/friend in one of the many attacks, or found themselves caught up in one of the events and lived to tell the tale, it's impossible to deny the emotional wounds that the PIRA and New IRA have left them with. On the grounds of this, the Irish Republican Army as a whole sufficiently fulfils the role of a terrorist organisation.

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