



The Hunger Strike of 1981
Historical Discourse and Folk Narratives about Northern Ireland
on the Internet

Richard Alexander Allen

Lokaverkefni til MA-gráðu í 2014

Félagsvísindasvið



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

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Leiðbeinandi: Terry Gunnell

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of an ongoing debate in the Irish Republican and wider Catholic/Nationalist/Republican communities in Northern Ireland. The debate began in 2005 and revolves around the claim that Sinn Féin, one of the main Republican parties in the region, let six of ten hunger strikers die in 1981 in order to gain votes and political power. The project examines the debate as it appears on “Republican.ie”, an Irish Republican website, and how the users form narratives about the events in 1981. It specifically looks at posts made on the website from 2008 all the way to the present day in order to trace repeating patterns of behaviour amongst the user-base, such as how the users evaluate the various pieces of evidence and the manner in which they employ this evidence in the service of the narrative they wish to tell. The project argues that this behaviour is not restricted to the users of “Republican.ie”, but will be found amongst the wider Republican community in Northern Ireland and probably everyone and therefore the behaviour discussed might reveal much about the transmission of folk narratives in the modern age and how they come into being.

Útdráttur

Í þessari ritgerð er fjallað um rannsókn á áframhaldandi deilu í samfélagi írskra lýðveldissinna (e. *Irish Republican community*) og því stærra samfélagi kaþólikka-þjóðernissinna-lýðveldissinna (e. *wider Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community*) í Norður Írlandi. Deilan sem hófst árið 2005 snýst um að fullyrt hefði verið að Sinn Féin, einn aðallýðveldisflokkur Norður Írlands, hafi árið 1981 látið sex deyja af þeim tíu sem voru í hungurverkfalli. Fullyrt var að það hafi verið gert í þeim tilgang að vinna inn atkvæði og fá völd innan stjórnmála. Í verkefnefni er deilan skoðuð eins og hún birtist á „Republican.ie“, vefsíðu írskra lýðveldissinna, og hvernig notendur mynda frásagnir um þessa atburði sem áttu sér stað árið 1981. Einkum eru skoðaðar athugasemdir á vefsíðunni gerðar frá árinu 2008 fram til dagsins í dag til að finna síendurtekin hegðunarmynstur meðal notendanna. Sem dæmi er skoðað hvernig notendur nýta sér hin ýmsu sönnunargögn til að styðja við frásagnir sínar. Í þessu verkefni eru færð rök fyrir því að samskonar hegðun finnist í stærri samfélagi írsku lýðveldissinnanna heldur en bara meðal notenda vefsíðunnar „Republican.ie“. Mögulega má finna samsvörun innan allra samfélaga og þar af leiðandi gæti þessi hegðun varpað miklu ljósi á útbreiðslu frásagna í samtímanum og hvernig þær mótast.

Foreword

This thesis is my final project as part of the MA Folkloristics/Ethnology (MA Þjóðfræði) programme at the University of Iceland/Háskóli Íslands and as such it accounts for 60 ECTS-credits of the degree's 120. The project was supervised by Professor Terry Gunnell, Head of the Folkloristics/Ethnology Department and Deputy-Head of the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences. The work, analysis and comments contained within this project are mine and mine alone and any mistakes are my own. Before this thesis can truly begin, however, there are number of people to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. I would first like to give Professor Gunnell my most heartfelt thanks for the kindness and patience he has shown as my supervisor. This project has been long and arduous and it would not be half as good were it not for Professor Gunnell's advice and comments and patient proof-reading. Second, I would like to thank Dr Ray Cashman for all the help he has provided me since I first emailed him in 2012 asking about Northern Irish folklore. His help has been greatly appreciated, especially considering he is not employed at the University of Iceland/Háskóli Íslands. He has gone above and beyond the call of duty with the assistance he has provided me. Third, I would like to thank Carrie Twomey, who contacted me after I allowed the members of "Republican.ie" to view the first draft of my thesis. The conversation we had about her posts as Rusty Nail has been exceptionally enlightening and I am truly grateful that she decided to email me. I can only hope that I have done her justice. Finally, I owe the largest debt of gratitude to the users of "Republican.ie". Despite some initial doubts, they allowed me to pursue my research on their website and have proven to be a truly interesting and colour group of people. Without them, this thesis would not exist and it is impossible to express how grateful I am that they consented to my project and everything involved with it. I can only hope that this project proves enlightening and interesting or if not that, then I hope it does not offend.

Keywords: Northern Ireland, Irish Republicans, Internet, folk narratives, hunger strike

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1. Introduction

1.0.1 The Project

Back in 2010, this MA project was first imagined as a way to explore contemporary folk narratives about the conflict in Northern Ireland to see if they might be contributing to the continuing tensions between the two communities in the region. Officially, with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in 1998, the conflict known as “The Troubles” came to an end. It was a long standing conflict that had been fought principally between Irish Republican paramilitary groups and the British state, but more often involved the wider Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities of Northern Ireland. People hoped that the GFA would see a lasting end to the violence, but Republican paramilitary organisations¹ have since continued to wage a low-level war against the British state. It is clear that the relations between the two communities have not greatly improved.² Background research showed that little work appeared to have been done on the role played by folklore and oral narratives in this issue and this project hoped to start to change that situation firstly by documenting narratives about the conflict as they arose in daily life and secondly through in-depth interviews with members of the two communities.

By 2012, some material had been found and there were strong indications of more being available, but access was proving to be a problem. As a student at the University of Iceland/Háskóli Íslands, my time in Northern Ireland was limited and due to the sensitive nature of the sought-after material, it was hard to cultivate a strong enough connection with new consultants in the short time I had at home in the region during my MA studies. The project therefore switched gear and moved on to the internet as a means of gaining access to material whilst based in Iceland. Instead of researching strictly oral material, it would attempt to see what manner of folklore could be found online.

¹ The Republican paramilitary organisations which continue to fight are often labelled “dissident Republicans” as they do not agree with Sinn Féin, the GFA or the current peace process. This distinction will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

² For more information about relations between the two communities, see the works discussed in Chapter Two; the example thread in Chapter 4.0.4; and Chapter 5.0.4.

During the initial period of research, I came into contact with a person, via the internet, who identified themselves as being an Irish Republican, but did not want to take part in the research. They were, however, kind enough to provide the web-addresses of a number of Irish Republican websites where I might find willing participants. When this project moved its focus to material on the internet, these links proved invaluable and provided the first step to choosing an appropriate field-site to study. It was in this manner that the project came to focus on “Republican.ie”, an Irish Republican website which seemed to be fairly active.³ On finding the website and being granted permission to pursue research there, the project moved on to number of questions it originally hoped to answer:

1. Do Northern Irish Republicans tell stories about The Troubles? What form do they take and what meaning do they have for Republicans?
2. Is there a difference between the legends told online and those told in person? If so, what differences can be found and why are the narratives different?
3. As an added consideration, do these legends share any characteristics with legends told in other areas with high levels of conflict, such as the Balkan region or Israel and Palestine?

It was easy enough to answer Question 1: Northern Irish Republicans certainly do tell stories about The Troubles, just like they have always told stories about their history; they even have a specialised forum for it on “Republican.ie”. The stories take the form of personal experience narratives, friend-of-a-friend tales and other genres and the meaning and role these narratives have is different for each Republican. As will be discussed later in Chapter Three, the users on “Republican.ie” forbade me from conducting interviews with them offline and so it is not possible to answer Question 2. Due to a subsequent shift in the project’s focus and a need to limit the project’s focus, Question 3 currently remains unanswered, but will hopefully form the basis of later projects.

The shift in focus was due to the amount of material found on the website. It was clear through reading only a few discussions that the members of the website most certainly did tell folk narratives⁴ on the website and that the site could prove a huge source of material for any

³ See Chapter Four for more details about the website.

⁴ The term “folk narratives” was vague by necessity in order to avoid limiting any prospective material. In short, a folk narrative is any narrative a folk group tells and a folk group is “*any group of people whatsoever* who share at least one common factor” (Dundes 1978: 7, italics in the original). For more information about folk groups

project. With this in mind, the project began to look at the material on the website with the following questions in mind:

1. What kinds of stories do Republicans tell online?
2. Does the internet influence what they post?
3. Do the stories relate to the conflict in Northern Irish society?
4. What do these stories say about the Republican community and its relations with other communities in Northern Ireland?

As can be seen above, Questions 1 and 3 had already been partially answered as part of the initial period of research: Republicans on the website tell a range of stories in their online discussions and these stories often relate to the conflict. Question 4 has since been dropped from the project because there was simply not enough space and Question 2 has been subsumed under the current research questions discussed below.

What, then, does this project actually deal with? The two sets of research questions noted above proved to be mere guiding posts along the way to this project. Once the material had been discovered, it was necessary to find a central topic which resonated with Folkloristics, the academic discipline, and which was important to the community that told the stories. Over the course of the initial period of research of the discussions on “Republican.ie”, which commenced after I had created an account on the website and received permission to observe the users, it was noticed that one topic kept appearing again and again over the years: the hunger strike of 1981. Most topics were discussed once or twice, but this issue has been discussed repeatedly from 2008 up until the present day. It was clear that this was a very important topic for the community and that it might be worth investigating. What came to light was a debate that has been ongoing in the Republican community since 2005 when Richard O’Rawe published a book called *Blanketmen* (O’Rawe 2005). As Chapter Six discusses in more detail, O’Rawe alleged that Sinn Féin, the main Republican party in Northern Ireland, had allowed six of ten men to die during a hunger strike in 1981 in order to gain more votes in elections. What seemed to be at the heart of the debate was the very narrative which the Republican community told about this particular hunger strike: was the

and the narratives they tell, see Bottigheimer 1989; Dégh 2001: 23-97; Dundes 1978; Gunnell 2008; Harris-Lopez 2003; Honko 1989a; and 1989b; Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1981; Lüthi 1986; Noyes 2003; Oring 1986; Sims & Stephens 2005: 1-63; Tangherlini 1994: 3-22; Wolf-Knuts 1999. As this project discusses narratives about a historical event, the above list focusses more on legends and similar narratives rather than fairy/wonder-tales, but does provide a number of works which discusses both.

community then to endorse O’Rawe’s new narrative and accept that they had been betrayed or were they to continue to accept Sinn Féin’s “official” narrative⁵ and brand O’Rawe a liar? Not only was this topic important to the community, but it also seemed to revolve around something which might conceivably be defined as “folklore”, in other words unofficial narratives that were passed on informally within the community. The project immediately became a case-study concerning the online community’s narratives which focussed on the aforementioned debate and hoped to answer the following questions:

1. Can this debate be considered to involve folklore?
2. Does this debate tell us anything about the formation of folk narratives in communities?
3. As the debate involves a historical event, which has been documented, is there any interplay between Historical discourses⁶ about the event and folk discourses about it?
4. Might the internet have had any influence on this debate? If so, in what way?
5. What does the debate surrounding the hunger strike of 1981 tell us about the Irish Republican community?
6. Can we safely assume that the online community on “Republican.ie” is representative of the greater Irish Republican community in Northern Ireland?
7. Does this research project have any relevance for Northern Ireland and the ongoing community tensions and violence in the region? If so, what?

Naturally, this project cannot simply jump straight to the analysis of the material and hope to adequately explain its conclusions. Folkloristics is a discipline which requires everything be placed into its proper context because it is not possible to truly understand something without considering its context (Dundes 1980: 22). Moreover, the material itself is often highly confusing to anyone who does not have any grounding in either Northern Irish

⁵ “Sinn Féin’s narrative” denotes the original version of the narrative which Sinn Féin continues to endorse to this day. Chapter 6.2 will deal with this in more detail and explain the nature of O’Rawe’s allegations in relation to Sinn Féin’s narrative.

⁶ In this project “History” is used to denote the academic discipline and its methods and works, whilst “history” is used to mean any narrative about an event in the past. Chapter 7.0.3 will discuss this distinction in more detail.

history or events of the hunger strike of 1981. Therefore this thesis will first prepare the way for the analysis through a number of chapters aimed at providing the necessary background information. Chapter Two will review previous research on Northern Ireland. It will primarily look at work published by folklorists or any work that might conceivably fall under the rubric of folklore, such as public traditions, cultural heritage, rituals and similar cultural phenomena. It will, however, also briefly review relevant research conducted by historians and political scientists as they can provide the best background information about the Republican community and the conflict itself. Chapter Three will discuss the project's methodology. This will include a fuller explanation of why "Republican.ie" was chosen; a discussion about the nature of online research; the ethical issues faced as part of the research; and the theoretical frameworks in which the case-study will work. Chapter Four will then provide an ethnographic description of the website itself, detailing how it works, its user-base and an example of the kind of discussions which take place there. Chapter Five will provide a brief overview of Northern Irish history, starting roughly at the beginning of the 20th century and following it through to the modern day. These four chapters are meant to provide background information for the case-study in Chapter Six.

As Chapter Six involves the case-study in its entirety, it is by necessity rather long and due to this it has been separated into six sub-chapters,⁷ the first of which will serve as an introduction to the chapter. The second sub-chapter will attempt to provide a coherent chronicle of events surrounding the hunger strike in 1981, providing the reader with enough background knowledge to understand the various details discussed in the analysis that follows. The third sub-chapter will then explore the increasing legendary status of the ten hunger strikers for the Republican community in Northern Ireland and attempt to show the reasons for this status. The fourth sub-chapter contains the analysis itself and will cover various aspects of the online debate in a chronological order, starting with the discussion in 2008 and ending with the present status in 2014. The fifth and final sub-chapter before the conclusion will review the effects of hindsight on the research and debate. The sixth and final sub-chapter then serves as a brief conclusion to the chapter itself, but not the project.

The project's conclusion is found in Chapter Seven which will draw together the various points discussed in Chapter Six, expand on them and attempt to answer the research questions listed above. Whilst it may not be possible to answer every question over the course of the thesis, Chapter Seven will attempt to draw together the various answers which have

⁷ Headings have been formatted to make the different types of chapter-division clear. Sub-chapter-headings are in bold; section-headings are italicised and underlined; and sub-section-headings are italicised.

been found to suggest some overall conclusions. This thesis hopes to provide a worthwhile contribution to the growing body of research on Northern Ireland and to increase our understanding not only of the role of the internet in modern political discussions, but also of the Republican community and the way in which it creates, uses and passes on its folklore.

In order to help the reader decide whether the thesis has achieved these goals, there will also be three appendices after the conclusion. Appendix A will contain a copy of the discussion with the users which occurred after they were given a copy of the draft of this thesis. This appendix is intended to provide the users with a more active voice within this project, but the thread quoted in the appendix was originally made with the intention of giving them the opportunity to correct any mistakes in the thesis so that it would not misrepresent them. Appendix B will include any and all material from the website which is referenced throughout the project, but not directly or fully quoted. As Chapter Four will explain, the website is partially closed to people who are not registered users, which makes it harder for the reader to view the material. To give the reader full access to the material without needing to register to the website, I felt it was best to put it in an appendix. The final appendix, Appendix C, will contain a copy of the questionnaire discussed in Chapter Three so that the reader can see exactly what was asked and in what manner. By providing all this material, hopefully this thesis, its methods and results will be as open and honest as possible so that the reader might be able to evaluate this project and its worth fairly.

1.0.2 The Author

To be open and honest requires more than just providing sources, methods and the community's response to the project, however. It also requires that the reader be aware of any possible bias which may have had an influence on my approach to the topic, the debates or the material. It is perhaps not possible to give a full account of all these possible biases, but this section hopes to go some way towards this goal by providing some background information about me. It will include a brief discussion of my family, my political views and my motivations behind this research. If any bias is to be found in my work, then the most likely source of that bias will be found in the information provided in this section.

My name is Richard Alexander Allen and I was raised as a loose member of the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community. My father is strongly Unionist and my mother could be described as either a weak Unionist or a weak Nationalist, but her main political emphasis is on building better relations between the two communities and ending the violence rather than Unionism or Nationalism. Politically I would be considered a Constitutional Irish

Nationalist. I personally believe that Ireland should be united, not due to any desire for a union between nation and territory, but rather because I believe that the separation of the two states was illegal and undemocratic, in that it was against the will of the majority of the island. I do not have any particular need to see a unified Ireland which is either independent or a socialist republic,⁸ although there are merits to either of these as well as flaws. Unification could also occur under the European Union, in a union with Britain or some other union which has yet to be imagined. I do not believe that an armed campaign can successfully achieve a united Ireland and I do not support the ongoing campaign by the remaining Republican paramilitary organisations. In my opinion, reunification can only come through electoral means and with the full consent of both the people of Northern Ireland and the people of Ireland.⁹ The issue is, however, not high on my list of priorities and I do not think that it should remain an issue in a world where borders and boundaries are slowly disappearing between countries and nations.

This is probably my main motivation behind my interest in both the conflict and the folklore surrounding it. As a child, I grew up in the countryside, isolated from many of the problems and only experienced them whenever I went into Belfast or Lisburn. I can remember having my car searched by soldiers as my mother drove me into school and being caught somewhere due to a bomb-scare. There were children in my primary school who used to run up and tell us to say “tree” or “haitch” and then punch us and laugh because we were “fenians” or “taigs”,¹⁰ both derogatory terms for Catholics in Ireland. Today I see notifications in my Facebook feed about “security alerts”, another term for bomb-scares, in areas where my friends live; about riots after the Orange marches on 12th July or over the British flag; or about attacks on the police. For all that The Troubles are supposedly over, Northern Ireland remains as divided as it ever was and the two major communities mostly remain segregated. I personally remain predominantly isolated from it even when I return home not least because my parents have always kept me isolated from it and as far as I am aware, none of my close friends are involved in any political activities. Due to this isolation, I am mostly unaware of what exactly either community is told or how their worldviews impact on their relations with the members of the other community. As a folklorist, I am

⁸ A unified Ireland is traditionally imagined as either merely a unified country or more specifically a 32 county, socialist republic.

⁹ Unless specified otherwise, “Ireland” refers to the country otherwise known as the Republic of Ireland. Ireland is the official name of the state, being a translation of “Éire” and so it shall be the term used for that country. If needed, the term “island of Ireland” will be used for the geographical entity and “united Ireland” used to describe an Irish state which might be formed by a united Ireland and Northern Ireland.

¹⁰ This behaviour is based on the idea that Catholics in Northern Ireland have an accent similar to the Southern Irish accent, which is in many ways different to the Northern Irish accent.

predominantly interested in beliefs and narratives and the role folklore in general plays in these community relations and would like to investigate how folklore may play a part in exacerbating them. I am essentially interested in how things work and I feel no need to make any personal stand or be directly involved.¹¹

As noted at the start of this section, it was felt important to give some details about my own personal background before dealing with such a politically loaded topic as The Troubles, as this thesis could have ramifications for both the community studied and the wider community in Northern Ireland. At best, the above information should indicate that I feel no reason to attack the Republican community and in fact have much in common with them. At worst, I am slightly less sympathetic to their cause than some others might be. Hopefully no bias will become apparent in the thesis, which will attempt to remain as objective as possible.

1.0.3 A Note about Terminology

I write “as objective as possible” above because it can be exceptionally difficult to achieve either actual objectivity or the appearance of objectivity with regards to Northern Ireland. When dealing with any topic about the region, one wades into a literal morass of conflicting terms many of which are politically loaded and as treacherous as a footing in a bog. The name of the region and towns can be used to determine from which side of the divide the community speaker is and so merely from the use of a particular wording it can be inferred that one supports one side or the other. This section will cover the two most important issues surrounding terminology in Northern Ireland: the names used for the region and the name of Derry/Londonderry. In addition to this, it will discuss two other issues unrelated to the problem of objectivity, but which nevertheless require explanation. The first of these issues is the names of the two major communities in Northern Ireland and the second is the nature of academic terminology and the vernacular understanding of this terminology. In this way, this section should cover any terminology which might cause confusion or insult.

As mentioned above, the way in which one refers to the region¹² automatically designates them as being a follower of either Unionism/Loyalism or Nationalism/Republicanism. Indeed, there is really no neutral term available as most terms are problematic for at least one community. The most commonly used terms are “Northern Ireland”, “the North of Ireland”, “Ulster”, “the Occupied Six”, and “the Six”. To the

¹¹ This issue is further discussed in Chapter 7.0.2 where I discuss my own position towards O’Rawe’s claims.

¹² In a similar fashion, whether one refers to Northern Ireland as a country or not can also identify which side they fall on. Republicans and Nationalists generally reject Northern Ireland as a legitimate country. This issue plays a part in the attitude of many Republicans towards Sinn Féin which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community, “Ulster” and “Northern Ireland” are terms which inherently support the idea that the region is British rather than Irish. “Ulster” is the term used by the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community to refer to the region and contains undertones of exclusionism within it, not least because the term “Ulsterman” is most often connected to Protestants rather than Catholics (*cf.* Moore & Sanders 2002).¹³ “Northern Ireland” is the name the British state gave the region and so to use it suggest one recognises the legitimacy of its status as a country within the United Kingdom and thus Britain’s rule over it. For these reasons, the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community rejects the term “Ulster” and often rejects the term “Northern Ireland”, whilst Irish Republicans vocally reject both. In a similar fashion, the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community objects to the terms preferred by the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community: “the North of Ireland”, “the Occupied Six” and “the Six”. The first of these terms rejects Northern Ireland’s existence as an entity independent of Ireland, whilst the last two refer to the idea that the six counties which form Northern Ireland are territories of Ireland under occupation by a foreign power, in this case Britain. As may have already been noticed, this project uses the term “Northern Ireland”; this is not out of any latent Unionist sentiment, but rather because it provides a recognisable and predefined geographical area, one in which the majority of The Troubles took place and in which the continuing tensions between the two communities remain. Unlike “Ulster”, which includes territory outside Northern Ireland; “the North of Ireland”, which could include parts of Ireland; or “the Occupied Six”/“the Six”, which are overtly political, the name “Northern Ireland” is the least problematic of the choices. Essentially, it seems to be the best of a bad bunch.

In a similar fashion, the name of the city Derry/Londonderry, which will be referred to in this form throughout the project, is likewise highly contentious and like the names for Northern Ireland, how a person refers to the city can often be taken as revealing their political allegiance. The Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community refers to the city as “Derry” whilst the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community prefers the name “Londonderry”. The original name in Irish was “Doire”, which is anglicised to “Derry”, but due to the city’s strong links to trade associations in the City of London, its name was eventually changed officially to “Londonderry”. The term “Derry/Londonderry” helps to avoid this issue by privileging

¹³ Ulster is also one of the four provinces of Ireland and is made up of nine counties, six of which form Northern Ireland and the other three remain part of Ireland. The fact that three counties remain in Ireland is another reason why the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community dislike the name “Ulster”.

neither name, but instead combines both in an attempt to give recognition to both communities. It is for this reason it has been chosen in this thesis.

Whilst the names of the country and Derry/Londonderry may prove contentious within Northern Ireland, general issues also exist about how to refer to the two major communities in the region. Traditionally the conflict is imagined as one between the Catholic and Protestant communities who are represented by Nationalism and Republicanism on the one hand and Unionism and Loyalism on the other hand. This often means that the two communities are just called “the Protestant community” and “the Catholic community”, which gives the impression of a religious war, when it is, in fact, an ethno-political one.¹⁴ If one prefers to refer to the communities by their political ideology, however, it ignores both the cultural milieu in which the adherents of the ideologies live and the cultural concepts on which the ideologies may draw. Irish Republicanism, for example, has been heavily influenced by Irish Catholic modes of thinking and this might be forgotten if one does not acknowledge the wider community in which Irish Republicanism exists.¹⁵ The reverse is equally true and Republican concepts and views will affect non-Republican Catholics for the same reasons. It may have already been noticed that hitherto the terms “the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community” and “the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community” have been used in the thesis and they will continue to be used. I feel that these two terms offer the best compromise to the issue described above. Neither of these terms favours either religion or political ideology, but emphasises the fact that both communities are formed by a combination of both. Nevertheless, this project deals with Irish Republicans and it should be noted that they can be of any religion, ethnicity or nationality. So whilst the two larger communities may be referred to as “Catholic/Nationalist/Republican” and “Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist”, the community studied as part of this project will be referred to interchangeably as either “Irish Republican” or “Republican” in recognition that the political community is bound to neither the Catholic community nor the Irish nationality.¹⁶

¹⁴ This historical relation between the political ideologies and the religious communities has had the effect that the religious label has come to signify ethnic identity in Northern Ireland more often than religious belief. Calling oneself “Catholic” or “Protestant” demarcates the cultural sphere in which one has spent one’s life. In a large number of areas of Northern Irish life these two spheres do not meet, although this is slowly changing. Thus, I am a Protestant despite the fact I am actually a neo-pagan religiously. This designation nonetheless suggests to people that I do not speak Irish, play Gaelic football or Hurling and may have a different outlook on certain topics, such as policing or the IRA. My political position will also be assumed to be based on this identity for the reasons discussed above and unless corrected, people will generally assume that I am either a Unionist or a Loyalist. I similarly expect Catholics to be Nationalist or Republican more often than Unionist or Loyalist unless corrected.

¹⁵ The influence of Catholic thinking on Irish Republicanism is discussed in Chapter 6.3.

¹⁶ The term “Irish Republican” is used to differentiate between the type of Republicanism found in Northern Ireland and other types of Republicanism, such as the kinds found in USA or UK.

One final consideration needs to be briefly made about terminology before moving on to Chapter Two. In Folkloristics, the term “folklore” and associated terms are viewed neutrally; as folklorists, we do not view our material negatively, as false or as being insulting and we do not use these terms in that manner. Nevertheless, I am fully aware that outside of the academic discipline, these terms are often laden with implicit value statements. To call something “folklore” is to immediately insult it or imply that it is some way untrue or fake with the added implication that anyone who believes it or practises it is in some way stupid or gullible. I wish to make it very clear from the start that when I refer to the Republican’s community’s folklore, I do not mean this in a derogatory manner, but am, like other folklorists, rather referring to the body of beliefs, practises, traditions, rituals, narratives and other phenomena which form the community’s culture. This issue will be discussed in slightly more detail in Chapter Six, but the point needs to be made clear from the beginning in order to avoid any confusion or offence.

2. Previous Research on Northern Ireland

2.0.1 Introduction

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, this project began primarily as an exploratory project which aimed to research Northern Irish folklore on The Troubles, the conflict which raged between 1968 and 1998 in the region.¹⁷ Whilst this thesis will focus on one example of folklore from the Republican community, it is part of a planned, larger project which aims to explore contemporary Northern Irish folklore about the conflict. There is a strong history of collecting folklore in Northern Ireland and whilst much of this has concerned itself with folklife,¹⁸ rather than folklore, researchers have continued to collect both. What came as a surprise to me regarding the collection of folklore, and specifically folk narratives, was that comparatively little work has been done on what might be called contemporary folklore, in particular The Troubles. It perhaps should not be so surprising, considering the fact that violence still occurs between the two communities and that memories are both long and pained in Northern Ireland. Researchers might not have felt comfortable challenging folk memory about sensitive events or entering into a politically charged discourse which could endanger themselves or the communities they have studied (*cf.* Ballard 1984: 3). Whatever the case, it is especially clear that there is a lack of literature from folklorists dealing with the conflict or tensions between the two major communities.

Nevertheless, whereas folklorists may have lagged, other disciplines have not. As the conflict has historical roots, historians have written any number of books on the origins of the conflict and general Northern Irish history. Political scientists also continue to study prevailing political thought in the region and have offered up any number of solutions to current problems. Sociologists and anthropologists have similarly explored how the two major

¹⁷ See Chapter Five for a brief history of Northern Ireland, which includes a discussion about this conflict.

¹⁸ According to Ó Giolláin, “[f]olklife research has usually been studied in the context of the museum, where it is displayed, and, like the museum itself, bears some relation to the natural sciences: it deals with what can be observed, quantified and mapped, and the pioneers were usually individuals with a scientific training. In that sense, folklife research is in an enlightened tradition of scientific observation of the outlying parts of the national territory, regionally significant, but not pertaining to a central part of the national heritage” (Ó Giolláin 2007: 62).

communities, the Catholic/Nationalist/Republicans and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalists,¹⁹ continue to express their identities in different ways and what issues and topics are of importance to them. Other valuable work has been done by psychologists who have, amongst other things, researched the impact of the conflict on child identity and the importance of sectarianism in the formation of identity in Northern Ireland. It could be said that for obvious reasons modern scholarship about Northern Ireland tends to revolve around the conflict and that this project is no exception.

This chapter will briefly review the aforementioned corpus of work. As this is a folklore project, it will emphasise the works done by folklorists, but it will not ignore the other disciplines which will be dealt with towards the end of the chapter. If anything, this corpus of material on the conflict shows that any project about the conflict needs to take into account all the work done by other disciplines to have a full understanding of the matter. The aim of this chapter is thus to chart the nature of previous research dealing with Northern Ireland and its most common trends, hopefully highlighting where this research seems to fall short. To be sure, there is much left to be explored in Northern Ireland with respect to the conflict and the continuing tensions that exist between the two major communities.

2.0.2 Folkloristics

The collection of folk material in the region known as Northern Ireland began as early as the 19th century and has continued ever since (Buckley 2008). The split between the types of material collected is mirrored in the division between Ireland and Northern Ireland. In Ireland, researchers have been primarily concerned with folklore and oral traditions as can be seen from the work of the Irish Folklore Commission, which has since given way to the Department of Irish Folklore at University College Dublin (UCD 2014).²⁰ Within Northern Ireland the organised collection of folklore began primarily under E. Estyn Evans (1905-1989),²¹ who taught geography at Queen's University, Belfast, for most of his academic

¹⁹ See Chapter 1.0.3 for a discussion of these terms and possible problems with them.

²⁰ The Department of Irish Folklore and its predecessors have sponsored the following works: Murphy 1964; 1965; 1973; 1975; 1976; and 1989; Ó Tuathail 1933; and Buckley, Mac Cárthaigh, Ó Catháin & Mac Mathúna 2007. Whilst these works are noteworthy because they show that bodies from Ireland continue to have interest in Northern Ireland, they are not relevant to this thesis' topic. Murphy's work is either too young or focusses on other kinds of material, such as older historical legends or wonder/fairy-tales. Ó Tuathail's work has not been fully translated into English from its original Irish dialect and is far too old to be of much use to this project. Buckley *et al.* focus on the mumming tradition across Ireland and their work does not concern this project.

²¹ Folklore was collected before Evans, but not in a systematic way. At least three collections were produced, for example, Andrews 1913; Foster 1951; and Henry 1939. For a general overview of the history of folklore in Ireland, see Ó Giolláin 2007; for information about folklore in Northern Ireland, see Ó Giolláin 2007: 57, 62, 95-100; and Buckley 2008.

career. It is perhaps due to Evans²² that folklife became the dominant orientation within Northern Irish folkloristics.²³ It was under him that the Ulster Folklife Society²⁴ and the journal *Ulster Folklife*²⁵ were created and he was instrumental in the foundation of the Ulster Folk Museum²⁶ in 1963 (Ó Giolláin 2007: 57; Evans 1965). Whilst he was primarily concerned with folklife, Evans also offered support to the collection of folklore because he felt that “folktales may throw light on some of the dark places and problems of archaeology and culture history” (Evans 1965: 363) and thereby provide further information about folklife. Under the auspices of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and the Ulster American Folk Park,²⁷ the study, collection and presentation of folklife has continued in Northern Ireland. The collection of folklore, in the form of beliefs, narratives and traditions, seems to have been less important.²⁸

This is not to say that no work has been done on folklore in Northern Ireland. Beyond the projects sponsored by the Department of Irish Folklore at UCD and its predecessors mentioned earlier, a number of important folklore studies have been conducted over the years. The principle pieces of research have been conducted by the following people: Linda-May Ballard, Henry Glassie, Ray Cashman, Donna Lanclos, Jack Santino and Fionnuala Carson Williams. Whilst there are other works and scholars who have researched Northern Irish folklore,²⁹ the six aforementioned scholars have published the most accessible and the most pertinent works in relation to this project. This is not to suggest these other works are not

²² See Evans 1942; 1957; 1965; 1984; and 1992. Whilst Evans was certainly the reason that folklife became so prominent in Northern Ireland, there were a number of other scholars who were also instrumental in this, including Ronald Buchanon (1957; 1962; and 1963); Alan Gailey, although he was also interested in folklore (1961; 1962a; 1962b; 1963; 1966a; 1966b; 1967; 1969; 1970; 1977; and 1984); Desmond McCourt (1956; 1962; and 1965); and Philip Robinson (1976; 1977; 1979; 1982; 1984; 1985; and 1991).

²³ Ray Cashman reviews Evans’ contributions to folklore in an article published in *Folklore Forum* (Cashman 1996).

²⁴ The Ulster Folklife Society was originally founded in 1961, but now appears to be defunct.

²⁵ *Ulster Folklife* was first published in 1955. The most recent volume appears to have been no. 56, which was published in 2013 (Irish Traditional Music Archive 2013). Volume 51 was published in 2005 (School of Celtic Studies 2005). It appears that after 2005, the journal started to be published biannually instead of annually as it had been up until then. It is possible to see a partial bibliography of articles published in the journal on the website for the National Library of Ireland. Whilst it does not go past 1968, it does provide some sense of the type of subject the journal preferred. As noted above, the emphasis is mostly on folklife, but there are some articles which discuss folktales, legends and other narratives: see National Library of Ireland 2014.

²⁶ The Ulster Folk Museum is now known as the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum.

²⁷ Both of these museums were once independent institutions, but are now part of the National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI), along with the Armagh County Museum and the Ulster Museum.

²⁸ Nonetheless, it should be noted that the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum does continue to collect and archive folklore: see National Museums Northern Ireland 2014.

²⁹ Crawford (1987); Cunningham & McGinn (2001); and Ní Uallacháin (2003), have all done work on topics relating to Northern Irish folklore. Crawford writes about the Protestants in Ulster, which has little relevance to a project interested in Republican folklore. Cunningham and McGinn meanwhile discuss the folklore concerning various historical monuments, some of which lie outside Northern Ireland. Ní Uallacháin’s work deals with singers and songs from the south of Northern Ireland, which is likewise outside the remit of this project, but does reflect the continuing interest in songs dealing with Irish history.

significant, simply that they are less pertinent to the present project which deals with the Republican community today.

Linda-May Ballard (née Smith) has played a key part in documenting and researching Northern Irish folklore. Since 1979, when she published her work on the Danes in Ulster's folklore (Smith 1979), she has written about the nature of authenticity in oral narratives in Ulster (Ballard 1980); about seal stories (Ballard 1983a); about oicotypes in Ireland (Ballard 1983b); about the concept of the "character" in folk narratives (Ballard 1986); about storytellers and cultural heritage (Ballard 1988b); and about the fairy-folk (Ballard 1997). She has also dealt with folklife. In 1998, she published the book, *Forgetting Frolic* (Ballard 1998), about marriage traditions in Ireland and she has written articles about boys wearing skirts in Ulster (1988a); about curating intangible cultural heritage in museums (Ballard 2008); and about traditional cures in Ulster (Ballard 2009). She was also employed at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum until early 2014 when she retired (NMNI: personal communication), which explains the range of topics about which she has written.

What is most relevant to this project, however, is Ballard's article entitled "Tales of the Troubles" (Ballard 1984). Whilst the article was published in 1984, it is clear from its contents that Ballard wrote it in 1982 as she discusses the ten hunger strikers who lie at the heart of this project and mentions that they died "last year" (Ballard 1984: 5). This article is noteworthy because it highlights the fact that within a year of their deaths, the ten hunger strikers "are in the process of emerging as folk heroes" (Ballard 1984: 5) and she draws attention to the influence of Catholicism on how they are depicted (Ballard 1984: 5), an idea which is discussed further in Chapter 6.2. It should be noted that this article is the first which openly tackles folk narratives about the conflict in Northern Ireland and it makes it clear these narratives reflect the social divisions between the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities.³⁰

A slightly different case is Henry Glassie, now Professor Emeritus at Indiana University, Bloomington, who was active in Northern Ireland around the same time as Ballard. Since 1975, Glassie has published at least five separate books on folklore in Northern Ireland, four of them focussing almost entirely on one small area, known as Ballymenone, in the border regions of the south-west of Northern Ireland. His work began in 1972 when he travelled to the region of County Fermanagh and began to record stories from a number of people in the area about the old tradition of mumming, which he then published in 1975 in *All*

³⁰ "Tales of the Troubles" appears to have been part of a wider trend in Northern Irish ethnology which started, according to Dr Anthony Buckley, in the early 1970s (Buckley 2008: 169-173).

Silver and No Brass (Glassie 1975). Glassie's second and third book saw him return to the area for further research and both were originally published in 1982. *Irish Folk History* (Glassie 1982) contains a collection of stories which appear in his seminal *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* (Glassie [1982] 1995), which is a masterful ethnography of Ballymenone and its inhabitants. His fourth book was a collection of Irish folktales from all over the island, but supplemented with some from his own research (Glassie 1985). His last major work on Northern Ireland, *The Stars of Ballymenone*, saw him return one final time to Ballymenone to focus more fully on a number of storytellers from the area whom Glassie felt were particularly noteworthy (Glassie 2006).

All of these works are highly important for the field of folklore and even more so for Northern Irish folklore. Glassie's work in Ballymenone is to be commended. His focus throughout his work on this area has been on how folklore draws the community in Ballymenone together. In *Passing the Time in Ballymenone*, he provides a breakdown of the community's demographic which indicates that it is predominantly Catholic, but also contains some Protestants (Glassie 1995: 25).³¹ Through his evaluation of their stories, performances and lost or dying traditions, Glassie charts the ways in which Protestants and Catholics find things which unite them at a time when their respective communities are being pushed further apart. For this alone his work is important because it indicates that there are ways for people in Northern Ireland to use shared folklore and tradition as a means of rising above their ethnic identities and political ideologies for the sake of the community they jointly inhabit.

With regards to this project, however, Glassie's work does not provide a lot of material. Glassie is fully aware of the events occurring around him during his fieldwork, which began at the latest in 1972, but he does not attempt to interpret his material based on these events. He acknowledges the community is somewhat divided (Glassie 1995: xix), but he does not explore how this division manifests itself in the folklore he collects.³² This is unfortunate because his works show quite clearly the importance of history to the community and he collects a number of legends or narratives which could easily be slotted into an

³¹ There is some issue with Glassie's demographics, however. At one point he claims that members of the Church of Ireland are Catholics (Glassie 1995: 300), but the Church of Ireland is in fact an Anglican Church which makes them Protestants, especially in Northern Ireland's divided society.

³² Glassie's position is best expressed in a recent article in *The Journal of American Folklore* (Glassie 2014). Here Glassie says that Hugh Nolan and others in Ballymenone told "of the great battles in the past [...] to illuminate by indirection the conditions of the present" (Glassie 2014: 73). The message he seeks to impart in *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* and his other works on that area is found succinctly in the following quotation: "In our time, there is neither war nor peace, neither conflict with honor nor concord with justice. But there are, as there always have been, gatherings and friendships and time to pass with stories. That is what Hugh Nolan taught. Our mission is less to examine war and its consequence than it is to acknowledge and celebrate the victory of daily endurance" (Glassie 2014: 79).

interpretive framework based around *The Troubles*.³³ Moreover, his works contain a large number of political songs, mostly Nationalist/Republican, which once again indicate the importance of history in the present, not least because they often deal with past events. It is also interesting to note that most of the historical narratives are about centuries-old events. This could be because the community had yet to create any narratives about the more recent events or it could be because no one felt comfortable discussing the topic, which is a common feeling amongst the Northern Irish. Whatever the reason, it is quite clear from the material that Glassie documents that the community uses these older events as analogues for the more recent ones and both Glassie and the community are fully aware of this (*cf.* Glassie 2006: 275-276).

The work of Dr Ray Cashman, currently an Associate Professor in the English department at Ohio State University, might be seen, however, as providing a bridge between this present project and Glassie's work. Cashman's research has been carried out over an extended period of time: it began right after the Omagh bombing in 1998 (Cashman 2011: xii)³⁴ and involved stays in the area of Aghyaran in West Tyrone in 2000, 2002, 2003, 2006 and 2007. Cashman was a student of Glassie's and it is thus not surprising that one can see a lot of influence from him in Cashman's work. As with Glassie, there is a distinct emphasis on how folklore brings the chosen community together.³⁵ Nevertheless, unlike Glassie, Cashman actively engages with the influence of the conflict in Northern Ireland and the possible sectarian divide within his community.³⁶

What is most interesting about Cashman's work is that it indicates that the community in Aghyaran has clearly begun to create folk narratives about more recent iterations of the conflict. In an earlier article (Cashman 2000b), he reviews the historical legends that are told in Aghyaran which discuss older instances of the conflict between the British and the Irish. In *Storytelling on the Northern Irish Border* (Cashman 2011), however, one also finds stories about priests who were alive in the area in the 1940's and 1950's, cursing troublesome members of the other community (Cashman 2011: 152-153) or Catholics getting one over British soldiers in the 1970's (Cashman 2011: 103-105).³⁷ Like Glassie, though, Cashman's focus on the community's methods for maintaining social cohesion means that he chooses not

³³ Parts Two, Four and Six of *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* all contain material which would explain divisions in the community and also indicate the ongoing importance of history to the people in Ballymenone. See Glassie 1995: 89-156, 185-311 and 497-523 respectively.

³⁴ For information about the Omagh bombing, see Chapter Five.

³⁵ See Cashman 2000a; 2002; 2006a; 2006b; 2007; and 2011.

³⁶ See Cashman 2000b; 2002; 2006a; 2007; 2008; and 2011.

³⁷ Many of the stories that Cashman has documented cannot be found either in Ballard's article (Ballard 1984) or in Carson Williams' collection (Carson Williams 2000a) discussed later.

to follow a line of investigation which would emphasise narratives about the conflict. This is not a criticism. Cashman's research is highly significant because it indicates both that sectarian divides continue to exist in rural Northern Ireland and that communities continue to rise above them.

Both Cashman and Glassie's work are important to the present project because, as noted above, they indicate the importance of history to their respective communities. Both *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* (Glassie 1995) and *Storytelling on the Northern Irish Border* (Cashman 2011) show how the stories told in these communities can be related to contemporary events. Moreover, as with Glassie's *All Silver and No Brass* (Glassie 1975), one can see how community tensions might be eased by certain types of folklore, at the same time as they are maintained through the telling of legends involving one recognised side beating the other, be it in the form of a priest (Cashman 2011: 152-153) or a battle (Glassie 1995: 187-311; 2006: 275-282). As will be discussed in Chapter 6.3, the Republican community draws explicit and implicit connections between the hunger strikers and past and current events and by doing so turn them into analogues for these events, much like the people in Ballymenone and Aghyaran did. Whilst the emphasis in this thesis is on how the narratives of the hunger strikes fracture the Republican community rather than unite it, it is clear that the same act of using history as commentary on contemporary events is still active in Northern Ireland.³⁸

Donna Lanclos, presently an Associate Professor for Anthropological Research at the J. Murrey Atkins Library, appears to have only written one work on folklore in Northern Ireland, *At Play in Belfast* (Lanclos 2003). The book is based on research conducted from 1996 to 1997 in five primary schools in Belfast: two of the schools are solely Protestant, two are solely Roman Catholic and one is integrated, which means that it has students from both communities. Lanclos' work attempts to look at children's games and analyse three main strands within them: the difference between concepts of "adult" and "child"; how gender roles are manifested in the games; and the influence of sectarian identities on children's playing in the five schools, which has the most relevance for this present project.

Lanclos' work returns some interesting results as she acknowledges that there seemed to be little reference to sectarian identities at school (Lanclos 2003: 124). She argues that this identity is still important to the children, but as the school system effectively reduces its importance, it comes up less often (Lanclos 2003: 124). Lanclos' results are limited, however, because Lanclos readily admits that she broke with her methodology and questioned the

³⁸ See Chapter Six and Chapter Seven for more on this.

children at the schools about folklore she had not previously observed (Lanclos 2003: 135). In this way, she imposed the subject on the children rather than documenting its occurrence in the field. Nevertheless, her work shows that children are very much aware of the tensions between the two communities in Northern Ireland (Lanclos 2003: 124-148) and in this way it complements the work by psychologists and sociologists which is discussed below.

Jack Santino, currently a Professor of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University, has written a number of pieces on Northern Ireland, although none of them have dealt with folk narratives (Santino 1996; 1998; and 2001). On one hand, Santino has written about Halloween traditions in Northern Ireland and on the other, he has explored the shrines that are created after a member of the community has died. In his work, *Signs of War and Peace*, Santino provides an overview of various forms of such commemorations in Northern Ireland (Santino 2001). His primary focus is spontaneous shrines, those community-created commemorations which pop up at the place of someone's death. In his preparatory discussion about Northern Ireland, Santino provides a nuanced approach to the region's murals and parading culture. His ideas about assemblage — the creation of an image out of multiple images — and how symbols cannot divorce themselves of previous contexts are particularly important for this thesis because they help explain how and why people in Northern Ireland respond to symbols, emblems and other images and why they remain so problematic for the community at large. Santino's work is also highly useful because of how it how deeply embedded it shows politics to be within Northern Irish society, something that helps explain the case-study in Chapter Six.

Fionnuala Carson Williams appears to have done the most work with regards to folk narratives about The Troubles in Northern Ireland.³⁹ In 2000, she turned over a report to the Community Relations Council in which she discussed research she conducted between 1997 and 2000 into verbal lore⁴⁰ about The Troubles (Carson Williams 2000a). The work is primarily a transcript of the most important parts from eight tapes of interviews which she recorded during this time, but includes material sent to her over the internet or found in other media. The report also contains some discussion surrounding ethics and the considerations she had to take whilst collecting the material.

³⁹ Carson Williams has also published a number of works about proverbs in Ireland: see Carson Williams 2000b; 2002; 2009. Her article, "Proverbial Expressions, the Local Press and the Current "Troubles" in Northern Ireland", focusses on the use of proverbs in statements about The Troubles, but the material has no relevance to this project other than to show again how deeply embedded the conflict is in Northern Irish society.

⁴⁰ Verbal lore is any type of folklore which is spoken. This ranges from belief statements to jokes to narratives.

The report mainly contains narratives, many of which are ghost stories. What is particularly interesting about this is that it allows for a comparison with the material found in Ballard's earlier article (Ballard 1984). On reviewing the material, one notices that there are a number of similarities in the type of story and even the location (Carson Williams 2000; *cf.* Ballard 1984: 8-13).⁴¹ Other material in the report includes jokes and belief statements about areas, people and political parties, but it does not contain anything about the hunger strikers. It is a highly useful report, its only flaw being that nothing has been done with it since it was turned over to the Community Relations Council in 2000 with the exception of one article (Carson Williams 2001). This article is mostly a review of the material found in the report and as such serves as a good introduction, but it does not make great use of it. Unfortunately, to the best of my knowledge, no one since that time has done any similar studies about Northern Irish folklore relating to the conflict. That means there has been a roughly fourteen year gap since the report was handed in; a time during which many more narratives will have come into being. Moreover, Carson Williams states that she collected her material from the general populace and preferred to record the folklore of the average person (Carson Williams 2001: 80-81). It would have been useful to have more access to earlier material relating to those groups of people in Northern Ireland who would be more likely to return to violence if the situation deteriorates. Nonetheless, it must be said that Carson Williams's work is possibly the most important of the six for the present project because it is the first and only project so far which has dealt directly with verbal lore directly relating to the conflict, and also the narratives being told in the urban area. It indicates quite clearly that oral tradition about The Troubles exists and that it begs for more research.

2.0.3 Other Disciplines

The preceding discussion dealt with the six main folklore researchers who have written about the folk narratives of Northern Ireland or about folkloric material related to The Troubles in some way. As noted above, however, psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, historians and political scientists have all been more active in researching the conflict or its effects on the population in Northern Ireland from different viewpoints. Whilst this research does not necessarily have a direct bearing on the project as very little of it deals with narratives or the hunger strike, what it does provide is a great deal of background information which any researcher into the current situation in Northern Ireland needs to be aware of.

⁴¹ Both works contain references to stories which take place near Narrow Water Castle, a site of an IRA ambush in 1979, and stories about disappearing soldiers.

Sociology appears to have been primarily active through the work of Madeleine Leonard, Professor of Sociology at Queen's University Belfast, and Bill Rolston, now Professor Emeritus at the University of Ulster. Leonard has focussed predominantly on the nature of child identity and socialisation in conflict situations, and her work — particularly her examinations of the influence of oral narratives on identity formation in Belfast, and how children respond to Belfast as a divided city — is extremely important in the present context.⁴² Leonard's work also indicates that there is a strong oral tradition alive amongst youths in urban Northern Ireland and that this plays an important part in the formation of their identity. Whilst her work rarely goes into detail about the various narratives which she records, it is important to note that sectarianism, for example, remains an important factor for teenagers' identities (Leonard 2006).⁴³ Rolston's work partially complements Leonard's for he has also recorded a number of personal experience narratives from people who were the children of activists throughout the Troubles (Rolston 2011). His main work has nonetheless mainly focussed on the murals in Northern Ireland, in other words on those paintings on buildings which use words or images — often both — to convey a highly political and territorial message.⁴⁴ Like Leonard's work, Rolston's research also indicates the presence of a strong oral tradition about The Troubles which could provide ample material for further study by folklorists.

Alongside Leonard's and Rolston's research is the work of a large number of psychologists, centring around Orla Muldoon, Professor of Psychology at the University of Limerick.⁴⁵ As with Leonard's work, a number of these works include transcripts of interviews and oral narratives which might prove important for future folkloristic research on The Troubles. However, the primary importance of these works is that they explore the effects of the conflict on identity in Northern Ireland. The enduring significance of sectarian or ethnic divisions in the country cannot be discounted if their work is to be believed. Research such as

⁴² See Leonard 2004; 2005; 2006a; 2006b; 2006c; 2006d; 2007a; 2007b; 2008a; 2008b; 2009a; 2009b; 2010a; and 2010b and Leonard & McKnight 2010; and 2011.

⁴³ In addition to the work by Leonard, a number of sociologists put forward articles for the book *Northern Ireland after The Troubles*: see Coulter & Murray 2008.

⁴⁴ See Rolston 1987; 1988; 1991; 1992a; 1992b; 1995; 2003a; 2003b; 2004a; 2004b; 2010; and 2013. For more information about the murals, see Brown & MacGinty 2003; Bryan & Gillespie 2000; Davies 2001; Finn 1997; Forker & McCormick 2009; Jarman 1992; and 1997; McAttackney 2011; and McCormick & Jarman 2005.

⁴⁵ See Lowe & Muldoon 2010; MacGinty, Muldoon & Ferguson 2007; McLaughlin, Trew & Muldoon 2006; Muldoon 2000; 2004; and 2013; Muldoon & Downes 2007; Muldoon & Lowe 2012; Muldoon & Trew 2000a; and 2000b; Muldoon & Wilson 2001; Muldoon, McLaughlin & Trew 2007; Muldoon, McLaughlin, Rougier & Trew 2008; Muldoon, Schmid & Downes 2009; Muldoon, Trew & Kilpatrick 2000; Muldoon, Trew, Todd, Rougier & McLaughlin 2007; Reilly & Muldoon 2004; Stevenson & Muldoon 2010; Todd, Muldoon, Trew, Bottos, Rougier & McLaughlin 2006; and Trew, Muldoon, McKeown & McLaughlin 2009.

this helps to underline the importance of the case study in Chapter Six, not least because it highlights how the existing narratives influence identity in Northern Ireland in general.

Where the work of the sociologists and psychologists has explored the impact of violence on identity in Northern Ireland, the work by anthropologists has mainly explored how people in Northern Ireland express their identity. A large amount of research has been produced over the years into parades and emblems, looking at how the communities understand their own celebrations.⁴⁶ This work has highlighted, for example, that the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community is divided about the meaning of their parades and thus that the community is not as united as outsiders might think (Bryan, Fraser & Dunn 1995). This work has been supplemented with research conducted by others into the issue of Protestant identity (*cf.* Bell 1987; Moore & Sanders 2002); everyday life in Northern Ireland (*cf.* Cairns 2000); and the role of religious identity in the region (*cf.* McAllister 2000). This research highlights the fact that identity, not least in Northern Ireland, is not such a simple matter and that whilst from the outside a community may look united as it celebrates its existence, the reality is much more complicated. This project will illustrate in Chapter Six that the nature of Irish Republican identity in Northern Ireland is similarly complicated.

Over and above the researched noted above, there are also a number of institutes or centres which are worth mentioning: the International Conflict Research Institute (INCORE),⁴⁷ the Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN)⁴⁸ and the Institute for Conflict Research (ICR)⁴⁹ in Belfast have all done important work on the conflict. INCORE, for instance, is currently running a project which hopes to create a digital archive for personal experience narratives about the conflict (INCORE 2014).⁵⁰ This could prove to be an

⁴⁶ See Bryan, 2000; and 2007; Bryan, Fraser & Dunn 1995; Bryan & Gillespie 2000; Bryan & McIntosh 2005; and Jarman 1997; and 1999; and 2001.

⁴⁷ INCORE was established at the University of Ulster, Belfast, in 1993 in conjunction with the United Nations University and studies both the conflict in Northern Ireland and elsewhere with the aim of promoting strategies to help resolve these conflicts (INCORE 2013).

⁴⁸ CAIN was founded as part of INCORE and Access Research Knowledge (ARK) to serve as a database for information about the conflict in Northern Ireland. It was established in 1996 and the website first went online in 1997 (CAIN 2014).

⁴⁹ ICR was established in 2001, but existed under different names before that (ICR 2014).

⁵⁰ This archive ties in nicely with similar projects that have been carried out in Belfast. On the Ormeau Road, there is Healing Through Remembering (HTR), an initiative set up in 2001 to explore ways to deal with the past (HTR 2014). There is also the Dúchas Oral Archive (DOA) based in the Falls Community Council Offices on the Falls Road (DOA 2010). Set up in 2000, it was created to document the personal experiences of people from the Falls Road. It has since widened its mission and has also collected oral histories from members of the nearby Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community. The material is not digitised, however, and there does not seem to a plan to adopt digitisation, out of respect for a number of contributors. A similar initiative is the Belfast Project by Boston College. Unfortunately the project has been embroiled in legal battles since the Police Service of Northern Ireland learned of its existence and wishes to use the interviews as evidence in various criminal cases concerning events during The Troubles which remain unsolved (The Belfast Project 2014). This serves as a reminder of the sensitive nature of these projects.

important source for comparative material once it is set up, allowing researchers to trace the development of memorates and fabulates (*cf.* von Sydow 1948: 74-77, 87) as they develop over time into historical legends. CAIN provides an easily accessible database of information relating to The Troubles and offers a mainly stripped down historical analysis of the conflict. The ICR, meanwhile, has published a large number of articles and reports dealing with a wide range of subjects, ranging from the murals to the daily realities of sectarianism.⁵¹ This body of work adds to the research of the other scholars discussed earlier by providing further examples of source material drawn from the wider populace. This work indicates that not only is research ongoing into various aspects of the conflict in Northern Ireland, but also that the conflict seems to have become the primary focus of much of Northern Ireland's scholarship. As violence keeps on erupting in Northern Ireland, it is no surprise that more scholarship continues to be produced. Folklorists could add to this body of research by exploring the oral tradition each community has; what is remembered and what is forgotten; and by comparing the folklore in Northern Ireland with the folklore in other areas which have experienced high-levels of conflict, such as Israel or the Balkan countries; and how folklore contributes to the communities' views about each other and their place in Northern Ireland.

To end this overview, it is important to note the important work which historians and political scientists have done on the situation in Northern Ireland. The work by historians is naturally highly important for a work like this. Not only do they help provide the reader and the project with context, but with regard to the case-study in Chapter Six, they have also enabled the project to explore which aspects of the topic are important and which are less so.⁵² Political scientists provide a similar, but still different, service to this project by continuing to research political changes and the alignment of the two major communities. Whilst their work is now more concerned with ways to ease tensions between the two communities, they are nonetheless important because of the material they provide about the overall context of Northern Ireland.⁵³ Whilst the overall relationship between Catholicism and Republicanism is not necessarily relevant to this project, these works provide good explanations of the mainstream political ideologies in Northern Ireland and the difference between, for example, Republicanism and Nationalism. They thus provide valuable context which any researcher into the conflict has to take note of. The work of political scientists will be of importance

⁵¹ See, for example, Bell, Hansson & McCaffery 2010; Bell & Young 2013; Byrne 2005; Hamilton, Hansson, Bell & Toucas 2008; Jarman 2004; and 2006; and Smyth, Fay, Brough & Hamilton 2004.

⁵² See Chapter Five and Chapter 6.2 for more information about the works by historians used in this thesis.

⁵³ Works by social scientists include McGarry 2001; McGarry & O'Leary 1993; and 1998; Ruane & Todd 1997; and Wolff 2003.

when describing the community on “Republican.ie”, the field-site for this project, in Chapter Four. The work of the historians has been used throughout Chapters Five and Six.

2.0.4 Conclusion

This chapter has contained a brief review of much of the previous research pertaining to the conflict in Northern Ireland and specifically Northern Irish folklore.⁵⁴ What should already be apparent is that there appears to be a dearth of scholarship examining folk narratives about The Troubles, especially from folklorists. Much of the work conducted by folklorists that has concerned Northern Ireland has taken note of the fact that such narratives exist, but has preferred to focus on other aspects of the folklore that the researchers have documented during their time in the field. As noted above, in the other disciplines, there has been less examination of the narratives and more discussion either about how the conflict has impacted on identity in Northern Ireland or about how groups express their identity through other means, such as rituals and emblems. This is not meant to be a criticism of any of these projects. They have all been highly useful and interesting additions to the growing body of material which deals with Northern Irish folklore and traditions. It is meant to be simply an acknowledgement of what appears to be the current situation with regards to the topic.

This project does not expect to shake things up drastically by providing with any radical new insight into the matter. What it nonetheless hopes to do by examining the online debate surrounding the hunger strike in 1981 on “Republican.ie” is provide some small insight into contemporary Northern Irish folk narratives about at least one aspect of The Troubles and how communities remember and retell the events of the conflict. Before we can begin to investigate the matter and its context, however, it is necessary to detail the project’s methodology. This will be the role of the next chapter which will detail, amongst other things, how and why “Republican.ie” was chosen; what methods were used to examine the discussion on this web-site; why the particular topic of the hunger strike was picked; and the theoretical underpinnings that lie behind the project.

⁵⁴ Dr Anthony Buckley provides a wider review of the work of anthropologists and folklorists in his piece, “Ethnology in the North of Ireland”, which covers ethnological research in the region, beginning in the 19th century and going up to the 21st century (Buckley 2008).

3. Method, Ethics and Validity

3.0.1 Introduction

As stated in Chapter One, this project started out with no clear subject in mind; it sought to explore what appeared to be the gap in the research described in Chapter Two and so there was no strict methodology in mind. Without first knowing what material there was to be found, it was hard to know which of the various available methodologies would fit best. Whilst deciding on an approach before seeing the material can be helpful, it can also hamper the research by forcing it to acknowledge only certain kinds of material, which this project wanted to avoid. It needed to be open to whatever material was available on the chosen website, “Republican.ie”, without making any assumptions about the material. This was, in a way, the first method used as part of the research, just simply reviewing all the discussions on the website and seeing what was there and what might prove to be of interest. It was only after finding the material that it was possible to choose a methodology.

This chapter seeks then to discuss the project’s chosen methodology and more. The particular form of the project will be discussed below. As will be seen, I have employed both qualitative and quantitative methods in an attempt to better understand both the community on “Republican.ie” and the nature of the debate on there. This chapter will furthermore discuss my epistemology so that the reader may understand how I have approached the topic. The chapter will then review the various ethical issues which have been met during the project and how they have been dealt with. The chapter will end with a brief discussion about the nature of validity in qualitative research projects and how this pertains to this particular project.

3.0.2 Methodology

In the simplest terms, this project began as a qualitative research project structured around ethnography: it hoped to explore the online community of “Republican.ie”, paying specific attention to the narratives the community told. According to Creswell “[e]thnography is a qualitative design in which the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviours, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group” (Creswell

2007: 68, formatting has been removed).⁵⁵ Nonetheless, this might be considered too wide a remit for what this particular project covers as it no longer seeks to explore all of the “values, behaviours, [and] beliefs” (Creswell 2007: 68, formatting has been removed) of the community on “Republican.ie”. Nonetheless, a brief discussion of the website, the members of this online community, their behaviour and a number of their beliefs and values will be given in Chapter Four, but this will be primarily to provide context for the analysis in Chapter Six. Using this ethnographic data, the analysis will explore one specific issue which has been prominent in the online community of “Republican.ie” since at least 2008 — Richard O’Rawe’s claims that six of the ten hunger strikers did not need to die in 1981 — and will attempt to answer the seven questions listed in Chapter 1.0.1. According to John Creswell, Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the intent “to understand an issue or problem using the case as a specific illustration” (Creswell 2007: 73) is a key characteristic of a case study.⁵⁶ With this in mind, it would be best to say that this project is an ethnographic case study.

In order to better understand the debate about the hunger strikers, this project has used a range of methods, some qualitative and some quantitative. It should be stated outright that no interviews have been taken with members of the website in question. It might appear strange that a qualitative research project dealing with a living community does not use interviews, but it was unavoidable. After initial contact with “Republican.ie”, in which I disclosed who I was and my original interest in the website, I asked a moderator of the website for an interview. They declined and I was later admonished by another moderator about asking for interviews. Whilst they allowed me to continue following the website they stated:

28. Dungiven Son: I don't think it would be wise for anyone to partake in these [interviews] and would encourage them not to engage with a faceless poster in any type of ‘interview’ “questionnaire” or whatever he wants to call it etc. in which one could incriminate themselves accidentally and end up in Antrim crime suite (RT1307-01 2013: Dungiven Son, Post 28).⁵⁷

⁵⁵ For a strong example of ethnography, see Glassie 1995. For more information about ethnographic research, see Alexander 2005; Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce & Taylor 2012; Christians 2005; Denzin 1989; Fetterman 2010; Foley & Valenzuela 2005; Holmes & Marcus 2005; Jones 2005; Madison 2005; Markham 2005; Pink 2007; and 2009; Schensul & LeCompte 1999; Tedlock 2005; Thomas 1993; and Van Maanen 1988.

⁵⁶ For more information about case study research, see David 2006; Merriam 1988; Simons 2009; Stake 2005; and 2006; Thomas 2011; and Yin 2009.

⁵⁷ “RT” stands for “Republican Thread” and “1307-01” denotes that the thread, that is the online discussion, was created in 2013 in the month of July and that it was the first thread in that month which I examined or read. This system is used for all threads to provide an easy means of reference and is based on my personal system for

Nonetheless, it might be argued that the fact that the field is an online discussion forum partially negates the need for interviews. It is true that I was unable to question any member about their posts or the positions in the debate, but for a number of reasons this was not necessary. Due to surrounding discussions on the website, it was possible, for example, to learn which political party a member supports and from this, it was possible to deduce what their feelings were towards Sinn Féin and the hunger strikers.⁵⁸ The website essentially serves as an online archive and so it is possible to read material from users dating back as early as 2008, which grants the researcher a lot more freedom to evaluate feelings, beliefs and political positions than even an in-depth interview might. This is possible because the evolution of the user's attitude towards the material is there to be seen clearly and in their own words. Moreover, as the primary material for this research was a debate, it was possible to see the users' feelings on the matter because they were more often than not explained in the posts. Seen in this light, the website's discussions could be viewed more like a group interview performed again and again over the years.

Despite the usefulness of the website as a substitute for interviews, I still felt it necessary to get some further background information about users and their feelings towards certain matters. Whilst the website does provide a wealth of information, relying on it solely to explain personal context is not wise as the website provides only as much or as little as the user is willing to give. It is part of this project to evaluate the relationship between the community on "Republican.ie" and the greater Irish Republican community and without more information about the users, this would not be possible. Therefore an anonymous, web-survey was conducted between the end of November, 2013, and the end of January, 2014, with regular reminders so that the community would not forget. This survey, RS1311-01,⁵⁹ was originally designed before this project had become a case-study, but was still interested in what the material might say about the Republican community's relations with the wider Northern Irish community.⁶⁰ Due to this, the survey asks a number of questions which have not been of use to this project and the respondents' answers to these questions have not been published. It is possible to view the questionnaire in Appendix C and a number of the results

interviews. Each reference has been provided with the poster's username and the number of the post in the thread to make it perfectly clear who wrote it and where in the thread it can be found.

⁵⁸ The relationship between what party a user supports and their feelings towards Sinn Féin will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

⁵⁹ "RS" stands for "Republican Survey" and "1311-01" denotes that it was conducted in 2013 in the month of November and that it was the first, and in this case only, survey administered in that month.

⁶⁰ This period of the research is represented by the second set of questions discussed in Chapter 1.0.1.

have been discussed in Chapter Four to present a fuller picture of the community on “Republican.ie”.

Structurally, the questionnaire is divided into four sections and is based primarily upon the formats found in works by Þorlákur Karlsson (2003) and W. Lawrence Neuman (2006).⁶¹ The first section attempts to get a picture of how the users use the website: what time do they go on; how long do they spend on the website; do they use other Irish Republican websites and why they use “Republican.ie”. This section presents a range of different question types and whilst Þorlákur Karlsson argues against the use of Yes/No questions on the grounds that they can often be leading and folk tend to answer positively rather than negatively (Þorlákur Karlsson 2003: 336), there are two such questions in this section.⁶² It was felt that the questions were clear enough for the use of a Yes/No answer not to be problematic. The question which asks why they use “Republican.ie” is partially open (Neuman 2006: 288) as the researcher cannot predict all the reasons someone might use the website, but the rest are closed (Neuman 2006: 287).⁶³ These questions were also designed as a way to gently ease the respondents into the survey by asking them first easier questions and not going right to the heart of the matter at the start.

The second section of the survey deals with the respondent’s political views and is exceptionally important to this project. Due to the website’s open distrust of me and the possible intentions behind this project, these questions were quasi-filtered (Neuman 2006: 289) by adding an option of “Do not wish to disclose”. Adding this answer allowed the respondents to continue answering the survey, but gave them the option to avoid answering questions which they felt were too sensitive. It was hoped that this option would encourage more people to answer instead of putting them off by forcing them to answer all the questions openly. Whilst such answers complicate the results of the survey, I felt the community’s desire for personal security and anonymity was more important than my desire for concrete answers. A number of other questions here are similarly partially open, despite the fact that Þorlákur Karlsson advises against this because a respondent is more likely to choose an answer from the list (Þorlákur Karlsson 2003: 343-344). It was felt that “Other” in these questions was a legitimate option because whilst the survey has been tailored for Irish

⁶¹ For more information about survey design see Brace 2008; Bradburn, Sudman & Wansink 2004; Converse & Presser 1986; Dillman, Smyth & Christian 2009; and Oppenheim 2000.

⁶² This refers to Questions Five and Six which ask whether the user visits other Irish Republican websites and whether “Republican.ie” is their favourite, respectively.

⁶³ An open question is one where the respondent is free to provide any answer they choose and a closed one has only answers provided by the survey’s creator. A partially open question provides a number of set answers chosen by the survey’s creator, but also an option for the respondent to provide their own: *cf.* Neuman 2006: 287-288.

Republicans who live in Northern Ireland, the website is international and has a number of users who are not part of this community.⁶⁴ By giving them the option of “Other”, it allowed them to present their own answers without confusing the original aim of the survey. There are also three completely open ended questions because the topic in them is not something that suits a closed format.⁶⁵ By asking these questions, I hoped to learn more about the political make-up of the community on “Republican.ie”, and how they defined Irish Republicanism; and to see just how they looked on Sinn Féin as a party, which I know to be a divisive issue in the Republican community as a whole.

The third section of the survey was originally meant to serve the older form of this project and was designed to be the heart of the survey. At time it was written, the questions were hoped to provide more information about how the community on the chosen website viewed various parties, people and organisations, which would have informed the discussion about their relationship with the wider community in Northern Ireland. As the project has changed, very little of this section has been used in this thesis, but some of the answers are discussed in Chapter Four. There are four questions here: Question 15 asks how likely or unlikely the respondent is to believe a statement from a party, a person or institution/organisation; Question 16 asks how strongly the respondent trusts or distrusts a party, person or institution/organisation; Question 17 wishes to know how much influence a story’s source has on whether the respondent will believe it; and Question 18 asks whether the respondent trusts the official story or local knowledge more.⁶⁶ The four questions all use a 5-point Likert scale (*cf.* Þorlákur Karlsson 2003: 339, 341), which means the answers range from “Very something” to “Very un-something”. Thus Question 15, which asks “How likely or unlikely are you to believe something stated by the following?”, presents the respondent with the following five answers: “Very Likely”, “Quite likely”, “Neither likely nor unlikely”,

⁶⁴ As will be discussed in Chapter Four, there are a number of users who come from countries other than Northern Ireland and there are even members of the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community. Instead of presenting all the available options, it was deemed better to present all the Republican options and allow those from outside the community to answer “Other” and let them provide their own answer.

⁶⁵ Two of these questions ask users to define in their own words Irish Nationalism and Irish Republican. The third is a follow-up to a question which asks whether they view Sinn Féin as a Republican party and asks them to explain their answer if they chose “No”.

⁶⁶ “Official story” was defined in the survey as the story that newspapers, general media outlets, historians, academics and the general public all accept as being the correct version. “Local knowledge” was defined as the kind of knowledge which is spread through word of mouth by people in an area, usually about a person or event, and it may agree or disagree with the official or accepted story. To clarify the difference, the survey used the example of Bloody Sunday; see Chapter Five for more details. For a long time, local knowledge about Bloody Sunday, 1972, contradicted the official story and it was not until the Saville Inquiry that this was resolved, in local knowledge’s favour. It is possible that the question may have been a leading one as it used an example in which local knowledge appears to have been correct and the official story wrong. It is perhaps best, then, that the answers to this question have not been used in this thesis. See Appendix C for more information.

“Quite unlikely” and “Very unlikely” from which they may choose one. Moreover, as Questions 15 and 16 ask for the respondent’s view about a large number of subjects, it was felt best that they were arranged as matrix questions which are “a company way to present a series of questions using the same response categories” (Neuman 2006: 295). Matrix questions save space in the survey and they also make it easier for respondents to answer quickly as each subject is judged on the same scale as the previous. This way they do not have to keep reading the same question over and over, which helps alleviate tedium and promote more responses. It is perhaps a pity that the responses have been barely used in the survey, but, as was noted above, it was conducted when the projected aimed to discuss more than it ultimately had space for.

The aim of the fourth and final section was to gather background material about the respondents. This section was the second most important as not only did it hope to provide personal context for the posters, but it was also the section that would help see whether “Republican.ie” was a good representative of the greater Irish Republican community in Northern Ireland. There are seven questions in this section: Question 19 asks whether the respondent was brought up in a Protestant, Catholic or another kind of community; Question 20 asks whether they were brought up in a Republican, Nationalist, Unionist, Loyalist or a different kind of community; Question 21 asks which social class they feel they come from; Question 22 asks for their age; Question 23 asks whether they are male or female;⁶⁷ Question 24 asks about the respondent’s level of education; and Question 25 asks for their username. As with the section about politics, these questions are quasi-filtered so that the respondent may choose not to provide an answer if they do not want to. The results of this section are discussed more in Chapter Four.

With regard to overall question order, I generally followed the advice of Þorlákur Karlsson:

1. Byrjaðu á áhugaverðri spurningu(m) [Begin with more interesting questions].
2. Léttar spurningar fyrst – erfiðar seinna [Easy questions first, difficult ones later].
3. Ekki byrja á mörgum bakgrunnsspurningum – hafðu þær síðast eða aftarlega [Do not begin with many background questions, leave them until later].
4. Hafðu þær spurningar sem snúast um aðalviðfangsefni rannsóknar í miðju [Have the main topic of the questionnaire in the middle].

⁶⁷ I debated whether an option representing the transgender community should be included as well. As the issue of gender has never been an important consideration in this project, in the end I decided that “Do not wish to disclose” would suffice. For this reason the question asks “Are you male or female” as a reference to biological sex rather than gender, although I realise that the issue is not as clear-cut as that makes out.

5. Hafðu viðkvæmar spurningar seint [Keep sensitive topics for later].
6. Hafðu efnislega svipaðar spurningar saman [Keep related topics together].
7. Hafðu opnar spurningar síðast [Keep open questions until the end].
8. Skildu að spurningar sem gætu haft áhrif hver á aðra [Separate questions which may influence each other] (Þorlákur Karlsson 2003: 347-348; my translation).

It was not always easy to follow this advice, however. For example, how does one define “interesting” in a survey or if two topics are related, but might influence each other, how do you keep them separate? In the end, it was decided to group similar topics together; to save background questions for the end; to put the easier questions at the start; and to place the main topic of the questionnaire in the middle. However, there were a number of open questions in Section B because they were related to the theme of that section and it made more sense to put them there than anywhere else. Nevertheless, it should be stated that Þorlákur Karlsson’s suggestions were always kept in mind throughout the design process.

Regarding the wording of the questions, I followed the advice given by Neuman:

1. Avoid jargon, slang, and abbreviations.
2. Avoid ambiguity, confusion, and vagueness.
3. Avoid emotional language and prestige bias.
4. Avoid double-barrelled questions.
5. Avoid leading questions.
6. Avoid asking questions that are beyond respondents’ capabilities.
7. Avoid false premises.
8. Avoid asking about distant future intentions.
9. Avoid double negatives.
10. Avoid overlapping or unbalanced response categories (Neuman 2006: 278-281).

The survey was then read over by my supervisor, Dr Terry Gunnell; Dr Ray Cashman; and Andrea Dofradóttir, a lecturer in Qualitative Methodology at the University of Iceland and a member of the Félagsvísindastofnun. Once they had all approved the questionnaire, I requested permission from the moderation team on “Republican.ie” to present the survey to the website’s users and on receiving that, a link to the survey was given to the users (RT1311-01 2013: Rikki, Post 1) on 25th November, 2013, and they were given until the end of January 2014 to complete it. A copy of the final questionnaire can be found in Appendix C and any results relevant to the project will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Whilst many authors (*cf.* Creswell 2007: 68; Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce & Taylor 2012: 65) claim that a key component of any ethnography is participant observation, this project actually uses non-participant observation. One simple reason for this choice is that participant-observation is not actually required in order to understand the community in question. Indeed, this is one area where the internet can help researchers avoid the problem of “going native”,⁶⁸ whilst still allowing them to research their topic in depth.⁶⁹ “Republican.ie” has accessible and readable threads dating back to 2008; this means that in “General Discussion” sub-forum⁷⁰ alone there are over 550 pages, with 30 topics per page, which any registered user can read. In many ways, “Republican.ie” is no different to any archive of folklore and the methods used for finding suitable material on the website reflect those used for finding suitable material in an archive. This has allowed me to read thousands of posts made by the users where they present their views, opinions and attitudes towards various topics and has allowed me to obtain a rather good understanding of the community on “Republican.ie”. Yet with the exception of the threads discussing my research, I have had very little contact with any of the users and have not become an active member of the community. Due to the nature of the forum, I have been able to learn much about the community without personally participating and so have been able to maintain a sense of distance from them which might not have been possible in an offline community. This behaviour mirrors that of many users who read the website, but do not post. These users are known as “lurkers” and by definition challenge the idea that participation involves active communication between members or even researcher and members. As a result of my relative inactivity on the website, I have been able to stay nominally neutral with regards to my topic as I have formed no relationships with any of the users and can therefore not be accused of favouring one group or another out of friendship. It for these reasons that I feel that non-participant observation was the right method for this project and should be counted as a valid research method in ethnography.

As will be shown more clearly in Chapter Four and Chapter 6.4, there is an overabundance of material on “Republican.ie” to sift through looking for anything of relevance. In the sub-forum “General Discussion” there are more than 419,000 replies alone. This was one of the strongest reasons for making this project a case-study about the debate

⁶⁸ “Going native” is an issue which arises when a researcher spends too long with their chosen community and loses both distance and objectivity regarding their subject matter.

⁶⁹ For more information about research on the internet, see Hooley, Marriott, & Wellens 2012; Horst & Miller 2012; Johns, Chen & Hall 2004; Jones 1999; Mann & Stewart 2002; Markham 2005; and Ó Dochartaigh 2002.

⁷⁰ See Chapter Four for more information about the structure of the website.

surrounding the hunger strike of 1981 as that automatically limited the material which needed to be examined for the project. Even with this limit, however, the amount of material found on this topic has been rather large, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.4. This material was found in two ways. The first was to use the website's in-built search engine to look for any discussion which contained words relevant to the strike, such as "hunger strike" or the names of key participants, such as "Richard O'Rawe". As this search engine does not appear to be all that reliable, this first method was then supported by a second which involved going through the website's archives in "General Discussion" from 2008 to the present day looking for any thread which dealt with the hunger strike debate. As a result of these two methods, over 50 threads had been found to date which have the hunger strike as their topic. This count does not and will not include threads which start off discussing another topic but somehow segue into the issue of the hunger strike. The threads themselves and the specific count will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.4 which will analyse their content.

Finally, with regard to the analysis, there was no specific method which was used to analyse the users' posts as such. I did not want to bind myself to any particular approach and thus run the risk of missing something. Instead, the posts were examined to see what they said and what they said in relation to other posts from the same user to see if there were any inconsistencies in a user's position. The posts were also evaluated to see whether an argument could be made for calling them narratives or perhaps proto-narratives and what role the debate played in the formation of these narratives. Similarly, I explored how the users treated any source they used in the debate, whether they used it faithfully or whether they changed it in some manner. It is possible that this falls under the term "content analysis".

3.0.3 Epistemology

Before briefly discussing the project's epistemology, it should first be noted that this project has not used any predetermined theoretical approach or framework in its analysis of the material. In Chapter 6.3 there is a discussion about the relationship between Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony and the legacy of the strikers, but that discussion has been saved for that chapter rather than being described here. Theory has, in this way, only been used where applicable which has meant that this project has been free to use any theory which fits the data rather than forcing the data to fit the theory. This approach to theory has mostly been determined by the project's roots as exploratory research and the freedom granted by the approach has been particularly useful in deciding what topic to research and what material to

use. It is quite likely that this project would have taken a different route had it chosen to follow a path laid out by a particular theory.

With that said, this project does have a particular epistemology. According to Crotty, “[e]pistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding which kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate” (Crotty 1998: 8). This section does not intend on going into a lengthy philosophical debate about the nature of knowledge as that is far beyond the scope of this MA project. As will hopefully become apparent in Chapter Six, this project holds that meaning, and thus knowledge, is socially constructed and is often highly subjective. This approach is designated “constructionism” by Crotty who defines its main tenant as: “[t]ruth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities of the world” (Crotty 1998: 8). Crotty’s statement mirrors Creswell’s definition of “social constructivism” which holds that:

[M]eanings are varied and multiple [...] these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interactions with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives. Rather than starting with a theory (as in postpositivism), inquirers generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning (Creswell 2007: 20-21).

This project, as already stated, feels that meanings are negotiated and it has not approached its subject with any theory, but prefers rather to let the data speak for itself. If the project’s epistemology needs to have a particular name then it would appear that Creswell’s definition of social constructivism suits it best.

3.0.4 Ethical Issues

Having discussed the methodology and epistemology of the research, it is now time to discuss ethics. In any qualitative research project there are always going to be a number of ethical issues which arise during the research and it is important that they are dealt with in the proper manner. These issues, however, take on a new form because this project deals with the internet which changes the nature of anonymity, researcher-community contact and informed consent. This section will include a review of these issues and others relevant to this particular project and the means employed to deal with them.

The first and foremost ethical question here pertains to access to the website, its material and the researcher's presence and their relation to the community's informed consent. Unlike offline communities where it is exceptionally difficult for a researcher to enter without announcing their presence, online communities are actually conducive to this silent approach. There are many forums, for example, where one can read the majority of posts without ever registering to the site, such as "Game FAQs" (Game FAQs 2014). Moreover, as the internet is predominantly a written and open medium, it stands to reason that one expects their posts to be read by people who are not necessarily part of their particular online community. Is it then ethical to study online communities without announcing one's presence? May a researcher be akin to a lurker and neither participate in discussions on the website nor reveal their presence? According to Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce and Taylor a researcher may not and should not be a lurker in an online community (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce & Taylor, 2012: 142-144). They call this "fly on the wall" approach a form of deception, which would make it undeniably unethical. Their position appears to be primarily based on the fact that they have conducted their research in virtual worlds, like *World of Warcraft*. Virtual worlds are essentially computer-generated worlds in which the player has a body and moves around and behaves much like they might offline. This means that any research conducted in them must behave like it would offline by using participant observation because to do otherwise would be unethical and would be akin to spying.

As was discussed earlier in Chapter 3.0.2, however, this project does not use participant observation, but rather preferred non-participant observation. If one were to agree with Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce and Taylor then this would make this research project unethical, but I must in fact disagree with them. I do so for a number of reasons: as described in Chapter 3.0.2 and discussed in further detail in Chapter Four, the website itself is essentially an archive which allows me to research without needing to participate to document relevant material;⁷¹ the website's political nature could leave me open to accusations of bias if I were to become too friendly with certain groups; and a researcher can announce their presence on the website. In fact, by creating a discussion where the researcher announces and describes their intentions, they can actively obtain consent from the community or at least

⁷¹ The website's format actually supports this position. Most of the discussions referenced as part of this project are rather old and, in internet-parlance, "dead". This means that the discussions are no longer active; and that no one has posted in them in a long time. It is considered bad form on an internet forum to "resurrect" a dead thread which has been inactive for more than a certain period of time, which can range from one month up to six months. The main reason is usually that allowing people to resurrect the dead threads would only clutter the website with old discussions that would not contribute to other, more current discussions. Due to this, it would be impossible for me to take part in the majority of the discussions which have taken place about O'Rawe's claims since 2008. See Walther 2002: 205-208 for a discussion about this very issue.

members of it. In this respect, I agree with Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce and Taylor because a community must always be aware that it is being studied, even if I do not agree about the use of participant-observation in all ethnographic studies.

With the aim of gaining the community's consent to this current project, I made the following post on 2nd July, 2013:

1. Rikki: Hey everyone,

My name is Rikki. I'm a Northern Irish guy, 26 years old, based at the University of Iceland studying an MA in Folklore/Ethnology (a kind of cultural anthropology) and my research project is stories told by the Republican community. One of the things I'm looking at is this website and the kinds of stories told on here and how the nature of the forum affects the way the stories are told. In the interest of transparency, I just thought I would announce this and see what you all think.

The research might involve some interviews if people are willing, but that will most likely be in August if not later in the year. As it stands I will just be taking part in discussions and reading through General Discussion, finding stories and learning more about the community. I also thought that this thread would be a good way of letting everyone ask me questions if they have any. You will have access to my research, will get to read it and I will most likely discuss it as time goes on. I have to hand in the thesis by April next year, so it should be done by then.

But yeah, if you have any questions or comments, I'd appreciate hearing them and will do my best to answer them (RT1307-01 2013: Rikki, Post 1).⁷²

As can be seen from the above, this post was made during the first period of this project, when there was no clear methodology or idea about the nature of the material on the website. When the questionnaire was presented to the users on "Republican.ie", an updated version of this statement was posted explaining better the focus of the project (RT1311-01 2013: Rikki, Post 1).⁷³ It was only after I posted the original announcement that I decided not to participate in the discussions for reasons discussed earlier in Chapter 3.0.2. The response to the post quoted above was nonetheless mostly positive. A number of moderators wished me luck whilst other users suggested I talk to certain users; one even wished to know what format the interviews might take. As mentioned in Chapter 3.0.2, one moderator, Dungiven Son, forbade me from interviewing users of the website and this had the knock-on effect that I felt

⁷² Any and all spelling mistakes were present in the original post, which has been copied from the website and then pasted into this document. This is discussed further in Chapter Four, but due to the sheer number of posts that will be quoted throughout this thesis, I have decided against writing "[sic]" beside every single error.

⁷³ This statement was updated a second time in a thread in which I presented a draft version of this thesis, see RT1404-01 2014: Rikki, Post 1.

remaining distant from the community might be beneficial. As can be seen from Dungiven Son's post (RT1307-01 2013: Dungiven Son, Post 28; see Chapter 3.0.2), the users were suspicious of me and the project and felt that it might be part of a police operation or something similar. It was quite possible then that by asking excessive questions I would have only antagonised them and threatened the project by losing their consent. The users' responses to my statement quoted above (RT1307-01 2013: Rikki, Post 1) was taken to mean that they consented to my presence on the website and to the research project.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that not every user was happy about my project. In response to the statement made by Dungiven Son (RT1307-01 2013: Dungiven Son, Post 28; see Chapter 3.0.2), one user suggested that the thread announcing my research should have been immediately deleted. This user was, however, the only one who seemed to disagree actively with my research, as Dungiven Son later gave me permission to continue to use the site and research as long as I did not ask to meet anyone. Since the above user did not seem happy about my research, I have taken the decision not to include any material posted by them in this project, not even the post where they expressed their dislike of the project. Whilst they did not outright refuse to take part, it seems only fair to respect their feelings towards the project by excluding them from it.

Another issue connected to informed consent is that "[o]nline discussion sites can be highly transient. Researchers gaining access permission in June may not be studying the same population in July" (Markham 2005: 813). This thesis is based on research which took place between July 2013 and April 2014 and as discussed in Chapter Four, new users have continued to register at a steady, if slow, rate. This creates a problem in that the users who agreed to the research in July 2013 are not the same users at any other time; some users have left the websites whilst others have joined. This is an issue I did not originally consider, but which I have taken into account nonetheless. Not only was my original announcement accessible to all users at any time, but when I announced the survey, I essentially asked for consent to carry on with my project, albeit tacitly. Moreover, I regularly reminded the users about the survey in order to get as many answers as possible and updated them on when I would have the results or something for them to read. At any point the users could have removed consent, but they did not. With regards to those users who no longer use the website, but who are quoted as part of this project, the position has been taken that the users were fully aware that their posts were open to being read by the wider public (*cf.* RT0905-06 2009: belfast poster, Post 1). For these reasons, I do not feel it is unethical to include either new or past members of "Republican.ie" as part of this project.

The other big issue for the website was the issue of anonymity. Researching material on the internet creates an interesting problem: if a person is already hidden behind a screen-name, do we need to provide new names to hide their identity yet further? This issue becomes further complicated as it has been possible to identify certain users on the basis of their statements, usernames or the way they have responded to certain posts. Should I reveal this knowledge or should I protect the identity of those involved in the debate? The general rule throughout this project has been to use the user's screen-name as it would be impossible to hide it and responsibly reference the material. Properly referencing the post would make it possible for any reader to go and find the user's actual screen-name. Revealing identities is a different matter, however. There have only been two people whose names have been revealed as part of this project: one's name was revealed in *Afterlives* by Richard O'Rawe (2010) and the other revealed their name on the website.⁷⁴ I initially considered keeping their name's quiet, but both these people have been prominent in the debate offline as well as online and due to their prominence, I felt it was safe to reveal them in an appropriate part of the thesis.⁷⁵ There is one other person whose name was revealed in the draft of this thesis, but after some discussion with the members of "Republican.ie" (*cf.* RT1404-01 2014), it has been decided to remove their name from the final version of this thesis. In the end the users are well aware of the risks of posting on the internet and as any offending posts are quickly removed by the moderation team, it was felt that the users' screen-names provide enough anonymity for this project.

One final consideration which deserves a mention is the impact this research might have on the community itself. The debate is highly politically and seems to contain an implicit challenge to Sinn Féin's power within the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community.⁷⁶ The debate also has large cultural implications because the debate threatens the memory of the ten hunger strikers who died and what they died for and thus a part of the Republican community's cultural heritage.⁷⁷ This means that any analysis of the debate will itself become political because it is unavoidable that the analysis will in some way highlight issues with either side's argument depending on what the material reveals and could thus have an influence on Republican culture and how they view the hunger strike. In an effort to have as small an impact as possible, the thesis has tried to avoid taking part in the debate as much as possible, but this has not always been successful as it has been necessary to discuss

⁷⁴ It should be noted that this person's screen-name is very close to their real name.

⁷⁵ Their names are revealed as part of the discussion in Chapter 6.4.

⁷⁶ Chapter Six will further explore the debate as a challenge to Sinn Féin's power.

⁷⁷ The idea that the hunger strikers are cultural heritage is discussed primarily in Chapter 6.3.

inconsistencies in the posts made by either side of the debate. In addition to this, my position in the debate is discussed in Chapter Seven so that any possible bias in the analysis will be made apparent and the reader can then disregard or support my interpretation and results based on this knowledge. Nonetheless, it is highly likely that this thesis will be used by the community as part of the ongoing debate surrounding the hunger strike of 1981 and this consequence has been accepted.

Ultimately, whether one reads a handbook such as the earlier mentioned *Ethnography in Virtual Worlds* (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce & Taylor 2012) or *InterViews* (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009) or reads the ethical guidelines of groups such as the American Anthropological Society (AAA 2013) or American Folklore Society (AFS 2013), any ethical guideline tends to boil down to the importance of putting the community being studied first. This includes taking into account their feelings about being researched; considering how best to protect their identity and avoid incriminating material; always being honest with them; and making sure that they have access to the research before and after publication.⁷⁸ In this way, the researcher is able to give something back to the community after having studied them. It is for this reason that the community on “Republican.ie” was given a draft version of this thesis four weeks before its deadline so that they might have time to read over it and discuss it and raise any issues they might have with the research (*cf.* RT1404-01 2014). Due to limited space in the thesis, the thread has been copied and pasted as a whole in Appendix A, so that the reader may see how the community responded to the research. Not only was I able to repay the community’s trust by presenting them the research, but they were able to point out any glaring flaws in the project which have since been addressed. Moreover, this has allowed me to give them a voice in this project instead of just assuming that my interpretations or conclusions are the only ones worth noting. Respecting the community’s voices and views has been the foremost concern throughout this project and it is this concern which has dictated the resolutions to all of the ethical issues which have arisen as part of this project.

3.0.5 Validity

One final matter which needs to be discussed is the issue of the project’s validity. According to the psychologist Andy Field, validity “is whether an instrument actually measures what it sets out to measure” (Field 2011: 11) and this quote clearly shows that validity is often

⁷⁸ For more information about ethics in research, see AAA 2013; AFS 2013; Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce & Taylor 2012: 129-150; Christians 2005: 139-164; Creswell 2007: 47, 141-142; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 61-79; Mertens & Ginsberg 2009; and Yow 2005: 121-156; and Markham 2005: 811-815 for more on ethics in internet research.

thought of in quantitative terms.⁷⁹ With the exception of the survey which was discussed in Chapter 3.0.2 and which will be discussed further in Chapter Four, there are no quantitative aspects to this project. This is primarily a qualitative research project which makes it harder to measure the research's validity as it is neither an instrument nor has it set out to measure any specific phenomenon, but rather to explore one. With this in mind, it is perhaps best to suggest that the project's validity rests in whether its conclusions can be viewed as correct. This can be measured in roughly two ways: the response from the website and the response from the reader. As noted above, the response from the website will be disclosed in Appendix A as there is not room in the main part of this thesis for it. On the whole the response has been positive, although at least one user has stated that they feel it is "a load of shite" (RT1404-01 2014: inla-supporter, Post 25). Ultimately, it is up to each individual reader to determine the validity of this project and they may do so through evaluating the methodology described throughout this chapter and the analysis and its conclusions which are discussed in Chapters Six and Seven respectively.

3.0.6 Conclusion

It may have been noticed that this chapter has not discussed whether or not it is possible to use the results of this project to discuss the wider Irish Republican community in Northern Ireland or people in general. This is because these discussions have been saved for other chapters. Chapter Seven will discuss the latter issue and make a case for one side or the other depending on the analysis in Chapter Six. The former will be discussed in the next chapter which will describe both the website, "Republican.ie", and its community in an attempt to discover just how representative it is of the greater Irish Republican community.

This chapter has been primarily concerned with describing the project's methodology, the ethical issues it has faced and whether it may be considered valid. As a part of this discussion, it has attempted to provide solid reasoning for the decisions and choices made as part of the project. It is hoped that by doing this, the reader will better understand the analysis in Chapter Six and its conclusions in Chapter Seven. Before that analysis can begin, however, the thesis will focus on "Republican.ie" and its users.

⁷⁹ For more about validity in qualitative research, see Angen 2000; Cho & Trent 2006; Creswell 2007:44-47, 202-221; Creswell & Miller 2000; Lather 1993; LeCompte & Goetz 1982; and Whittemore, Chase & Mandle 2001.

4. “Republican.ie”

Date	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.
1 st	344	313	319	343	277	293
2 nd	360	331	327	371	305	276
3 rd	370	318	344	367	303	322
4 th	365	333	365	373	293	312
5 th	368	296	335	362	303	329
6 th	350	320	357	365	300	307
7 th	335	332	356	349	305	295
8 th	358	315	356	366	304	289
9 th	361	323	329	341	299	296
10 th	381	406	309	345	310	302
11 th	373	383	337	346	274	292
12 th	373	386	356	322	284	305
13 th	356	342	336	343	302	310
14 th	346	372	331	340	288	325
15 th	335	373	333	338	293	283
16 th	349	351	348	371	298	282
17 th	336	336	328	<u>372</u>	291	281
18 th	334	350	351	374	292	<u>290</u>
19 th	322	352	339	364	278	299
20 th	327	340	358	344	292	285
21 st	334	370	362	322	291	281
22 nd	299	354	374	320	283	263
23 rd	321	361	350	322	289	282
24 th	320	354	349	309	284	298
25 th	332	345	379	278	276	293
26 th	341	<u>336</u>	373	281	280	301
27 th	327	<u>327</u>	374	279	286	289
28 th	298	325	382	280	281	294
29 th	291	348	371	287	281	N/A
30 th	319	345	335	292	296	N/A
31 st	N/A	338	N/A	299	305	N/A
Avg.	341	344	349	334	292	296

Table 4.1. Daily number of users on “Republican.ie” over a six-month period. Numbers which are underlined and italicised indicate dates where the number was not recorded. The provided number is the approximate mean of the number of users from the day before and the day after. The averages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

4.0.1 Introduction

In Chapter Three it was stated that “Republican.ie” was chosen as the field-site for this project because it appeared to be the most prominent Irish Republican forum on the internet. When one searches “Irish Republican forum” on Google, “Republican.ie” is the very first result,⁸⁰ which means that anyone searching for a forum dedicated to Irish Republicanism is more likely to find it before they come across any other. A quick review of the surface website indicates that it caters to all branches of Republicanism. As a guest,⁸¹ it is not possible to see much, but after registering on the website, a more in-depth examination of the website confirms this immediate impression. It was clear to me that the website offered a far better field-site for research than other Republican forums,⁸² which seem to favour one interpretation of Republicanism over another or have less active users. “Republican.ie” would appear to provide the best cross section of the online Republican community of all the available forums. This chapter will focus on three main areas: the format of the website itself; the user-base; and the nature of the discussions on “Republican.ie”. In doing so, it aims to provide the reader with a solid understanding of both the Republican community and the community on the website, all of which should provide further necessary background for the case-study in Chapter Six.

4.0.2 The Website

“Republican.ie” was founded in May 2007 under the name “IrishRepublican.net” by a group of people who hoped to open a forum to which Republicans of all kinds could come and discuss issues relevant to their political cause (Seabird:⁸³ personal communication). The website may have been larger at one time,⁸⁴ but now it is simply an online discussion forum,⁸⁵

⁸⁰ “Republican.ie” is, however, the eleventh result if one searches “Irish Republican website”. The first ten results in this case are mostly links to political parties and “Republican.ie” remains the first online forum listed in the results.

⁸¹ “Guest” is the term for a person viewing a website, but has not logged onto an account.

⁸² This is borne out by the evidence of other Irish Republican forums. “IrishRepublican.org” only has 383 members and 31,221 posts (IrishRepublican.org 2014). “The Irish Republican Socialist Forum” is locked to anyone not registered to the website (Irish Republican Socialist Forum 2014). “Irish Republican Army Forum” only has 708 threads, and no list of members (Irish Republican Army Forum 2014). “The Irish Republican Bulletin Board” has 1,301 registered users who have made 77,366 replies since it was founded in December, 2004 (I.R.B.B. Forums 2014). An article by Alex McGuigan suggests a new forum was made in 2012, but none of the links provided for this work, so one is left to assume that the website died quickly or has changed name and web-address (McGuigan 2012). As can be seen from these figures, “Republican.ie” has both a greater number of postings and users. These numbers were correct as of 11pm, Wednesday 7th May, 2014.

⁸³ For the purposes of this thesis, the users’ screen-names on “Republican.ie” and elsewhere are being treated as if they were normal names. This also means that neither their spelling nor their formatting will be changed.

⁸⁴ Links to “Republican.ie” and “Forums” can be found on the front page, which suggests that the forums were a part of a larger whole at one point.

on which people can create threads and discuss issues.⁸⁶ According to the forum's own statistics, since it was founded 17,673 users have registered and posted a total of 1,092,132 posts.⁸⁷ Each day roughly anywhere between 250 and 400 users log on and contribute to any ongoing discussions, create new ones or just read the posts that have been made since they last visited.⁸⁸ As can be seen from Table 4.1 at the start of the chapter, the average number of users between September, 2013 and February, 2014 never dipped below 290, but never exceeded 350. During this six month period, the highest number of users on the website was 406 on 10th October, 2013, and the lowest was 263 on 22nd February, 2014. Whilst a number of issues in the past seem to have come up which drove a number of users away,⁸⁹ people continue to use and register to the forum. The forum itself is comparatively small and according to Seabird it has lost some of its more serious debaters (Seabird: personal communication), but it remains active for the moment.

The larger forum is split into five sections — “Republican.ie/ Irish Republican Forum”; “Irish Republicanism/Discussion & Debate”; “Multimedia”; “History”; and “Bits and Bobs” — all of which are divided into sub-forums and some have even smaller sub-forums. “Republican.ie/ Irish Republican Forum” has two sub-forums: “Republican.ie/ Phoblachtach.ie” for topics about the website and “Breaking News/ Nuacht Bhriste” for breaking news from around Ireland. Both of these sub-forums are protected, which means that guests cannot view their contents, but are aware they exist.⁹⁰ “Irish Republicanism/Discussion & Debate” is divided into eight sub-forums: “General Discussion/ Plé Ginearálta”, which is a protected sub-forum which gives the users freedom to discuss most topics and contains two smaller sub-forums on political theory and housing and social issues; “Organisations/ Eagraíochtaí”, which contains smaller sub-forums for the most important

⁸⁵ The term “forum” can be used to denote both the website and the area of discussion on the website. Thus a website which is a forum will often contain many forums. For more information about forums, see Ó Dochartaigh 2002: 103-104

⁸⁶ “Thread” or “threaded discussion” is the term for the type of discussion on these kinds of websites. When a user creates a new topic, all of the subsequent replies are threaded together so that the discussion is easier to follow. Each discussion is reached by a unique web-address or link on the main website and in this way it reduces clutter as each discussion is kept to itself (SAS 2014).

⁸⁷ True at the time of writing: 11pm, Wednesday 7th May, 2014.

⁸⁸ The most users ever online in one day were 489 on 2nd November, 2012, according to the website.

⁸⁹ A dispute regarding personal messages (PMs) seems to have taken place in 2009. It seems the administrators were accused of hacking users' accounts and reading their PMs and the website was also alleged to be a front for intelligence gathering for Sinn Féin. See CMe 2011; Clarke 2009a; McGuigan 2012; and Rusty Nail 2009a for more information on this.

⁹⁰ The fact that a number of sub-forums cannot be viewed by guests is another reason why I had to announce my presence to the website as discussed in Chapter 3.0.4. Whilst an argument could be made that researching an open website without announcing one's presence is ethical, such an argument cannot be made when the website is closed or partially closed like “Republican.ie”. The very act of protecting the material in these sub-forums shows that the community value their privacy and I have to respect that.

Republican organisations or political parties;⁹¹ “Political Prisoners/ Príosúnaigh Polaitiúil”, which deals with political prisoners, a topic which is close to Republican hearts and is a protected forum; “International/ Idirnáisiúnta”, which is for the discussion of those events or topics from outside Ireland which are of interest to Irish Republicans; “Remembrance/ Roll of Honour”, in which the users can discuss fallen members of their community and the paramilitary organisations; “As Gaeilge”, which is an Irish-language forum;⁹² and “Other Discussion”, which is for any topic which does not fall under the remit of the other forums in this section and does not appear on the website unless a person is logged on. It has smaller sub-forums for sport, music, technology, theology and other topics; and “Brainiacs” which is invisible to guests and its contents inaccessible to users without a special password, meaning they are unknown to me.⁹³ “Multimedia” as a section is invisible to guests, but accessible to users and is divided into “General Media”; “Photographs”; “Videos”; “Murals & Posters”; and “Music”, all of which are self-explanatory. The section entitled “History” is divided into four forums: “‘The Troubles’ Memories, Stories and Reminiscing”, which is a protected forum, but an excellent source of stories from the users about the conflict in Northern Ireland; “Articles and Essays”, which is a protected forum for articles or essays written by users or those that they find interesting; “Historical Events”, which deals with topics on any historical events of interest to the users or relevance to Irish Republicanism; and “Political Quiz”, which contains links to quizzes which are available on the internet and covers a range of disparate topics from Irish Republicanism to general political ideology. The “Bits and Bobs” section is exactly what it sounds like: a section for those forums which do not fit anywhere else. This includes the “Activism” forum has threads about different kinds of activism, from Republican activism to protests in support of Basque activists and prisoners; “Links”, which provides the users the web-addresses of different kinds of websites, but primarily those of interest to Irish Republicans; and “Bottom of the Bin”, which appears to be a catch-all sub-forum in which users can post pretty much what they want because it is where the less serious threads go.⁹⁴ Table 4.2 below provides the relative popularity of each forum by listing the total number of threads and replies each contains and Image 4.1 at the end of the chapter shows how the part of forum looks to a guest.

⁹¹ There are sub-forums for the following organisations: Shell to Sea, a group protesting against a natural gas pipeline in County Mayo, Ireland; the Republican Network for Unity; Republican Sinn Féin; Sinn Féin; the 32 County Sovereignty Movement; éirígí; the Irish Republican Socialist Movement (also known as Irish Republican Socialist Party); and The 1916 Societies.

⁹² As I neither speak Irish nor trust Google Translate, the contents of this forum are unknown.

⁹³ As a researcher, I preferred to leave such secrets to the website’s users in order to respect their privacy.

⁹⁴ The description of “Bottom of the Bin” is “The drama queen’s domain” and there appears to be no set pattern to the topics posted in there.

The website seems to be reasonably well structured. The forums are varied enough that each one has a clear subject which threads should be based around, but not so over-specialised that the user becomes confused about where to post. Each area is relatively active and has seen activity from the users since at least mid-April. The only exceptions is “‘The Troubles’..... Memories, Stories and Reminiscing”, which has not been used since 12th February, 2014. In order to make sure that newly created threads are not missed by the users, the website has a “Recent Topics” list at the side of the page which lists the newest threads from across the website. “General Discussion” is the main focal point of the website and users post there frequently, multiple threads being created weekly. Most of the regular users all appear to know each other to some degree, if only through the website, and whilst they may not all be friends, it could be argued that there is a sense of community on the website. This sense of community is encouraged by the continuous discussions and rules unique to “Republican.ie”, and further enhanced through the request for donations from users.⁹⁵ It may not be as strong a community as those which exist offline, but all of those involved are nonetheless users on the same the website and they recognise that they share this in common.

As noted above, nearly all of the communication on the website takes place in the discussion threads contained within the forums. Users are able to leave short messages on each other’s profiles,⁹⁶ but these have a character limit and anyone can read them. Private messages have been disabled for the general user and are only available to those users who donate money towards the upkeep of the website. As so much of the communication occurs in the threads, the website requires a dedicated team to police the conversations to make sure that no one breaks the website’s rules and to make sure the website runs properly. Three administrators, Seabird, Dave1916, Irishmo and *chucky*, oversee the general running of the website and make sure that forum changes and software updates are handled properly. They are essentially the managers of the website. Below the administrators are nine moderators who oversee the various sections: cara, CregganDerry, Dungiven Son, hammer and sickle, irelands32, n187, UlstermanandIrish, undefeated and Young Ned of the Hill. These moderators also take part in discussions, but spend much of their time reviewing the threads

⁹⁵ Those users who donate receive a badge underneath their avatar, which sits to the left of their posts and announces to the rest of the website that they are a “Republican.ie contributor”. A user’s avatar is a small picture which also sits to the left of their post. A user may choose any image they like and they are often connected to whichever forum the user is on. In Image 4.2, we can see that Newry Republican has a man wearing a balaclava and holding a gun whereas in Image 4.3 *chucky* has a picture of Gerry Adams. The reasons behind the choice of avatar are various and have not been part of this project.

⁹⁶ Every user has a unique profile-page, on which they can display contact and background information. The profile-pages also contain links to the user’s friends on the website, their posts and the discussions they have started.

to make sure that none of the rules are broken.⁹⁷ Furthermore, given the somewhat illicit nature of some Republican groups and their activities, the moderators are also there to make sure that the users do not post anything that might cause them or the website problems. In this way, the administrators and moderators ensure that the discussion on the forum flows well and is polite, as a means of keeping the users happy and keeping traffic coming to the site.

Forum	Topics/Threads	Replies
“Republican.ie”*	95	1,805
“Breaking News”*	5,402	139,490
“General Discussion”*	19,535	415,312
“Organisations”	9,616	166,133
“Political Prisoners”*	1,550	25,372
“International”	10,977	62,768
“Remembrance”	1,014	11,284
“As Gaeilge”	522	4,533
“Other Discussion”**	7,050	157,950
“Brainiacs”***	-	-
“General Media”**	2,829	19,992
“Photographs”**	32	9,384
“Videos”**	275	2,260
“Murals & Posters”**	33	502
“Music”**	202	1,164
“‘The Troubles’...”*	7	706
“Articles and Essays”*	34	105
“Historical Events”	239	1,910
“Political Quiz”	24	337
“Activism”	147	648
“Links”	207	1,784
“Bottom of the Bin”*	133	5,276

Table 4.2. Total number of threads and replies per sub-forum.⁹⁸ * indicates protected sub-forums. ** denotes those sub-forums which are invisible to guests. *** signifies that the sub-forum is invisible to guests and users need a special password to access it.

It is possible to argue that this online forum is in many ways a little like an Irish ceili storytelling gathering, the like of which Ray Cashman attended during his fieldwork in Aghyaran (Cashman 2011: 52-70), and Henry Glassie describes from his time in Ballymenone

⁹⁷ Most of these rules can be viewed on the website itself (Republican.ie 2014). It should be noted that a number of rules are learnt through participation. For example, whilst the word “dissident” can be used on the website, its use is frowned upon by many as it is considered a slur by Republicans (*cf.* RT1202-02 2012: jimbojoe09, Post 12). The term comes from the larger phrase “dissident Republican” which is used to denote those groups or parties that reject the Good Friday Agreement, which means essentially every Republican group or party apart from Sinn Féin. The term appears to be founded on the idea that Sinn Féin are the main Republican party and therefore anyone who disagrees with them disagrees with “mainstream Republican” thought. As discussed later in this chapter, many people reject the idea that Sinn Féin are Republican at all and thus they disagree with the term “dissident Republicans” and find it insulting.

⁹⁸ True at the time of writing: 11.15pm, Wednesday 7th May, 2014.

(Glassie 1995: 35-108; 2006: 251-255). Another analogy would be that the forum is the online equivalent of the pub or town hall where members of the community gather to talk and discuss whichever topic takes their fancy. In this case, it is often news or issues which are relevant to Northern Ireland, Irish Republicanism and how to further the cause, but it need not always be so. As has been noted above, there are also areas for those who wish to talk about music or sports or other topics. It is also important to always be aware that much like the pub allows visitors from outside the nearby community, so too does the forum. Not everyone on the forum is from Northern Ireland⁹⁹ and not everyone is a Republican,¹⁰⁰ something which could have ramifications for this project. The next section will therefore discuss the user-base of “Republican.ie” in more detail to see just what exactly they believe in and how unified they are.

4.0.3 The Users

Like many communities, the users of “Republican.ie” are a disparate group. According to the survey conducted between November, 2013, and February, 2014, the respondents have ages ranging between 16 years old and 60 years old; 82% are male, 14% are female and 4% chose not to disclose; 75% have achieved A-Levels or higher; 62% were brought up in a Catholic community; 48% were brought up in a Republican community and 26% in a Nationalist one; 82% stated they were from a working class background and 14% were from a middle class background; and 93% defined themselves as Republican and 4% as Nationalist (RS1311-01 2013). The reliability of this survey is admittedly a little questionable because only 28 people responded which means it is impossible to say whether the results reflect the wider user-base on “Republican.ie”. Nonetheless, it does provide some information about those who answered, underlining if nothing else that the community is in no way homogenous and that the users almost certainly have a wide range of backgrounds and mind sets.

Most relevant to this project and the case-study in Chapter Six is the question of which party the users support and whether they feel Sinn Féin are a Republican party. In Table 4.3 on the next page, one can see the results of three polls conducted by the users in 2009, 2010 and 2013 as well as results drawn from the survey mentioned above. Both the polls and the survey asked users to identify which party they supported. Due to the sheer difference in

⁹⁹ It was noteworthy that the present survey placed on the site received answers from people who were originally from the USA, Scotland and Ireland as well as Northern Ireland. The survey did not ask where they were currently living, so it is quite possible that these people now live in Northern Ireland or Ireland.

¹⁰⁰ For instance, posts by the user peeohkneel make it quite obvious that he is a Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist, cf. RT1403-03 2014. It is interesting that he does not appear to have responded to the survey.

number of respondents, it is hard to make any true comparison between the different sets of results, or any general conclusion about the political affiliation of the users as a whole, but it is clear that results seem to vary from year to year. For instance, one can see from the polls that the 32 County Sovereignty Movement went from being the most popular group in 2009 to being tied first in 2010 and then tied third in 2013. They did not receive a single vote in the survey. With regards to the party run by Gerry Adams, (Provisional) Sinn Féin, the results show that they are rarely the most popular party on “Republican.ie” at any given time. The only time Sinn Féin comes out on top is in the survey conducted as part of this project, where they tied in first place with the IRSP and “Other” all of whom got six votes each. This is particularly interesting because Sinn Féin claim to be the main Republican party and use their position as the largest Catholic/Nationalist/Republican party in Northern Ireland as the basis for this. It would seem, however, that within the Republican community specifically, they are less than popular than they believe, at least if the results in Table 4.3 are to be believed.¹⁰¹

Party/Organisation	2009 (RT0910-02 2009)	2010 (RT1010-01 2010)	2013 (RT1308- 01 2013)	2014 (RS1311- 01)
Provisional Sinn Féin/Sinn Féin	79	14	4	6
32 County Sovereignty Movement	85	28	8	0
Republican Sinn Féin	68	28	15	3
Irish Republican Socialist Party	36	16	8	6
éirígí	35	17	6	0
Republican Network for Unity	41	11	8	0
1916 Societies	N/A	N/A	4	5
Socialist Democratic Labour Party	N/A	N/A	N/A	0
Independent	46	15	N/A	N/A
Other	12	5*	23**	6***
None	N/A	4	N/A	0
Do not wish to disclose	N/A	N/A	N/A	2
Total number of respondents	402	138	78	28

*Table 4.3. A breakdown of the political groups or parties the users say they have supported by year, based on polls carried out by the website and data drawn from the survey discussed in Chapter 3.0.2. “N/A” signifies that the option was not available in the poll in question. * refers to the fact that three of the votes in this number belong to the Real Sinn Féin, an off-shoot of Republican Sinn Féin. As regards the figure marked **, these 23 votes were cast for “Other/None” in this year’s poll. As regards the figure marked ***, it should be noted that if users chose more than one option, they were counted under “Other”.*

¹⁰¹ For a discussion about the relationship between a survey’s or poll’s sample-size and its reliability, see Þórólfur Þórlindsson and Þorlákur Karlsson 2003: 52-53; and see Field 2011: 645, 647 for a discussion about sample sizes in general.

A more interesting result of the survey than Sinn Féin's popularity, however, is that whilst 36% of the respondents view Sinn Féin as a Republican party, 54% do not and the rest chose not to answer the question. On the surface, one would expect that those users who support a party other than Sinn Féin would be the ones to state that Sinn Féin is not a Republican party for reasons discussed later. However, reviewing the results shows that this is not true. 21% of the survey's respondents state that they vote Sinn Féin,¹⁰² but as was mentioned above, 36% of them view Sinn Féin as Republican. This means that roughly 15% of the respondents view Sinn Féin as a Republican party even though they do not vote for them. When reviewing the survey data, it was found that two users who vote for independent candidates, one who votes for 1916 Societies and one who votes for The Workers Party also supported Sinn Féin as a Republican Party. If we look at those people who feel that Sinn Féin are not Republican, we find that three still vote for Republican Sinn Féin, whilst four vote for the IRSP,¹⁰³ four support the 1916 Societies, one preferred not to disclose and one was independent. Whilst these results generally reflect what one might expect from the Republican community, the fact that some people who do not support Sinn Féin still view them as Republican might come as a surprise to some.

The question the reader might be asking is why it might be seen as a surprise to find Sinn Féin's opponents rejecting them as Republicans? After all, it does not automatically follow that because one disagrees with Sinn Féin, this must mean they should not be seen as Republicans. This is perhaps difficult to answer, but it revolves around Sinn Féin's decision to accept the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) and join with the Unionists in a power-sharing government, which was seen as a betrayal by many in the Republican community.¹⁰⁴ To many people the Good Friday Agreement was simply another attempt at legitimising Northern Ireland's continuing existence as part of the British State and so Sinn Féin's acceptance of the GFA was taken as recognition of this and thus a betrayal of the Republican cause. Take a look at the following responses on the survey to the question, "Why do you not view Sinn Féin as a Republican Party":

¹⁰² Respondents were only allowed to choose one party when answering this question. One user stated that they voted for Sinn Féin and the IRSP and so was placed under "Other" in the results. It should come as no surprise that they view Sinn Féin as a Republican party. Nonetheless, it was a surprise to see someone support both parties.

¹⁰³ There was a fifth IRSP supporter who did not view Sinn Féin as a Republican party. They have not been included in this number because they stated they also support the Communist Party of Ireland.

¹⁰⁴ According to a poll conducted in January, 2010, 86% of the 127 users on "Republican.ie" were anti-GFA (*cf.* RT1001-01 2010). A poll conducted in August, 2010, indicated that 81% of 85 users were anti-GFA (*cf.* RT1008-05 2010).

Simple their policies are completely anti republican and are now puppets of the british and free state¹⁰⁵ (RS1311-01 2013: Respondent 2).

They have sold out on anything that has defined them as republicans down the years, they deserve not the title of republicans (RS1311-01 2013: Respondent 5).

It recognised the Leinster House parliament¹⁰⁶ as the rightful Irish Republic, accepting British rule in Ireland. It enforces British rule in the 6 counties¹⁰⁷ (RS1311-01 2013: Respondent 7).

the rejection of violence (RS1311-01 2013: Respondent 13).

They have compromised too far with the british state becoming a unionist party in effect, attacked and murdered other republicans and political opponents, and brought the idea of republicanism into disrepute with condoning the sectarianism of their members and attacks on civilian targets (RS1311-01 2013: Respondent 21).

Sinn Fein has abandoned Republican principles and is apart of the British system, it engages in collaboration with British occupation in order to create an illusion state of normalization. Also, it is a reformist party that has betrayed the tenants of the Republican movement, which is not only national liberation but the empowerment of the working class (RS1311-01 2013: Respondent 23).

they are prepared to administer british rule in Ireland¹⁰⁸ and to publically support the crown forces in Ireland (RS1311-01 2013: Respondent 25).

With the exception of one, the five respondents above all list Sinn Féin as selling-out to the British as one of the main reasons they do not consider them a Republican party. Whilst the survey does not have enough answers to discuss the views of the greater Republican

¹⁰⁵ “The Irish Free State” is now a derogatory term for Ireland. The Irish Free State was the name of the country when it was a British Dominion and part of the British Commonwealth. It thus implies that Ireland is still under the control of the British or at least serving their interests.

¹⁰⁶ Leinster House is Ireland’s version of Westminster. It is the seat of the Oireachtas, Ireland’s parliament.

¹⁰⁷ “The Six Counties” is a Nationalist/Republican term for Northern Ireland and reflects their belief that the region belongs to Ireland. It is also used sometimes in the form “The Occupied Six” or “The Occupied Six Counties” to reflect their feelings towards the British state’s presence in Northern Ireland.

¹⁰⁸ As Republicans reject the partition of the island into Ireland and Northern Ireland, Republicans continue to refer to Northern Ireland simply as “Ireland”. In their minds the border is illegal and so does not exist, much like they argue Northern Ireland does not exist.

community with any certainty, the ubiquity of the theme of selling-out in the answers would indicate that this is a commonly held position within the Republican community.¹⁰⁹

This raises the question of how exactly did Sinn Féin sell out? Which Republican values did they actually betray? Growing up in the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community, it was a simple adage that Unionists supported parliamentary methods and Loyalists violent ones and that Nationalists and Republicans mirrored these approaches. Thus for many years I defined Republicanism as “violent Irish Nationalism”,¹¹⁰ a position I believe is common in my community. Nonetheless, this survey and the time spent on the website have challenged this long held belief and have shown that multiple definitions of Republicanism exist. The survey asked the users to define Republican in 100 words or less, using their own words. Using the same respondents as before where possible to allow the reader to compare the two sets of answers properly,¹¹¹ here is a handful of their definitions:

National liberation and Socialism for Ireland and her people,, free from the institutions of Britain and free to determine our own futures without fear or hinderance from foreign powers (RS1311-01 2013: Respondent 5).

The idea that the true authority of the Irish people is the Irish Republic and its adherents.The re-establishment of the 32 County Socialist Republic (RS1311-01 2013: Respondent 7).

the support of the use violence to create a united Ireland (RS1311-01 2013: Respondent 13).

Republicanism is looking for the political liberation of Ireland with a republican/democratic government, and seeking the prosperity of all her people, loyalist, nationalist, protestant catholic, rich, poor, etc. (RS1311-01 2013: Respondent 21).

¹⁰⁹ In response to the question “How strongly do you trust or mistrust Sinn Féin”, 29.6% stated that they strongly distrust Sinn Féin; 11.1% mildly distrust them; 22.2% neither trust nor distrust; 18.5% mildly trust them; and 18.5% strongly trust them. It is interesting to compare those results with the response to the question “How strongly do you trust or mistrust Republican (excluding SF [Sinn Féin]) political parties?” According to the survey, 3.7% strongly distrust them; 3.7% mild distrust them; 37% neither trust nor distrust them; 44.4% mildly trust them; and 11.1% strongly trust them. If one can trust the figures are giving a fair overview of the attitudes, this would indicate that Sinn Féin lack the trust of the community on “Republican.ie” and possibly in the wider Republican community in Northern Ireland. This issue will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

¹¹⁰ This position is mirrored by Respondent 13 as can be seen from their answer shown on this page to the request to define Irish Republicanism in their own words.

¹¹¹ Respondent 2 chose not to provide an answer to this question.

A national liberation movement to liberate Ireland from British neo-colonialism and imperialism. A movement for the working class to bring about socialism for the working class (RS1311-01 2013: Respondent 23).

a political position that rejects any form of british rule in Ireland (RS1311-01 2013: Respondent 25).

As can be seen from the above responses, only one person feels that Irish Republicanism must involve violence. Whilst many, like myself in earlier years, immediately connect the Republican political ideology with violence,¹¹² it does not appear to be so in the minds of the Republicans that answered the survey. Indeed, the community itself seems to be split over the issue of violence and a number of threads on “Republican.ie” dealing directly with the issue.¹¹³ Whilst violence may be historically connected with Republicanism, it seems that it is not an inherent part of it today.

This section has briefly attempted to provide an introduction to the user-base on “Republican.ie” and their beliefs. It has provided some demographics and explained the principle splits in the Republican community, which centre on the GFA and the nature of Sinn Féin as a Republican party. It has also shown that despite outward appearances and its reputation, the Republican community is not completely in support of the armed campaign. It has not, however, gone into much depth about the overall political beliefs of the community nor the differences between the various political parties. The reason for this is that it is simply not important for the project to go into detail of this kind as the ideological differences over and above those already discussed do not seem to inform the debate about the hunger strike discussed in Chapter Six.¹¹⁴

What is most apparent from this section is how fluid the nature of the Republican community is. Unlike ethnicity or race, Republicanism as a political ideology, is something that people voluntarily choose to identify with. This means that the community will be far from homogenous because its members will come from a range of different backgrounds. As

¹¹² Research by Lorraine Bowman-Grieve suggests that using Republican websites serves as a gateway to violent Republicanism (Bowman-Grieve 2010; and 2013). Whilst Bowman-Grieve does not focus on “Republican.ie”, the debates over whether the armed campaign is worthwhile that occur on that website might cause her to reconsider that opinion. She does, however, acknowledge this fact and she and Maura Conway have stated elsewhere that more research needs to be done on the matter (Bowman-Grieve & Conway 2012).

¹¹³ See, for example, the following threads: RT1001-02 2010; RT1312-01 2013; and RT1312-02 2013 which discuss the issue of violence and whether the armed campaign in this day and age can succeed in uniting Ireland.

¹¹⁴ To learn more about the political beliefs within the Nationalist/Republican community, see McGarry & O’Leary 2000: 14-21. Stefan Wolff provides a breakdown of the major political beliefs of the SDLP and Sinn Féin, see Wolff 2003: 166-170. Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd also discuss beliefs within the “catholic” community, see Ruane and Todd 1997: 66-76, 87-88, 89-90.

can be seen from the results discussed above, Republicans have differing definitions of “Republicanism”, some which stress the idea of a united 32 county, socialist republic on the island of Ireland and others which stress the use of violence to unite the aforementioned island. Over and above this, membership in the Republican community is not restricted by birth place, skin colour, accent or dialect, something the website underlines by allowing people from foreign countries¹¹⁵ to join and discuss Irish Republican issues. In this way, it could be argued that the website does not necessarily provide an accurate reflection of the offline Irish Republican community living today in Northern Ireland, but rather the Republican community at large. Whilst foreign Republicans are likely to form a minority of the Republicans taking part in discussions on the website, this it is nonetheless an important point to remember in the following chapters.

4.0.4 The Discussions on the Website

Having reviewed the website and the user-base, it is now time to examine the discussions that take place on them. It was felt that the simplest means of demonstrating how the website works was to provide an example of a thread, which will show the reader much more than can be easily described in the same amount of space. The next few pages thus contain one such example.¹¹⁶ For sake of space, if any post contains a quotation from another post, then the quotation has been removed and replaced with a reference to the original such as “[Quoting Post 5 above]”. With the exception of this, the content of the posts have been unchanged and how they are presented here is how they appear on the website. Due to this, it should be assumed that any mistakes in wording, grammar or spelling existed in the original post. This will be the standard practice for any quote from the website throughout the project, including those given above or in earlier chapters. If a post is changed in any way, then it will be indicated through the use of square parentheses or through a footnote. The post number and user have been written in bold, but the date and time-stamp has been left off for ease of formatting the posts within a word document. Images 4.2 and 4.3 were taken from this thread and show the discussion in its original context and how other discussions might appear to a user of the website. One final point about the thread in question is that it should be noted that it is relatively short. Whilst a number of the posts are longer than average, due to the fact they

¹¹⁵ For the purpose of this project, “people from foreign countries” are defined as those living in a country which is not Northern Ireland. This includes Ireland and Great Britain.

¹¹⁶ At the end of the chapter, a number of pictures will be provided to show how the thread looks on the website, Image 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3.

quote news articles, the thread itself is reasonably short, containing only 23 posts spread across two pages.¹¹⁷

“Police and MI5 get power to watch you on the web” (RT1204-04 2012)¹¹⁸

1. *chucky*: Every phone call, email or website visit will be monitored by the state under plans to be unveiled next week.

The proposals will give police and security services the power to snoop on every single communication made by the public with the data then likely to be stored in an enormous national database.

The precise content of calls and other communications would not be accessible but even text messages and visits to social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter would be tracked.

The move has alarmed civil liberty campaigners, and the country’s data protection watchdog last night warned the proposals would be “unacceptable2.

Jacqui Smith, the Home Secretary, will argue the powers are needed to target terrorists and serious criminals who are taking advantage of the increasing complex nature of communications to plot atrocities and crimes.

A consultation document on the plans, known in Whitehall as the Interception Modernisation Programme, is likely to put great emphasis on the threat facing Britain and warn the alternative to the powers would be a massive expansion of surveillance.

But that will fuel concerns among critics that the Government is using a climate of fear to expand the surveillance state.

Information Commissioner Richard Thomas, the country's data watchdog, told the Daily Telegraph: “I have no problem with the targeted surveillance of terrorist suspects.

“But a Government database of the records of everyone's communications – if that is to be proposed – is not likely to be acceptable to the British public. Remember that records – who? when? where? – can be highly intrusive even if no content is collected.”

It is understood Mr Thomas is concerned that even details on who people contact or sites

¹¹⁷ On this website, a page consists of twenty posts, including the first post.

¹¹⁸ This thread was originally posted on 2nd April, 2012.

they visit could intrude on their privacy, such as data showing an individual visiting a website selling Viagra.

Chris Kelly, Facebook's chief privacy officer, last month revealed he was considering lobbying ministers over the proposal, which he described as “overkill²”.

The proposed powers will allow police and security services to monitor communication “traffic”, which is who calls, texts, emails who, when and where but not what is said.

Similarly they will be able to see which websites someone visits, when and from where but not the content of those visits.

However, if the data sets alarm bells ringing, officials can request a ministerial warrant to intercept exactly what is being sent, including the content.

The consultation is expected to include three options on how the “traffic” information is then stored: a “super database” held by the Government, a database held and run by a quango or private company at arms' length, or an order to communication providers to store every detail in their own systems, which can then be accessed by the security services if necessary.

A memo written by sources close to the project and leaked last year revealed it was fraught with technical difficulties.

Ms Smith has already claimed local authorities will not have access to the data but the Tories have warned of the “exponential increase in the powers of the state”, while the Liberal Democrats have dubbed the plans “Orwellian” and deeply worrying.

Security services fear a failure to monitor all forms of communications effectively will hamper their ability to combat terrorists and serious criminals. Sir Stephen Lander, chairman of the Serious Organised Crime Agency, said: “Any significant reduction in the capability of law enforcement agencies to acquire and exploit intercept intelligence and evidential communications data would lead to more unsolved murders, more firearms on our streets, more successful robberies, more unresolved kidnaps, more harm from the use of Class A drugs, more illegal immigration and more unsolved serious crime.”

<http://www.telegraph...-monitored.html>¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Hyperlinks have been left in the posts, but the linked articles will not be referenced.

2. ***chucky***: I must have been living in a bubble, I always believed they eavesdropped anyway. This new law must be an all out snooping war on every single person now

3. **Wounded Knee**: <http://www.independe...b-7606788.html#>

Martin Hickman, Oliver Wright

Monday, 2 April 2012

Police and intelligence officers are to be handed the power to monitor people's messages online in what has been described as an "attack on the privacy" of vast numbers of Britons.

The Home Secretary, Theresa May, intends to introduce legislation in next month's Queen's Speech which would allow law-enforcement agencies to check on citizens using Facebook, Twitter, online gaming forums and the video-chat service Skype. Regional police forces, MI5 and GCHQ, the Government's eavesdropping centre, would be given the right to know who speaks to whom "on demand" and in "real time". Home Office officials said the new law would keep crime-fighting abreast of developments in instant communications – and that a warrant would still be required to view the content of messages.

But civil liberties groups expressed grave concern at the move. Nick Pickles, director of the Big Brother Watch campaign group, described it as "an unprecedented step that will see Britain adopt the same kind of surveillance as in China and Iran. "This is an absolute attack on privacy online and it is far from clear this will actually improve public safety, while adding significant costs to internet businesses," he said. David Davis, the former Conservative shadow Home Secretary, said the state was unnecessarily extending its power to "snoop" on its citizens.

"It is not focusing on terrorists or on criminals," the MP said. "It is absolutely everybody. Historically, governments have been kept out of our private lives. They don't need this law to protect us. This is an unnecessary extension of the ability of the state to snoop on ordinary innocent people in vast numbers."

The former Labour Home Secretary Jacqui Smith abandoned plans to store information about every phone call, email and internet visit – labelled the "Big Brother database" – in 2009 after encountering strong opposition.

Ms May is confident of enacting the new law because it has the backing of the Liberal Democrats, normally strong supporters of civil liberties. Senior Liberal Democrat backbenchers are believed to have been briefed by their ministers on the move and are not expected to rebel in any parliamentary vote. A senior adviser to Nick Clegg said he had been persuaded of the merits of extending the police and security service powers but

insisted they would be “carefully looking at the detail”. “The law is not keeping pace with the technology and our national security is being eroded on a daily basis,” the adviser said. Confirming the legislation would be introduced “as soon as parliamentary time allows”, the Home Office said: “We need to take action to maintain the continued availability of communications data as technology changes. Communications data includes time, duration and dialling numbers of a phone call or an email address. It does not include the content of any phone call or email and it is not the intention of Government to make changes to the existing legal basis for the interception of communications.”

According to The Sunday Times, which broke the story, the Internet Service Provider's Association, which represents communications firms, was unhappy with the proposal when it was briefed by the Government last month. A senior industry official told the paper: “The network operators are going to be asked to put probes in the network and they are upset about the idea... it's expensive, it's intrusive to your customers, it's difficult to see it's going to work and it's going to be a nightmare to run legally.”

Google and BT declined to comment. A spokesman for Microsoft told The Independent: “We comply with legislation in all the countries in which we operate. This is a proposal and we have not had the opportunity to review it in depth.”

Shami Chakrabarti, director of Liberty, said the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats had resisted greater surveillance powers when in opposition. “This is more ambitious than anything that has been done before,” she told Sky News’s Dermot Murnaghan. “The Coalition bound itself together in the language of civil liberties. Do they still mean it?”

SECURITY THEN AND NOW

June 2009: “Today we are in danger of living in a control state. Every month over 1,000 surveillance operations are carried out. The tentacles of the state can even rifle through your bins for juicy information.” David Cameron

April 2012: “It is vital that police and security services are able to obtain communications data in certain circumstances to investigate serious crime and terrorism and to protect the public.” Home Office spokesman

4. RodÓ: nothing new to our communities

5. Newry Republican: They’re doing it anyway, everything you type is being watched

Members if this forum unfortunate enough to be held in Antrim have had their posts they made on here read out to them

6. irishrepublican1916: [Quoting Post 5 above]

You serious man?

7. cara: Welcome to our world !!!

8. Newry Republican: [Quoting Post 6 above]

Yes 100%

In the interrogation room they read posts out to the person held captive. Posts they made on this forum

This has happen ed more than once as far as i know

9. frank1916: [Quoting Post 8 above]

one of the ones this happened to is now in maghaberry concentration camp

10. Newry Republican: A simple rule

Don't type something you wouldn't say to a cop

Which wouldn't be much

11. cara: [Quoting Post 10 above]

name. over 21, coming from the house and going to the shop !!!

not much typing skills required for that...lol

12. Newry Republican: [Quoting Post 11 above]

lol

That's about the height of it alright

13. ploughstar: *Who they trying to kid with this new latest "info" gethering .*

There a white colour 360degree dome shape building in wakefield area england where it takes in all phone calls ,emails, voicemails, texts and much more etc.

This building has be working for years and years.

Look at trails in 6counties last few months all phone calls where played in court.

Sure even go far back as 1998 there they listen in weeks and day on omagh bomb.

Snooping by british has been going on long before theresa may came up with this latest bluff story.

14. Rí-Rá: I don't buy into the story that they haven't been doing the aforementioned before now.

I believe the new powers are being put in place now so the evidence intercepted will stand up in court easier and paperwork needed for individual taps will be lessened as everyone is fair game

15. Óglach John Starrs: man they have always been doing it internationally as well as here, which goes to show never type or say anything you cant defend anywhere at anytime

16. fighting irish: [Quoting Post 11 above]

Coming from the house going down to the doctors to get this rash looked at i think its contagious.

They don't be long getting out of your face then lol

17. ToxikWaltz: They have been doing this the whole time anyway why now are they coming out publicly with it?

18. donnlass: Name Mickey Mouse.

Can you safely say that if they ask your name?

I'm sure I heard that its perfectly legal but am not sure. 🤔

Off for bike ride.

Keep up if you can lol.

Well if my foot was sound that is 😞

19. *chucky*: [Quoting Post 18 above to "[...] but am not sure. 🤔"]

lol would seriously doubt it. reminds me of the time years ago when a british army patrol had my car pulled over at a checkpoint one saturday night when we were heading out clubbing. the usual drill of names, address, etc, etc... were being jotted down. everything was actually going fine for a change which was a surprise because british army had a habit

of making you stand outside to get body searched while they tore car apart, they must have been sympathetic to us for a change because it wasn't taking time to pish out of the heavens this particular saturday night. well last person to get details noted was a wee slabber of a girl who lived down the street from us, it was here 1st night out with us (and last). when soldier asked her name she replied 'kylie minogue'. well I looked at my mate and he looked at me at exactly the same time and both our faces dropped because we knew what was going to happen next. next thing soldier shouted "OUT" so we had to exit car and stand in pouring rain and ended up soaked to skin. headed home after that cos we were drenched. if it had been a lad who cost us our night out, he'd have been left on side of road 😊¹²⁰

20. donnlass: [Quoting Post 19 above]

Aww not fair, have soldiers no sense of humour lol they should have said yeh funny whats our name. But too much to ask of brit squaddies I suppose.

What did you do to her were her ears burning for weeks after lol.

[Page 2 Starts] 21. *chucky*: [Quoting post 20 above]

when we got back in car, between getting soaked and the verbals threw at her, (and not only from me), the whole night was destroyed, there was a bad atmosphere in the air. we all just headed back home

regards the soldiers, yeah a bit of common sense wouldn't have went amiss. they could have taken it as a joke ffs 😊

22. Meon na Saoirse: Government climbdown on digital 'Big Brother' plan

By Nigel Morris

Wednesday, 4 April 2012

Plans to allow the authorities to monitor the [online](#) activity of every person in Britain were pushed back last night after being condemned by MPs of all parties.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, announced that the contentious measures would be published only in draft form and would be subject to widespread consultation – concessions that could delay the proposals for at least a year. In a letter to Mr Clegg published in The Independent today,

¹²⁰ A number of emotes move and transferring them to a word document robs them of this. This emote, for example, should roll its eyes.

17 Liberal Democrat MPs welcomed his intervention but warned him their support could not be taken for granted on the issue.

A storm erupted this week after it emerged that legislation to allow the police, intelligence services, councils and other public bodies to obtain [details](#) of messages sent via Skype and social networks would be included in the Queen's Speech.

The disclosure provoked anger among Tory and Liberal Democrat MPs alike, who warned that the proposals contradicted the parties' opposition to a similar Labour scheme – and were not included in the Coalition Agreement. There have also been recriminations within the Coalition as Liberal Democrats – understood to have been backed by some Tory ministers – accused Theresa May, the Home Secretary, of mishandling the issue.

Mr Clegg told the [BBC](#) yesterday that the most contentious parts of the legislation would be published in draft form to enable “proper scrutiny and examination and stress-testing”. He said the Government would “consult and think whether existing powers are sufficient”, adding: “People should be reassured we will not ram something through Parliament.”

His comments came just [hours](#) after Ms May made a passionate defence of the proposed measures – which the intelligence services originally wanted in place by the summer – as essential for tracking down criminals, paedophiles and terrorists.

The planned Bill would also reportedly allow GCHQ to obtain [information](#) “on demand” and in “real time” without a warrant, and require internet companies to install hardware tracking telephone and website traffic.

In their letter, the Liberal Democrat MPs make clear that Mr Clegg will have a rebellion on his hands if the Government allows a major expansion of surveillance.

They write: “Liberal Democrats in government will not follow the last Labour government by sounding the retreat on the protection of civil liberties in the United Kingdom. It continues to be essential that our civil liberties are safeguarded, and that the state is not given the powers to snoop on its citizens at will.”

They continue: “It is absolutely vital that the public get a chance to see and debate the details of any proposals to extend state surveillance, not just being presented with a Home Office fait accompli. It is also essential that the initial plans include adequate safeguards – which should be stronger than the current weak controls.”

David Cameron also sought to lower the temperature among his backbenchers yesterday, insisting he was opposed to creating a “snoopers’ charter”.

He said: “his is not about extending the reach of the state into people’s data; it’s about trying to keep up with modern technology.”

The proposals would not allow the authorities to read the contents of messages, but to track whom internet users have contacted and when and where the contacts took place.

Last night the civil liberties group Big Brother Watch described the moves as a U-turn – an interpretation fiercely disputed by the Government.

Nick Pickles, the group's director, said: “This is a victory for everyone who cares not only about privacy, but living in a country where the Government does not put every one of its citizens under surveillance.

“If [new](#) powers are needed, then let the Home Office come and make the case. It isn’t for innocent people to justify why the Government should not spy on us.”

Stephen Williams, a Liberal Democrat MP, took a swipe at the Home Office's “inept” handling of the issue.

“If there has been an attempt to bounce us into backing this, then it has backfired, because any legislation will be scrutinised in incredible detail,” he said.

Read more: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/2012/04/04/cameron-snooper-charter-inept-handling-of-the-issue/>

22. *chucky*: so it’s being ‘pushed back’ now? hmmmmmm.... well according to cameron and his cronie clegg who both gave separate interviews last night on radio, this plan is still very much alive and kicking - so remains to be seen what develops

As can hopefully be seen from the thread quoted above, the discussion flows, but it is very individualistic. Users have as much time in the world as they want to prepare an answer and sometimes may not answer for days at a time.¹²¹ Others clearly answer immediately with little thought as if chatting. The website allows each user to “multi-quote”, which means a user can quote a number of posts they wish to respond to; the software then copies and pastes the relevant posts into the reply box and the user can reply to each post at once. This is an improvement on previous software in which one could only quote one post at a time, and

¹²¹ The discussion in the thread quoted above lasted until 4th April, 2012, and therefore does not show this characteristic as clearly as other threads might.

thereby allows for a more realistic conversation in which a user can reply to many people at a time. This does have the habit of creating multiple mini-conversations going on simultaneously as threads develop, as different groups of users answer each other, whilst ignoring the conversations of other groups in the same thread.¹²² Such discussions can be very confusing for anyone who has not been following them and offer an interesting hybrid of the written medium and the confusion of a large, oral group conversation.¹²³

4.0.5 Conclusion

This chapter has been primarily concerned with providing the reader with an accurate and relatively in-depth picture of the website, “Republican.ie”, and its users. The chapter has not been as in-depth as it could have been in order to respect the privacy of the users and their desire for anonymity; a wish which was communicated in a post referenced in Chapter Two. The preceding discussion has detailed the structure of the website, its popularity, the demographics of its users and provided an example of a thread to better prepare the reader for the case-study in Chapter Six. The example in question underlines in no uncertain fashion the degree to which thread discussions have an oral quality to them. It is not so obvious when individual postings on a thread are presented as static quotations. What is clear from the example is that much like SMS text messages, users treat these discussions with very little formality meaning that they can move at pace, much like a spoken discussion. Another key point to bear in mind is that, as noted above, the Republican community on the website is not necessarily reflective of the Republican community of Northern Ireland as a whole or of the greater Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community, and that the nature of the internet poses certain problems when it comes to using such materials to discuss “Northern Irish folklore”. All the same, the area of discussion and the nature of the online community will naturally mean that the majority of people taking part in discussions on the website will be either Northern Irish/Irish and/or living in Northern Ireland/Ireland. This project is not overly concerned with the fact that some of the users may be foreign, but, as noted above, it is a point that should always be borne in mind in the following discussions. Nevertheless, it is

¹²² For instance, two users may start a small debate in a thread and only reply to each other whilst other users continue to talk amongst themselves, all on the same thread. Whilst large oral discussions can be hard to follow because the content is lost once it is spoken and so one can only focus on their immediate discussion, threads can be hard to follow for the exact opposite reason: all the content is saved and available, but the reader has to sort the posts into their individual conversations. For shorter threads, this is not an issue as the mini-conversations do not have time to form, but the longer the thread is, the harder it can be to follow as it breaks up into smaller discussions, especially if the thread is active over a prolonged period and users take a day or two to respond to posts.

¹²³ This issue will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven.

argued that whilst the website may or may not be skewed towards one type of Irish Republicanism, the types of behaviour and attitudes displayed on “Republican.ie” are representative of those found within the greater Irish Republican community in Northern Ireland. It is there possible to make at least tentative statements about the wider Republican community based on the users of “Republican.ie” and people in general, an issue which will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

The preceding chapter has deliberately kept to the superficial features of the web site: its form, and its users. Little has so far been said about the background context of the discussions that take place, or why the forum should have been established in the first place. Why is it that Republicans want a united Ireland? Why is Ireland not united in the first place? Without the historical context, it is hard to understand any group in Northern Ireland, let alone their traditions and folklore. The following chapter will provide a short introduction to the history of Northern Ireland to give readers a better understanding of Irish Republicans and their origins, and the discussions that take place between them on “Republican.ie” before we begin to focus on one particular area of online dispute.

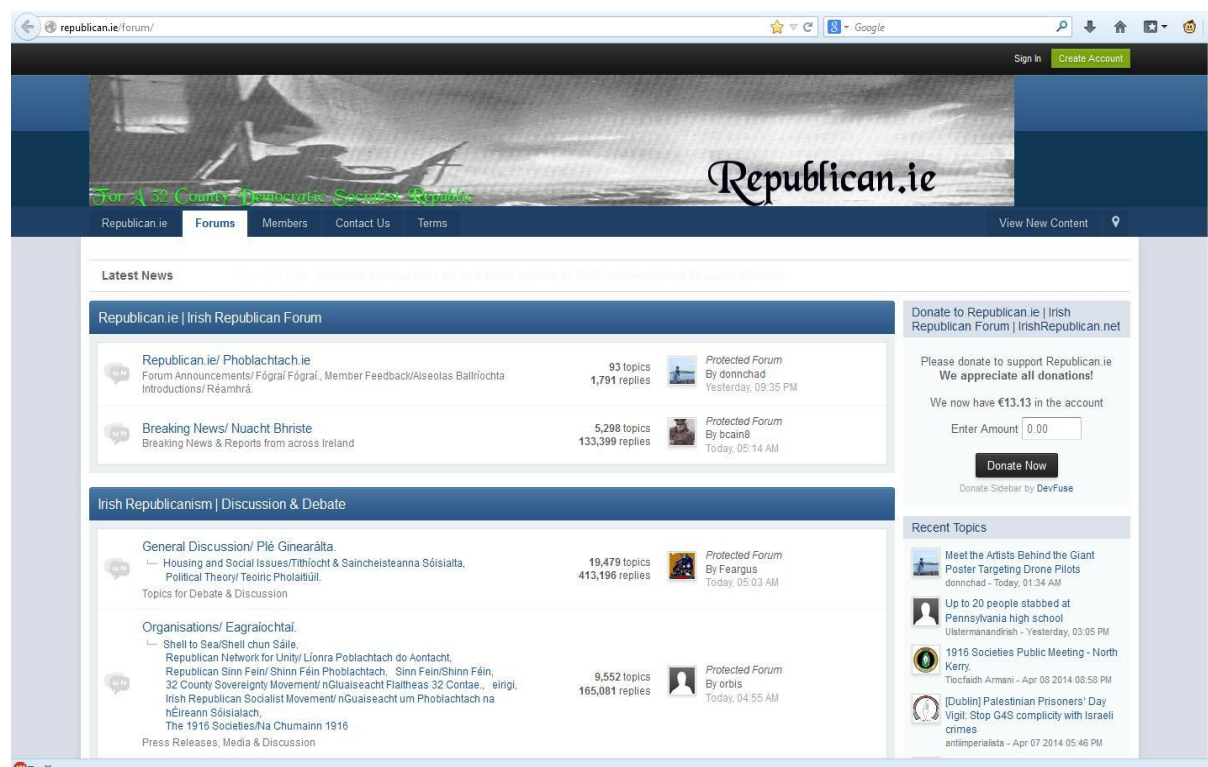


Image 4.1. Image of the website visible to guests. The image shows the donation tab, the “Recent Topics” list, and four sub-forums, all of which are protected: “Republican.ie/ Phoblachtach.ie”; “Breaking News/ Nuacht Bhriste”; “General Discussion/ Píe Ginearálta”; and “Organisations/ Eagraíochtaí”.

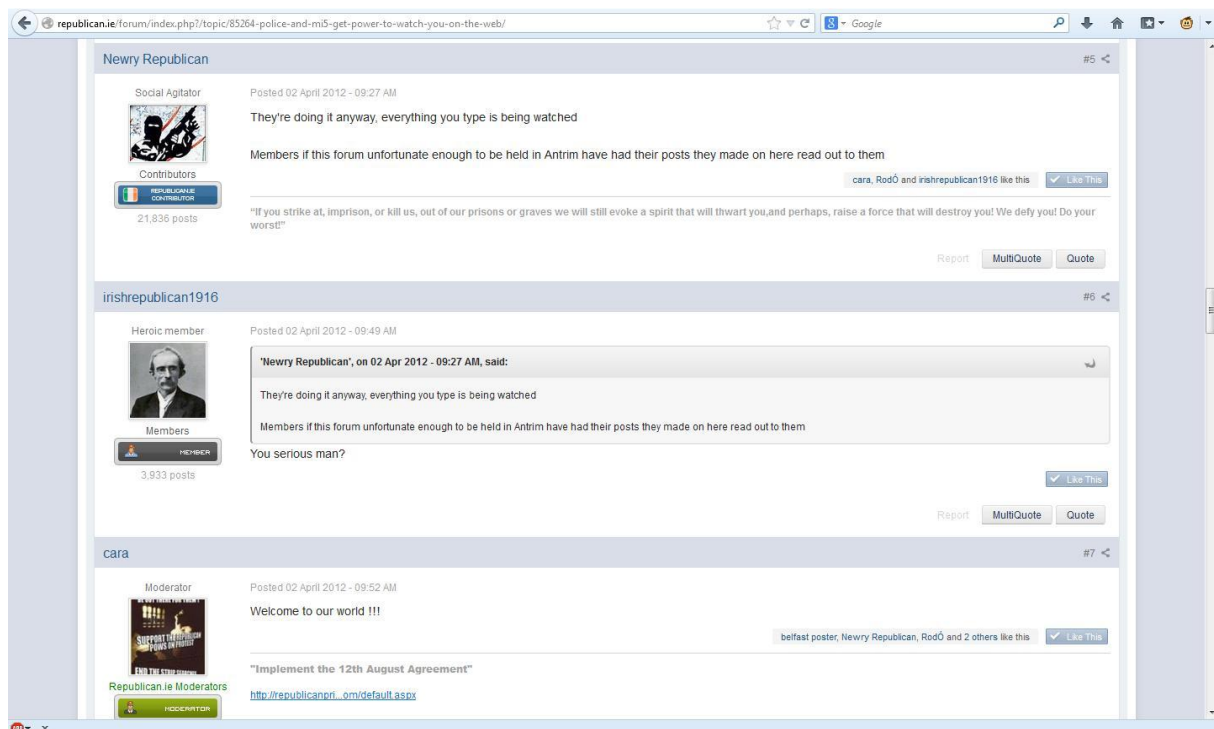


Image 4.2. An image of the example thread discussed in Chapter 4.0.4., showing Posts 5-7. One can see three different types of users: contributor, member and moderator in that order. The image also shows how the quoting system works and the website's "like" function, which works similar to Facebook's.

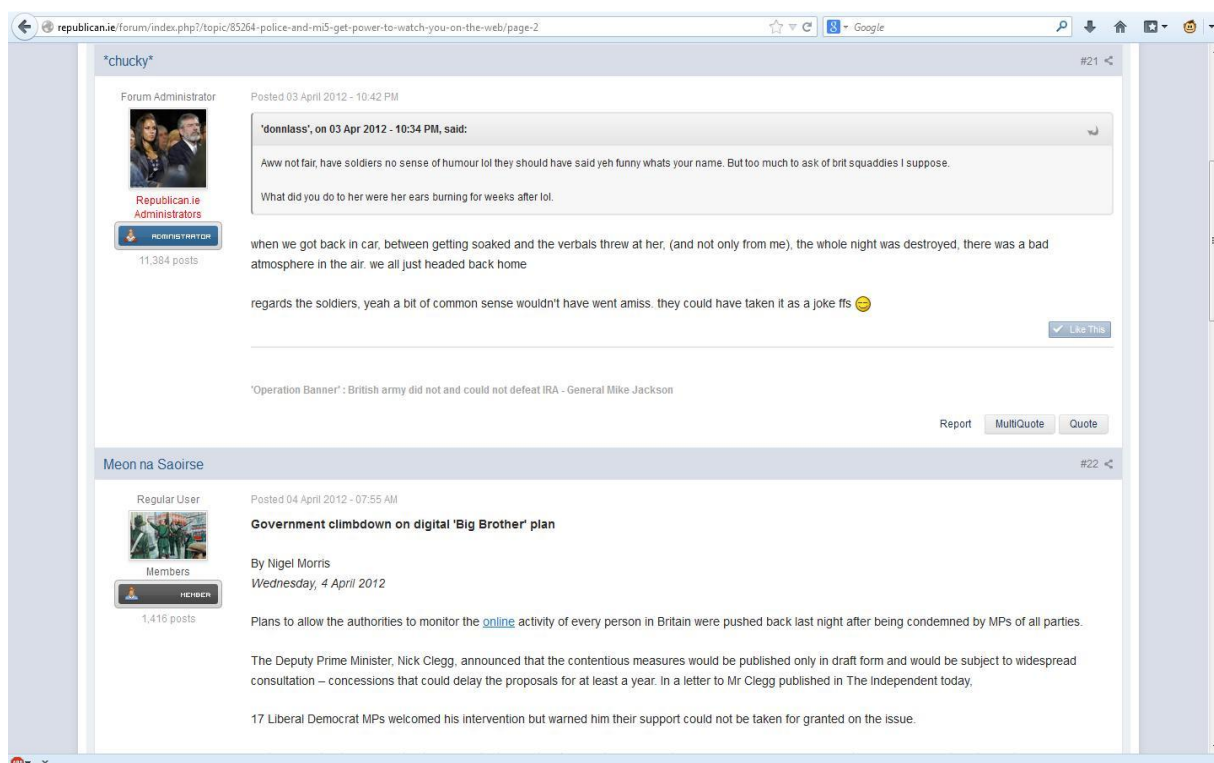


Image 4.3. Another image of the example thread discussed in Chapter 4.0.4., showing Posts 21 and 22. One can see two types of users: an administrator and member. Post 21 contains an emoticon, an image used to signify some kind of emotion, and the beginning of Post 22, which is quoting a newspaper article.

5. A Short History of Northern Ireland

5.0.1 Introduction

When discussing the history of Northern Ireland and its conflict, it is often hard to know when to begin. Since the 12th century, there have been numerous conflicts between the Irish and the English, later the British, and so there is always a temptation to begin the story there (*cf.* O'Malley 2001: 9). Robert Kee (2000: 9), for example, begins his discussion of Irish nationalism back in the mists of time tracing the developments from the early interactions with the Normans in the 12th century up until the most recent conflict in Northern Ireland. Whilst certainly interesting, such an approach suggests that Irish nationalism is more a monolithic, united ideology with deep historical roots rather than a collection of different ideologies that have evolved at different times.¹²⁴ Since this chapter seeks only to give a brief introduction to a rather complicated topic, it is more useful to focus solely on the most recent precedents to the current conflict. This also allows us to discuss the events which have been the most formative with regard to the varying group identities in modern-day Northern Ireland. It thus seems best to begin the discussion with the event which led directly to the creation of Northern Ireland: the Home Rule Crisis which began at the start of the 20th century. This will be followed by a brief description of events following the partition of Ireland and Northern Ireland, running up until beginning of the conflict known as “The Troubles”. This conflict lasted from the late 1960s until 1998, when the majority of political parties in Northern Ireland signed the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) called an end to their campaign. Given its huge importance to Northern Irish society, this section of the chapter will naturally be the largest, yet can only give an overview of the key events. The chapter will end by looking at Northern Ireland since the GFA and what has changed since then. This brief history of Northern Ireland will hopefully give the reader a measure of understanding of modern-day Northern Irish society and enable them to have a better understanding of the material discussed in Chapter Six.

¹²⁴ For more information about the different forms of Irish Nationalism, see McGarry and O'Leary 1998: 14-25.

It should be stated from the outset that this chapter is not an attempt to interpret events or to blame one party or another. It will seek only to portray the generally accepted facts, but as the project revolves around Irish Republicans, it will naturally focus more on events relating to the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community as a whole. Whilst I am very much aware that religion and politics do not always overlap, it nonetheless remains true that Catholics are more likely to be Nationalists or Republicans than Protestants and that Nationalist/Republican parties draw the majority of their support from the Catholic community.¹²⁵

5.0.2 The Home Rule Crisis, Partition and a Protestant State: 1900-1960

The origins of the Home Rule Crisis began at the end of the 19th century when the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) began to push for a devolved parliament in Dublin to deal with Irish affairs. The preceding impetus came from a man called Isaac Butt (1813-79), a politician who started the Home Rule movement in the later 1870s after the Great Famine,¹²⁶ inspired by a failed rebellion by the Young Irelanders (English 2007: 192).¹²⁷ The IPP was formally founded by Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-1891) in 1882 and immediately began to push more seriously for home rule in Ireland. By 1900, two Home Rule Bills had been defeated in the House of Commons and Gladstone's Liberal government, which had brought forward both bills, had been replaced by an anti-home rule, Conservative government. In Ireland, the anti-home rule movement had been spearheaded by the Dublin-based Irish Unionist Party (IUP) as well as the Orange Order,¹²⁸ who organised support through their network of lodges on the island. At this time the IPP had been rocked by a scandal revolving around Parnell¹²⁹ and after a short split was reunited in 1900 under the leadership of John Redmond (1856-1918), who was to lead the party until his death in 1918. The split in the IPP combined with the arrival of a new Conservative government led to a lull in the home rule movement which was to

¹²⁵ For more information about Northern Irish history or the conflict, I would recommend the following books in particular: Bardon (2005) gives the reader an in-depth analysis of Ulster's history; Bew and Gillespie (1999) provide more detail about the recent conflict than is here given here; English (2007) offers the reader a comprehensive study of Ireland's history from the 18th century onwards; McGarry and O'Leary (1998) present an exhaustive analysis of all the arguments relating to the causes of the conflict and provides a good introduction to the main ideologies; whilst CAIN's Chronology of the Conflict (2013a) provides an objective description of events in the conflict and links to pages detailing events from the 12th century going up to 1967.

¹²⁶ The Great Famine was potato famine from 1845 to 1852 which led to the death of over a million Irishmen and the emigration of a million more: see CAIN 2013a.

¹²⁷ The Young Irelanders were a revolutionary group who sought Irish independence.

¹²⁸ The Orange Order is a Protestant fraternal association founded in 1796. It is strongly pro-British and anti-Catholicism. The Order is widely known for its yearly parades on the 12th July where they celebrate the victory of the Protestant William of Orange over the Catholic King James at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690.

¹²⁹ Charles Parnell was named a co-respondent in a divorce case involving Katharine O'Shea.

dissipate around 1905 when the government collapsed and a new Liberal government was formed in 1906.¹³⁰

The following decade was nonetheless highly significant in Irish history as it ultimately laid the groundwork for the partition of the island into two states. In 1905, around the time of the collapse of the Conservative government, Arthur Griffiths founded Sinn Féin, a party which aimed to create a union between Ireland and Britain similar to the union between Hungary and Austria in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Moreover, the Ulster Unionist Council, later the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), was formed with the express aim of defending Ireland from home rule. Due to other developments in the past, such as the Great Famine and the Penal Laws,¹³¹ the home rule parties — the IPP and Sinn Féin — drew their support from Catholics, whilst the anti-home rule parties — the IUP and the UUP — were largely supported by Protestants, most of whom lived in the area known as Ulster. With the exception of Sinn Féin, who remained comparatively unimportant until after 1916, these parties only came to real prominence in 1910 when the Liberals lost a significant amount of seats in Westminster. In order to maintain their majority, the Liberals turned to the IPP with the promise of home rule if they gave their support to the Liberals. This decision led to the Third Home Rule Bill being brought before the House of Commons in 1912 and eventually the partition of Ireland.

The Third Home Rule Bill was to have massive impact in Ireland despite its initial rejection in 1912. Opposition was again centred around Ulster, where the majority of the Protestant population in Ireland lived. Edward Carson (1854-1935) had become leader of the UUP in 1910 and immediately set about strengthening their fight against home rule. After the Bill was announced in 1912, Carson and the UUP organised Ulster Day when 237,368 Ulstermen signed the Solemn League and Covenant in which they pledged to defend Ulster against home rule by any means (CAIN 2013a). This resistance manifested itself in the formation in 1913 of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), a paramilitary organisation, which had the intention of waging civil war should home rule be introduced in Ireland. Around the same time, the ‘Home Rulers’, as they came to be known, formed their own paramilitary

¹³⁰ See English 2007: 66-231 and Bardon 2005: 75-425 for more information about events before 1905.

¹³¹ The Penal Laws, enacted during the 18th century and only repealed in the mid-19th century, were laws which took away most rights from Catholics. See Rafferty 1994 for more information about the laws. These laws along with the Plantation of Ulster, in which Catholic land was given to Protestant settlers from Scotland and England, and minority rule by Protestants over Catholics in Ireland led to deep divisions between Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants. During the Romantic era, however, “Irishness” came to be defined as Irish-speaking and Catholic (*cf.* Ó Giolláin 2000), which further alienated the Protestant population who saw themselves as increasingly British as the 19th century wore on. By the early 20th century, religious affiliation had come to define political affiliation and it has mostly remained this way in Northern Ireland.

organisation called the Irish Volunteers. Both groups imported arms from Germany with unequal success in preparation of violence over home rule. Despite the opposition's open threat of violence, the government placed the Third Home Rule Bill on the statute book in 1914, but it was then immediately shelved due to the outbreak of the First World War. With the suspension of the Third Home Rule Bill and the onset of the war, a number of Irishmen who desired total independence from the UK began to plan for an armed rising. Their plans culminated in 1916 with the Easter Rising on 24th April, and the Proclamation of the Irish Republic by the leaders at the General Post Office in Dublin (see Bardon 2007: 452-454; Coogan 2005; English 2007: 260-263, 271-279; and Kee 2000: 548-587). The Rising lasted only a few days and the British government responded with martial law and the execution of the ringleaders, including Patrick Pearse (1879-1916), Joseph Plunkett (1887-1916), John MacBride (1868-1916), Sean MacDiarmada (1883-1916) and James Connolly (1868-1916).

Popular response to the executions had a dramatic change on British policy and Irish strategy. As English notes, "[t]he rebels quickly became Irish national saints" (2007: 262) and the rest of those imprisoned were promptly released as a result of the rising tide of Irish Nationalism. One of those pardoned was a man named Éamon de Valera (1882-1975),¹³² who swiftly gained control of Sinn Féin and set its course towards an independent Irish republic, riding the wave of feeling created by the executions. The Irish desire for complete independence, rather than mere home rule, was confirmed in the 1918 general elections when Sinn Féin won 73 seats as opposed to the IPP's six. Taking this as a sign of popular support, Sinn Féin formed the first Dáil Éireann¹³³ and issued a Declaration of Independence in 1919. This declaration, combined with the killing of two policemen in Co. Tipperary, brought about the start of the Irish War of Independence (see Kee 2000: 632; and English 2007: 286-287) which was to last until 1921, ending with the formation of the Irish Free State as a Dominion in the British Commonwealth.

The war was mostly fought as a guerrilla war by the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the successors of the Irish Volunteers, and the British forces. This war included a number of key events which polarised opinions in Ireland. The IRA were known for their attacks on police officers, for example, whilst the Royal Irish Constabulary hired World War I veterans, known as the Black and Tans, who often attacked civilians in revenge. One of the best known reprisal attacks was "Bloody Sunday" in 1920, when the RIC opened fire on spectators at a Gaelic

¹³² De Valera was to remain a force in Irish politics until his death, having served twice as Taoiseach (Prime Minister) and once as President.

¹³³ The Dáil Éireann is the Irish parliament which was modelled predominantly on the British system.

football match in Croke Park, Dublin, in revenge for the assassination of a number of officers by the IRA. Despite their numerical superiority and superior strength, the British armed forces were unable to defeat the IRA. Nor were they able to change the attitude of the larger Irish populace which was against them. This fact led to a truce between the two countries and ultimately a peace treaty.

After two years with neither side the clear victor, both parties agreed to the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December, 1921. By signing this treaty, the Irish delegates agreed, amongst other things, to the partition of Ireland if Northern Ireland wished it; to the establishment of a Boundary Commission to determine the borders between Northern Ireland and the Free State; to the independent status of the Irish Free State as a Dominion within the British Empire; to the Irish Free State taking part of the British national debt; and to allow the British armed forces to continue using Irish ports. The controversial acceptance of the treaty by the Dáil led to what has been called the Irish Civil War which was fought between pro-treatyites and anti-treatyites,¹³⁴ with the pro-treatyites ultimately winning. Northern Ireland, having officially been separated in 1920, had been ruled by its own parliament since 1921 and stated that it wished to remain separated from the rest of Ireland. The separation enshrined in the treaty remains in place to this day, with 26 counties in Ireland and six in Northern Ireland.

As noted above, in Northern Ireland, the Unionist government had already started running their own state. In response to sectarian rioting across the state, they introduced the Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act in 1922 which granted the government the ability to take whatever measures deemed necessary to quell violence in the state. In his work on Catholicism within Ulster, Oliver Rafferty suggests that this Act was used specifically to target Catholics in Northern Ireland (Rafferty 1994: 215). At the same time, the government removed Proportional Representation (PR) for local elections and redrew their electoral boundaries (Rafferty 1994: 219, 225). In 1926, they passed the Emergency Powers Act, which allowed the British, and thus Unionist, Governor of Northern Ireland to declare a state of emergency and take full control of Northern Ireland until the state of emergency was resolved. Finally, in 1929, they also removed PR for parliamentary elections and switched to the British “first-past-the-post” system (Rafferty 1994: 227), thereby giving the Unionists a stranglehold on power in Northern Ireland, since this system favoured majority parties.

¹³⁴ A portion of the Members of Parliament was against the Treaty and attempted to oust the pro-treatyites from government. This consequently led directly to the Irish Civil War, in which the pro-treaty party represented both the majority in the government and the majority of the populace.

After this turbulent beginning, Northern Ireland nonetheless eventually settled down and began to rule itself. With the new electoral rules in place, the Protestants effectively ran the country, both at a regional and a local level. One of the best examples of this can be seen in the Derry/Londonderry Council, which represented 29,000 Catholics and 18,000 Protestants and yet was staffed by only 8 Catholics and 12 Protestants (Rafferty 1994: 237). The state nonetheless continued to mistrust and maltreat Catholics, some politicians even going so far as to avoid hiring them on principle (Rafferty 1994: 232), whilst others kept them out of the civil service altogether (Rafferty 1994: 233). Even the welfare state was prejudiced against Catholics, council housing more often being allocated to Protestants than Catholics (Rafferty 1994: 247). An article by Mac Laughlin and Agnew (1986) also suggests that between the years 1945 and 1972, the government deliberately funnelled money into Protestant areas, whilst neglecting Catholic ones. Nonetheless, the state was relatively stable after 1920.

In spite of what has been noted above, the Catholics were far from entirely blameless and it would be wrong to say that things ran completely smoothly between the formation of Northern Ireland and the beginning of The Troubles. The IRA ran a border campaign during the Irish Civil War which only came to an end after the war ended. They then started a second campaign during the 1950s, but this failed to achieve any real successes and only served to further strengthen Protestant distrust of the Irish and Catholics living within their borders. Another problem arose when Catholics began to fly the Irish tricolour in their area which led eventually to the Flags and Emblems Act in 1954, effectively banning any emblem or flag which the state or police saw as provocative, which essentially meant the Irish Tricolour (Bardon 2005: 604). Oliver Rafferty's book on Catholicism in Ulster is a very useful book for understanding Catholic behaviour during this period (Rafferty 1994: 222-259). Rafferty provides a balanced account which also points out those times at which Catholic behaviour did more damage than good to their political aims and how this affected Protestant opinion of them. Nevertheless, Rafferty points out that by the 1960s, relations between the two communities had begun to improve.

5.0.3 The Troubles: 1960s-1998

Despite a preceding period of warming relations between the two communities in Northern Ireland, the 1960s were not only to witness the situation worsen,¹³⁵ but also erupt in violence

¹³⁵ For an analysis of the period 1964 to 1969, see Rose 2000.

which was to engulf the region for roughly thirty years causing the deaths of 3,488 people.¹³⁶ The conflict was once again fought between Republicans and Nationalists on one side and Unionists, Loyalists and the British state on the other. As before, the Republicans and Nationalists drew their support mainly from the Catholic community and were represented by the IRA. The Unionists and Loyalists drew their support predominantly from the Protestant community and had a number of paramilitary groups to represent them: the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF). The British state was represented by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) and the British Army. Over and above this, both sides were represented by various political parties: Sinn Féin, led by Tomás Mac Giolla (1924-2010), who were the main Republican party; the Socialist Democratic Labour Party (SDLP), founded in 1970 and led by Gerry Fitt (1926-2005), who represented the Nationalists; and the UUP, led by Terence O'Neill (1914-1990), and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), founded in 1971 led by Ian Paisley (1926), who were supported by Unionists and Loyalists. The period was characterised by political deadlock and intransigence on all sides.¹³⁷

Following the failed IRA campaign of the late 1950s to remove the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, relations between the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities had begun to worsen again. The Campaign for Social Justice was formed in 1964 and in line with other protest social movements in this period began to push for social reform whilst publishing booklets about discrimination within Northern Ireland, which included the lack of proportional representation and the gerrymandered electoral boundaries (Bardon 2005: 639-640, 643, 646). That same year, riots exploded in Belfast when the RUC took down the Irish flag which was flying outside the electoral offices of Republican candidates, in accordance with the 1954 Flags and Emblems Act. This was done in response to Ian Paisley's threat to march in and tear the flag down himself unless it was removed by the police (Bardon 2005: 632; English 2007: 364). In response to rioting by Catholic communities, a number of Protestants reformed the UVF in 1966 which immediately began to target Catholics in revenge attacks (Bardon 2005: 635). The following year, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was founded to strengthen the demands for electoral reform; the end of gerrymandering; the end of discrimination in employment; the end of discrimination in the allocation of housing; the

¹³⁶ This number is based on the information on CAIN (2002) for the years 1969 to 1998.

¹³⁷ For more information about The Troubles, see Bardon 2005: 622-830; Bew & Gillespie 1999; CAIN 2013b; English 2005: 81-301; 2007: 361-408; and Moloney 2007. It should be noted that Bardon's *A History of Ulster* only covers up to 1992.

repeal of the 1922 Special Powers Act; and more (Bardon 2005: 651-652; English 2007: 367). In 1968, the NICRA began to hold protest parades based on the Black Civil Rights Movement, marches which were often banned by the RUC as result of counter-demonstrations which were arranged by Loyalist groups, thereby raising the possibility of open conflict between the two groups (Bardon 2005: 652). This became a key issue later that year when the NICRA marched in Derry/Londonderry in October, only to be attacked by the RUC who used batons to break up the parade, something which led to further rioting across Derry/Londonderry and fighting between Catholics and the RUC (Bardon 2005: 654-655). Meanwhile, the NICRA continued their protests and Terence O'Neill, then Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, announced a minor reforms package, which attempted to answer some of the NICRA's demands.

Tensions nevertheless continued to worsen between the two communities. In March 1969, the UVF and other Loyalists began a bombing campaign against Catholics and new riots broke out during the Marching Season (CAIN 2012).¹³⁸ The first death attributed to the conflict occurred in July of the same year, when a man was beaten to death by the RUC in Dungiven (CAIN 2012). Issues came to a head in August when the Battle of Bogside began in Derry/Londonderry. The Apprentice Boys¹³⁹ held a parade around the city's walls near to a Catholic area known as Bogside. This march led to serious rioting in the area met by the RUC with water cannons and CS gas and the support of a Loyalist crowd. The rioting then spread to other areas and towns and eventually the government decided to deploy the British Army to help quell the riots (Bardon 666-672; English 2005: 102). This did little to help the situation and the violence between the two communities became so bad that the first "peace-line"¹⁴⁰ was built in an area of Belfast to prevent the two communities from attacking each other. More significantly, the IRA itself split in December over a debate about abstentionism at Sinn Féin's annual meeting. Those in favour of abstentionism became known as the Provisional IRA (PIRA) with Provisional Sinn Féin¹⁴¹ under the leadership of Ruairí Ó Brádaigh (1932-2013) as their political party whilst those against it became the Official IRA (OIRA) represented by Official Sinn Féin under the leadership of Tomás Mac Giolla (Bardon 2005: 674-675; English 2005: 105-108; 2007: 383). Following this split, the PIRA went on to

¹³⁸ The Marching Season is period of the year, between March and August, when the majority of Northern Ireland's parades are held.

¹³⁹ The Apprentice Boys are a Protestant fraternal association founded in 1814, whose main celebration revolves around actions of the apprentice boys who had shut the gates of the city of Derry before King James' forces, thereby starting the Siege of Derry, 1689. In their celebrations each December, they burn effigies of Governor Lundy, who tried to yield the city to James during the siege.

¹⁴⁰ Peace-lines are tall barricades built between the two communities to prevent missiles and attacks.

¹⁴¹ Provisional Sinn Féin eventually became the party today known simply as Sinn Féin.

become one of the best-known paramilitary groups in the world, committing most of the attacks in the conflict and once more polarising opinions in both communities.

The early 1970s were the worst period of the conflict if one goes by the number of deaths alone (CAIN 2002): between the years 1970 and 1975, 1,486 people were killed due to the conflict. Whilst 1970 itself was relatively quiet, it saw a number of open gun battles between the IRA and British authorities. It was also the year in which rubber bullets were given to the RUC (CAIN 2013c) and the year the earlier noted SDLP was formed (Bardon 2005: 679). In the same period the British Army placed the Falls Road¹⁴² under a 34-hour military curfew in order to search for illegal weapons in homes. The curfew caused the Catholic community to lose faith in the impartiality of the British Army and a number of gun battles occurred between them and the IRA (Bardon 2005: 677-678; English 2005: 136; 2007: 370). The situation worsened in 1971 as the UVF continued their campaign (Bardon 2005: 682); the UDA was also founded (Bardon 2005: 685);¹⁴³ and the British government introduced internment (Bardon 2005: 681-686).¹⁴⁴ Whilst internment only lasted until 1975, it brought about the imprisonment of 1,874 Catholics and 107 Protestants. Rafferty describes it as “a weapon aimed not only at the IRA but at the very heart of the [C]atholic population” (Rafferty 1994: 266). It may have been an attempt to curb the rising violence, but only pushed Catholics further into the arms of the IRA, creating a context for greater violence (Bardon 2005: 682).

1972 saw the largest amount of deaths of any single year in the conflict as a total of 480 people died (CAIN 2002). There were a large number of attacks on both sides which saw multiple fatalities. Two of the most famous are Bloody Sunday and Bloody Friday. Bloody Sunday occurred on 30th January when British soldiers opened fire on NICRA marchers in Derry/Londonderry, killing 13 and injuring 14 (Bardon 2005: 686-688; English 2005: 146-150; 2007: 370). The event has spawned two independent inquiries,¹⁴⁵ the last of which gave its report in 2010.¹⁴⁶ It has been formative in the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican identity, becoming one of the many issues which led to the dissolution of the Parliament of Northern Ireland and the beginning of direct rule from Westminster in 1972. Bloody Friday refers to an IRA attack in Belfast on 21st July when 20 bombs were let off in 65 minutes, killing 9 and

¹⁴² The Falls Road is located in west Belfast and is predominantly a Catholic/Nationalist/Republican road.

¹⁴³ The UDA is the Ulster Defence Association and is a Loyalist paramilitary organisation.

¹⁴⁴ Internment is the incarceration of people without trial.

¹⁴⁵ The first was the Widgery Tribunal which was held directly after the event and found the soldiers innocent and accused the marchers of having explosives (CAIN 2013l).

¹⁴⁶ The Saville Inquiry, which rejected the findings of the Widgery Tribunal and stated that the marchers were innocent and had been fired on by the British Army.

injuring 130 more (Bardon 2005: 695-698).¹⁴⁷ This was the largest attack in the conflict. Whilst atrocities have been committed by both sides since,¹⁴⁸ these two events are used as examples of the lengths either side would go to in order to win and can be viewed as important if only for the damage they caused.¹⁴⁹

In an effort to stem the violence emanating from both communities, the British and Irish governments signed the so-called Sunningdale Agreement in December, 1973 (Bardon 2005: 703-707). Part of this agreement entailed the creation of a Council of Ireland which would be half Northern Irish and half Irish, granting the Republic of Ireland a consultative role in matters concerning Northern Ireland. Loyalists were completely against the agreement and refused to participate, organising strikes and other blocking measures in order to make the agreement fail (Bardon 2005: 707-711; English 2007: 391). This was to become a common Loyalist tactic, one which they repeated through the conflict whenever an agreement attempted to introduce some form of Irish role in Northern Ireland. This tactic was often successful and led to the resumption of direct rule in 1974 after less than a year and the end of the Sunningdale Agreement. It also signalled the end for a time of movement towards peace, and punishment killings, which later came to be known as “tit for tat” killings, started to become more common.

In 1976, the British government removed the special status of those prisoners arrested in connection with the conflict. This led to numerous protests by the prisoners, such as the so-called ‘blanket’ and ‘dirty’ protests. The most famous protest was the second hunger strike held in 1981. This led to the deaths of 10 prisoners, one of whom was Bobby Sands (1954-1981), who had been elected to Westminster whilst in prison. As the analysis in Chapter 6.4 revolves around these events in 1981, a separate, more detailed history about them can be found in Chapter 6.3 and no more need be said here.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that there was some light appearing in the conflict at this time: the IRA and Loyalist paramilitaries had declared multiple, if short, ceasefires which showed at least a willingness to end the fighting. Sinn Féin had also been declared a legal organisation by Westminster in 1974 and in 1981 they announced they intended to contest all

¹⁴⁷ By 00.00am on 22nd July, there had been 39 explosions across Northern Ireland (Bardon 2005: 697).

¹⁴⁸ Other events include the assassination of Lord Mountbatten (1900-1979), killed by the PIRA in a fishing boat off the coast of County Sligo (CAIN 2013f); the Guildford Pub bombings in 1974 (CAIN 2013d); the murder of numerous Catholics by a Loyalist group known as the Shankill Butchers (Dillon 1989); the Disappeared, a group of killings by the PIRA where many of the bodies remain undiscovered; and the bombings of Dublin and Monaghan by the UVF in 1974 (CAIN 2013d).

¹⁴⁹ For more information about Bloody Sunday, see Hayes & Campbell 2005; McCann, Shiels & Hannigan 1992; Mullan 1997; O'Brien 2002; and Walsh 2000. Less has been written about Bloody Friday, but information about the event can be found in the references provided in the text.

Northern Irish elections (Bardon 2005: 746; English 2007: 380). The movement towards peace can be seen in the reduction in the number of deaths related to the conflict, which had fallen to 121 by 1979 and to 57 by 1985 (CAIN 2002). Whilst not always effective, a definite shift in thinking was taking place amongst the political parties and their respective paramilitary organisations by the mid-1980s.

The road to peace was nonetheless slow. Yet another effort to find some form of peaceful resolution to the conflict was again foiled by the Loyalists led by Ian Paisley (Bardon 2005: 757-766). In November 1985, the UK and Ireland signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement which stated that Northern Ireland could only change its situation through the consent of the majority (Bardon 2005: 753-766). The Agreement also established an intergovernmental conference which was to give the Dáil a consultative role in Northern Ireland once again. As before, it was this last requirement which Loyalists objected to and through protests and strikes which carried on into 1987, they were able to prevent the Agreement from taking hold. Meanwhile, the IRA continued their campaign for an independent Ireland, widening their targets to those working for the security forces. One of their larger attacks was in Enniskillen on Remembrance Day in 1987 when they killed 11 and injured 63 (Bardon 2005: 775-777). The Loyalist paramilitaries were also active. One of their more important killings in this period was the murder of the solicitor, Pat Finucane, carried out in 1989 by the UFF because he had represented a number of Republican paramilitary members (BBC 2013a). Loyalists were also responsible for a number of civilian killings and the murders of a number of Republican politicians (Bardon 2005: xvii, 811). At the same time, the respective political parties of both groups remained in deadlock, despite multiple attempts to find some form of resolution.

Talks between the various parties began and ended repeatedly throughout the conflict. In 1993, however, the situation began to improve. John Hume, then leader of the SDLP, and Gerry Adams had been meeting on and off for years (Bardon 2005: xvii) and in 1993, Gerry Adams announced that Sinn Féin was moving more towards a peaceful route as a means of achieving their goals. Moreover, it was revealed that the British had secretly been involved in on-and-off talks with Republicans since 1986 (English 2007: 403), talks which only became regular after February 1993. These talks complemented those that London had had with Dublin which led to the Downing Street Declaration in December of that same year (English 2007: 403-404). The joint Declaration was dedicated to changing the political structure in Northern Ireland and working towards reconciliation between all the parties. As before, Ian Paisley and the DUP protested against the agreement, but this time they lacked the support of

the UVF, one of the leading Loyalist paramilitaries. This turn towards peace by various paramilitary organisations was demonstrated in action in 1994, first by the IRA who declared a cessation of all military action in the August of that year and later by the Loyalists who called their own ceasefire (Bardon 2005: xviii; English 2005: 285; 2007: 404). Although there was still rioting and some attacks after both of these declarations, the lines of communication were slowly opening between all sides of the conflict.

Despite the movement towards peace that was taking place in the 90s, the PIRA called off their ceasefire in 1996 and recommenced their armed campaign (Bardon 2005: xix; English 2005: 289; 2007: 404). The resumption of violence led to the Manchester bombing in the June of the same year when 200 were injured by an IRA attack (English 2005: 292). At the same time, however, the Mitchell Report was calling for the simultaneous decommissioning of paramilitaries and the beginning of cross-party talks, rather than waiting for one or the other to begin first. Whilst most parties agreed to this, the DUP once again rejected this proposal and continued to call for IRA decommissioning before they would enter into talks with Sinn Féin (CAIN 2013f). For the time being, political deadlock ruled which allowed the violence to continue. However, by 1996 the violence had become only a fraction of what it used to be and CAIN records only 18 deaths that year connected to the conflict (CAIN 2002).

The year 1997 saw an even greater change in Northern Ireland which continued the slow march towards peace. The North Report¹⁵⁰ called for an independent body to regulate contentious parade routes, such as those which involved walking down streets belonging to the other side. This report ultimately gave birth to the Parades Commission in October, 1997, and it continues to regulate the parades in Northern Ireland. Labour then led by Tony Blair came to power in the general election on 1st May and Sinn Féin became the third biggest Northern Irish party in Westminster. This indicated a movement away from Conservative, pro-Union based politics in Westminster as well as a growing recognition and acceptance of Sinn Féin as legitimate political party. This trend was repeated in the local elections in Northern Ireland later that year where Sinn Féin came third after the UUP and SDLP. This change in the balance of votes led to Belfast's first ever Nationalist council, as well as its first Nationalist mayor. This new change meant that results were not long in coming and in July of that year, the PIRA announced their ceasefire and Sinn Féin were invited to talks between the

¹⁵⁰ The North Report was published by the Independent Review Body on Parades and Marches in Northern Ireland and chaired by Peter North, a legal scholar at Oxford.

other major parties at Stormont.¹⁵¹ The party even participated in their first ever television debate with the UUP in August, 1997. Following on from this, the British and Irish governments agreed on and set up the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD) to oversee the decommissioning of the various paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland, although the IRA were still expected to be the first group to carry this out (CAIN 2013g).

Cross-party talks culminated in the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) on 10th April, 1998. The GFA arranged for a separate Northern Ireland Assembly with 108 seats; power-sharing; a 12-member Executive; Proportional Representation at all levels; a North-South Ministerial Council; the amendment of Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution which laid claim to Northern Ireland; the requirement of the consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland in order to change its status as a member of the UK; and the repeal of the 1920 Government of Ireland Act which laid claim to Ireland. This agreement was rejected by the DUP and a large number of Republicans, but the overwhelming majority of everyone in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland voted in favour of it in two separate referenda held in 1998 (Bardon 2005: xiv-xvi; Bardon 2007: 404-408). Nonetheless, further violence was to mar the GFA. In August 1998, a dissident Republican group calling itself the Real IRA (RIRA)¹⁵² bombed a high street in Omagh, killing 29 and injuring many more in one of the worst single attacks of the conflict. Public reaction was such that the RIRA swiftly called a ceasefire after the attack as did the remaining Republican paramilitaries, allowing people to believe the conflict was really finally over (Bardon 2005: xxiii).

The conflict had spanned roughly 30 years and killed over 3,400 people by its conclusion (CAIN 2002). The reasons given for the conflict are myriad and often very dependent on who is being asked the question. McGarry and O'Leary (1998) have written an entire book just examining and debating the various these reasons. Rafferty (1994) provides a balanced appraisal from a Catholic point of view, whilst Tom Wilson (1989) does the same from the Unionist side. The Troubles remain a formative event in Northern Irish history and for Northern Irish identity, both in the Republican/Nationalist and in the Loyalist/Unionist communities. However, the signing of the GFA led to both sides beginning to move away from violence and towards peace: Sinn Féin had become an accepted part of the political milieu; Catholics had had many, if not all, of their complaints addressed in the GFA and other

¹⁵¹ Stormont is the seat of the Northern Ireland Assembly and was seen as a bastion of Unionism until recently.

¹⁵² The Real IRA was formed by Republicans and former members of the PIRA who rejected the GFA and Sinn Féin's acceptance of it. They are represented politically by the 32 County Sovereignty Movement (CAIN 2013j).

agreements; and paramilitary organisations on both sides had called ceasefires and agreed to decommission. All that was left was to establish an agreement on how to share power.

5.0.4 The Post Good Friday Agreement Era

The period after the GFA is the one least written about. This should not surprise anyone as it is the most recent period in Northern Irish history and scholars are in many ways more interested in debating the conflict rather than its aftermath. Bardon has a brief introduction that includes a discussion of events up to 2001 (Bardon 2005: xiii-xxvi); English covers events up to 2004 (English 2007: 404-420); and Bew and Gillespie's work covers up to 1999 (Bew & Gillespie 1999), but it has been primarily social scientists who have reviewed the most recent years.¹⁵³ That being said, the period still deserves a brief discussion at the end of this chapter as it is the one in which the Northern Irish, the subjects of this research project, are currently living. Much has changed: there is now a power sharing Assembly which has been running since 2007; there are no longer any checkpoints along the roads or the borders; the army is no longer a facet of everyday life; and Sinn Féin regularly participates in the Assembly, forming the second largest party after the DUP, the only party who rejected the GFA. Northern Ireland is a changed society, but tensions remain which have been known to bubble to the surface when provoked.

Two of the biggest changes have been the policing reforms and the decommissioning of the IRA. In 1999, the Patten Report¹⁵⁴ was published, laying out various reforms needed in the police in Northern Ireland (BBC 2001a). To this end, the Royal Ulster Constabulary was rebranded the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in 2001 following a 50% Catholic hiring policy. Whilst before the RUC had been predominantly Protestant, thus Unionist/Loyalist, and often seen as the enemy of the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community, the PSNI was intended to be a cross-community police service which served each community impartially. The second change is possibly even more important. Before and after the GFA, loud calls had come from the Unionists for the PIRA to decommission. In 2000, the PIRA had begun to make plans for such a development, only to withdraw them again in 2001. Ultimately, after renewed calls from Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Féin, the PIRA eventually began to decommission under the watchful eyes of the IICD on 23rd October, 2001 (CAIN 2013h). This has led to a Northern Ireland in which the police are nominally accepted

¹⁵³ See, for example, work by Coulter 2008; McGarry 2001; and Wolff 2003. See also the work of the anthropologists, political scientists, psychologists and sociologists discussed in Chapter Two.

¹⁵⁴ The Patten Report was published by the Patten Commission, also known as the Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland, led by Chris Patten, a Conservative.

by the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community and the only Republican paramilitary groups still active are widely denounced by the majority of the population, including by Sinn Féin ministers. Loyalist paramilitaries remain active, but they are coming more and more under fire from both their communities and their political parties.

The road to the present has not been easy and has often been marred by violence. Areas where Protestants and Catholics live close to each other still tend to become violent with only slight provocation (*cf.* Byrne 2005; and Jarman 2004; and 2006). One such area was the Ardoyne area in Belfast which is often the site of a bitter dispute between the two sides. One example was when, due to population shifts, the Catholic, Holy Cross Primary School, found itself part of a Protestant area, in spite of still being used by Catholics. In the early 2000s, this led to a standoff between the Protestant residents in the area and the Catholic families taking their children to school. The dispute lasted for two years and often became violent (BBC 2001b). Issues also often arise over parades held by the Orange Order which have been rerouted by the Parades Commission or where members attempt to insult the other side. In 2005, riots broke out in Belfast over the rerouting of an Orange Order march (BBC 2005). Similarly, the communities in Drumcree in Portadown have been known to break out into riots over the Orange marches which go through a Catholic/Nationalist/Republican area. During the late 90s, Drumcree was a regular area of dispute and one which led to bouts of violence (*cf.* Bryan, Fraser & Dunn 1995). This continued after the GFA but of late, the disputes have been predominantly non-violent. There was also serious rioting during the Christmas period in 2012 in Belfast after the City Council voted to take down the British flag. Until that point the flag had been flown on Belfast City Hall every day of the year, but the Council took the decision to fly it only on special days as advised by Westminster in order to be more sympathetic to Nationalist and Republican feelings. Loyalists held a protest the night of the Council's vote and on learning the result, they swiftly became violent, injuring three people the same night (BBC 2012b). The protests continued for weeks, often turning into violent clashes between the police and the protestors or between the protestors and the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community who lived along the route regularly followed by the protestors (BBC 2013c). The protests have been non-violent since the end of January, 2013, but rioting broke out once more across Belfast during the Marching Season that year when the Orange Order was forbidden to march back up the Ardoyne Road on 12th July, 2013. When the Order attempted to march up the road, they were blocked by the PSNI and the situation turned violent, with the rioting lasting for several days (BBC 2013b). Both the CIRA and the RIRA have also remained active during this period, as have other Republican

paramilitary groups, and a number of attacks have been launched. The two most famous were the 2009 Massereene Barracks shooting by the RIRA which killed two British soldiers (BBC 2012a) and the killing of policeman Ronan Kerr in 2011 by Continuity IRA (BBC 2012c).¹⁵⁵ Whilst the violence from both sides is of a much lower intensity than before, the fact remains that there is still violence between the two communities and community relations remain strained, even over a decade after the GFA was signed.

5.0.5 Conclusion

This chapter has by necessity covered an extremely complex and detailed topic in a brief and perhaps shallow manner. There is so much more that could be said about Northern Irish history; about the issue of discrimination in the region; about the relationship between the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist and Catholic/Nationalist/Republican communities; about the historical precedents; and about The Troubles themselves. This chapter has tried to ignore motivations and apportioning blame to anyone for the sake of neutrality. There are other works which are better suited to such a task and the best have been referenced throughout this chapter should the reader wish to learn more about Northern Ireland's history. The primary concern has been to provide the reader with enough historical context that the discussion in the next chapter will not seem so esoteric. With all this in mind, it is time to turn to the debate surrounding the hunger strike of 1981 and to the heart of this thesis.

¹⁵⁵ The Continuity IRA is a splinter group from the PIRA which formed in 1987, but has been relatively quiet since. They are believed to be represented politically by Republican Sinn Féin (CAIN 2013i).

6. The Hunger Strike of 1981

6.1 Introduction

In 1981, ten Irish Republican prisoners held at the Maze Prison starved themselves to death in an attempt to gain recognition from the British Government that they were prisoners of war.¹⁵⁶ The general narrative briefly noted in Chapter 5.0.3 is known to most people in Northern Ireland: a first hunger strike, held in late 1980, collapsed and a second one, led by Bobby Sands (1954-1981), began in early 1981 and led to the death of the ten men, including Sands without the British conceding any form of prisoner-of-war status to the prisoners.¹⁵⁷ In the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Republican communities, the ten men have been hailed as heroes and martyrs and their memory is enshrined in murals and memorials across Northern Ireland and the community continues to hold yearly commemorations dedicated to their memory. It is safe to say that the memory of these ten men is highly integral to the Irish Republican identity in Northern Ireland and the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican identity as well.

Since 1981 it has been argued that what concessions the strikers did manage to gain from the British had required the deaths of all ten men. In 2005, however, this idea and the entire narrative surrounding the events in 1981 were challenged by one of the Republican community's own. Richard O'Rawe, the Press Relations Officer of the PIRA prisoners at the time of the hunger strike, released the book *Blanketmen* (O'Rawe 2005), in which he describes daily life "on the blanket"¹⁵⁸ in the late 70's and early 80's. The book focusses primarily on the two hunger strikes by Republican prisoners which took place in 1980 and 1981 respectively. O'Rawe's account follows the narrative outlined above with one glaring exception: he states that the British had offered the strikers a deal; that he and Brendan "Bik"

¹⁵⁶ The prisoners had been protesting for this since 1976 in one form or another. They argued that as they were members of an army waging a political war against a foreign oppressor, they should be afforded the rights of prisoners of war.

¹⁵⁷ This narrative is essentially the one found in the work by Beresford, the first published book which dealt with the events in 1981: see Beresford 1994

¹⁵⁸ "On the blanket" refers to prisoners who refused to wear prison uniforms and were therefore only allowed to wear their blankets. This form of protest is known as a blanket protest.

McFarlane (b. 1951)¹⁵⁹ agreed to take the deal; and that the PIRA's Army Council outside the prison rejected the deal, thereby leading to the death of six strikers who could have been saved (O'Rawe 2005: 181-184). In short, he claims that six of the ten men had not needed to die and were betrayed by the outside leadership.¹⁶⁰ At the end of his book, O'Rawe discusses this event and comes to the conclusion that the outside leadership, specifically Gerry Adams¹⁶¹ and Sinn Féin, let the hunger strikes die for political gain (O'Rawe 2005: 252-256), an accusation which Adams and Sinn Féin strongly reject.

Since O'Rawe first published his book, the Republican community has been locked in a debate over the veracity of his claims. Sinn Féin and the party's supporters have vehemently denied what he has claimed, whilst O'Rawe and his supporters have steadfastly refused to change their story. Politicians and laymen have all made comments and the Republican realm of the internet has been awash with blogs, articles and posts on forums such as "Republican.ie" all discussing the issue. The debate gained pace in 2009 when the Northern Ireland Office granted a request by Liam Clarke, a journalist then working at *The Times*, to be granted access to documents relating to the strike under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Further evidence was released in 2011, the 30th anniversary of the hunger strike, under Public Records Act 1967 which states the British Government must release its documents after thirty years. This law meant that at the end of 2011 all of the documents from the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) and Margaret Thatcher's¹⁶² government related to the strikes were released into the public domain. In spite of this, the debate within the Republican community continued and both Sinn Féin and O'Rawe refused to change their story. Adams and his party still categorically rejected the idea that there had been any kind of workable deal from the British Government (see Adams 2011) and O'Rawe stated that all the evidence only supported his version of events.¹⁶³

To this day, the Irish Republican community continues to debate the topic and it is this debate with which the project is concerned. This chapter, and the project, is going to explore the debate and how it manifests on one particular website: "Republican.ie". Through its

¹⁵⁹ Brendan "Bik" McFarlane was the Officer Commanding (OC) of the protesting prisoners inside the Maze and was thus in charge of the hunger strikers.

¹⁶⁰ "The outside leadership" refers to the PIRA's leadership outside of the Maze Prison.

¹⁶¹ Gerry Adams, the current president of Sinn Féin, was involved in the discussions with the British during the strike through a backchannel contact at the British Foreign Office.

¹⁶² Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013) was the Prime Minister of a Conservative government during the time of the hunger strike. She became Prime Minister in 1979 and was in office until 1990.

¹⁶³ *Afterlives* (O'Rawe 2010) is a sequel to O'Rawe's first book in which he describes the debate that followed. The book was published in 2010 and does not go past 2009, but provides nonetheless a good, if biased, overview of the debate and what O'Rawe has gone through since he first made his accusations.

examination of the various discussions on the website, this chapter hopes to answer the following research questions, which were listed in Chapter 1.0.1.

1. Can this debate be considered to involve folklore?
2. Does this debate tell us anything about the formation of folk narratives in communities?
3. As the debate involves a historical event, which has been documented, is there any interplay between Historical discourses¹⁶⁴ about the event and folk discourses about it?
4. Might the internet have had any influence on this debate? If so, in what way?
5. What does the debate surrounding the hunger strike of 1981 tell us about the Irish Republican community?
6. Can we safely assume that the online community on “Republican.ie” is representative of the greater Irish Republican community in Northern Ireland?
7. Does this research project have any relevance for Northern Ireland and the ongoing community tensions and violence in the region? If so, what?

To better answer these questions, the chapter has been divided into six sub-chapters, each of which deals with a different issue. The first sub-chapter is this one, which provides an introduction to the overall topic of the chapter. The second sub-chapter will review the events of the two hunger strikes in 1980 and 1981 so that the reader will be able to follow the material discussed in Chapter 6.4. Chapter 6.3 will explore the hunger strikers’ position in the Republican community and how their status as cultural heritage ties in to the power dynamics between Sinn Féin and the other Republican parties mentioned in Chapter 4.0.3. Chapter 6.4 will contain the entirety of the analysis and will review the debate starting with the earliest thread on “Republican.ie” from 2008 all the way to present day. The fifth sub-chapter, Chapter 6.5, will examine the role of hindsight both in the debate and in this research before moving on to the sixth and last sub-chapter which will bring this chapter to a close.

¹⁶⁴ In this project “History” is used to denote the academic discipline and its methods and works, whilst “history” is used to mean any narrative about an event in the past. Chapter 7.0.3 will discuss this distinction in more detail.

The discussion which will take place throughout the chapter will require some familiarity with the topic. The next sub-chapter hopes to provide that, but the analysis in Chapter 6.4 will move quickly and assume that the reader recognises the names, dates and events mentioned. This may have the unfortunate side-effect of making the analysis harder to follow, but it is not something that can be avoided, only prepared for. If the reader wishes to know more about the hunger strikes and the debate surrounding it, there are a number of works they can turn to. Thomas Hennessey, Professor of British and Irish History at Canterbury Christ Church University, has written the first and only book on the hunger strike of 1981 since the British Government released all of its documents and has been integral to this project (Hennessey 2014). Richard O’Rawe’s two books (O’Rawe 2005; and 2010) naturally give an account of the topic from his point of view and are invaluable reading for this reason. Likewise, the book on the hunger strike by David Beresford, a journalist currently with *The Guardian*, is important for its position as the official progenitor of what this project calls the Sinn Féin narrative (Beresford 1994). Pdraig O’Malley, the John Joseph Moakley Professor of Peace and Reconciliation at the John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies of University of Massachusetts, has also written a strong analysis of the hunger strikes, their origins and their consequences and has been prominent both in this project and the debate (O’Malley 2001). Beyond these key works, it also possible to read about Bobby Sands, both through his writings (Sands 1981) and a biography written by Denis O’Hearn (O’Hearn 2006), both of which are useful reading for anyone who wishes to know Sands better. The sub-chapters preceding Chapter 6.4 will do their best to prepare the ground for the analysis, but these books go into far more detail than this MA project has space for and so will provide the most help should the reader need it.

6.2 The Two Strikes

6.2.1 Beginnings

The beginnings of the 1981 Hunger Strike lie back in 1972, when the British government suspended and then abolished the Northern Ireland Parliament and reinstituted direct rule. This manifested itself in the formation of the Northern Ireland Office and the creation of the Secretary of State of Northern Ireland. In his first year, the first Secretary of State, a man named William Whitelaw (1918-1999), was faced with a hunger strike by one Billy

McKee,¹⁶⁵ a Republican prisoner, who demanded prisoner of war status (O'Malley 2001: 18). Whitelaw eventually capitulated and granted those convicted of political crimes, both Republican and Loyalist, "special status",¹⁶⁶ which meant that each group was kept in separate cages in the Maze Prison;¹⁶⁷ they were allowed to wear their own clothing; had the freedom to associate inside their cages; were allowed weekly visits; and they were not required to work (Hennessey 2014: 11). According to O'Malley, this meant that "the prisoners had control of the prison system" (2001: 19), a fact which was later to prove of great importance during the strike in 1981. O'Rawe himself admits that the prisoners' demands about association and control over work in the 1981 strike revolved around control over the prison (O'Rawe 2005: 177-178) as freedom of association would allow them to govern themselves and bully the wardens, whilst the freedom to decide their own work meant they could spend time learning tactics and the art of war.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, Hennessey states that this status granted the prisoners an air of respectability (Hennessey 2014: 13) and that this was part of the reason why the British Government stopped awarding people special status after 1st March, 1976.

The removal of special status for political crimes was part of a process known as "criminalisation", whereby the British Government attempted to remove legitimacy from the Republican and other paramilitaries by depicting and treating them solely as criminals, rather than soldiers of an opposing army. This decision essentially created two separate jails within the Maze Prison: on the one hand there was the prison for normal criminals and those members of paramilitary groups convicted after 1976; on the other was the special status compound which housed the remaining, earlier convicted, paramilitary members who retained their special status. Ordinary prisoners were housed in what are still known as the "H-Blocks", due to their distinctive shape. The blocks were arranged in four wings with a central hub in the cross section, which housed medical rooms and facilities for the prison staff. It is quite possible that the existence of the special status compound was a motivation behind the start of the blanket protest in 1976.

Ciaran Nugent was the first man to be convicted after the removal of special status and he immediately refused to wear the prison uniform provided by the staff in the Maze Prison

¹⁶⁵ Billy McKee was a former leader of the PIRA in Belfast.

¹⁶⁶ "Special status" is the term most commonly used when discussing what the hunger strikers and Republican prisoners were protesting for. It is merely another way of saying "prisoner-of-war status".

¹⁶⁷ The Maze Prison was known then as Long Kesh, a name by which Republicans continue to refer to it. The prison, which opened in 1971 and closed in 2000, was situated on an old airfield near the town Maze, from which it takes its current name.

¹⁶⁸ See the "Five Demands" listed below to see what exactly the prisoners and strikers wanted from the British Government.

(O'Malley 2001: 20). This was the start of the Republican "blanket protest" from which O'Rawe's earlier mentioned book takes its name. Anyone who refused to wear the prison uniform was confined to their cell for 24 hours a day (Bardon 2005: 742) and was "subject to a punishment regimen¹⁶⁹ every fourteen days" (O'Malley 2001: 21). They lost their three extra visits, the possible remission of their sentence and were denied access to television, radio, reading and writing materials (O'Malley 2001: 21). When the government refused to heed their calls for the resumption of special status, the prisoners went a step further and in 1978 began what was known as the "dirty protest" (Hennessey 2014: 19-21).

The dirty protest was exactly as it sounds. Prisoners began by refusing to slop out their cells and it eventually developed to the point at which they began to smear their faeces onto the cell walls in an effort to make life as unpleasant as possible for the prison staff. Pdraig O'Malley states the protest came to this point when the prison warders refused to let the protestors go to the toilet if they refused to wear the uniform (O'Malley 2001: 22). As O'Malley writes, by taking their protest to this point, "[t]hey forced the warders to become part of an environment of deprivation, making them, if only psychologically, the targets of excremental assault, so that they, too became prisoners of the conditions the blanketmen had created" (O'Malley 2001: 22). In addition to being an attempt to regain special status, the dirty protest was an attempt to highlight the inhumane treatment the prisoners felt they were being subjected to by the guards (Hennessey 2014: 14). For both prisoners and prison staff, the protest was disgusting and dehumanising. In spite of this the government refused to budge on the issue of special status, leading to a stalemate between the two sides.

Jonathan Bardon states that by 1980, there were 837 Republicans in the Maze Prison, 341 of whom were on the dirty protest (Bardon 2005: 742). All of them were demanding special status, in other words recognition that they were not ordinary criminals. By 1978, they had formulated their first set of demands which were simply to be allowed to enforce their own discipline, wear their own clothes and not have to work (Hennessey 2014: 15). By 1980, these had developed into the essential basis of what are known as the "Five Demands":

1. The Right not to wear a prison uniform.
2. The Right not to do prison work.
3. The Right of free association with other prisoners.
4. The Right to organize their own educational and recreational facilities.

¹⁶⁹ For more information about what it was like on the protest, see O'Malley 2001: 20-25; or O'Rawe 2005. Both provide excellent accounts of what the prisoners experienced at the hands of the prison warders and what they themselves forced themselves to undergo, not least as part of the punishment regimen.

5. The Right to one visit, one letter and one parcel per week (Longkesh.info 2014b).

Eventually, the senior PIRA Officers Commanding (OCs) within the prison, Brendan Hughes and Bobby Sands, felt that the protest was getting nowhere (Hennessey 2014: 68-71). The prisoners thus decided that they had to escalate the situation by going on a hunger strike. There has been a long history of political hunger striking in Ireland and it holds a special place in the Republican mythos, which will be discussed further in Chapter 6.3.¹⁷⁰ Interestingly, this history of hunger striking is one of prominent failures, where all but the most recent hunger striker, the aforementioned Billy McKee, have failed to achieve the aims of their strike (O'Malley 2001: 28). According to O'Malley:

[...] the fact that hunger strikes had a decidedly less than successful record of accomplishment was of no concern to the blanketmen in the H-blocks in 1980. Their options had narrowed. They either escalated their protest, continued the dirty protest indefinitely, or ended it. The third option was unthinkable, the second unacceptable, leaving only the first, with McKee's singular achievement in 1972 to guide them (O'Malley 2001: 28).

With this in mind, seven men went on hunger strike: six to represent the six counties in Northern Ireland and one more to make them reflect the seven signatories of the Declaration of Independence mentioned in Chapter 5.0.2. The strike began on 27th October: the strikers were Brendan Hughes (PIRA),¹⁷¹ John Nixon (INLA), Thomas McFeely (PIRA), Raymond McCartney (PIRA), Leo Green (PIRA), Sean McKenna (PIRA) and Thomas McKearney (PIRA). Like the prisoners on the blanket and dirty protests, the strikers stated they had gone on strike in order to attain special status within the prison as manifested by the five demands detailed above. According to O'Malley, the strike was timed "to ensure that the fast would peak at Christmas" (O'Malley 2001: 29) and thus put both emotional and political pressure on the government via the media.

The strike was ultimately a failure. Whilst there is some confusion as to the order of events (see Hennessey 2014: 117-118), it is clear that Brendan Hughes called off the strike in a successful attempt to save McKenna's life. It collapsed on 18th December after the British Government had failed to offer the prisons any concessions and it looked like Sean McKenna

¹⁷⁰ For more information about the history of hunger striking in Ireland and its significance to Republicans, see O'Malley 2001: 25-28.

¹⁷¹ Hughes gave up his position as senior PIRA OC inside the prison once he went on strike. However, due to his former position, he was the *de facto* leader of the hunger strikers in 1980.

was about to die. The British still refused to grant any semblance of special status — such as control over work or freedom of association — but they did show that what was already on offer to prisoners who conformed was in many ways equal to or better than the strikers' Five Demands (Hennessey 2014: 120-121). When the strikers realised that the British were not going to move from their position and that their lives would be wasted, Hughes preferred to call off the strike rather than let McKenna or the others die.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that it was around this time that a “backchannel” communication was opened up.¹⁷² Known as “Mountain Climber” to the Republicans and referred to as “SOON” in Thatcher’s documents (Hennessey 2014: 117) he was one Brendan Duddy, a businessman from Derry/Londonderry who was in contact with the PIRA and knew a member of the British Foreign Office. This backchannel was operated by the Foreign Office at one end, fully briefed by Thatcher, and the PIRA at the other. According to O’Malley (2001: 31), this channel was believed by some to open up the possibility of an offer which went further than those rights and privileges on offer to conforming prisoners from the NIO.¹⁷³ Whilst Hughes demanded written clarifications of what exactly was on offer here, time had run short as McKenna took a turn for a worse long before the clarifications had a chance to reach the strikers. When the document finally reached them, it was revealed that it offered nothing new (Hennessey 2014: 120-121). On learning that there was to be no settlement, the strikers nonetheless continued to behave as if one had been made, promptly blaming the British for the entire affair and releasing a statement to that effect (Hennessey 2014: 121-122). Whilst the backchannel had proven less than useful from a PIRA prospective at this point, it was nevertheless to play an important role in events later on and in fact forms the core part of the earlier mentioned accusations made in O’Rawe’s book (O’Rawe 2005).

6.2.2 The 1981 Hunger Strike

When it was clear that nothing was forthcoming from the British Government, Bobby Sands resolved to embark on a second hunger strike. The strike was announced in February and began on 1st March, 1981. Unlike the previous strike, when a group started together, this strike was staggered. Bobby Sands (PIRA) was the first person to start the strike and he would not be joined by another striker until 15th March, when Francis Hughes (PIRA) joined him. As

¹⁷² A backchannel communication is one which is carried out through one or more intermediaries. In this case, the PIRA received and gave their information to Brendan Duddy who passed it along to his contact at the British Foreign Office who then passed it along to Thatcher.

¹⁷³ For a full review of the rights and privileges that conforming prisoners had, see Hennessey 2014: 98-99; and O’Malley 2001: 30-31.

a show of good faith and support to the new hunger strikers, the dirty protest ended the day after the hunger strike started, but the protesters remained on the blanket. As before, the strike was intended to gain some form of recognition of political status for the Republican prisoners and this again required the concession by the British of all five of the demands discussed earlier. According to O’Rawe, the rationale behind the new format to the strikes was to make sure that they would now see it to the finish. Instead of all waiting to die together, each hunger striker would follow someone who had already died or was near to death. This was designed to increase the pressure on both the strikers, who would see it out so that they would not let down the memory of their deceased comrades (O’Rawe 2005: 121-122), and the British Government who would face conveyor-belt of deaths. Right from the start, this strike was different from the previous one and was inherently designed to lead to the death of the strikers if their demands were not met, a system which was to prove fatal for ten men.

As the strike wore on, Sinn Féin announced a new tactic which they hoped would win the prisoners the concessions. Raymond McCreesh (PIRA) and Patsy O’Hara (INLA) had both joined the strike on 22nd March to increase pressure and to show that the strike, like the one before, was a pan-Republican issue, rather than one solely involving the Provisional IRA. With the addition of these two, there was a total of four men on hunger strike by 26th March when Sinn Féin announced that Bobby Sands had been nominated for the Westminster by-election for the Fermanagh/South-Tyrone seat which had recently been vacated by the death of Frank Maguire MP on 5th March. This was the first time that Sinn Féin had decided to contest elections in Northern Ireland and they managed to secure a promise from the SDLP not to contest the seat (Hennessey 2014: 165). This concession from the SDLP was to prove important because it allowed Sands to run as the uncontested Catholic candidate in a predominantly Catholic constituency against Harry West, a Protestant Unionist politician from the UUP.¹⁷⁴ In spite of his incarceration, Sands ultimately won the election on 9th April by 1,446 votes with a total turnout of 86.7% (Hennessey 2014: 170). This further complicated the matter, since now an elected MP of the British Government was on a hunger strike against this same government. Whilst Sands was unable to take his seat in Westminster, the by-election had the side-effect that it greatly raised public awareness both of Bobby Sands as a personal figure and of what the hunger strikers were protesting about (O’Malley 2001: 60-61; Hennessey 2014: 166).

¹⁷⁴ For a discussion on how the SDLP’s decision not to field a candidate proved the key factor in Sands’ victory in the election, see O’Malley 2001: 58-60.

Despite the increased publicity, little movement was made from either side at this point. As Hennessey notes, Sands “was now a folk hero” (Hennessey 2014: 183) in both the Republican and greater Catholic/Nationalist/Republican communities, but there was still little overt outside support for the strikers (Hennessey 2014: 199). This meant that there was little pressure on the British Government to make any concessions to the strikers, who cared little for Sands new status as an MP (Hennessey 2014: 166) despite statements from Sands in which he claimed he was not seeking political status (Hennessey 2014: 201). All the same, the central issue remained that despite all statements to the contrary from the strikers and their supporters, the British Government still felt certain that whether or not it was openly demanded, by conceding the Five Demands, they would be granting special status to the prisoners (Hennessey 2014: 202). This meant that the British continued to refuse to negotiate with the strikers or their representatives outside of the prison, repeatedly pointing out how the general prison regime had already surpassed a number of the demands (Hennessey 2014: 202).

Bobby Sands eventually died on 5th May after 66 days on hunger strike and soon after was joined by the other three. Riots broke out in Republican and Nationalist areas across Northern Ireland and the British Government began to get bad press for their position towards the strikers (Hennessey 2014: 209). The funeral for Sands was held on 7th May. Around 30,000 people showed up as part of the funeral cortege and new riots erupted across Belfast (Hennessey 2014: 217-218). Sands was also swiftly replaced on the strike by Joe McDonnell (PIRA) who began to refuse food from 9th May and became the fifth man to go on the hunger strike. Two days later, on 11th May, Francis Hughes passed away after 59 days on strike, 15,000 attending his funeral (Hennessey 2014: 228). He was replaced by Brendan McLaughlin (PIRA) on the 14th May.¹⁷⁵ Raymond McCreesh and Patsy O’Hara then both died on the 21st May, their funerals being attended by 12,000 and 10,000 respectively (Hennessey 2014: 242). McCreesh was replaced by Kieran Doherty (PIRA); O’Hara was replaced by Kevin Lynch (INLA); and McLaughlin after dropping out due to a stomach ulcer was replaced by Martin Hurson (PIRA). One effect of the quick succession of deaths was that the strike began to resonate more loudly within the greater Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community in Northern Ireland, drawing more and more sympathy (Hennessey 2014: 245). It may have taken longer than expected, but the strikers were slowly getting outside support for their cause.

¹⁷⁵ Brendan did not last long and ended his strike on the 26th May due to a stomach ulcer: Hennessey 2014: 258.

The increased resonance within the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community was compounded by the behaviour of the British Government. Thatcher gave a speech about the strikers in Belfast on 28th May which was poorly received by Catholics or further alienated them (Hennessey 2014: 249-251, 260). A large part of the problem was that the public at home and abroad was starting to see the government as being too intransigent in the face of the deaths of the strikers. By this point, the government had been approached by a number of outside parties to discuss the matter, including the Irish government, the European Court of Human Rights, Pope John Paul II and John Hume, then leader of the SDLP (Hennessey 2014: 251-262). Despite this, Thatcher and the British government still refused to countenance even the idea of negotiating with the strikers or their outside representatives (Hennessey 2014: 251-252).

Meanwhile the strike continued. On 8th June, Thomas McElwee (PIRA) also began to refuse food and joined the others on the strike. He was soon joined by Paddy Quinn (PIRA) on 15th June. During this time an organisation called the Irish Commission for Justice (ICJP) and Peace had been making a number of proposals towards the NIO, which would involve granting all prisoners in the Northern Irish prison system certain rights and privileges (Hennessey 2014: 261). Their proposals were simple: prisoners should be able to wear their own clothing most of the time; moves should be made to increase the opportunities for association, but that there would still be limits on this; and that the definition of prison work should be reviewed (Hennessey 2014: 201). David O'Connell of Sinn Féin attacked these proposals because they ignored the demands about visits and remission (Hennessey 2014: 272). O'Connell made it clear that the strikers would not quit for anything less than the acceptance of all of the Five Demands. Eventually the pressure led to a series of talks starting up between Michael Alison¹⁷⁶ and the ICJP in an effort to find some resolution to the strike.

The first meeting between Alison and the ICJP on 22nd June involved a discussion of the three proposals the ICJP had released earlier in the month. Alison, and thus the British government, was adamant that these proposals, if they were to be instigated, would only apply to conforming prisoners (Hennessey 2014: 276). One of the biggest issues was still the belief that by allowing the prisoners greater freedom of association and the right to determine what work they would do, the prison warders would essentially lose control over the prisons (Hennessey 2014: 276-277). The government continued to refuse to enter into negotiations or consider concessions for fear the PIRA would use these concessions to gain something more

¹⁷⁶ Michael Alison (1926-2004) was a Conservative politician who served as the Minister of State responsible for prisons at the Northern Ireland Office during the time of the two hunger strikes.

at a later date (Hennessey 2014: 280). This meant that despite subsequent meetings with the ICJP on 3rd and 4th July, the British government remained unwilling to make the first move in the strike and that the discussions were ultimately to prove fruitless; even more so because Brendan “Bik” McFarlane, the OC of the protesting prisoners and the strikers,¹⁷⁷ dismissed the ICJP and felt nothing much would come of their talks with Alison (Hennessey 2014: 302).

Whilst the government was debating the concessions with the ICJP, the prisoners themselves decided to slightly amend their demands in response to a statement made by Secretary of State Atkins on 30th June about any possible changes to the prison system.¹⁷⁸ On 4th July, the prisoners released what is now known as the “4th July Statement”.¹⁷⁹ The essential difference between this statement and their previous ones was that in this one they argued that they wanted to see their five demands applied to all prisoners in the system (Hennessey 2014: 302; O’Rawe 2005: 168). According to O’Rawe (2005: 166), the rationale behind this statement was to offer the British a way out without losing any face. Whilst the NIO, and thus British government, accepted that here the demand for special status had now been dropped (Hennessey 2014: 304), the issue remained that the strike would not end until the demands had been met. According to Hennessey, it “did not meet the Government’s criteria that it would not make any concessions under duress or that the prison authorities were the ones who would make the decisions and retain control” (Hennessey 2014: 304). So whilst the government was willing to admit that certain adaptations had been made in the original Five Demands, the central issues remained. It nevertheless led to the reactivation of the earlier-mentioned backchannel communications between the Foreign Office and the PIRA and eventually the deal which is at the heart of O’Rawe’s accusations.¹⁸⁰

On 4th July the British Government communicated with Brendan Duddy through his connection with the Foreign Office. During the initial contact, Duddy and the British discussed suggestions from the PIRA about ending the hunger strike in such a way that both sides could save face, which included the concession of the immediate provision of prisoners’ own clothes once the strike was over (Hennessey 2014: 310). By 5am on 5th July there was still no offer of concessions from the British (Hennessey 2014: 310-311; *cf.* Duddy 2011).

¹⁷⁷ McFarlane was promoted to the position after Sands went on strike and was unable to lead.

¹⁷⁸ See Hennessey 2014: 302-304 for a full discussion of Atkins’ statement on 30th June, 1981.

¹⁷⁹ For a full quotation of the 4th July Statement, see O’Rawe 2005: 167-171.

¹⁸⁰ The following section will rely heavily on Hennessey 2014 and will only recount the most important events. For a full discussion of all the events surrounding the deal, see Hennessey 2014: 300-350, which deals specifically with O’Rawe’s accusation that there was an offer on the table. For a review solely of the discussion between the British and the PIRA through Brendan Duddy, Hennessey 2014: 310-317, 324-329, 332-333, 347-348, 375-376 covers all that the Thatcher, and thus the British, were willing to offer at the time; the responses from the PIRA; and issues that arose through the use of the backchannel.

Nonetheless, during a phone-call later that afternoon, the British granted Danny Morrison, then Sinn Féin's national director of publicity, permission to enter the prison to speak with both Bik McFarlane and the strikers, although this would have to be done separately (Hennessey 2014: 312). According to Hennessey, Morrison explained to both McFarlane and the strikers about SOON/Duddy and the British proposals, which he claimed were better than the ICJP's offer. He then spoke to Gerry Adams and informed him that the strikers wished for Adams to improve on the offers and get everything fully confirmed (Hennessey 2014: 314). It is important to note that by this point in time the British had still not offered anything, although there had been some discussion about the various demands during the early morning conversations (Hennessey 2014: 311-312).

One result of Morrison's meeting with the strikers and prisoners is that the prisoners as a whole became more hostile towards the ICJP's attempts to find a resolution. Hennessey states that Duddy told the British that the prisoners now doubted the British Government and would want a written offer based on the 4th July Statement relayed to them before anything was made public (Hennessey 2014: 315-316). In *Blanketmen*, O'Rawe states that the prisoners felt that the public discussions between the British government and the ICJP could endanger their own secret negotiations with the British via Duddy and so it was better to ward them off (O'Rawe 2005: 181-182). This meant that the PIRA and the prisoners were putting all their eggs into SOON's basket.

By the 6th July, Thatcher and her ministers were still considering what kind of statement they should make to the PIRA. Documents show that Thatcher was still unwilling to concede anything other than the general improvements which would occur after the strike came to an end. Association between prisoners remained a difficult topic and the government also refused to allow the prisoners to dictate what work they could or could not do (Hennessey 2014: 325). They therefore sent, through SOON, the following offer which had been personally approved by Thatcher on the evening of 6th July:

- (i) The clothing regime in Armagh Prison would be applied to all prisons in Northern Ireland (ie own clothes subject to approval) *of the Prison Governor*.¹⁸¹
- (ii) Parcels, visits and letters would be made available on the same basis as for conforming prisoners at present;
- (iii) On work, association and remission the Government's position will be as set out in the Secretary of State's statement of 30 June. However, emphasis will be laid on the

¹⁸¹ Italics in this section are used to denote changes made to the document by Thatcher personally before it was sent through the backchannel: see Hennessey 2014: 326.

Government's record of its readiness to administer the regime flexibly, and on the 'scope for yet further developments'.

- (iv) *On work the Prison authorities must retain the right to decide what work shall be done.*
- (v) *On association*****[left blank]***** 30th June*

If we receive a satisfactory response to this proposal by 9.00 a.m. on Tuesday 7 July we shall be prepared to provide you with an advance text of the full statement.

If the reply we receive is unsatisfactory and there is subsequently any public reference to this exchange we shall deny that it took place. Silence will be taken as an unsatisfactory reply.

*Within this fundamental role further *****of work are added to the schedule from time to time [sic](as quoted in Hennessey 2014: 326; nothing has been changed or added to the text; cf. National Archive Documents 2011: 27).*

The PIRA had until 9am on 7th July to reply. It is important to note, as Hennessey does, that “in its essentials, it [the offer] did not go beyond previous *public* statements by HMG [Her Majesty's Government]” (Hennessey 2014: 327). Seen in this light, the British were offering nothing they had not offered already — for example, in Atkins' statement from 30th June — and they were only willing to implement these changes if it would bring about an immediate end to the strike (Hennessey 2014: 326). Hennessey also indicates that Duddy's contact in the Foreign Office appears to have elaborated on the above document, reading past what Thatcher had approved (Hennessey 2014: 327; cf. Duddy 2011). This could suggest that Duddy was himself expanding on the British offer in an attempt to convince the PIRA to accept it or that, as Hennessey implies, his contact in the British Foreign Office had gone further than he was allowed to by Thatcher. The PIRA then sent a response asking for clarification and received a reply from Thatcher stating that the government would not move past Atkins' statement made on 30th June. As the British did not receive the answer they wanted to their offer, they closed down the backchannel on 7th July despite two further messages being sent by the PIRA (Hennessey 2014: 327-329).

Nonetheless, a day later the British chose to reopen the backchannel in order to expand on their previous statements whilst making it clear they were not negotiating. These clarifications would form the backbone of a public statement if the strike ended immediately. If it did not, the government would fall back on Atkins' previous statement (Hennessey 2014:

332-333).¹⁸² Nevertheless, the PIRA rejected the offer as it was presented in the form of a statement and then requested that Gerry Adams be granted access to the prisoners. The government's response to this was to shut down the backchannel once more (Hennessey 2014: 333). At 4.45am, 45 minutes after the channel was shut down, hunger striker Joe McDonnell passed away.

6.2.3 The End of the Strike

The death of McDonnell, the fifth man to die on the hunger strike, led the British Government to reconsider their attitude towards the strike. Following a statement on the 8th July, in which the prisoners blamed the British government's intransigence for the death of McDonnell, the ICJP held a press conference in which they too blamed the government for the lack of resolution (Hennessey 2014: 335). The prisoners nonetheless reacted badly to this move by the ICJP, who they saw as attempting to dilute their five demands in the search for a resolution (Hennessey 2014: 338). All the same, the pressure from the public, the prisoners and the ICJP as well as the American and the Irish governments who were also getting more and more involved led the British to reopen the backchannel on 11th July and they indicated that they were now reassessing their position (Hennessey 2014: 347).

The British Government's reassessment did not reach the PIRA until the 20th July, even though the line had once again been reactivated on the 19th. By this point, Michael Hurson had died on 12th July, making him the sixth death. Two new PIRA members had also joined the hunger strike to replace McDonnell and Hurson. Whilst the two sides communicated heavily over the 19th and 20th July, the British continued to do little more than clarify and reiterate their previous position. As before, the PIRA found this unsatisfactory. Finally on 19th July, Morrison became ill and the government made the decision not to allow anyone else to see the prisons. By 20th July the backchannel was closed once again, this time for good as it seemed that nothing was going to come of it (Hennessey 2014: 375-376).

Four more men were to die on the strike following this new failure in communication: Kevin Lynch on 1st August; Kieran Doherty on 2nd August; Thomas McElwee on 8th August; and finally Michael Devine on 20th August. According to O'Rawe, he and McFarlane were notified by Adams on 22nd July that talks between the British government and the PIRA had

¹⁸² Hennessey states that with this offer Duddy or his contact again appears to have gone further than sanctioned by Thatcher: see Hennessey 2014: 333. It would seem, however, that Hennessey has either missed a document from the British Government or that it had not been released at the time his book went to publication. The particular section of Duddy's notes which Hennessey quotes here corresponds exactly to the text found in British Government 1981, which would suggest that in this instance, neither Duddy nor his contact elaborated at all.

fully broken down (O’Rawe 2005: 200). Both sides seemed to be unwilling to move from their respective positions. As each striker died, new ones replaced him, but Michael Devine was the last man to die as part of the hunger strike.

Ultimately, it was the families that were to decide the fate of the hunger strike. Paddy Quinn became the first striker to be given medical treatment at the request of his family after he lapsed into a coma on 31st July (O’Malley 2001: xiii). Whilst other prisoners continued to join the strike during August, Pat McGeown (PIRA), who had joined on 10th July, was given medical treatment on his family’s request on 20th August (O’Malley 2001: xiii). This started a trend and by the end of September, the rest of the critical strikers had been given life-saving treatment or had been convinced to quit by their families (O’Malley 2001: xiii-xiv). On 3rd October, the hunger strike was officially declared over and the NIO moved immediately to implement those changes that they had promised from the beginning. The eventual reforms to the prison system were a combination of those promised by Atkins; those offered through the backchannel; and those suggestions offered by the ICJP (Hennessey 2014: 449-453).

With regard to O’Rawe’s claims about a deal which could have saved the lives of six of the strikers, the principal differences relate to the events that occurred on 5th July: in other words, Danny Morrison’s meetings with McFarlane and the strikers and their acceptance of an offer. According to O’Rawe, who references David Beresford’s work on the subject (Beresford 1994: 292-294), during Danny Morrison’s visit to the prison, he relayed an offer that the British had apparently passed down through the backchannel (2005: 176-179). It is interesting to note that Duddy’s personal notes (quoted in Hennessey 2014: 311-312; *cf.* Duddy 2011) go nowhere near into as much detail as the proposals given by either O’Rawe or Beresford, nor do the notes match the offer quoted earlier which was sent through the channel the day after Morrison’s visit (Hennessey 2014: 326). In fact, the clarification O’Rawe (2005: 177-178) gives on the issue of work is first detailed in Duddy’s notes dated 8th July (Hennessey 2014: 333; *cf.* Duddy 2011: Pol35/166 (9-10); and British Government 1981c), three days later than O’Rawe claims. The most important part of O’Rawe’s work is the claim that the prisoners accepted an offer made on 5th July (O’Rawe 2005: 181), but that this acceptance was rejected by Adams and the outside leadership on 6th July (O’Rawe 2005: 184). As can be seen from Beresford’s book (Beresford 1994: 292-294), the fact that the British Government had communicated something around 5th July has been known since at least 1987, but O’Rawe has gone further by suggesting that the offer had originally been accepted by the prisoners. Unfortunately, he readily admits himself that there is no proof that

the alleged “comm”¹⁸³ exists (O’Rawe 2005: 257) and so he can provide little proof beyond his testimony. Hennessey feels that O’Rawe’s claim is unprovable and is also unable to locate the comm (Hennessey 2014: 314, 464), which leaves it up to the individual to decide who they believe.¹⁸⁴ The fact remains that O’Rawe has claimed that Sinn Féin, especially Gerry Adams, forced the hunger strikers to reject an offer which could have saved their lives, an offer which the strikers’ leaders allegedly accepted.

The remaining facts are that by the end of October, 1981, ten men had died in an attempt to regain a form of political status for prisoners that had been removed in 1976. Whilst the Five Demands were in one way or another eventually granted after the strike ended, the fact remains that these ten men fought Thatcher’s government and paid for it with their lives. Republicans to this day call it a victory and their names are remembered in commemorations, parades, trusts and murals across Northern Ireland. Their deaths have meant that Sands, Hughes, McCreesh, O’Hara, McDonnell, Hurson, Lynch, Doherty, McElwee and Devine have joined a long line of Irish Republican folk heroes who fought the British; people such as Tone,¹⁸⁵ Connolly¹⁸⁶ and others. The next sub-chapter will explore these commemorations, parades, murals and the strikers’ status as folk heroes to explain why the strikers have become so important to the Republican community and why this debate is such a sensitive issue for them.

¹⁸³ “Comm” is short for “communique” and refers to messages written on toilet or cigarette paper and smuggled into and out of the prison by Republicans.

¹⁸⁴ The fact that O’Rawe’s version of events is unprovable means it will always find support as there will never be conclusive proof that it was wrong. In this way, it reflects numerous legends and conspiracy theories which survive for the same reasons.

¹⁸⁵ Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763-1798) was the leader of the United Irishmen, an Irish independence movement who had a failed rebellion in 1798.

¹⁸⁶ James Connolly was one of the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising discussed in Chapter 5.0.2 and remains an influential figure in Irish Republicanism.

6.3 The Legacy of the Hunger Strikers

6.3.1 Introduction



Image 6.1. Portraits of the ten hunger strikers of 1981, *An Phoblacht* 2012.

The above picture was taken from *An Phoblacht*, Sinn Féin's newspaper, and was part of an article discussing the hunger strikers, with a short talk with the brother of Kevin Lynch, Gerald (An Phoblacht 2012). Given how important these ten men are to the Republican community and to this project, it seemed only right to put faces to their names. In the article, Lynch is described by his brother as a “martyr” (An Phoblacht 2012) and the strikers are said to have been “as ordinary people thrust into extraordinary circumstances” (An Phoblacht 2012). The wording says a great deal: the strikers are clearly viewed today as Republican heroes, figures larger than ordinary people, and this is one of the reasons why O’Rawe’s accusations cut so deeply and evoke such emotional reactions from Republicans. As his narrative is threatening their memory, O’Rawe threatens some of contemporary Irish Republicanism’s central legends about itself.

According to Ballard (1984: 5-6), the hunger strikers had already entered Republican folklore a year after they had died. She notes that “[t]heir “ultimate sacrifices” enshrines them in folk memory” (Ballard 1984: 6). Similarly, Hennessey notes that Sands was a folk hero (Hennessey 2014: 183) when he was still living because of both his sacrifice and his victory in the election discussed in Chapter 6.2.2. It is clear that this process of “folklorification” can be quick when the community finds something which resonates with them and their ideals. This sub-chapter aims to explore the hunger strikers as cultural heritage and how exactly they have been enshrined in contemporary folk memory. This will entail a discussion about the murals found across Northern Ireland; about the various kinds of commemorative events that

are held each year; and about the debates and conferences which have been held since O’Rawe first made his claims in 2005. By the end of this sub-chapter, it should be clear not only how the hunger strikers are remembered, but also why.¹⁸⁷

6.3.2 The Memory of the Ten Men

As someone from Northern Ireland, it seems strange trying to explain how important the hunger strikers are to the Republican community as it seems self-evident. Growing up in the region, I learned from my parents and school teachers who the strikers were, what they did, and their influence on the course of Northern Irish politics. As a member of Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community, I was told that the strikers had failed to beat Thatcher and as a result this led to change in tactics for Sinn Féin, who announced at their *ard fheis*¹⁸⁸ near the end of 1981 that they would now contest elections in Northern Ireland. Whilst the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist and Catholic/Nationalist/Republican communities may disagree on the result of the strike, the fact remains that both communities acknowledge that the strikers are an important part of Northern Irish history. It is clear that their memory is exceptionally important for the Republican community.

The most obvious manifestation of how the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community remembers the ten dead strikers is the murals, the large paintings painted on walls and billboards in Northern Ireland which may be images or words, but are often a combination of both.¹⁸⁹ A quick search of the words “Bobby Sands” or “Hunger”¹⁹⁰ on CAIN’s Mural Directory Search page reveals a large number of results: 113 results for “Hunger” and 48 for “Bobby Sands”. A number of these results will be shared between the two search terms as murals will sometimes have one or more of the hunger strikers in them (see Image 6.2 to 6.10). Moreover, a good number of the murals in question no longer exist, something which applies to at least 20 of the results for Sands.¹⁹¹ This could be because the mural has been painted over to make way for a new one; because the building has been knocked down; or because interest in painting murals has decreased in the area leading to

¹⁸⁷ There is also the movie “Hunger” made by the British film director, which deals with the hunger strike up until Bobby Sands’ death. As it has nothing to do with the debate, it will not be discussed as part of this project.

¹⁸⁸ The *ard fheis* is the annual party meeting for Sinn Féin.

¹⁸⁹ For more information about the murals, see Brown & MacGinty 2003; Davies 2001; Finn 1997; Forker & McCormick 2009; Jarman 1992; and 1997; McAtackney 2011; McCormick and Jarman 2005; and Rolston 1987; 1988; 1991; 1992a; 1992b; 1995; 2003a; 2003b; 2004a; 2004b; 2010; and 2013.

¹⁹⁰ It should be noted that the number of results will change depending on whether one searches “hunger”, “hunger strikers”, “hunger strike” or “hunger striker”. “Hunger” returned the most results, but also includes results which reference only the 1980 strike or earlier ones and so not all of them refer to the 1981 hunger strike.

¹⁹¹ Due to the nature of CAIN’s Mural Directory search engine, it is not possible to directly reference the results of any search. The link provided will only return “Sorry, but you did not enter any search criteria!”

their deterioration. Nonetheless, these results show that there is a longstanding tradition in the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Irish Republican communities to remember the ten dead strikers through murals.

Murals remain perhaps one of the best ways to communicate ideas about events or people: as pictures they are able to condense complex ideas into a few, easily understood images or words which can be seen effortlessly by motorists as well as pedestrians. Due to this, murals make for exceptionally good evidence about the key ideas with exist inside each community. Therefore, by examining the murals relating to the hunger strikers, we should be able to see how exactly the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community in Northern Ireland feels about the strikers. Whilst Chapter 1.0.3 and Chapter 4.0.3 made it clear that there is no strict overlap between the wider Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Irish Republican communities, Chapter 1.0.3 also stressed that they both inform each other. Whilst the murals may exist as part of the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community's culture, they also exist as part of the Republican community's culture and thus contain messages it wishes to express.



Image 6.2 McCormick 2013: Album 9, Mural 298.



Image 6.3 McCormick 2013: Album 12, Mural 417.



Image 6.4 McCormick 2013: Album 34, Mural 1134.



Image 6.5 McCormick 2013: Album 34, Mural 1157.



Image 6.6 McCormick 2013: Albume 78, Mural 2768. Image 6.7 McCormick 2013: Album 79, Mural 2808.



Image 6.8 McCormick 2013: Album 81, Mural 2900. Image 6.9 McCormick 2013: Album 83, Mural 2965.



Image 6.10 McCormick 2013: Album 51, Mural 1784. Image 6.11 Yvette 2008.¹⁹²

¹⁹² CAIN's Mural Directory does not provide an image for this one, but a description of it can be found, see McCormick 2013: Album 14, Mural 456.

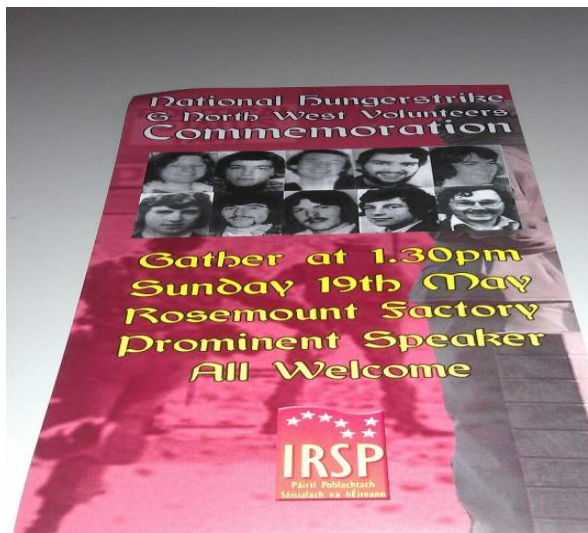


Image 6.12 RT1305-05 2013.



Image 6.13 Pádraig 2014

Consequently, we can use the murals to explore the messages Republicans wish to communicate about the ten hunger strikers. If we look at Image 6.10, for example, we can see what kind of imagery the Republican community connects with the hunger strikers. Dr Jonathan McCormick, who took the picture, states that the woman in the middle is Éire,¹⁹³ a personification of Ireland (McCormick 2013: Album 51, Mural 1784); she is flanked by a pair of Irish wolfhounds and is holding a sword; to either of side of her are portraits of the hunger strikers arranged so that she forms the centre of an “H”. By painting the mural in this way, the artist has explicitly connected the strikers with the cause of Celtic Ireland, which was independent before the English came. Whilst Republicans may not necessarily agree with the possible ethnic undertones of a Celtic and independent Ireland, they will most certainly agree with the explicit message that the strikers died for a united Ireland. Moreover, this image connects this cause to the idea of battle through the sword and so the strikers are acknowledged as part of Ireland’s army. In this way, Image 6.10 attempts to show the idea that the strikers died as martyrs to Ireland’s cause and as part of the country’s army, something which Image 6.2 and 6.3 echo.

Images 6.4 and 6.11 contain a different kind of message, however. Both murals here show something breaking free: Image 6.4 shows ten white doves breaking free of a cracked H and Image 6.11 shows Bobby Sands surrounded by sundered chains. As murals are images rather than statements, they work on multiple levels and it is important to remember that. On

¹⁹³ “Éire” is the name both of the country known as Ireland in English and the island on which it is found.

one level, both these images suggest that the hunger strikers have broken free of their prisons by sacrificing their lives for the cause.¹⁹⁴ As both images are found in Catholic/Nationalist/Republican areas of Northern Ireland, it is safe to assume that the implicit cause is that of an independent Ireland. However, on another level, these images refer directly to the fight the hunger strikers waged against the British Government in 1981. Image 6.4 clearly shows a cracked H, as in the H-blocks of the Maze Prison and the chains can be seen as a symbol of his incarceration by the British Government. On this level, the images appear to be saying that the strikers in some way broke the British Government or their imprisonment. Read this way, these two murals reflect statements made about the ten strikers by members of the community on “Republican.ie”. Dixie Elliot,¹⁹⁵ for example, states that the strikers “broke Thatcher” (RT1201-01, 2012: Dixie Elliot, Post 22) and Barrack Buster echoes this point of view when they state that “Joe McDonnell defying his own body to buy time broke the back of Thatcher and brought victory to the Hunger Strikers” (RT1305-04 2013: Barrack Buster, Post 61). In this way, it can be argued that these murals are mere manifestations of the Republican idea that the strikers, through their deaths, broke the British Government. It is important to remember, however, that whilst these murals exhibit this argument, they also help inform it through providing easily understood depictions about the strikers.

Images 6.3 and 6.5 contain different messages to the rest. Image 6.3 shows an image of twelve strikers — the ten from 1981 and two strikers who died in the 1970s, Michael Gaughan and Frank Stagg — above a poem written by Bobby Sands. Its links to Republicanism would be strong enough with just that combination, but beside the four corners of the picture of the strikers can be seen Easter lilies. Easter lilies are worn by Republicans in remembrance of their dead, much like the poppy is worn to remember those who died during the two World Wars. Moreover, the lily itself is expressly connected with the 1916 Easter Rising (CAIN 2013k) discussed in Chapter 5.0.2, which could be called the birth of modern Irish Republicanism. By placing the lily beside the picture, the painter has not only expressed his respect for the dead strikers, but connected them with past Republicans and made it clear that they are part of the same tradition. Conversely, Image 6.5 looks at recent events and

¹⁹⁴ Image 6.4 shows 12 portraits but only has ten doves. It is assumed here that the doves refer explicitly to the ten hunger strikers of 1981 due to the H. The other two portraits are of Michael Gaughan and Frank Stagg, both of whom died in English prisons on hunger strike as members of the PIRA. According to McCormick, this mural no longer exists but it was in Derrylin as recently as 2001.

¹⁹⁵ Thomas Dixie Elliot, known as Dixie Elliot on “Republican.ie”, was a former blanketman and was an outspoken supporter of O’Rawe on the website until he was banned at some point in the past two years for an unknown reason. He has taken part in commemorations as a speaker and remains an outspoken supporter of O’Rawe.

shows that the fight the strikers took part in is still ongoing at the Maghaberry Prison in Northern Ireland. As the mural states, political status is still being denied to Republican prisoners and the British Government continues to reject their status as legitimate prisoners of an opposing army. Taken together, these murals could be argued to be advocating the idea that the battle which began with the Easter Rising in 1916 is still ongoing and that political status for Republican prisoners is still a requirement for victory.

What do the murals tell us about the status of the hunger strikers as Republican folk heroes? It can be seen from the preceding discussion that the murals have begun to strip away the hunger strikers' individuality and personalities. They are no longer mere people, with thoughts and feelings, but have now become embodiments of certain ideals and ideologies. Most explicitly they are the embodiment of the Irish Republican ideology which stresses the fight for an independent Ireland as envisaged by the Declaration of Independence from the Easter Rising in 1916. As O'Malley states, "[m]artyrdom forged an organic connection between succeeding generations of heroes" (O'Malley 2001: 137) and thus the hunger strikers of 1981 became their generation's heroes, related to previous heroes who died for the same cause. The hunger strikers fought the British Government and in the minds of some, such as Dixie Elliot noted above, they won their particular battle and for this reason they deserve to be commemorated. More implicitly, however, the hunger strikers reflected Catholic attitudes and this is echoed in some murals, documented by Ballard (1984: 6), in which the strikers are illustrated in the attitude of the Pietà, in other words cradled by the Holy Mother, Virgin Mary. In this manner, the strikers in this manner have joined a larger body of secular, saint-like figures who have sacrificed their lives for a greater cause.

The murals, however, are not the only manner in which the Republican and wider Catholic/Nationalist/Republican communities honour the memory of the hunger strikers. One of the most common methods is the commemoration,¹⁹⁶ which is when people gather at a prearranged time and place and listen to speeches about the ten strikers of 1981 from family members, fellow prisoners and/or politicians to show their support for the strike and the family members of those who died. Many of these events are held at symbolically important sites, such as the General Post Office in Dublin¹⁹⁷ (Nickleodeon 2011; RT1304-01 2013) or times,¹⁹⁸ which play their own part in linking these figures with the other folk heroes in the

¹⁹⁶ Images 6.6 to 6.9 and 6.12 all refer to an important anniversary or commemorative event.

¹⁹⁷ The General Post Office (GPO) in Dublin was the main site for the Easter Rising in 1916 and thus has huge symbolic and emotional meaning to Republicans across Ireland.

¹⁹⁸ One such symbolic time was in 2013, when Republicans organised a white-line picket in memory of the hunger strikers to coincide with Margaret Thatcher's funeral: see RT1304-02 2013. A white-line picket is when a

Republican pantheon, such as Connolly who took part in the Easter Rising, 1916. Through these commemorative events, the Republican community strengthens the links between earlier Republicans, the hunger strikers of 1981 and modern day Republicans. By doing so, they strengthen their communal identity and remind each other that their battle for an independent Ireland is still ongoing.

The events in question are also often very political and can help to reveal the existing divisions within the Republican community, not least with regard to the strikers. For example, in one thread on “Republican.ie” about the hunger strikers, Comrade Foster announces that they are “[j]ust leaving to go to Derry for the RSM’s¹⁹⁹ commemoration for the Ten Hunger Strikers that died” (RT1305-04 2013: Comrade Foster, Post 5). As his comment shows, the IRSP held their own commemoration for the hunger strike, which probably placed emphasis on their own members who died as part of the strike, Patsy O’Hara, Kevin Lynch and Michael Devine, rather than the ten strikers as a whole. Whilst all were allowed to attend and pay their respects, the poster for the event clearly marks it as an IRSP event (Image 6.12), which means that views which are perhaps less than sympathetic towards Sinn Féin might be aired during the event. Similarly, one can expect that events sponsored by Sinn Féin would include topics relevant to Sinn Féin, which may or may not align with the interests of the other Republican groups in Northern Ireland.

In this way, one can say that the commemorations often deal explicitly with the issue of ownership. Does the memory of the strikers and their legacy belong to the Republican community as a whole, to their political parties or purely to their friends and relatives? This is clearly an issue that the Republican community continues to wrestle with and forms a key part of the debate on “Republican.ie”. When looking at the discussions about the strike on “Republican.ie”, one can see how some Republicans feel: OpenFire rejects the request for a public inquiry into the strike because “the majority of families from 'our [Sinn Féin’s] side of the house' don't want one” (RT1201-01 2012: OpenFire, Post 18); Blanket claims that with regard to a public inquiry “with respect to the families this is not and nor should it be their call alone” (RT1201-01 2012: Blanket, Post 19); miley states that “[i]t is not up to the families and it never was” (RT1201-01 2012: miley, Post 23); and inla-supporter makes it clear they does not trust Sinn Féin to answer the questions of the families of the IRSP/INLA strikers

group of protestors picket along the central white line of a road in the United Kingdom or Ireland. It is an effective way to draw attention to an issue as motorists have to slow down and drive past the picket carefully to avoid hitting anyone. By holding this picket on the same day as Thatcher’s funeral, Republicans celebrated her death and underlined their belief that the strikers defeated her in 1981: see RT1304-02 2013: riseup, Post 1.

¹⁹⁹ “RSM” here denotes the “Republican Socialist Movement” and is another term for the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) and its paramilitary wing, the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA).

(RT1201-01 2012: inla-supporter, Post 17, 20).²⁰⁰ In short, some Republicans on the website feel that only the families have the right to call for a public inquiry into O’Rawe’s claims and others feel it is the Republican community’s right. If the website is an accurate representation of the greater Republican community, as this thesis argues it is, then it stands to reason that the community is divided over this issue as a whole. As noted above, these divisions are mirrored in a diluted form in the commemorative events which are sponsored by the competing political groups, rather than the families or friends of the strikers.²⁰¹

The aforementioned divisions are also made explicit in the last form of remembrance in which the Republican community takes part: the debates and conferences held about O’Rawe’s claims discussed in Chapter 6.2. The conferences are much like the commemorative events discussed above in that they are public and involve a number of speakers who discuss their experiences during the strike, their views on these events and their opinions about O’Rawe’s accusations. Where these conferences differ from the commemorative events is that they are not strictly commemorative, in fact most are predominantly political events aimed at answering questions which a particular party or part of the community feels need answered. Image 6.13 shows a poster from such an event held recently in Dublin in which O’Rawe and a number of his supporters met to discuss the event. As O’Rawe’s accusations form the bone of contention in the narrative about the hunger strikers, it is not surprising that he was also the key speaker at the event. Indeed, he has been the main speaker at a number of similar events.²⁰² The title of the conference suggests that the emphasis has moved on from determining the validity of O’Rawe’s claims and onto a discussion about whether the six needed to die after “O’Rawe’s deal” had been made and subsequently rejected. This, of course, suggests that the organisers support O’Rawe’s version and thus are unlikely to be supported by Sinn Féin, who continue to deny that such a deal was made (*cf.* Adams 2011). It is also worthy of note that no Sinn Féin member took part in the Gasyard Debate or will take part in the one in Dublin.²⁰³ Whether this is a tacit rejection of

²⁰⁰ The posts listed here were part of a conversation in the same thread. These posts can be found in Appendix B in their entirety.

²⁰¹ Unlike the commemorative events, where it is usually clear who is sponsoring, the political affiliations of individual murals are much better hidden and unless there is a clear dedication or focus on either Sinn Féin or the IRSP’s strikers, it is almost impossible to tell who sponsored it. Moreover, the vast majority of the murals include the strikers as a group, rather than individuals, which makes it harder to tell: see Images 6.2-6.11.

²⁰² O’Rawe was a key speaker at the “Gasyard Debate”, held in Derry/Londonderry in 2009, which has played a large part in the debate on “Republican.ie”. The other five speakers were Brendan Duddy, discussed in Chapter 6.2.2; Willie Gallagher from the IRSP; Gerard Hodgins, a former PIRA hunger striker; Liam Clarke, the journalist who received the FOI Documents discussed later in Chapter 6.4.3; and Tommy Gorman, a PIRA prisoner at the time of the strikes and the chair of the debate (Rusty Nail 2009c).

²⁰³ With regard to the Gasyard Debate, a number of Sinn Féin delegates were invited, including Bik McFarlane and Gerry Adams, but they either refused the invitation or declined to answer (Rusty Nail 2009c).

Sinn Féin's narrative by the organisers or a sign of the continuing rejection of O'Rawe's narrative by Sinn Féin is not always clear, but what these events do show is how his narrative continues to hold a prominent place in any discussion about the strikers.

These events show, furthermore, just how important it is for the Republican community to find some way to both accept O'Rawe's version of events and give meaning to the deaths of six hunger strikers. If O'Rawe is correct — a topic this thesis is not concerned with — then the Republican community suddenly has six victims rather than martyrs or heroes. It would mean they were sacrificed for political gain which ultimately led to the GFA and Sinn Féin working with the Unionists in Stormont as part of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive. For many Republicans, as discussed in Chapter 4.0.3, the very fact that Sinn Féin now work within the Assembly is seen as a betrayal of everything that the hunger strikers and many Republicans fought for. Indeed, if O'Rawe is correct, it would mean that the hunger strikers were used to divert the Republican movement away from their original goal and into something which they neither wanted nor fought for.²⁰⁴ This presents the Republican community with a kind of crisis of faith: either they accept the idea that Sinn Féin purposely let six men die or believe that they did not and feel O'Rawe is lying for some unknown reason. Neither option is particularly palatable, so even if they accept O'Rawe's narrative, they still feel the need to find some way to honour the six men who died, to stress that they were more than just pawns in Sinn Féin's scheme.

To bring this discussion closer to the topic of this thesis and the next sub-chapter, it might be noted that the debate on "Republican.ie" reflects the aforementioned larger conferences. Some members of the website, such as Dixie Elliot, were alive at the time of the strike and even took part in the blanket and dirty protests. Others, however, are younger and have been brought up on stories of the hunger strikers and their sacrifice for the Republican cause. Even for those who were alive at the time, it is clear that the strikers have taken on the status of folk heroes (Ballard 1984: 6; Hennessey 2014: 183) and have become a part of the Republican community's cultural heritage. The users on the website, meanwhile, mirror the same urges discussed so far in that their debates are both an attempt to make sense of the conflicting arguments made by Sinn Féin and O'Rawe and a means of finding a way to honour the memory of all the strikers, but especially those six whose legacy is now in doubt (*cf.* RT1112-03 2011: irelands32, Post 35).

²⁰⁴ See Chapter 4.0.3 for a discussion about how Republicans define "Irish Republicanism", how they view Sinn Féin and how Sinn Féin are seen as having betrayed Republicanism.

6.3.3 Cultural Heritage, Contemporaneous History and Cultural Hegemony

The previous section argued that the hunger strikers, by virtue of their sacrifice, have become part of the Republican community's culture heritage and it is for this reason that the debate about what happened is so controversial. It did not, however, explain what cultural heritage is or how this plays a part in the debate itself. This section will now attempt to expand on the argument made above by first attempting to define cultural heritage and then exploring what this means for the hunger strikers and the power dynamic. This will involve not only a discussion about cultural heritage, but also an exploration of what I have termed "contemporaneous history" and the role that cultural hegemony plays in the debate.

Cultural heritage is not an easy thing to define. In Western conceptions it is often imagined as something tangible (Smith 2006: 2-3), it is something one holds and the outdoor folk museums like the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum can thus be said to display a form of cultural heritage. If this were truly the case then the only thing connected to the hunger strikers that would count as cultural legacy would be the murals of them and that would be irrespective of their content. Dr Laurajane Smith, Professor of Heritage and Museum Studies at the Australian National University, Canberra, prefers to define cultural heritage another way and states that heritage:

is itself a constitutive cultural process that identifies those things and places that can be given meaning and value as 'heritage', reflecting contemporary cultural and social values, debates and aspirations. [... H]eritage is used to construct, reconstruct and negotiate a range of identities and social and cultural values and meanings in the present (Smith 2006: 3).

This definition explains how the hunger strikers can also be viewed as part of the Republican community's cultural heritage. If we assume that Smith's definition is correct, then the discussion in the previous section presents strong evidence for their growing status within this cultural heritage. The murals, commemorations and debates all identify the hunger strikers, or the memory of them, as being important and it was argued that they embody significant, contemporary Republican cultural and social values. The very act of remembering the hunger strikes identifies them as something that can and has been given meaning.

Heritage, however, does not exist in a vacuum and often it calls on history and tradition to give it meaning. It is interesting that Henry Glassie has a definition of tradition which parallels Smith's definition of heritage quite closely. According to Glassie, tradition is "the creation of the future out of the past [...] situated in the nothingness of the present"

(Glassie 2003: 176). Both heritage and tradition would thus appear to be linked and seem to use the same processes to give themselves meaning and value in contemporary society. In Northern Irish society, the relationship between history, tradition and cultural heritage has always been readily apparent and Jonathan Bardon, the historian, writes at the start of the introduction to his *A History of Ulster*:

It has often been observed that Irish history, even from the earliest times, is current affairs. Whatever the truth of this statement, it cannot be denied that popular historical memory in Ulster is particularly long and that growing conditions for the cultivation of myths are particularly favourable there (Bardon 2005: xiii)

What Bardon describes here is “contemporaneous history”. Perhaps a better way of phrasing Bardon’s idea quoted above is that history in Ireland “is contemporaneous with the contemporary — that is happening at the same time” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Gablik 1995: 417) but not of the same time. Essentially this means that historical events are treated like recent ones and chronological distances are ignored because the events reflect each other. As Bardon notes, memories are long in Northern Ireland and it is not uncommon to hear mention of events from over a hundred years ago as if they happened only yesterday (*cf.* Glassie 1995: 187-311). As an example of this, it might be noted that Northern Ireland and Ireland are currently in the first years of the so-called “Decade of Centenaries”,²⁰⁵ which began in 2012 and will run until 2022. This decade has already seen celebrations of the foundation of the Ulster Volunteer Force in 1912 and will see celebrations of the Easter Rising in 1916 and the birth of Northern Ireland, 1921, to name but a few events which occurred between 1912 and 1922.²⁰⁶ In many ways, one could argue that history of this kind is not “allowed” to be history in Northern Ireland.²⁰⁷ Whilst an English child might learn about the Tudors in England and how they shaped the country in the past, children in Northern Ireland learn about William of Orange and the Battle of the Boyne and their relevance to current events.²⁰⁸ It is perhaps not surprising then that events which occurred less than half a century ago remain highly

²⁰⁵ See <http://www.decadeofcentenaries.com/> for more information on how the two countries intend to celebrate this decade and which events they view as significant.

²⁰⁶ For more information about these events, see Chapter 5.0.2.

²⁰⁷ This can be seen in the reactions by members of the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community to praise for Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658). They continue to react very badly to praise for him due to the way he treated Irish Catholics during the Massacre of Drogheda and afterwards. The phrase “to Hell or to Connacht” is attributed to him and implies the Irish Catholics should either give up their land and move to Connacht or die.

²⁰⁸ One need only look at the Orange Order to see how William of Orange and these battles still have relevance in Northern Ireland today. The Order’s largest celebration is a parade in memory of William’s victory at the Battle of the Boyne.

important and alive for the Republican community. What this means precisely is that for some people in Northern Ireland as noted above, it feels like historical events never really ended and are still occurring. It could be argued that the Battle of the Boyne is repeated every summer when the Orange Order march on 12th July; that the 1916 Easter Rising and subsequent Irish War for Independence is ongoing;²⁰⁹ and the hunger strike is relived as part of the commemorations and debates or whenever someone mentions their names. The murals play a similar role in contemporaneous history because they thrust depictions of these past events into daily life as people are confronted by images of William of Orange, the Battle of the Boyne and Bobby Sands and the other hunger strikers. The chronological gaps between events thus become distorted and history has become contemporaneous with current events.

The interesting side effect of this distortion of time is that it allows people of both communities to create continuities or connections between modern and historical events as can be seen from the murals discussed in the previous section. Therefore Republicans can connect the idea of an independent, Celtic Ireland with the cause of the hunger strikers and Protestants can draw parallels between modern events and events during the Glorious Revolution.²¹⁰ As mentioned in the Chapter Four, “Republican.ie” contains a section called “History”, in which there is a sub-forum called “Historical Events”. In this sub-forum Duleek Hunger Strike Monu has posted a thread called “The Hungerstrikers” (RT1208-01 2012). This thread includes a picture of every hunger striker who died between the years 1917 and 1981. The OP²¹¹ contains information about every striker, who they were, how and why they were captured and also details about their motivations for going on a hunger strike. According to the OP, some strikers starved themselves in an effort to gain, or regain, political status as prisoners, whilst others did it to protest against the inhumane conditions they were forced to live in (RT1208-01 2012: Duleek Hunger Strike Monu, Post 1). By linking all these separate hunger strikes together, Duleek Hunger Strike Monu creates the appearance of a hunger striking tradition in Ireland (*cf.* Hobsbawm & Ranger 1984), which subsequently allows them to underline the argument that the events in 1981 were part of a long-established, historical pattern of rejecting the legitimacy of the Republican community’s fight against the British. Moreover, as O’Malley points out, they are able to connect the 1981 hunger strike with laws which existed in ancient Ireland, which suggested that hunger striking was the way for a less

²⁰⁹ The Irish War of Independence was discussed in Chapter 5.0.2.

²¹⁰ “King Billy”, the colloquial term for William of Orange, is a common image in Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist murals. The Apprentice Boys march every year to celebrate the fact that citizens of Derry/Londonderry did not fall to the besieging, Catholic, army and the common phrases “still under siege” and “never surrender” hearken back to this event.

²¹¹ “OP” can mean either “Original Post” or “Original Poster”.

powerful person to redress a wrong committed by a less powerful person (O'Malley 2001: 25-26). In such a presentation of the facts, Republicans can mould their discourse about the strikers in such a way as to suggest that they are a wronged party seeking some form of reparation from a more powerful party, such as when ArdEoin Gael begins their discussion of hunger striking by referencing this law:

1. ArdEoin Gael: Due to the importance of hospitality in Irish culture, Troscádh²¹² would be used against an offender with the victim starving on his or her doorstep. If the offender ignored the Striker, he or she was deemed to have inflicted the greatest of dishonour to his community. If the Striker was allowed to die outside the Offender's home, the Offender would then be ordered by a Brehon (Judge) to pay compensation to the Striker's family. He would also be sent from the village in which he/she lived to live forever in exile. Most fasts were undertaken to recover debts or to achieve justice for a perceived wrong (RT1201-02 2012: ArdEoin Gael, Post 1).

By opening their post with this review of ancient Irish law, ArdEoin Gael implies that the strikers had attempted to use their hunger strike “to achieve justice for a perceived wrong” (RT1201-02 2012: ArdEoin Gael, Post 1) much like the ancient Irish did. They forms a connection between the ancient and the modern and as the British Government ignored the strikers by refusing to concede to their demands, ArdEoin Gael creates the impression that the British Government “was deemed to have inflicted the greatest of dishonour to his community” (RT1201-02 2012: ArdEoin Gael, Post 1). In this manner, the users legitimise the Republican struggle against the British at the same time as strengthening the belief that hunger striking has been a tradition amongst the Irish specifically and thus within their own community. However, this is only possible by decontextualising events — by ignoring or putting to one side the time and place in which they occurred — and assuming that each one is just part of a long chain that stretches back into the past. By doing so, Republicans create the idea of tradition and the people who partook in that tradition eventually become part of the Republican community's cultural heritage and are celebrated for their sacrifice to the ancient cause of an independent Ireland, regardless of whether they died for that reason or not.

Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that cultural heritage is often used as a political weapon. What a community accepts as their heritage has the ability to marginalise other groups within that community who contest this heritage or feel that they are being forgotten. As Dr Laurajane Smith says:

²¹² “Troscadh” is the Old Irish term for “fast”, as in to abstain from food (Foclóir 2013).

the ability to control heritage plays at least three interlinked and important roles. The first is to define community identity; the second is to create and recreate new political identities from which to assert and negotiate with governments the legitimacy of a range of cultural and civil rights; and the third is to demonstrate control over a political resource (Smith 2010: 288).

Smith's statement is based primarily around the experiences of Indigenous cultures, specifically those in Australia, and so she looks at the issue from that angle (*cf.* Smith 2010), but it is perfectly possible to take what she has said and apply it to the situation in Northern Ireland. When viewed in this light, the ability to control the legacy of the hunger strikers becomes an important part of the cultural-hegemonic battle between two groups, Sinn Féin and their opponents, where each attempts to assert dominance over the greater Republican community using various cultural phenomena as part of the battle.

Before going any further, it might be best to explain what exactly is meant by "cultural-hegemonic battle". The term as it is used here refers to the theory of cultural hegemony first expounded by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), an Italian Marxist intellectual, and which has since been developed by Raymond Williams (1921-1988), a former Professor of Modern Drama at the University of Cambridge. According to Gramsci, cultural hegemony focusses more on "intellectual and moral leadership"²¹³ (Gramsci 1998: 210; Williams 1977: 108) and is the way in which one class uses culture to support its dominance over another group. Williams has expanded this definition and states that cultural hegemony is more than just culture, ideology or a social process, but also a discourse about the dominated and those that dominate (Williams 1977: 108-114). Due to the use of culture, the dominant group generally has prestige within the larger community due its historical position and this leads to the masses consenting to being dominated (Gramsci 1998: 214).²¹⁴ Williams goes further than this and discusses alternative formations and oppositions in culture which can threaten the dominant group (Williams 1977: 113). In this way, the dominated group can participate in a cultural-hegemonic battle by drawing on cultural phenomena to combat the effects of the dominant group's cultural hegemony. This can be done by drawing on the same cultural

²¹³ This is in contrast to "domination", which focusses on governmental institutions like the armed forces or police service which enforce the government's wishes: see Gramsci 1998: 210.

²¹⁴ Due to this, Gramsci says "the State must be conceived of as an 'educator'", Gramsci 1998: 215, because whilst it requires the consent of the masses to rule, "it also 'educates' this consent, by means of the political and syndical associations", Gramsci 1998: 215.

phenomena as the dominant group, but providing a different analysis or narrative, or by throwing light on aspects of culture which have been forgotten by the dominant group.

The legacy of the hunger strikers is one such cultural phenomenon which is being used as part of a cultural-hegemonic battle. As mentioned in Chapter 4.0.3, the Republican community in Northern Ireland is divided between those who think Sinn Féin are a Republican party and those who feel they are not. Lying at the heart of this division is a battle for the soul of Irish Republicanism: do Republicans accept Sinn Féin's methods and accept Northern Ireland's status as part of the UK and work to change that from within or do they reject Northern Ireland's right to exist and try to change it from without? At the moment, Sinn Féin is the dominant Republican party and it is their culture which rules. The legacy of the hunger strikers of 1981 is one piece of culture which Sinn Féin use to give them and their methods legitimacy (*cf.* RT0905-04 2009) and therefore it is important they keep control of it.²¹⁵ Whether O'Rawe intended it or not, however, his alternative version of events, his alternative formation, has presented the anti-Sinn Féin groups and elements within the Republican community with a way to attack Sinn Féin's position. It could be said that whoever owns the legacy of the hunger strikers can make a claim to the "ownership" of the Republican community.

This battle for control can be found throughout the debate on "Republican.ie". As the following post shows, the anti-Sinn Féin side uses O'Rawe's narrative as a means to attack Sinn Féin and as evidence of their betrayal of the Republican cause (*cf.* Chapter 4.0.3):

127. rbreathnach: you and your ilk [Sinn Féin] are part of the brit establishment ffs,its you lot who have done all in your limited power to "SHORE UP THE BRITISH" and thats no two faced lie its a fucking fact,like all the other facts in this thread you refuse to see,it really is just one excuse after another,but the excuses are coming from the likes of you and each and every time your proved wrong with facts,you play the oul DEFLECTION card,well it aint fucking working anymore,this will never be brushed under the carpet and as i said before the truth will out-THE WHOLE TRUTH that is..... (RT1305-04 2013: rbreathnach, Post 127).

The user miley has even gone so far as to imply on "Republican.ie" that Sinn Féin's actions during the hunger strikes were coordinated by the British intelligence agencies at work

²¹⁵ Sinn Féin are also able to draw on the party's long history of separatist, Republican deeds since the party was first founded at the start of the 20th century by Arthur Griffith, see Chapter Five. By doing so, they conform to Gramsci's statement above about historical position granting the dominant group prestige and the consent of the masses to being rule by them: see Gramsci 1998: 214.

in Northern Ireland (RT1112-03 2011: miley, Post 180). O’Rawe’s narrative about Sinn Féin of duplicity with regards to the hunger strikers of 1981 thus becomes a powerful weapon with which to attack Sinn Féin’s dominance. As can be seen from rbreathnach’s post above and the discussion in Chapter 4.0.3, the anti-Sinn Féin Republicans already feel that by working in the Northern Ireland Assembly alongside the Unionists, Sinn Féin have sold out to the British Government and have joined their side. This betrayal of Republican values is hard to prove, but O’Rawe’s narrative provides compelling evidence for the idea that Sinn Féin and especially Gerry Adams have been British operatives for a very long time. If it could be proven to be true, then Sinn Féin’s electoral support would dry up rather quickly and the anti-Sinn Féin parties²¹⁶ could move into the political vacuum and return the movement to the course they feel it has departed from.

None of this is to suggest that O’Rawe originally intended this to happen. It is perfectly possible that he wrote the book looking to reveal what he considers to be the truth and find some answers. Any form of knowledge can be turned to political purposes, however, and it is clear that the debate surrounding O’Rawe’s accusations has political overtones. The hunger strikers’ importance to both the Republican community and Sinn Féin’s cultural hegemony, which supports their political dominance within the community, means that they make the perfect weapon with which to attack Sinn Féin’s aforementioned dominance. In this way, the debate revolves not just around their memory or legacy, but also around the control of this legacy and who controls the Republican movement in Northern Ireland.

6.3.4 Conclusion

Folklorists and anthropologists often take it for granted that whatever phenomenon they are studying is important to their chosen community and thus worthy of study. As such, studies sometimes fail to provide a justification for the importance of what they are studying. Interestingly, Elliot Oring, Professor of Anthropology at California State University, Los Angeles, has suggested, albeit as a thought experiment, that what we study could be said to lack importance and is actually trivial or trivia (Oring 2012: 317-321).²¹⁷ This sub-chapter has taken a different approach and has instead attempted to argue that the legacy of the hunger strikers of 1981 is exceptionally important to the Republican community and in fact forms a

²¹⁶ It is important to remember that the anti-Sinn Féin parties are also against the Good Friday Agreement and do not wish to participate in any Northern Irish institution.

²¹⁷ It should be noted that Oring does not actually espouse this interpretation of folklore and ends his thought experiment by stating that “[t]here really are no such things as trivia, because things are not trifling in-and-of themselves. Knowledge only appears trivial absent a context” (Oring 2012: 321).

key narrative in their mythos. An attempt has been made to provide reasons for this by examining how exactly the hunger strikers are remembered by the Republican community. Moreover, this sub-chapter has made the argument that as the hunger strikers form part of the Republican cultural heritage, they have become part of a cultural-hegemonic battle being waged between Sinn Féin and their opponents for dominance in the Republican community and that it is this battle which lies at the heart of the debate surrounding O’Rawe’s claims. Hopefully this and the previous sub-chapter have provided enough background information for the following sub-chapter, which will now look at the form this debate took on “Republican.ie”.

6.4 The Debate

6.4.1 Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter 4.0.2, “Republican.ie” was created in 2007,²¹⁸ but it appears that no one made any threads concerning O’Rawe’s claims about the hunger strikers of 1981 until 2008. Since that first thread was made, however, more than 50 threads have been made on the topic and the users have posted over 5,000 replies debating the merits of the evidence for and against O’Rawe’s version of events. The two periods with the most activity were in 2009 and from late 2011 to early 2012 when new evidence was released. In 2009, Liam Clarke, a journalist then working for the British newspaper, *The Times*, was given access to a number of documents from the Northern Ireland Office through the Freedom of Information Act 2000. He subsequently published these documents in an online article (Clarke 2009b) along with a number of articles about them which reignited the debate within the Republican community, both on- and offline. These documents were then supplemented by witness testimony from Brendan Duddy (see Chapter 6.2.2) and other evidence at the Gasyard Debate in Derry/Londonderry. As a result, at least 18 separate discussions were created on “Republican.ie”, more than in any other year.²¹⁹ This was followed by an apparent lull in the debate as very few threads appear to have been created in 2010. Then at the end of 2011, under the “thirty year rule”²²⁰ the government released their documents from 1981, many of which dealt specifically with the British government’s position towards the hunger strikers at

²¹⁸ See Chapter Four for more information about the website, “Republican.ie”, its formation and the nature of the discussions contained on it.

²¹⁹ If we consider a single, twelve-month period, however, the same amount of threads was made between late 2011 and early 2012, but with significantly fewer replies. See Chapter 6.4.4.

²²⁰ The “Thirty Year Rule” is a colloquial term for the Public Records Act 1967, which keeps sensitive documents from the public for a period of thirty years.

the time (National Archive Documents 2011). Moreover, the National University of Ireland, Galway, published Brendan Duddy's notes from his time as an intermediary online (Duddy 2011) thereby giving the public even greater access to the content of the discussions that had taken place between the PIRA and the British Government. This led to a new upsurge in the number of threads about the subject: between late 2011 and early 2012 24 threads were posted about the hunger strike of 1981, the majority in 2012 after the release of the government's files. A further 10 have been created since 2013. Nonetheless without the release of any new information, it would appear that the appetite for debating the same subject has once again lessened on "Republican.ie".

The following sub-chapter will follow the debate with the aim of providing answers to the questions listed in Chapter 1.0.1 and Chapter 6.1. In order to answer these questions, the sub-chapter will be divided along the lines of the time periods outlined above and will examine how the users responded to O'Rawe's accusations; how they responded to and treated the evidence as it was made available; how they formed their chosen narrative; and how this debate might involve folklore. This discussion will then be followed by an examination of how hindsight affected both the users' attitudes towards O'Rawe's claims and my attitude towards their posts, as well as the methods I employed to negate this effect. The discussion will not be fully concluded by the time the chapter ends, however, and the case-study's conclusions will be fully discussed later in Chapter Seven.

Before beginning the analysis, it is nevertheless important to note that it will involve a very close reading of the posts made by the users and at times will require pointing out when a user appears to have been incorrect about a point or ignored a piece of evidence by comparing their posts with the documents available at the time they posted. Due to this, it may appear that this thesis is siding with one group or another with regard to the "facts" throughout the discussion. This is an unavoidable side effect of the analysis and is not politically motivated.²²¹ As has been noted previously, this project is not concerned with the truth of the events surrounding the hunger strike in 1981, but is far more interested in how the Republican community deals with the debate and how, like any other community with opinions about historical events, it creates differing narratives based on different kinds of evidence. Another unintended side-effect of this close examination is that some users will be mentioned more than others and it may seem like the project is attacking them personally. One reason for this is that many of these users have become the most prominent spokespeople

²²¹ For a full overview of my political beliefs and my thoughts on O'Rawe's claims, see Chapter 1.0.2 and Chapter 7.0.1 respectively.

for their side of the debate and as such have taken on the role, albeit unwittingly, of key tradition bearers²²² or representatives of their side: they post more often and in significantly more detail than other posters. As a result of this, it is perhaps natural that as part of a folklore project, the analysis will gravitate towards their posts more than towards those made by other users who write less, if only because they write more and often provide the best examples of the processes that the analysis will examine. Whilst I am aware that the project may become part of the debate due to this side-effect, as has often been stated, it is not the intention of this thesis to provide evidence for or against either Sinn Féin or Richard O’Rawe. If one side is examined more than the other, it is only because that side’s posts provide better evidence for the processes examined as part of this case-study, rather than because they offer me a chance to prove or disprove one claim or another.

One final point about the following analysis needs to be made before it can begin. Throughout the case-study there will be repeated references to different kinds of sources on a sliding scale from unofficial to official. It is perhaps best to explain now what exactly is meant by these two terms and what kinds of evidence fall at either end of the continuum. Official sources are those that come from an institution or person involved at the strike and which were written at the time. Examples of this kind of source include Brendan Duddy’s notes made during his time as an intermediary between the British Government and PIRA (Duddy 2011) and the documents released by the British Government under the “thirty year rule” at the end of 2011 (National Archive Documents 2011). Official sources are also those works based on the documents listed above; these kinds of sources are also known as “secondary sources” which can be written by journalists or historians. The works by Beresford (1994), O’Malley (2001) and Hennessey (2014) fall into this group. Unofficial sources are those which have no solid reference and include friends of friends, other Republicans and similar types of evidence, also known variously as folklore, oral tradition or local knowledge. There are also sources which fall in-between these two poles and could be described as either mostly official or unofficial depending on one’s point of view. Such sources include the memories of people involved in the strike²²³ or connected to it in some way or alive at the time, opinion pieces and blog posts about the issue and O’Rawe’s book,

²²² A tradition bearer can be either active or passive. An active tradition bearer is a person who performs that tradition, which includes telling a story or enacting a ritual. A passive tradition bearer is someone who knows of the tradition, but does not perform it (*cf.* von Sydow 1948: 13-18). Users who post more often and debate more vehemently can be seen as active tradition bearers because they actively help shape their chosen narrative and argue its merits with their opponents.

²²³ Memories are known to play tricks on people and therefore are not counted necessarily as reliable sources of evidence.

Blanketmen (O’Rawe 2005). O’Rawe’s book falls into a strange place between the two poles because it counts as the ultimate source of his narrative, and so would appear official, but it is weakened by being written 24 years after the hunger strike and because O’Rawe provides very little evidence for his version of events in the book.²²⁴ For the purposes of this project, it is not counted amongst the official sources of evidence for the events of 1981, but it is counted as an official source for one of the narratives about those events. With that in mind, this sub-chapter will now turn to the analysis.

6.4.2 2008

As mentioned above, there appears to have been only one thread posted on “Republican.ie” about the hunger strikers in 2008. This was posted on 29th March by ardonian²²⁵ and accumulated 18 pages and 341 replies before people stopped posting to it on 21st April. Like many of the threads on “Republican.ie”, the OP (original post/poster) is a “copy and paste” of a blog²²⁶ earlier posted on another website, “Slugger O’Toole”.²²⁷ The blog was originally written by Rusty Nail,²²⁸ a vocal supporter of O’Rawe who has contributed numerous opinion pieces to the debate. Despite posting on a separate website, Rusty Nail has in many ways become the representative for O’Rawe’s narrative on “Republican.ie” and elsewhere and her blogs have been heavily quoted by users on “Republican.ie” over the years. The blog posted in this thread appears to be one of her earlier pieces and is based on a radio discussion with the journalist Eamonn McCann who claims that a number of prisoners, as well as Brendan Duddy, have spoken to him and confirmed Richard O’Rawe’s narrative that Sinn Féin let six of the ten hunger strikers die for political gain.

As the earliest thread about the issue, posted at least a year before any of the relevant documents were released, the discussion here presents a unique opportunity to view how people responded to McCann’s new claims about former blanketmen coming forward. Reactions to the claims ranged from disbelief to acceptance and calls for more evidence:

²²⁴ To be fair to O’Rawe, there was no evidence which he could produce. If it had been written after 2011, it is likely that the book would have made use of the documents later released by the British Government.

²²⁵ As mentioned in Chapter Four, users’ screen names are being treated like normal names and so will not be set in quotation marks or reformatted.

²²⁶ A “blog” is an online journal. The word “blog” can be used to refer to the website, as in a person’s blog, or to a particular post on the blog. The latter usage can also be denoted by the slightly longer “blog post”.

²²⁷ “Slugger O’Toole” is a news website which allows registered users to post news articles and opinion pieces. Its main focus is Northern Irish politics and society, but it reports on British and Irish issues as well.

²²⁸ “Rusty Nail” is the screen name of Carrie Twomey, O’Rawe 2010: 151. She was also a regular poster on “Republican.ie” under the name “CMe” until she left in 2009, Twomey: personal communication. Twomey is the wife of Anthony McIntyre, a former PIRA volunteer and the man behind the Boston College Belfast Project which collected oral history from people involved in the conflict between 1969 and 1998. McIntyre is also a known critic of Sinn Féin, see McIntyre 2008.

2. LarryM: I find it hard to believe someone could allow their own people to die in return for political gains (RT0803-01 2008: LarryM, Post 2)

3. inla-supporter: Looks like Gerry has some explaining to do to the families of the hunger strikers or will he be screaming the usual kak about ‘securocrats’ undermining ‘the peace process’. It’s difficult to take in that the leadership of the PRM would stoop to that level of callousness and if true gives a serious kick in the balls to all republicans of all shades (RT0803-01 2008: inla-supporter, Post 3).

7. Dúiche Néill: So O Rawe is claiming that himself and Bik McFarlane agreed to this alleged proposal and an un-named prisoner claims that he heard the alleged discussion but wasn't told about the alleged proposal. Where are all the prisoners who would have discussed and decided upon the alleged proposals? Are we to believe that this decision fell to O Rawe and Bik alone and no other prisoners were told about it? I haven’t heard Bik McFarlane agree with O Rawe’s version of events, but then he’s not trying to sell any books (RT0803-01 2008: Dúiche Néill, Post 7).

9. ardonian: [Quoting Post 7 above]

Bik denies the events took place when Richard book was released. But now more people are coming out and saying the conversation did take place or do you think this is just a case of more republicans with an axe to grind with there former comrades (RT0803-01 2008: ardonian, Post 9)?

12. Dúiche Néill: [Quoting Post 9 above]

I believe Bik McFarlane and I have no reason not too. The problem with O Rawe’s story, imo, is that there would have to have been more than the two of them involved in any decisions. Furthermore, his version of events has been utterly rejected by Bik McFarlane and Lawrence McKeown who; was also one of those who would have been party to such discussions. McKeown states in ‘The Hunger Strikes’ by RK Walker:

“I think Richard has frozen a monent in tiome. The Hunger Strikes were a very fluid situation. For instance there were hints of offers going on all the time. But nothing was in writing. If it was good enough to offer it was good enough to put in writing. But of course it never was.

Unless it is in writing it's not an offer. Why excite people with something that wasn’t there? The timing of that book (Blanketmen) was conspicuous, coming before an election and with all the other stuff being flung at Sinn Féin all the tme. And it was seroialised in the Sunday Times. Now what has the Sunday Times ever done for Republicanism?” (RT0803-01 2008: Dúiche Néill, Post 12).

19. CMe: [In response to Post 19 above]

Here's the problem with McKeown's position. First of all, all that he is doing is claiming that because he didn't hear the discussion that O'Rawe describes, therefore it did not exist. This is being destroyed because other prisoners are coming forward and confirming that the conversation did take place because they heard it. So to say that because it wasn't heard by everyone, it didn't take place means nothing, for when people who did hear it come forward, that position is destroyed. [...] Secondly, the guff about whether an offer was in writing or not is just guff, a fig leaf. What was wanted was public guarantors, not "OFFERS MADE IN WRITING". Given what we now know, we can see how that is a feeble excuse, offered to all sides and the public, as to why the acceptance of the deal was not passed onto the A/C [Army Council], or in fact, passed on at all (RT0803-01 2008: CMe, Post 19).

The responses above are only a handful of what can be found on this thread and the many others which exist. As can be seen, users had already taken sides, if only cautiously, with regard to O'Rawe's claims. Thus inla-supporter's response above suggests they were more than willing to entertain O'Rawe's claims, whilst CMe was outspoken in her support for O'Rawe. Similarly, LarryM's post indicates that he was more likely to believe Sinn Féin's version of events and Dúiche Néill was quite adamant that Bik McFarlane was in the right. Despite the paucity of evidence at this time, participants seemed to feel relatively comfortable choosing who to believe. There seems, however, to be little sense of a single accepted narrative. One reason for this could be the original poster's personal background and political beliefs. Indeed, as noted in Note 227, CMe was Rusty Nail who is Carrie Twomey (Twomey: personal communication), the wife of Anthony McIntyre, an outspoken critic of Sinn Féin (*cf.* McIntyre 2008) and a good friend of Richard O'Rawe and it is likely this has had an impact on her personal views of Sinn Féin. Twomey was also involved in the Boston College Belfast Project²²⁹ and might thus have been privy to information about Adams and other members of Sinn Féin that was at the time unknown to the general public, and would have influenced her opinion.²³⁰ Similarly, inla-supporter appears to be a member of the IRSP, which would likewise explain why they might also lean towards favouring O'Rawe's accusations as the IRSP and Sinn Féin have never been friends.²³¹ One might then suggest that Dúiche Néill and LarryM are either Sinn Féin supporters or at least sympathetic to their political aims based on their posts. This is particularly true for Mellows1922 (discussed further below) who was at

²²⁹ See Note 50, Chapter 2.0.3.

²³⁰ Any information about Adams collected as part of the Belfast Project has yet to be released to the general public.

²³¹ See Chapter 4.0.3 for more information about this.

one point a member of Sinn Féin and who has become one of the key debaters for Sinn Féin's side. Nonetheless, it should be noted that it can often be almost impossible to gauge a participant's political beliefs accurately. Whilst their opinion of Sinn Féin or other Republican parties may become apparent through the discussion, this is not always the case and so for the vast majority of users, their personal political beliefs are often kept a mystery as no one is forced to state which party they prefer. Regardless, this thread shows that if we can trust the website to reflect general opinions in the Republican community,²³² even by 2008 many Republicans had already chosen a side in the matter if only weakly. Many were also contributing to the debate by analysing and discussing the credibility of what little evidence there was at this time. If nothing else, it is clear that there were various narratives going the rounds (like with any folklore or conspiracy theory), something fed by the lack of solid evidence and the need to trust more unofficial sources, such as friends or oral narratives about the hunger strike.

It is interesting then that despite the emphasis on the evidence even at this point in time, no one mentioned a possible error that existed in the OP. According Rusty Nail's blog post, "[in] the Belfast Telegraph article [... it states that] an offer [came] from the Foreign Office, conveyed to McFarlane on July 5" (RT0803-01 2008: ardonian, Post 1), but at the same time the blog quotes Eamonn McCann as saying:

1. ardonian: I think that's right...that Richard O'Rawe is telling the truth. ... I don't know what the motivation for the rejection, by the outside IRA leadership, for the rejection of the offer, which was made on 6/7th of July (RT0803-01 2008: ardonian, Post 1).²³³

The wording is unclear,²³⁴ possibly because it is a transcript of a radio interview, but the above quote could suggest that the offer was made on 6th or 7th July, which would indicate that O'Rawe is at least mistaken if not wrong that there was an offer on the 5th July, which Sinn Féin/Gerry Adams rejected on 6th July. Nevertheless, this ambiguity went unnoticed

²³² See Chapter Four for more information about the website.

²³³ Any additions, subtractions or changes which have been made in the quotes will be indicated by square parentheses. In the odd case where the quotation also contains square parentheses, my changes will be indicated through a footnote.

²³⁴ With regard to this confusion, Twomey says that "[a]t the time the chronology of events was far more confused/confusing than it is today, in part because of the whole nonsense about offers and deals. Those semantics were meant to muddy the waters and they did. I have not gone back and reread that post but I do remember when writing it having trouble tracking down what Eamonn had said on the radio. I would not read much into the issue of July 5 vs 6/7. We know, and knew, that on the 5th Morrison went in with the Mountain Climber offer, and that the rejection from Adams came in afterwards. That's what I believe Eamonn was pegging on the 6/7th - not Morrison's visit but the comm telling the prisoners 'More was needed'" (Twomey: personal communication).

throughout the thread. It is a good example of what might be termed the “malleability of chronology”. Similar to contemporaneous history, which removes chronological gaps to greater emphasise connections, malleability of chronology refers to how events which happen on one date are sometimes used by participants as evidence for events which might have happened on another, often earlier date. In other words, for example, a deal made on 8th July is used as evidence for a deal made on 5th July.²³⁵ This is possibly the first example of such malleability and is relatively minor as a result of the ambiguity of the original statement. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note how it became more prominent in 2009 once the official documents become part of the debate. That is why it is important to take note of it now.

Another influential aspect which has been quite prominent throughout this debate but raised its head immediately in this thread is the secrecy that has surrounded the evidence, thereby directly encouraging speculation. It is noteworthy that the OP, whilst in clear support of O’Rawe’s narrative, refused to name any of the men who claimed to have heard the key conversation between Richard O’Rawe and Bik McFarlane in which they accepted the offer from the British government. It identified one as having been O’Rawe’s cell-mate, but chooses not to name him. This slightly mysterious nature of the evidence and the identity of “witnesses” appeared in the thread time and time again, and led to reactions such as the following:

22. Mellows 1922: Where are all these people ? All we are getting is third and fourth hand accounts of people being told by other people that something was said.

Nobody has came forward and said, yes I heard that conversation and it did occur (RT0803-01 2008: Mellows1922, Post 23).

By withholding the names of the people involved, it might be argued that the O’Rawe-supporters effectively kept their account in the realm of folklore/oral tradition, allowing the Sinn Féin-side to ignore their argument as they demand hard facts:

Post 48. Mellows1922:They released nothing, not a jot. They simply said they had the evidence to prove what O'Rawe said was true, and years down the line not a shred of this so called evidence has been released by them.

²³⁵ This particular example is discussed in further detail in Chapter 6.4.3.1.

If what they say is true, they have a responsibility to the families of all those men as well as to Republicanism at large to produce the evidence, this promise of confidentiality is a con job and should be ridiculed for what it is.

This subject is far too serious to be given a free pass with some abstract promise of confidentiality made to a fella trying to flog a book (RT0803-01 2008: Mellows1922, Post 48).

57. Mellows1922: As an author, O’Rawe should be seeking to validate his claims not be getting people to swear ridiculous oaths of secrecy (RT0803-01 2008: Mellows1922, Post 57).

100. Mellows1922: I’m sorry if it came across that it was to protect O’Rawe, I think the silence is designed to protect both O’Rawe and the IRSP. I think the evidence doesn’t stack up and I think that the IRSP used it as a stick to beat SF, even though they were aware that the “evidence” was shaky at best.

I think if any “evidence” existed, they all, the IRSP and O’Rawe would have it in the public domain pretty rapidly.²³⁶

The IRSP claimed that they had evidence that backed up O’Rawes story, we know that evidence was not O’Rawes cellmate as the IRSP said he wouldn’t confirm or deny. This implies that other evidence exists. I am just at a loss to understand if this evidence is there why it hasn’t been presented. It leads me to believe that this “evidence” doesn’t back up O’Rawes story in the manner that the IRSP tried to imply at the time. The fact the IRSP have been virtually silent on this issue since the initial flurry to shout about it from the rooftops, leads me to the same conclusion.

If there were genuine reasons for making these claims, by both O’Rawe and the IRSP then there should be no reason for this secrecy (RT0803-01 2008: Mellows1922, Post 100).

What can be seen from these posts by Mellows1922 is that, for him if not others, the lack of verifiable sources was a weakness in O’Rawe’s argument. By keeping the evidence hidden, O’Rawe’s account moved a lot closer to the unofficial end of the scale and this made it easier for his opponents to ignore. Moreover, this shows the beginning of a type of behaviour which became all the more apparent in 2009 and later, in which users often paid no attention to whether a source or piece of evidence was official or not, but chose it based on its

²³⁶ Mellows1922’s posts also indicate that O’Rawe and IRSP have been closely aligned since at least 2008, if not before. This ties in with the argument made in Chapter 6.3.3 that the debate is highly political.

content. Here we can see that for some users, even hidden and unknown sources were better than nothing.

Whilst a large amount of the official documentation would eventually be released and then used in different ways to lend support to both sides of the argument (showing that even then the narrative remains fluid), some evidence has continued to be withheld from the public eye, allowing even further debate and speculation. The argument each time it has been mentioned has continued to be some variation of the one above: if it is good enough, let us all view it. Moreover, in Post 100 above, back in 2008, one can see the beginnings of what will become a common defence against certain evidence produced by O’Rawe: in other words that the entire debate has been constructed as “a stick to beat SF” (RT0803-01 2008: Mellows1922, Post 100). If evidence is kept secret, no one is able to refute its existence which means it can continue to be an active shadowy weapon with which to attack Sinn Féin. Whilst the secrecy surrounding much of the evidence at this stage may be for perfectly good reasons, it does lead one to doubt whether it truly exists and it thus remains a weakness in the argument put forth by O’Rawe’s supporters.

One side-effect of the emphasis on evidence in the debate on “Republican.ie” is that it shows how the internet provides communities with greater access to material. This thread, for example, made use of a number of outside sources throughout the discussion. As mentioned before, the OP for the thread was an article posted on another website, “Slugger O’Toole”. In this thread, various users mentioned discussions they had had with other Republicans elsewhere (*cf.* RT0803-01 2008: Newry Republican, Post 22) and multiple users posted or gave links to articles that have appeared: *The Irish News* which sided with O’Rawe (RT0803-01 2008: DFCRFB, Post 201); *The Daily Ireland* which sided with Sinn Féin (RT0803-01 2008: DFCRFB, Post 202); and *The Blanket*, in which Gerard Foster²³⁷ explained how he came to support O’Rawe (RT0803-01 2008: Guest_DublinRepublican_*, Post 203). Moreover, when the official documents started appearing, they were heavily quoted on “Republican.ie” and became a new mainstay of the debate as will be shown later. Whilst use of newspaper articles and other outside sources is part and parcel of daily life and the forum itself, it indicates that not only did the community on “Republican.ie” have access at this time to a range of sources ranging from official to unofficial, but they are more than willing to make use of any source which proved their point and disproved those of their opponents.

This use of outside sources has interesting implications for folklore and folklore research. Folklore is often depicted as having a dual nature: it exists outside of more “official”

²³⁷ Gerard Foster was a member of the INLA.

discourse,²³⁸ but can at times form the sum of a group's history and identity, not the least when solid facts are lacking. We can see this in Northern Ireland, for example, with the discussions about what happened on Bloody Sunday. Until the Saville Inquiry stated that the soldiers had shot at the marchers who were unarmed, it was generally believed by people outside of the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community as a result of the findings of the Widgery Tribunal that the marchers had fired on the soldiers.²³⁹ The Saville Inquiry only came about because the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican population in Derry/Londonderry refused to accept that their version of events was false or "folklore" as it might have been called. Until 2010, their version existed outside of the official narrative about Bloody Sunday yet continued to form part of the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community's oral history. What the earlier-examined thread on the hunger strikers indicates, however, is that "folklore" and Historical²⁴⁰ discourse are far more intertwined in everyday life, and in particular in communities in conflict than we might otherwise believe, and not least when it comes to events in living memory. As with Bloody Sunday, there is nonetheless a desire across the community to discover the truth of what happened in 1981 and the regular use of both official and unofficial sources to establish this truth is part and parcel of this drive. Whilst the lack of trustworthy information means that folklore is bound to run alongside the official discourse, it also informs and is informed by it.

This intertwining of folkloric and Historical discourses online and in daily discussion is also important for another reason. It shows that the narratives field-researchers document and archive rarely begin their lives fully formed. Folklorists are used to thinking of folktales, legends, myths, memorates and more as fully formed narratives with beginnings, middles and ends. What the above debate about facts shows is that community narratives like that concerning the hunger strike or Bloody Sunday (or any earlier historical events) are gradually created through the slow accretion, accumulation and transformation of other earlier statements telling about the said event. For example, in Post 233 of the said thread, Liam Lynch posted an article from *The Derry Journal* (Derry Journal 2008) in which Colm

²³⁸ Martha Sims, Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at Ohio State University, and Martine Stephens, Professor in the Department of English at the Ohio Wesleyan University, state that "the term *folklore* refers to the knowledge we have about our world and ourselves that we don't learn in school or textbooks—we learn folklore from each other. It's the informally learned, unofficial knowledge we share with our peers, families and other groups we belong to [sic]" (Sims & Stephens 2005: 3-4).

²³⁹ See Chapter Five for more information about Bloody Sunday.

²⁴⁰ As has been mentioned before, "History" is used to denote the academic discipline, its methods and products in order to differentiate it from other kinds of history. Thus "History" denotes an official narrative about an event in the past, whilst "history" can be used to denote an unofficial narrative. Hennessey's work (2014) would thus count as History and O'Rawe's book (2005) would count as history. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.0.3.

Scullion, an ex-blanketman and cell-mate of Richard O’Rawe, denied the claims he supported O’Rawe’s claims about the deal:

233. Liam Lynch: What is being said is untrue. There was no deal. I agree with Richard that there was certainly an offer which Richard was made aware of by Brendan McFarlane who was a few cells away. I didn’t hear anything like what Richard is saying. We all desperately hoped that there would be a deal. Unfortunately, the British government refused to stand over or verify what it was offering. It refused to send any of its representatives into meet the hunger strikers and tragically Joe McDonnell died and his death was followed by five more of our comrades (Colm Scullion, quoted in RT0803-01 2008: Liam Lynch, Post 233).

By posting the article containing the above quotation, Liam Lynch added it to the other statements that have been made about the events in 1981. As each user read all of these statements from various sources, they sorted them into what will later become a unified narrative and it is this narrative which a field-researcher might one day record when researching folklore about The Troubles. In many ways, one might say that this debate reflects a stage that precedes the kind of narratives about people beating members of the British documented by Ray Cashman in Aghyaran (Cashman 2011: 100, 103-104) or the battles documented by Glassie (Glassie 1995: 187-311).²⁴¹ During Cashman’s research, he found anecdotes about local people which seemed to have been already been accepted by their community and so there was rarely any dispute during their telling. The evidence presented above shows that even though it is clear that the figures involved are beginning to take on a legendary status as discussed in the previous sub-chapter, the Republican community on “Republican.ie” and elsewhere has yet to come to any kind of consensus over the actual nature of the events of 1981. This means that whenever anyone presents a new version of the narrative, the community erupts into what can sometimes be a quite heated debate over it. Because of the nature of the source materials, it may be that the community will never come to agreement over what happened and that the two or more versions of the narratives will serve as weapons wielded by either Sinn Féin’s supporters or their enemies as discussed in the previous section.

It is nonetheless interesting to note how people responded to the last quotation given above in their online discussions and narratives. As mentioned before, in such discussions the chronology of events can often be shaped to fit a predetermined narrative, depending on

²⁴¹ See Chapter 3.0.2 for more information about Cashman’s findings.

whether one wants to support or reject a particular version of events (like that given by O’Rawe). A similar malleability can be seen in the statements people made or the narratives they told. For instance, after the above statement was made on the site, one person, Dúiche Néill, followed it up by stating that he felt it proved that O’Rawe wrong or mistaken (RT0803-01 2008: Dúiche Néill, Post 248). CMe had a different view:

254. CMe: [Responding to Dúiche Néill’s post mentioned above]

You must be reading a different letter as he has just confirmed what O’Rawe has been saying all along:

I agree with Richard that there certainly was an offer which Richard was made aware of by Bik McFarlane, who was a few cells away.

The semantics over “deal” and “offer” are just there to confuse, as they have been meant to do from the start, by Gibney and Morrison et al. The contention was over what O’Rawe said about their being an offer from the British that they could accept. His cellmate has confirmed this (RT0803-01 2008: CMe, Post 254).

As can be seen from Dúiche Néill’s post and CMe’s response to it, the two users had contradictory interpretations of the meaning of what Scullion said. The former, as mentioned above, feels that Scullion supported Sinn Féin’s narrative, whilst CMe’s indicated that Scullion actually supports O’Rawe’s one. If we compare CMe’s post with Liam Lynch’s, which contained the full statement by Scullion, one can see that CMe dropped the part which said “I didn’t hear anything like what Richard is sayin” (Colm Scullion, quoted in RT0803-01 2008: Liam Lynch, Post 233) which would appear to change the meaning of the sentence before it (RT0803-01 2008: CMe, Post 254; see above). CMe’s argument hinged on the idea that a deal and an offer are the same thing, so Scullion’s denial that any deal was made does not invalidate O’Rawe’s claims, but rather supports them because he stated there was some kind of offer (Colm Scullion, quoted in RT0803-01 2008: Liam Lynch, Post 233; see previous page). Dúiche Néill felt that the part which CMe has dropped was, in fact, important and that the debate over whether it was a deal or offer was more than just semantics (RT0803-01 2008: Dúiche Néill, Post 256). What this exchange indicates is that meaning is malleable and can be made to suit a person’s views.

This “malleability” of meaning, whereby the meaning of statements is changed to suit a particular narrative, is another aspect which appears again and again throughout the online

debate. It is quite likely that it stems from the same impulses which led to posters not noticing the slight difference in chronology given in the OP (noted above). It is also quite possible that this might be seen as an indication of “confirmation bias”,²⁴² something that will be discussed in more detail in the section about 2009. It may also be a side effect of the way in which the media functions. As the internet removes both tone and body language from communication, it can become harder to fully understand the subtleties of various statements, something which can lead to greater ambiguity as people try to understand just what exactly was said by a particular person. This can then lead to arguments over semantics, such as that noted above. As the exact meaning is lost or blurred, it remains up to the individual to decide what the speaker or author originally intended, allowing both sides to find support for their different arguments within the same statement. Here one might argue that the web is more dangerous than the oral medium.

In the end, this debate, like any discussion or storytelling session conducted in a pub, is conducted by people. As “Republican.ie” is an internet forum, it is natural that throughout this debate there will be a large number of participants and that these participants (and the stories they tell or dispute) will change over the years. New users register and contribute whilst older users cease to use the website for a number of reasons or are banned by the moderation team. Nonetheless, in the case of this particular thread, it is noteworthy that there were at least three users who were very prominent in the debate: Mellows1922, who, as seen above, regularly rejected O’Rawe’s claims, and inla-supporter and Dixie Elliot, both of whom ultimately came to support O’Rawe, although in this earlier thread they did not support O’Rawe as strongly as they did in later ones after having reviewed the various pieces of evidence (*cf.* RT0803-01 2008: inla-supporter, Post 3; RT0803-01 2008: Dixie Elliot, Post 284 and 288). Whilst Dixie Elliot has not hitherto been quoted, his voice became ever more prominent as the debate waged on. As mentioned in the previous sub-chapter, Dixie Elliot is himself a former blanketman and was in the same wing as McFarlane and O’Rawe during the strike (RT0803-01 2008: Dixie Elliot, Post 224). He was also at the most recent conference on the issue as mentioned previously. Whilst he was banned at some point after 2012 for some unknown reason, it is clear that he continues even now to take part in the debate in an effort to settle it once and for all.²⁴³ Mellows1922 and inla-supporter have also continued to fight the

²⁴² Confirmation bias is when “people may allow their beliefs to bias their evaluation of new information, and then use that biased evaluation to derive even further confidence in the validity of their beliefs” (Sherman & Cohen 2002: 119).

²⁴³ As mentioned in Chapter 6.2, Dixie Elliot takes part in the conferences and debates held about the hunger strike and O’Rawe’s claims.

good fight on “Republican.ie”, inla-supporter also speaking as a member of the IRSP and a representative for the families of the INLA’s strikers. In the more traditional folkloristics parlance, it might be argued that these three figures would be known as key, active tradition bearers²⁴⁴ because they are the ones who appear to be most informed about the issue, working to keep the narrative on line. Nonetheless, one should always remember that a community’s culture is more than just the tradition bearers or gate-keepers.

Finally it should be stressed, however, that what has been discussed above represents just a tiny portion of the full debate that took place during the period in question. In this thread alone there were 341 replies to the OP, many of which followed similar lines to those that have already been discussed. Internet debates are never as cut and dried as they appear after the fact and the large number of posts makes it impossible to represent them all with any justice. This aspect of the project should be kept in mind as the discussion now turns to the web-site discourse that came about in the year 2009 at the time when Brendan Duddy took part in the Gasyard Debate and Liam Clarke obtained some documents from the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.²⁴⁵ As noted above, these developments resulted in a new surge of activity, causing the creation of 18 threads and 3,039 replies on “Republican.ie” alone.

6.4.3 2009

As mentioned above, 2009 was the year when the British government began releasing documents pertaining to the hunger strike in 1981. In March a transcript of an interview with Sir John Blelloch who had been working in the Northern Ireland Office in 1981 was released. The interview had been conducted in 1986 at the Ministry of Defence by Padraig O’Malley and after the release was published in 2009 first on the Bobby Sands Trust website and then partially reprinted in an article by Allison Morris for *The Irish News* (RT0903-01 2009). Whilst the interview itself had little impact on the debate, it was swiftly followed by the limited release of other government documents dealing specifically with the hunger strike by the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.²⁴⁶ These documents were released to Liam Clarke, a journalist then working for *The Times*, who

²⁴⁴ See Footnote 222.

²⁴⁵ These events were briefly discussed in Chapter 6.4.1, but will be discussed more in Chapter 6.4.3.

²⁴⁶ These documents will hereafter be simply referred to as “FOI Documents” (FOI referring to the Freedom of Information Act).

subsequently posted them in an online article reporting on the information contained in them (Clarke 2009b).²⁴⁷

Following the release of these documents, the Republican Network for Unity held a debate in the Gasyard²⁴⁸ in Derry/Londonderry in May which they hoped would settle the matter of O’Rawe’s accusations about Sinn Féin’s actions towards the hunger strikers in 1981 once and for all. As detailed in Chapter 6.3.2, all sides of the debate were invited, but the Sinn Féin members declined to participate. As part of this debate, the British contact with the Provisional IRA, Brendan Duddy,²⁴⁹ was invited and was shown a document by Liam Clarke which Duddy confirmed was the offer that Richard O’Rawe discussed in his book. This debate was then followed in June 2009 by a meeting between a number of the families of the strikers and Gerry Adams, Bik McFarlane and Danny Morrison which led to a signed declaration by the majority of families calling for an end to the debate.

As can be seen from the fact that at least 18 threads were created in 2009 about the hunger strike debate, the new material proved to be ample inspiration for a renewed, and heated, debate on the website which lasted from March until November 2009. The longest relevant thread was posted on 23rd May and lasted until 6th October, amassing 2,346 replies over that time (RT0905-02 2009). The shortest thread which discussed the debate was posted on 29th September and it remains unanswered to this day (RT0909-01 2009). As with the previous section, there is no space here to review each thread thoroughly. This section will thus seek to focus on those aspects discussed in the previous section: the apparent malleability of chronology and meaning in discussions of this kind; the use of sources, both official and unofficial; the secrecy that continued to surround certain evidence; and how each side’s central narrative about the events in July 1981 was influenced by a multitude of other, smaller narratives. Finally, as a large amount of information will be discussed in a short space in the following discussion, it might be wise for readers to review briefly the sequence of events and key players discussed in Chapter 6.2 to avoid confusion.

²⁴⁷ The documents were initially accessible in the form of a PDF document that could be reached via a hyperlink at the top of the said article. Whilst the link is still active, the file unfortunately seems to have been removed and it is thus no longer possible to see which documents were released to Liam Clarke. From the discussion on the website, it would appear that the dating of the documents does not start before 7th July and does not extend past 21st July at the latest: see RT0904-02 2009: undefeated, Post 15.

²⁴⁸ The Gasyard is a community centre in Derry/Londonderry.

²⁴⁹ As noted earlier in Chapter 6.2.2, Brendan Duddy was known as “SOON” in the British documents, and as “Mountain Climber” to the Republican community.

6.4.3.1 Malleability

In the previous section it was argued that the malleability of both chronology and meaning in the debate came from the same impulse: the desire of participants to find evidence which supports their various arguments, which has elsewhere been called “confirmation bias”.²⁵⁰ Removing or ignoring context and/or intentionally or unintentionally changing the date on which certain things happened makes it easier for someone to argue their version of events and convince their opponents that they are correct (something that regularly happens also in day-to-day oral discussions). Both sides of the debate seem to have taken part in this process to a greater or lesser extent, although it is apparently practised more by some users than others. The changing of chronology is nevertheless far more apparent on the pro-O’Rawe side than it is on the pro-Sinn Féin side and then especially in the comments made by inla-supporter.²⁵¹ Both sides, however, seemed to mould the meanings of various statements to suit their own argument. The malleability of chronology has all the same tended to be less common — if no less important — than the malleability of meaning. What follows will be a review of both aspects, starting with questions of chronology in the debate.

One of the most important ways in which the users have sought to change the order of events is by intentionally or unintentionally moving the exact time at which the British government made the offer that O’Rawe claims was accepted by the PIRA prisoners, something which has profound consequences both for the debate and the Republican community as a whole. As discussed in Chapter 6.4.2, users seem to have ignored Eamonn McCann’s statement that implied the offer occurred on either 6th or 7th July whilst Richard O’Rawe has specifically stated that the offer was made on 5th July and subsequently rejected the following day (O’Rawe 2005: 172-184). These dates continued to move in the discussion: we see, for example, the user carter claiming that “deal was on the cards from JULY 8th 1981” (RT0905-02 2009: carter, Post 39) whilst other users nevertheless continued to push for the 5th July date (for example RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 58; RT0911-02 2009: yaya, Post 72). It is possible to read this behaviour in one of two ways. On the one hand that there appears to have been any kind of offer at all is, in the opinion of some, confirmation of O’Rawe’s account. They were able to claim that O’Rawe was telling the truth, that there had been an offer made on 5th July and the outside PIRA leadership subsequently rejected it for

²⁵⁰ As mentioned in the previous section, confirmation bias is when people look solely for evidence to support their beliefs or ignore evidence which contradicts them: see Sherman & Cohen 2002.

²⁵¹ This is partially down to the way the evidence was released. The FOI Documents do not appear to have covered all of July and so the users have had to rely on documents dated later and oral confirmation that these documents reflect the supposed offer from 5th July.

political gain. On the other hand, it could be that the users were so determined to prove O’Rawe’s claims that they were willing to adapt his original narrative — that the offer was made and accepted on 5th July 1981 — to suit the evidence in the FOI Documents and therefore the date of the offer changed and no one questioned whether O’Rawe might have been wrong about other details. What is important to note here is that how this adaptation of the source material highlights the importance overall of the narrative that a deal was made over the small details contained in the evidence.

The apparent malleability of chronology noted above is seen further especially in the posts of inla-supporter. As noted earlier, inla-supporter appears to be a prominent member of the IRSP, the party that represents two of the strikers’ families, the O’Haras and the Devines, who wish for more answers about the events in 1981. As indicated above, inla-supporter was fully committed to the 5th July version of events, but they continued to adapt other source material to suit this chronology. For example, after the Gasyard Debate, they stated that “[t]he Mountain Climber confirmed that the document Clarke showed him last night was indeed authentic and he said that it was passed in to the prison on July 5th” (RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 146). In the same thread (RT0905-02), they later presents two versions of the 5th July offer, quoting from the FOI Documents which were released by Liam Clarke:

393. inla-supporter: They’re on this thread, I copied the text from a scanned document but here they are again:

Firstly ‘The Offer’ document is the one Duddy confirmed on Saturday night [at the Gasyard Debate] as the one he gave to PIRA on July 5th. The contents of it (coincidentally:rolleyes:) is what Richard claimed four years earlier. The same one Bik said didn’t exist and Danny said contained no concrete proposals. The other document is the one referred to in the 8th July Downing Street document²⁵² which was the expanded ‘message’-this was to be the public statement the brits claimed they would release if PIRA stated the offer was accepted and would end the strike. In the absense of a committment to end the strike the brits wouldn’t release it and revert back to the 30th June hardline public position. You should read the 8th July and 18th Downing street documents to put these two here into more perspective, both are important for clarity (RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 393).

As can be seen from the piece above, inla-supporter was fully aware of the content of the FOI documents and had already created a hybrid narrative blending them with O’Rawe’s

²⁵² By “Downing Street document”, inla-supporter means any of the FOI Documents.

account. Following this, inla-supporter presented two separate documents, entitled “The Offer” and “Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland(Humphrey Atkins) [sic]”.²⁵³ The former was apparently confirmed by Duddy as being O’Rawe’s 5th July offer, whilst the latter provides an expanded, clarified version of the said offer, which is dated to 8th July:

393. inla-supporter: The Offer

- a) allowing prisoners to wear their own clothes provided it was of style approved and type approved by the prison authorities.
- b) Widening the scope of prison work to include many of the activities regarded as recreational and educational but within a framework approved by the prison authorities.
- c) Making ad hoc (and for practical reasons, probably rather limited) provision for those prisoners who wished to do so to, associate together from time to time in self-constituted groups.
- d) Allowing prisoners to “buy back” remission lost on protest subject to good behaviour.
- e) Confirming those present privileges which in effect meet the main part of the protestor’s other demands.

Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland(Humphrey Atkins)

1. In the light of discussions which Mr Michael Alison has had recently with the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace, during which a statement was issued on 4 July on behalf of the protesting prisoners in the Maze Prison, HMG have come to the following conclusions.

2. When the hunger strike and the protest is brought to an end (and not before), the Government will:

I. extend to all male prisoners in Northern Ireland the clothing regime at present available to female prisoners in Armagh Prison (i.e. subject to the prison governor’s approval);

II. make available to all prisoners in Northern Ireland the allowance of letters, parcels and visits at present available to conforming prisoners;

III. allow the restoration of forfeited remission at the discretion of the responsible

²⁵³ This document is the same as “Northern Ireland: No.10 Record of Conversation (MT-Atkins-Woodfield-Unknown) [Hunger Strike at HMP Maze] [Declassified 2011]” (British Government 1981c). It is interesting to note that according to the Margaret Thatcher Foundation, this document was declassified in 2011, yet inla-supporter has access to it in 2009.

disciplinary authority, as indicated in my statement of 30 June, which hitherto has meant the restoration of up to one-fifth of remission lost subject to a satisfactory period of good behaviour;

IV. ensure that a substantial part of the work will consist of domestic tasks inside and outside the wings necessary for servicing of the prison (such as cleaning and in the laundries and kitchens), constructive work, e.g. on building projects or making toys for charitable bodies, and study for Open University or other courses. The prison authorities will be responsible for supervision. The aim of the authorities will be that prisoners should do the kinds of work for which they are suited, but this will not always be possible and the authorities will retain responsibility for decisions about allocation.

3. Little advance is possible on association. It will be permitted within each wing, under supervision of the prison staff.

4. Protesting prisoners have been segregated from the rest. Other prisoners are not segregated by religious or any other affiliation. If there were no protest the only reason for segregating some prisoners from others would be the judgment of the prison authorities, not the prisoners, that this was the best way to avoid trouble between groups.

5. This statement is not a negotiating position. But it is further evidence of the Government's desire to maintain and where possible to improve a humanitarian regime in the prisons. The Government earnestly hopes that the hunger strikers and the other protesters will cease their protest (RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 393).

Inla-supporter's acknowledgement that the latter document was from 8th July 1981 nevertheless did not prevent them later from presenting it as being the same offer that was made on 5th July. As they writes:

1,420. inla-supporter: This is the document which Liam Clarke received under the Freedom Of Information Act which he read out at the Gasyard to which Duddy said was authentic and the one he communicated to PIRA on 5th July 1981. Read the Downing Street documents to get the full context cara. [What follows here is "Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland(Humphrey Atkins) [*sic*]"detailed above] (RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 1,420).

This was not the only time that inla-supporter quoted the "Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland(Humphrey Atkins) [*sic*]" as if it were the offer from 5th July (*cf.* RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 2,046). Whilst they originally provided both "The

Offer” and “Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland(Humphrey Atkins) [*sic*]” in Post 393, they later dropped “The Offer” and only discussed the latter when referring to the 5th July offer. They thus essentially moved “Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland(Humphrey Atkins) [*sic*]” from 8th July to 5th July, something which in turn not only makes O’Rawe’s narrative seem more believable, but also makes Sinn Féin’s apparent refusal to accept it all the worse.²⁵⁴ Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that inla-supporter truly seemed to believe that their interpretation of the documents was correct and they based this belief on Duddy’s informal confirmation. He maintained elsewhere that the “Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland(Humphrey Atkins) [*sic*]” was merely a reflection of the offer given to the PIRA on 5th July (*cf.* RT0908-01 2009, inla-supporter, Post 23) or an expanded version of the said offer as noted in their introduction to both documents in Post 393. When viewed in this way, it might appear as a strong example of the influence of confirmation bias noted earlier, especially as inla-supporter provided no evidence of any document which states “The Offer” he outlined (RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 393; see above).²⁵⁵

Similarly, in order to make the “Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland(Humphrey Atkins) [*sic*]” an accurate reflection of the supposed 5th July offer, it is noteworthy that users were required to adapt other evidence in order to strengthen their argument. In a debate on the same thread (RT0905-02), O’Rawe’s supporters relied on a distorted version of the quote below:

And I said to Richard (O’Rawe) this is amazing, this is a huge opportunity and I feel there’s a potential here (in the Mountain Climber process) to end this (Bik McFarlane as quoted in Rowan 2009).

This quotation is important because it formed quite a significant part of the debate and the distorted form it later took within the debate is one of the clearest examples of the malleability of meaning. The article it is taken from originally appeared on the thread in Post 485 by inla-supporter (RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 485), but it appeared again thirteen posts later in a new form when inla-supporter posted an article by Rusty Nail in

²⁵⁴ When compared to the strikers’ Five Demands, the “Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland(Humphrey Atkins) [*sic*]” seems particularly good, and would then paint Sinn Féin in a very bad light if O’Rawe is correct in saying they rejected this offer, especially if the prisoners had previously accepted it.

²⁵⁵ It is possible that “The Offer” as outlined by inla-supporter exists somewhere on Longkesh.info, but as the website can be hard to navigate at times, I have not yet managed to find it.

which she compares Bik McFarlane's²⁵⁶ new and previous positions on the debate through a review of both his current and older statements. The heart of her article lies in the following statement:

This is a major about-face from where he started, going from "That conversation did not take place, there was no deal, there was no offer, there was no rejection, it didn't happen" to "Something was going down, this is amazing, this is a huge opportunity and I feel there's a potential here to end this" (Rusty Nail 2009b).

Twomey has stated that she removed the parentheses because she felt they were insertions made by *The Belfast Telegraph's* editing staff or by Brian Rowan himself and so it was safe to do so, which she bases on her experience working with them as a journalist (Twomey: personal communication). In this way, she claims the statement in the brackets was not in the original interview or alluded to by McFarlane himself during it. Personally, she does not feel the parenthesis changes the meaning of the quote (Twomey: personal communication), but it is clear from the discussion that developed after her blog post was published that the two camps had different interpretations of McFarlane's statement and that her article was the inspiration for the interpretation used by O'Rawe's supporters on "Republican.ie".

Both the original version, the one with the brackets, and the one without formed a key part of a debate between users Dixie Elliot and Mellows1922. What is interesting, however, is that Dixie Elliot was (of course) aware of the original version with the explicatory parentheses. He first gave an emboldened version of the changed quote in Post 521 (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot Post 521); then provided an emboldened version of the original quote in Post 523 (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot Post 523); and then used the version without the brackets again in Post 529 (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot Post 529), although in this one he noted the change in the text through the use of an ellipsis. It is clear that Dixie Elliot based his interpretation of McFarlane's words on Rusty Nail's blog post and it is in this last post that his argument becomes apparent for he has added:

529. Dixie Elliot: As I've pointed out Bik's statement to the Telegraph now confirms that "this is a huge opportunity and I feel there's a potential here...to end it."

²⁵⁶ As noted in Chapter 6.2.2, Brendan "Bik" McFarlane was the Officer Commanding of the strikers and the protesting prisoners during the 1981 hunger strike.

Which added to the Mountain Climber's admission that 4 of the 5 demands were contained in this offer shows that indeed there was something there after all....Then why did he and Morrison not tell the Hunger Strikers and the proof of this is contained in Bik's own comms as well as statements from Laurney and other Hunger Strikers when they speak of only vague offers....

I think this statement of Bik's whether he realises it or not is the most damning so far that they were keeping the Hunger Strikers in the dark about the Mountain Climber initiative (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 529).

As noted above, it is worth noting that by removing the vital words of McFarlane's statement given in the parentheses — “in the Mountain Climber process” (Bik McFarlane as quoted in Rowan 2009) — the entire meaning of the quote was changed. It became far more amenable to O'Rawe's version that there was an offer which he and McFarlane accepted rather than that the backchannel communications, through Brendan Duddy (Mountain Climber), could provide an opportunity to end the strike. McFarlane's statement thus moved from being about the overall discussion between the British government and the PIRA leadership to one about whatever offer Danny Morrison might have discussed with him on 5th July 1981, thereby providing tacit acknowledgement of O'Rawe's accusation. What is very interesting is that in later posts, Dixie Elliot continued using the altered version in his argumentation, seemingly believing that it truly did refer to a particular offer. In posts such as the following, he completely rejected the idea that McFarlane was referring to the process rather than a deal:

857. Dixie Elliot: The only person contorting anything is you cara. Bik changed his version several times. When someone goes from there was never an offer what so ever to this has the potential to end it, then thats one hell of a turn about no matter how you try and twist it (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 857).

859. Dixie Elliot: You [Mellows1922] are talking nonsense yet again cara, He [McFarlane] told Fergal McKinney on UTV Live, 1st March 2005, that there was no offer what so ever. As for the complete nonsense you are now pushing that he was saying the Mountain Climber initiative had the potential to end it and that is what he was referring to not the offer, well cara I'm sorry to inform you the Mountain Climber initiative was there from the 1st Hunger Strike and I earlier in this thread pointed that out when I showed Adams was lying by quoting from his book where he mentions the Mountain Climber during the first Hunger Strike (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 859).

863. Dixie Elliot: You said he was talking about the mountain climber initiative having the potential to end it yet when I proved you were talking nonsense you try and shift the goalposts.

You know he said that in a recent Belfast Telegraph article [Rowan 2009] so don't try and nit pick. (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 863)

The three previous posts make up just part of an argument between Dixie Elliot and Mellows1922 over the exact meaning of McFarlane's statement. Whilst Mellows1922 did not draw explicit attention to the fact that Dixie Elliot appeared to be ignoring the explicatory parentheses which appeared in the original article, he did underline that McFarlane was only ever referring to the backchannel communications between the PIRA and the British government (RT0905-02 2009: Mellows1922, Post 858; Mellows1922, Post 860; Mellows1922, Post 864).

As can be seen from the preceding discussion, McFarlane's statement and the debate surrounding it provide a good example of the malleability of meaning. Not only does it show how when evidence is missing people can argue endlessly over the exact meaning of a statement concerning historical events, it also illustrates how people actively change (even their own) statements to suit their preferred interpretations. Dixie Elliot clearly agreed with O'Rawe's version of events and agreed with Rusty Nail's article which used McFarlane's statement to support O'Rawe's narrative that there was an offer. It is clear that he knew what the full quotation was, but he actively denied any interpretation which might suggest that the statement referred to the process in general rather than an offer and denies outright that McFarlane might have meant the former (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 863; see above). It is likewise an indication of how similar the stories, accounts, narratives, articles and other material in this debate are to folklore. Much like a folktale, the digital narrative and the various pieces of evidence that it uses are not fixed. Throughout the debate, both seem to be adaptable to the needs of the particular teller.

The example given above is not the only time that Dixie Elliot changed or reinterpreted the evidence, intentionally or otherwise. As is shown in Post 529 above, Dixie Elliot believed that the offer given to the PIRA via Duddy on 5th July 1981 contained "4 of the 5 demands" (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 529). Nevertheless, as part of the above-noted debate between him and Mellows1922, Dixie Elliot often complained that both Danny

Morrison and McFarlane told the strikers that the offers made through the backchannel²⁵⁷ were vague (*cf.* RT0905-02 2009, Dixie Elliot, Post 523; Dixie Elliot, Post 1,371 Dixie Elliot, Post 1,599). What is interesting here is that Dixie Elliot often quoted the following FOI Document²⁵⁸ (British Government 1981b) as part of a separate debate,²⁵⁹ something which could contradict his argument that the offer contained four of the Five Demands:

1,954. Dixie Elliot: MIPT contains the text of a statement which SOSNI [Secretary of State Northern Ireland] proposes to authorise should be released to the hunger-strikers/prisoners and publicly. The statement contains, except on clothing, nothing of substance which has not been said publicly, and the point on clothing was made privately to the provos on 5 July. The purpose of the statement is simply to give precise clarification to formulae which already exist (FOI Document 2 as quoted in RT0905-02 2009, Dixie Elliot, Post 1,954).

A reading of this particular FOI Document (British Government 1981b) would imply that that on 5th July 1981, the British government had made a new private statement to the PIRA about their position on clothing, but with the exception of this one item, they had not changed their position since the public 30th June Statement.²⁶⁰ What is important to note here is that the 30th June Statement had previously been rejected by the prisoners as not going far enough and so the British Government's new position on clothing could hardly be considered as conceding to four of the Five Demands (in fact only one of them). Furthermore, this would suggest that whatever was provided to the PIRA on 5th July through the backchannel did not look like either "The Offer" or "Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland(Humphrey Atkins) [*sic*]" provided by inla-supporter as discussed earlier.

If the above reading is correct, then it would directly contradict Dixie Elliot's narrative that there was an offer on 5th July which conceded four of the demands. Whilst one might suggest that this was because Dixie Elliot had not read all of the FOI Documents, this would not agree with his other posts in the debate in which he shows he was quite familiar with them (*cf.* RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 121; Dixie Elliot, Post 126; Dixie Elliot, Post 141; Dixie Elliot, Post 160; Dixie Elliot, Post 167). This would indicate that Dixie Elliot was either intentionally or unintentionally ignoring parts of the FOI Documents which disagreed with his

²⁵⁷ See Chapter 6.2.2 for more information on this.

²⁵⁸ A number of documents were released to Liam Clarke which are all grouped under the name "FOI Documents" in this project. This is because, as has been noted earlier, with the exception of a few, it is impossible to know how many documents were released or in what form as the original file is not longer accessible from Clarke's article: see Clarke 2009b.

²⁵⁹ This debate over whether the British would send in a representative to talk with the prisoners is discussed below.

²⁶⁰ See Chapter 6.2.2 for more information about the British government's public position during the strike.

narrative. If we recast Dixie Elliot in the role of a storyteller using the events of the hunger strike in 1981 as his tale, then the evidence he used might be envisaged as being comparable to individual motifs which are picked up or dropped according to the whim of the storyteller. The difference here, however, is that Dixie Elliot was most likely unaware that he was doing it as confirmation bias is often a subconscious behaviour. It is also important to note that Dixie Elliot was not the only person who exhibited this kind of behaviour and it could be argued that it is actually quite common.

This malleability of meaning is not only found amongst those who would argue for O’Rawe’s version of events, however. As discussed earlier, there was some debate surrounding Bik McFarlane’s position regarding whether there was actually an offer or not. According to inla-supporter, in 2005 McFarlane responded with the following when asked about O’Rawe’s accusations:

1,407. inla-supporter: these were his first comments:

**Interview by Fergal McKinney with Bik McFarlane on UTV [Ulster Television] Live
28-02-05**

McKinney: “*Who took the decision to reject that offer?*”

Bik: “*There was no offer of that description.*”

McKinney: “*At all?*”

Bik: “**Whatever. No offer existed.**” (RT0905-02 2005: inla-supporter, Post 1,407)

This post was in response to another one — also quoted in the above post — by Mellows1922 which had stated:

1,377. Mellows1922: Bik has said, and still says, there was no offer that was acceptable, meaning no offer the Brits would stand over. The document you are talking about was not an offer, it was a demand to end the strike and trust the Brits. Somehow in the “new analysis” this has become a great offer. It wasn’t (RT0905-02 2005: Mellows1922, Post 1,377).

Mellows1922 is a supporter of Sinn Féin’s argument which states that the outside leadership, principally Gerry Adams, did not overrule the prisoners’ acceptance of an offer

from the British government because there was no true offer which they could have accepted. Inla-supporter's post shows McFarlane originally stated that there was no offer whatsoever, but in his interview with Brian Rowan (discussed earlier), McFarlane stated that the British Government had needed to "expand the offer" (Rowan 2009). McFarlane thus appears to have gone from categorically denying any offer existed to stating there was one, but that it was not enough. This forced Mellows1922 and other Sinn Féin supporters to make sense of McFarlane's older and more recent positions, not least because O'Rawe and others used them as part of their argument. Thus Mellows1922 began to add clarifying information to McFarlane's earlier statement, such as "meaning no offer the Brits would stand over" in the quote given above (RT0905-02 2005: Mellows1922, Post 1,377). Like Dixie Elliot and inla-supporter, Mellows1922 was forced to extrapolate the meaning and alter it through the addition of extraneous explanatory information in order to make it fit his narrative more succinctly. The question of exactly what happened then led the two sides to debate the meaning of the words "deal" and "offer".²⁶¹

1,391. Mellows1922: They were, you still keep calling it an offer though, it wasn't, it was a demand to cease and trust. Did you trust the Brits when you were on the blanket chara ? (RT0905-02 2005: Mellows1922, Post 1,391)

1,398. Dixie Elliot: [In response to the above post]

There you go ago it was an offer and stop trying to change it to a demand. If I had of received that offer I would have said that the Hunger Strike would end but if the Brits reneged I would ensure that the Hunger Strike resumed within 24 hours and no I didn't trust the Brits then but to save mens lives I would have taken the chance. RT0905-02 2005: Dixie Elliot, Post 1,398)

Whether one agrees with the interpretation presented by Mellows1922 or the one by Dixie Elliot and others, what is interesting to note here is the conflicting approach to evidence and the role of the internet in the discussion. Whilst the earlier discussion showed how flexible the written word can be and how the users in a fluid situation where solid evidence is unavailable adapt the source material, this debate also exemplifies the key difference between the written and the spoken word, in that McFarlane and his supporters were unable to escape McFarlane's previous statements once they have appeared in written form (even on the web). Once printed, McFarlane's initially spoken statement was, in a manner of speaking, set in

²⁶¹ The argument about the nature of what was offered already existed in 2008 as can be seen from CMe's post given in the previous section.

stone meaning that from that time onwards he and others have to account for the recorded statement in relation to any new statement he might make. Moreover, this discussion clearly indicates how the internet facilitates debates like the one between Mellows¹⁹²² and Dixie Elliot above. In years past, McFarlane's statements might no longer have been available to the debaters as the tangible newspaper might have been destroyed or unavailable. Now that nearly everything is posted on the internet, including the FOI Documents, the debaters were able to find and post older statements made by participants, much to the chagrin of McFarlane's supporters. It makes for an interesting situation in which the formality and rigidity of the written word, embodied by the debate over the meaning of McFarlane's statements, is juxtaposed with the fluidity of the informal website narrative and the informality of the internet as manifested by the malleability of meaning and chronology shown in web-site discussion.

It is also worth noting the effect that putting words in bold print can have on how one receives textual information and the role it plays in moulding meaning. We are trained, either formally at school or informally through experience, to pay more attention to written words which are formatted in a different way. More important words or key phrases are emboldened, italicised, underlined or formatted in any number of ways to make them stand out similar to the ways in which we might change tone or volume, or use gesticulation in speech. Due to this, we tend to place more significance on phrases which are formatted differently, and comparatively less significance on normally formatted ones. It also allows for faster reading as it allows us to see which information is more important or regarded as being more important, which can be different. In discussions like those on "Republican.ie", formatting of this kind can allow users to provide the entire context of a quote, but still mould its meaning. As an example, one can take the FOI Document (British Government 1981b) quoted in a post by Dixie noted earlier in this chapter (and repeated here for context). It is noteworthy how, Dixie highlights the section he feels most important, whilst apparently sidelining the rest:

1,954. Dixie Elliot: FOI Document 2: "Extract from a Telegram from the Northern Ireland Office to the Cabinet Office"

PLEASE PASS FOLLOWING TO MR WOODFIELD

MIPT contains the text of a statement which SOSNI proposes to authorise should be released to the hunger-strikers/prisoners and publicly. The statement contains, except on clothing, nothing of substance which has not been said publicly, and the point on clothing was made privately to the provos on 5 July. The purpose of the statement is simply to give precise clarification to formulae which already exist. It also takes count of advice given to

us over the last 12 hours on the kind of language which (while not a variance with any of our previous public statements) might make the statement acceptable to the provos.

The statement has now been read and we await provo reactions (we would be willing to allow them a sight of the document just before it is given to the prisoners and released to the press). It has been made clear (as the draft itself states) that it is not a basis for negotiation (FOI Document 2 as quoted in RT0905-02 2009, Dixie Elliot, Post 1,954).

Dixie Elliot provided this quotation in response to a request from another participant to see an official statement from the British government in which they expressed their willingness to go into the prison and show the strikers their offer. By highlighting the section about the “provo reactions”, Dixie Elliot helped to draw the reader’s attention away from the less beneficial part of the quote whilst at the same time providing most of the context for it.

On another subject, inla-supporter used formatting in a way which goes further, actually changing the entire meaning of the document they were referring to. In post 1,427, inla-supporter quoted a document which ultimately states that the British government had not been willing to send any representative into the prisoner to discuss or clarify the British government’s position with the prisoners. However, through their use of bold print, inla-supporter implied the opposite, making it appear that the British Government had in fact been willing to send a representative in. (The quote will be given at length to provide the necessary context):

1,427. inla-supporter: The Brits were at the point of sending someone in but didn’t due to no indications from PIRA that it would be enough to end the strike despite Bik and Richard agreeing there was enough in the offer.

Extract from a letter dated 18 July 1981 from 10 Downing Street to Northern Ireland Office [British Government 1981a]

As you know Philip Woodfield came in here this evening to brief the Prime Minister on the situation in regard to contacts with the hunger strikers in the Maze prison. He explained to the Prime Minister the sequence of events in the last 36 hours leading up to this **afternoon’s statement by the PIRA about the need for an official to go to the Maze to meet the hunger strikers.**

Mr Woodfield told the Prime Minister that Mr Atkins felt that the government had to

respond to the PIRA statement either with a statement of its own along the usual lines refusing any negotiation or by sending in an official to clarify the position to the hunger strikers yet again. **The official would set out to the hunger strikers what would be on offer if they abandoned their protest. He would do so along the lines discussed with the Prime Minister last week. He would say that the prisoners would be allowed to wear their own clothes, as was already the case in Armagh prison, provided these clothes were approved by prison authorities. (This would apply in all prisons in Northern Ireland.) He would set out the position on association; on parcels and letters; on remission; and on work.** On this last point he would make clear that the prisoners would, as before, have to do basic work necessary to keep the prison going: there were tasks which the prison staff could in no circumstances be expected to do. But insofar as work in the prison work shops was concerned, it would be implicit that the prisoners would be expected to do this but that if they refused to do it they would be punished by loss of remission, or some similar penalty, rather than more severely.

Mr Woodfield emphasised that the official would not be empowered to negotiate. He would simply be making a statement about what was on offer to the hunger strikers if they abandoned the hunger strike. **The statement would be spelling out what had been implicit in the Government's public statement and explicit in earlier communications.** We would aim to avoid argument on the conditions under which the meetings had been arranged. We would simply say that we had done it on our own terms. There could be no guarantee that acting in this way would end the hunger strike. However there had been one or two indications that the hunger strikers were hoping to come off their strike.

The Prime Minister agreed that a further effort should be made to explain the situation to the hunger strikers. The official who went in should stick closely to the statement which had been drafted last week. He should go in to the prison early tomorrow morning.

However following further discussions, in the course of which it was drawn to the Prime Minister's attention that any approach of the kind outlined above to the hunger strikers would inevitably become public whether or not it succeeded, the Prime Minister reviewed the proposal on the telephone with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Mr Atkins confirmed that it would not be possible to keep the initiative quiet once it had communicated to the hunger strikers. The Prime Minister said that she thought the approach could be made on the same basis as before and that therefore nothing would be lost by trying. However it seemed that this was not the case. She was more concerned to do the right thing by Northern Ireland, than to try to satisfy international critics. Mr Atkins observed that, from a purely Northern Ireland point of view, he would rather do nothing.

The Prime Minister asked whether it would not be sufficient for the official to repeat the

Secretary of State's previous statement. Mr Atkins said he did not think this would do the trick.

After further discussion, the Prime Minister decided that the dangers in taking an initiative would be so great in Northern Ireland that she was not prepared to risk them. The official who went in to the prison could repeat the Government's public position but could go no further. The Secretary of State agreed (RT0905-02 2005: inla-supporter, Post 1,427).

As can be seen from the last three paragraphs, the British government ultimately decided that there would be no point in sending an official into the prison to clarify their position to the prisoners. Through the clever use of formatting, inla-supporter drew the reader's attention to those pieces of the FOI Document (British Government 1981a) which discussed a hypothetical situation in which an official might have gone in. By doing so, they are able to argue that the British Government would have sent an official in had it ended the strike or been requested by the strikers or prisoners. If one only pays attention to the emboldened sections of the quotation it appears as if the British Government would have sent someone in had it been requested, much like inla-supporter claimed. It is only by reading the full text that one can see the British Government was in fact unwilling for fear it would become public and that this would be dangerous for the situation in Northern Ireland.

It might be argued that the clever use of formatting in writing is thus another example of malleability of meaning and perhaps is even more subtle than the adaptation of quotations. As with the raising of the voice in speech, this method allows one to change the entire meaning of a statement without leaving oneself open to accusations of decontextualisation, even though that is precisely what the change in formatting does. As with the other examples of malleability, it once again indicates how in questions of history discussed online (or in a pub), official sources can sometimes be used almost as if they are folklore, and altered or reshaped when it suits the storyteller. In such cases, it sometimes matters less what the documents actually say than what use they are to the narrative being expressed and to the community which supports the said narrative.

The examples of malleability of chronology and meaning discussed in this section offer only a small glimpse of their use in the debate regarding narratives told about the hunger strikers on "Republican.ie". As has been argued elsewhere, it is quite possible that they spring from a form of confirmation bias, something that the examples provided seem to support. As the examples show, the users appear already have a particular narrative in their head and they attempt either to try and fit this it to the evidence, or try to mould the evidence to fit the narrative in order to rationalise their position. This leads them sometimes to decontextualise

quotations; to ignore statements which contradict their arguments; to add explanatory insertions; and to adapt or classify source material through the use of formatting. Whilst the suggestion that confirmation bias takes place is certainly an interesting feature of the debate, the evidence of malleability is far more interesting for the present discussion because of what it suggests about the way in which even official sources can become like folklore when detailed evidence is lacking (as in this situation). It would certainly appear from the above that, in cases like those presently under discussion, an agreed narrative can be seen to be more important than carefully following sources, whether one's decision to treat the source like folklore is intentional or not. As with the telling of any folktale, the narratives contained within the evidence and O'Rawe's narrative are changed to suit the audience as part of the debate. In spite of this, at the heart of the debate the core of O'Rawe's narrative remains the same: there was an offer, it was accepted and the outside leadership, that is Gerry Adams, rejected it and let six men die. The exact details are commonly treated as little more than motifs which change in accordance with who exactly is telling the tale at the time.

6.4.3.2 The Sources

The above discussion has interesting implications for how we define "official" and "unofficial" source material, especially when looking at material published online, and how we tend to look at folklore as being something apart from the official (Sims & Stephens 2005: 3-6). As has been shown, users on "Republican.ie", like internet users elsewhere, are not above adapting official documents to suit their own narratives. We can see from the preceding section how users argued over the meaning of a person's statements, such as that by McFarlane about the Mountain Climber process, and adapted these statements to suit their argument. Similarly, we have seen that users could provide the entire quote but change its meaning by formatting a number of key phrases, creating contradictory meanings out of the source material even when providing all of relevant information. Much like a folktale or oral tradition, the official sources about the events of the hunger strikes appear to have no fixed version, allowing for a multitude of versions to proliferate as each user adapts the said documents to their own purpose. Unlike an oral narrative, however, these sources ultimately do have a fixed version which can be traced if the text has been sourced properly.²⁶² Nonetheless, it seems clear that when participants try to convince readers of the truth of their

²⁶² Part of this project has involved tracing these sources, documents and statements, to make sure that they have been quoted correctly on the website and to see what, if anything, has been changed.

narrative,²⁶³ official documents are often placed alongside a host of unofficial sources, such as online articles or anonymous oral sources, all of which are treated as equal to or sometimes greater than the official documents (not least because all of the above are found alongside each other on the web, with no obvious proof of their veracity). The following section will review the sources that are used in these discussions, not so much for how they are used (because that has been covered in the preceding discussion and will be in some ways also be considered in throughout the analysis), but more for the role they play in the discussions, and how this role helps to blur the boundaries that used to exist between folklore and official discourse.

Perhaps the most striking element of the use of the sources for postings is how often they are used purely as the starting point for a discussion about the hunger strike of 1981 and O’Rawe’s claims. For example, in 17 of the 19 threads posted in 2009 about the hunger strike, the OP was an article or blog post from another website which was used to both inform the community on “Republican.ie” about what had been said and to start a discussion about the topic.²⁶⁴ Whilst such articles might be quoted later in the discussion by the same user or others as part of their evidence, by serving as the OP, they initiated the discussion. This is partly because the forum requires an “official source” for any allegation in order to protect the user and forum from legal proceedings. It is also because these articles provided the user with a quick way of portraying their thoughts on the subject. In a way, these articles and blog postings became the mouth-pieces for the users who post them.

As the users on “Republican.ie” find journalists and bloggers who resonate with them, certain users or authors are quoted more often than others on the website. For example, users have often posted full or partial quotations of Rusty Nail’s blog posts throughout the debate. One such blog has been mentioned above in connection with McFarlane’s statement about the Mountain Climber process, but Rusty Nail has written numerous other pieces throughout the years which have often been posted on “Republican.ie”. Much like Dixie Elliot, inla-supporter and Mellows192, Rusty Nail thus also takes on the role of active tradition bearer or leading spokesman in terms of narratives and opinions concerning the hunger strikers. In fact, her work has received so much recognition that links to her articles are listed on the front page of “Longkesh.info”, a website dedicated to documenting the entire debate surrounding the

²⁶³ In this way, the official documents become another device which the narrative’s teller can use to convince their audience of the tale’s veracity. See Oring 2008 for a discussion of the various devices legend tellers use to make their story seem more believable.

²⁶⁴ See RT0903-01 2009; RT0904-01 2009; RT0904-02 2009; RT0904-03 2009; RT0905-02 2009; RT0905-04 2009; RT0905-05 2009; RT0906-01 2009; RT0906-02 2009; RT0906-03 2009; RT0907-01 2009; RT0908-01 2009; RT0909-01 2009; RT0909-02 2009; RT0910-01 2009; and RT0911-01 2009.

hunger strike of 1981 (Longkesh.info 2014a). The fact that she has been quoted so much on “Republican.ie” by O’Rawe’s supporters shows that they respect her opinion and how she voices it through her blog posts on “Slugger O’Toole”. It also implies that at least a portion of the user-base on “Republican.ie” views her interpretation of events as being in some way authoritative or as representative of their side of the debate. Rusty Nail’s status within the debate also means that other users on the website who differ in opinion will often target Rusty Nail (and her words) in an effort to discredit her and therefore O’Rawe’s accusations (which she supports). For instance, in one posting we find Seabird, one of the administrators of the website and a known Sinn Féin supporter, deliberately referencing an article by Rusty Nail and then providing a number of quotations from the ensuing discussion which occurred underneath the said article on the website, all of which implied Rusty Nail was wrong in her argument on a number of points (RT0905-02 2009: Seabird, Post 413). There is little question that by focussing on Rusty Nail, Seabird believed that they weakened the argument of the other side as a whole.

Whilst Rusty Nail is a prominent example of a tradition bearer in this debate, even though her posts were never made on “Republican.ie”, the line of thinking exhibited by Seabird in their attack on Rusty Nail is also valid for the other ideologues on the website. The feeling seems to be, for example, that if one were to convince Dixie Elliot or inla-supporter to admit as part of the discussion that O’Rawe was wrong or mistaken, that would provide some weight to Sinn Féin’s argument. Likewise, if Mellows1922 or Seabird were to be convinced by O’Rawe’s faction that they are wrong, this would make O’Rawe’s argument all the more compelling for participants. It was perhaps for this reason that the ideologues on “Republican.ie” offer up articles instead of reaction-postings because this allowed them to maintain a measure of distance from the debate whilst also actively participating in it. This also created a form of hierarchy in the discussion. Some initiated and commented (like spokesmen or politicians) whilst others merely commented. A similar hierarchy of course often occurs in oral discussions in a pub or part of a ceili storytelling session.

In the online discussions, the more official sources, such as government documents from the time, are joined by a host of word of mouth and more obscure sources which are difficult to prove or disprove.²⁶⁵ As mentioned in Chapter 6.4.2, the IRSP are in possession of

²⁶⁵ It is possibly worth consideration whether O’Rawe’s book, *Blanketmen* could be considered as a kind of ‘folklore’ (not least in its use by others), because it is essentially based on word of mouth and personal experience. Were it not for the printing press, O’Rawe’s accusations would have remained part of the oral tradition surrounding the events in 1981, and thus deemed to be a variant form of the tale in the form of a memorate. This again raises the question of whether the nature of the medium (that is writing) automatically

a tape which apparently provides proof of O’Rawe’s version. In 2009, whilst they had still not released the tape to the public, they nevertheless continued to use it as evidence during the Gasyard Debate, reading out apparently a partial transcript of the tape (RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 67; see Chapter 6.4.3.3). Similarly, Dixie Elliot stated at one point “that more and more former Blanket men were coming out to back Ricky” (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 1,205), a piece of information that is offered up as if it is as valid as any official documentation. No further proof is given. This tactic, however, is one that both sides can use and Seabird employed it to support her own side when she then told Dixie Elliot that “that is not what [... she was] hearing from various people” (RT0905-02 2009: Seabird, Post 1,524). Inla-supporter’s posts also indicate that unofficial sources are just as valid as official ones in the following discussion over differing narratives concerning the Gasyard Debate:

23. inla-supporter: [To Faoi Driocht] What were you saying cara about Duddy describing the offer Clarke showed him as being an “innacurate summary?” Between your YouTube and YaYa’s tape should sort that innacuracy out. Are you claiming that document outlining the offer which was released under the Freedom of Information Act is a fraud?

No body ever claimed that the offer was in document form on the 5th so there never was a disagreement on that particular. What about the 6th or 7th?²⁶⁶ If you had have read the last post I made on the hunger strike thread about the ICJP you would have seen that it contained an internal telegramme between the ‘home’ office and NIO. Read it cara as you’ll find it enlightening (RT0908-01 2009: inla-supporter, Post 23).

26. Faoi Driocht: [Quoting the last two sentences of the above post]

Duddy said to the audience ‘I challenge the scholars to enquire as to when that document was written’ (RT0908-01 2009: Faoi Driocht, Post 26)

28. inla-supporter: [Quoting the above post]

And? What’s your point cara?

Is your account or us YaYa’ s account the accurate one cara regarding Duddys description of the offer shown to him by Clarke. Both accounts can’t be accurate. I first heard yaya’s account when he phoned after the Duddy meeting and it’s the same account he wrote here

removes it from the purview of folklore? As noted above, however, the written form is often taken as having more validity, something that has occurred since the appearance of the written medium: see Ong 1980: 292; and 2000.

²⁶⁶ Note that inla-supporter has now changed the date of the offer from 5th July when before they were quite adamant that the offer had been given on the 5th.

about duddys description of the offer that Clarke had (RT0908-01 2009: inla-supporter, Post 28).

The last sentence of inla-supporter's post would suggest that they preferred yaya's account to Faoi Driocht's partly because they knew yaya, who was able to phone inla-supporter in person, and partly because yaya's account was given right after the event and matched the description on "Republican.ie". Much like Seabird's and Dixie Elliot's statements noted above, inla-supporter gave clear indication that informal information sources from personally trusted or known sources have equal validity to (if not more validity than) unknown informal or formal sources. In a similar way, Seabird disregarded possible evidence²⁶⁷ because they knew people who also disagreed. Both inla-supporter and Dixie Elliot did the same in their posts discussed above. This would suggest that for the Republican community at least, all sources are equally valid or invalid as it suits the individual user. The situation is, of course, not uncommon in an orally-based community (where trust tends to be placed more on friends than outsiders), and not least when solid trustworthy information is lacking, as was the case in 2009. Here, however, the situation is worsened because people do not even trust official sources for obvious reasons, which weakens their validity, lowering them often to having less meaning than the word of the man next door.

The overt adaptation of the source material, such as official documents or unofficial blogs, could possibly be linked to this lack of trust. Perhaps when someone does not believe the contents of a source, whether document or oral statement, they feel more comfortable about changing the source to suit their narrative. Regardless of the reason, this kind of adaptation once again suggests that the narrative is more important than the sources or the evidence. In many ways, the use of different sources ranging from official to unofficial reminds one of the folk artists documented by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett who maintained or created folk art through the use of non-folkloric material (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989). For them, the end justified the means and the maintenance of a tradition was more important than exactly how it was maintained. Similarly, for the users on "Republican.ie", the maintenance of the overall narrative, whether pro-Sinn Féin or pro-O'Rawe, is more important than keeping to what the author of the blog has said or the facts found in the documents.

As mentioned in Chapter 6.4.3, the thread (RT0803-01) and throughout this present section, the treatment of the sources by the users on "Republican.ie" indicates how 'folklore' (in other words unofficial, and/or oral sources) and official discourses are often placed on a

²⁶⁷ Such as the FOI Documents or the evidence from the Gasyard Debate.

similar level in terms of validity and trustworthiness. For the users on the website, there is little difference between the word of a friend and the statements found in official sources. This treatment also shows us how the internet as a medium can help to intertwine both folklore and official discourses by providing a medium in which the informal and formal constantly mix in the form of preserved written texts which one can refer to. The internet is a written medium where things rarely vanish and therefore “Republican.ie” requires users to provide citations or evidence for any possibly dangerous statements. In this way, it might be said the website takes on the more formal aspects of academic discourse in which people are required to source their material properly. Nonetheless, as an essentially informal, alterable and thereby eternally changeable medium, in some ways it recreates the fluidity of the informal oral tradition. This is seen in the fact that the users feel more than comfortable about changing the wording of statements or documents or in some of their sources in a way which would never pass muster in an academic journal. This juxtaposition of the informal and formal which is the very nature of the internet might also explain why the different types of sources are placed on an even footing in web-site debates like that under discussion here. Just as the forum in many ways recreates and resembles a community centre or informal gathering of friends at a pub or coffee house, it also recreates the way in which people debate historical or political questions in an informal setting, referencing sources, paraphrasing them and adapting them to suit their own interpretations of events, using a mix of both informal and formal evidence to support their position on a particular subject. The potential problem is that newcomers (and those already involved) often find it difficult to decide what is trustworthy and what is not; and what is fact and what is not, because it all appears in the medium of writing (which, as noted above, people have been brought up to trust more).

6.4.3.3 Secrecy

As mentioned in the previous sub-section, there are a number of sources used by posters which are of dubious or unknown origin. These sources include nameless Republicans who have voiced their opinion which supported that of whoever happened to be making the post at the time and friends of friends who all had something to say about O’Rawe’s claims about the hunger strikers. There is, however, one piece of evidence which transcends these with regard to its unknown origin and that is the tape that was first mentioned in Chapter 6.4.2. This tape seems to have existed for a number of years, but only a select few have been granted access to its entire contents. These contents are and were a significant factor in the tape’s power as a piece of evidence. In 2008 it allowed a small group of people to claim that the evidence on the

tape damned Sinn Féin and proved O’Rawe right, but it also meant that their opponents could disregard it because no one knew what it contained. In 2009 at the Gasyard Debate, this changed when the following transcript was read out to those assembled:

67. inla-supporter: The following is an extract from a private conversation that was taped without this persons knowledge or permission. There is a lot more powerful quotes/revelations in the tapes which will be released in due course. The pesrson in question is an ex-blanketman, not the one who came out last night [at the Gasyard Debate], who was in a cell close to Bik.

Mr A: “I have said to people, yes... it’s true enough. A couple of people around here got at me about it, and I said ‘Well, I don’t want to get involved in this, but I do recall that conversation’”.

Mr A: “I can verify it, it f***in happened; I don’t want f*** all to do with it. It did happen. O’Rawe’s telling the truth.....

Mr A: “Well, I can verify the first part of it, the offer ...except I thought it was three points rather than four and I know it was rejected – but I don’t know who – and neither I do...”

Mr A: “The reply, the reply... well, I know it was turned down – but I don’t know by whom.” (RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 67)

The above post is the only evidence that has hitherto been presented from this alleged tape. As the tape seems to be a recording of a private conversation, the IRSP has stated that they will be unable to air it as they feel they are under threat of legal action if they do so (RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 549). Whether this is true or not, this statement is used to allow the IRSP and others to continue using the tape as a piece of supporting evidence for O’Rawe’s accusations without ever having to prove it exists. Whilst providing a decontextualised transcript containing only the “relevant” information is a useful addition to the debate, the fact remains that the transcript remains unproven and as such is little different from a word-of-mouth story that mentions (without proof) the existence of numerous nameless supporters (see examples given above).²⁶⁸

²⁶⁸ Moreover, without hearing the recording as a whole, it is impossible to state whether or not the transcript is an accurate reflection of the recording or whether all the relevant information has been produced.

The secrecy or unknown origin of certain sources makes for a powerful tool. It allows people to draw on the idea of “where there’s smoke, there’s fire” and assume that because something has been said, there must be something to it. Whether the tape actually exists is relatively unimportant because it is what the tape is said to contain that makes it significant. By shrouding the tape’s contents in secrecy, even with a perfectly good reason such as the threat of legal action, the tape firmly enters the realm of folklore, a known story that lacks anything to verify it. Moreover, as the tape cannot be played, its contents can only ever be passed along orally or through the internet and no specifics beyond those revealed above can ever be revealed. Due to this, Sinn Féin’s supporters can easily disregard the tape, but it remains a prominent piece of evidence for O’Rawe’s supporters who continue to use it to this day in their narrative about the hunger strike of 1981.

6.4.3.4 Narratives

It is nonetheless important to remember that there are actually numerous narratives floating around at this time. On the one hand, there are the two core narratives about the hunger strike — Sinn Féin’s and O’Rawe’s — which are reformulated endlessly through the users’ posts on “Republican.ie” and the various opinion pieces in newspapers and blog posts on the internet. On the other hand, there are the shorter narratives contained within the various pieces of evidence, which slowly make their way into the two core narratives. There is, however, a third type of narrative which sometimes appears which is best described as a meta-narrative. This kind of narrative is one which discusses the debate surrounding O’Rawe’s claims that Sinn Féin let six of the ten hunger strikers die and finds its best example in *Afterlives* by Richard O’Rawe (2010), which covers the events after he published his first book. The issue here is that all of these narratives are locked together and it is often hard to separate them.

The tape mentioned above is a good example of how these three narratives are locked together. It was first revealed in the Gasyard Debate and was but one revelation of many given that night. It was that night that Brendan Duddy apparently confirmed that the offer had been made by the British Government, although, as has been shown he was less than sure about this. A number of the earlier-noted documents were also read out; along with the transcript of the tape recording. The combination of three events (presented orally) on that occasion it certainly helped to create a narrative which agreed with O’Rawe’s version of events in which the outside leadership, specifically Gerry Adams, allowed six of the ten hunger strikers to die for political gain. The combined Gasyard Debate narrative serves both as a meta-narrative about the debate surrounding the hunger strike and as a piece of evidence.

In this way, it helped to create O’Rawe’s narrative. What this means is that whilst O’Rawe provided the bare bones of the narrative in *Blanketmen* (O’Rawe 2005), the fuller narrative was still being formed in 2009. Unlike Sinn Féin’s narrative, which has remained relatively stable over the years, O’Rawe’s narrative is in a state of flux as more evidence is found which it needs to take into account. Thus it is not possible to discuss O’Rawe’s claims without discussing the evidence presented at the Gasyard Debate, which will naturally require an explanation of what happened at the Gasyard Debate.

This process is the same for much of the evidence and many of the meta-narratives which exist about the hunger strike. The following three posts provide examples from the discussions on “Republican.ie” of how the core narratives, like folk narratives (not least folk legends), are formed through the slow accretion of the narratives contained in the evidence and the meta-narratives about the debate:

2,135. inla-supporter: I didn’t convince myself at all cara but what did was, firstly the taped admissions, the PSF contradictions and U-turns in their narratives, the FOI documents, Duddy authenticating the offer(which according to PSF never existed) Cleeky and another ex-prisoner confirming hearing the acceptance conversation. Of course, amazingly, according to you and others defending the PSF narrative, there’s nothing new in those revelations. Given Gerrys Monty Python claim and his account of his meeting with Kieran Doc, among others, is it any wonder Gerrys truth would be treated with a huge dose of scepticism (RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 2,135).

449. inla-supporter: I can’t speak for what revolt cara but I can assure you that the IRSP in fact did not want to believe O Rawe, many didn’t including the INLA prisoner OC. The circumstances of the tape recording and it’s content changed all that. Then McCanns contribution added extra weight, then even more so with the Downing Street Documents, then even more again the documents Duddy confirmed were authentic, one of them he pointed out is what he delivered to “a known IRA member from Derry.” Then Duddy’s confirmation of four of the demands being conceded, his belief the offer was genuine. The extract from the tape saying he thought it was three points(demands) rather than four. Cleeky’s contribution. All this in contrast to Bik’s no offers whatsoever to “I couldn’t accept something that didn’t exist.” To Danny’s ‘no concrete proposal’ to Larny’s ‘vague proposals of prison regime change’ to Adams not being aware of the mountain climber. Did you not listen to all this on the various links on the net. And you say there’s nothing new-how can you come to that conclusion cara. Would you not agree that all of this deserves a detailed response from the leadership of PSF coming from Gerry?

As I said in another post cara we have no evidence in regards to the motivation behind the rejection. We are not interested in speculation but only in facts and evidence. PSF's version has been demolished cara it's staring you in the face. At the very least a detailed explanation is a must, an explanation of the rejection, and for us the IRSP, an explanation as to why the 1981 RSM and the INLA prisoners OC and his men on hunger strike kept in the dark (RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 449)!

260. Mellows1922: I'm not doubting your motivations, nor that of the IRSP, I do doubt the motivations of many others who are seeing this as nothing more than another avenue to attack SF. I don't doubt your only motivation is resolving the questions surrounding the deaths of your comrades.

I do hope you can get the recording released, I think the issue is only further confused by snippets of information being available from all sides.

I honestly don't see anything from Saturday [the Gasyard Debate] that is new and I'm not looking at all of this with blinkers on blindly believing what is a party line. From what I have seen it's still the same information that has been previously available, just more detailed, the salient important factor being that the Brits were unwilling to do anything until the strike was called off. Did people in 1981 simply trust that the Brits would be true to their word if the strike was ended? And should they have been expected simply to trust them?

The corroding nature of what is being alleged needs to be addressed and sooner rather than later so on that point I would agree that everybody involved needs to put forward the details of what it is they know (RT0905-02 2009: Mellows1922, Post 260).

As can be seen from all three posts, the users discussed the events of the hunger strike through the evidence and the meta-narratives. In all three quotations, the users discussed the various pieces of information that have been released and the impact this new information has had on their own version of events. Some users, like inla-supporter above, felt that the information shows that Gerry Adams and others are guilty of what O'Rawe has accused them of, whilst other users, such as Mellows1922, argued that the information only verified their own narrative that Adams and Sinn Féin are innocent of these charges. It thus seems that they had already ordered the material into united mini-narratives which could be used to inform the larger, ever developing central narrative that they might later tell whenever the subject is broached. Thus, inla-supporter might begin by stating that Sinn Féin betrayed the hunger strikers, in a form of short dité (belief statement) (von Sydow 1948: 107), and then go on to

explain how they came to this conclusion, using various smaller narratives or other sources to back this up, or they might simply discuss the events (from their viewpoint) and then mention the more detailed information offered by the FOI Documents as support. This will in turn require them to tell a further story about the events (as discussed in their posts given) above. In a similar way, Mellows1922 might tell Sinn Féin's tale of the hunger strikers,²⁶⁹ but then relate how people such as O'Rawe have since tried to attack Sinn Féin over the alleged betrayal of the hunger strikers, something which will similarly require another discussion of more recent events, such as the Gasyard Debate or the release of the FOI Documents, and how these events have affected Mellows1922's view of the Sinn Féin narrative about the hunger strikers.²⁷⁰ In both cases, the discussions might then lead to either user telling a tale about the debate that occurred on "Republican.ie" and elsewhere and how the Republican community was further divided by this. These examples demonstrate how interconnected all of the various narratives are and how it is not necessarily possible to separate them from each other. In short, these smaller narratives all affect to a greater or lesser extent the two core narratives about the hunger strike.

The quotes given above also serve to indicate that the community on "Republican.ie" is sufficiently versed in the debate that one only needs to reference a narrative for it to be understood. This would imply that for the community the various narratives concerning the hunger strike and the debate surrounding have already reached a stage where they can form a kind of "immanent narrative" which does not need to be told in detail because it is already known by all the participants in a storytelling event.²⁷¹ This means that the narrative can take the form of short episodic narratives which remind the audience of the main events of a story (which they already know) through the use of mere references, such as names (Clover 2005: 293). It is noteworthy how rare it is that the entire hunger-strike narrative is ever written up in full on the website. It is nonetheless clear that most users are fully aware of it in one form or another, which would suggest how important and relevant the events have become to the community (see Chapter 6.3 for examples of this). This shared knowledge, however, allows participants in the online community to quickly make reference to an event or idea relevant to

²⁶⁹ It must be always kept in mind that until 2005, this was the only version of the tale that existed and is likely to be the one most accepted by the greater Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community. The greater Republican community is another matter, however.

²⁷⁰ It would certainly be interesting to do field-research and collect oral stories about the hunger strike to see what effect, if any, the on-line debate has had on how members of the Republican community at large respond when asked to tell the researcher what happened during the hunger strike in 1981.

²⁷¹ For more on how the audience can shape a storytelling event see Bauman 1986: 3; Grotowski 2000: 24; and 2007: 227; and Schechner 2006: 104-105. For more information about immanent narratives, see Foley 1991: 1995: 6-7; and 2002: 109-124.

the debate without having to detail it at length. Whilst this might provide a hindrance for anyone new to the debate,²⁷² it does provide an example of how quickly information and narratives can become immanent within a community and how this can be made use of.

What is most important to bear in mind, however, is that the entire debate that has hitherto been discussed revolves essentially around a desire to find the truth about the hunger strikers and establish and maintain a believable narrative (*cf.* Oring 2008) which takes account of all the differing evidence that had been released by the end of 2009. Whilst the users might debate semantics, chronology or the importance of various pieces of evidence, the fact remains that the entire point of the debate about the alleged offer is to establish which narrative is correct: Sinn Féin's or O'Rawe's. Therefore it is also important to bear in mind that whilst the aspects discussed in this present section and in the previous section about 2008 (Chapter 6.4.2) have been separated from each other, this does not really reflect the true nature of the debate in which all of these aspects inform each other and thereby ultimately also inform whichever narrative the user happens to espouse. Whilst this process may not always be as apparent as it is in the three quotes noted at the start of this sub-section, it can almost always be found in some form or other. Indeed, when it comes down to it, the entire debate about the hunger-strike, like the debates about Bloody Sunday, the Omagh bombing, or even the Battle of the Boyne, has always revolved around a complex web of narratives. In general, considering the material given above, it would appear that the users on "Republican.ie" (and their discussions) are little different to the inhabitants of Ballymenone described in detail by Henry Glassie who disagreed with each other over certain historical narratives. Not only did the people who Glassie documented disagree about the narratives, they also regularly changed the versions they told in such a way that they were made more relevant to the teller (and listener), commonly providing evidence of various kinds for the reasoning behind their stories (Glassie 1995: 95-156; 187-217). In the threads that have been discussed, the users on "Republican.ie" have changed their narratives, using various kinds of evidence to convince their readers in a similar way. Viewed in this way, in the context of verbal discourse, the debate examined here highlights the degree to which "truth" can be a fluid concept with regard to information from official documentation, not least in Northern Ireland. Whilst the debate itself clearly has important consequences for the Republican community and how it views its history and heritage in the form of the strikers, and the ways in which it sees its leaders, in terms of folklore and Folkloristics, the debate demonstrates primarily what little difference there is between the formation of a folk narrative and the

²⁷² This will include any researcher who enters the discussion long after it has started, such as myself.

narratives concerning recent history that are created in online discussions, however more “official” they may seem or how many official sources they use (*cf.* Oring 2008).

6.4.3.5 *The Debate Moves Towards 2011*

The preceding discussion has dealt with only the threads posted in 2009 and as with 2008, it has only presented the smallest fraction of the available material. As has been noted earlier, it must be remembered that the focussed way in which the debate has been presented here in this project bears no resemblance to the day-to-day reality of the way in which the debate has taken place on the web site. The debate has waxed and waned as informal debates are wont to do. Numerous posts have not been quoted here. In fact, the project has wilfully abstained from presenting the debate on “Republican.ie” as a whole because whilst the breadth, scope and sheer size of the debate exhibits the importance of the hunger strikers, this project is naturally limited in space, and is more concerned with the processes found within the debate: in other words how people use and argue about the sources; what sources are viewed as being most important to posters, and how others are disregarded; and finally the uncertain relationship that exists here between “official” and “folklore”.

As noted at the start of this sub-chapter, the debate ebbed in 2010 during which very few new threads were posted on the topic: a sum total of five new threads specifically relevant to the debate were posted involving 58 replies altogether and very little actual debate occurred between the sides.²⁷³ One possible reason for the decline at this time is that users had simply had enough of the debate, having had their fill the previous year, and had become somewhat apathetic. Another reason could be that despite the release of further supposedly new documents (*cf.* RT1009-01 2010), very little new information was contained in them and so there was very little for the community to debate without covering old ground.²⁷⁴ This is not to suggest that the topic had become any less important or that the strikers themselves had become any less important.²⁷⁵ What it does suggest, however, is that the issue only really

²⁷³ See RT1002-01 2010; RT1009-01 2010; RT1011-01 2010; RT1011-02 2010; and RT1011-03 2010 for more information about the content of these threads.

²⁷⁴ The *Londonderry Sentinel* had obtained another set of documents from the NIO through the Freedom of Information Act 2000; *Londonderry Sentinel* 2010; but these documents apparently shed no new light on the matter: *cf.* RT1009-01 2010.

²⁷⁵ The community continued to hold a number of commemorative events throughout the year and there were a number of threads discussing them, such as RT1003-01 2010; RT1004-01 2010; RT1004-02 2010; RT1004-03 2010; RT1004-04 2010; RT1005-01 2010; RT1005-02 2010; RT1007-01 2010; RT1008-01 2010; RT1008-02 2010; RT1008-03 2010; RT1008-04 2010; RT1011-04 2010; and RT1011-05 2010. RT1004-03 is particularly interesting because it suggests that some issues of principle, such as asking the British government for permission to march, are more important than commemorating the hunger strikers.

becomes “an issue” for the Republican community when something new occurs or appears to spark the debate.

6.4.4 2011-2012

Such a spark came in 2011 when National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI), published Brendan Duddy’s notes online and the National Archives released the British government’s documents from 1981. It seems that a small number of Duddy’s notes were first released online by NUI in November, 2011 (*cf.* RT1111-03 2011; Rusty Nail 2011b)²⁷⁶ and that the rest were released to the public in January, 2012, (*cf.* RT1201-01 2012) along with a transcription of the notes (Duddy 2011).²⁷⁷ This release was swiftly followed by the official release of government documents under “the Thirty Year Rule” as discussed earlier in Chapter 6.4.1.²⁷⁸ These documents naturally contained a lot of new information about the hunger strike and the British government’s attitude towards it. Moreover, they filled in a large number of the gaps left by the documents earlier released in 2009 and 2010 by the NIO under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.²⁷⁹ Following the release of the new documents, users of “Republican.ie” posted a total of at least 18 threads between September, 2011 and April, 2012 involving 1,486 replies, the vast majority being posted in 2012.

The next section will not follow the same format as the previous one. Much of what has been discussed previously appears again in the new threads from 2011 and 2012,²⁸⁰ but these aspects have already been covered in sufficient detail and will be put to one side here. This is not to suggest that these aspects are no longer important, rather that there is little to be gained by re-covering ground which has already been covered in the preceding analysis. This section will instead examine how, following the release of the documents, users once again placed greater value on certain pieces of evidence than on others. In keeping to this aspect of

²⁷⁶ This is apparent from RT1111-03 (2011), which only makes use of a limited number of the notes and is based on a blog post by Rusty Nail (2011b). The rest of the notes seem to have been made available in mid-January according to RT1201-01 which contains a photo of an article by Allison Morris discussing the new material in *The Irish News*. I have been unable to find a copy of the article online.

²⁷⁷ According to Dr Niall Ó Dochartaigh, the man behind NUI’s online archive of Duddy’s notes, NUI released the full set of notes with a transcription because the partial release had created a lot of speculation and there was a serious mistranscription circulating which was being used to bolster an argument and so he felt it was best to published the correct version (Ó Dochartaigh: personal communication).

²⁷⁸ These documents will simply be referred to as the “NA Documents” (“NA” referring to the National Archive).

²⁷⁹ Unlike the previous releases of documents by the British Government, it has been possible to view these documents in the form in which they were released via a hypertext link to a PDF document showing them in their original form (National Archive Documents 2011).

²⁸⁰ In this period, the user, *yaya*, for instance, continued to argue about the meaning behind McFarlane’s quote — about the Mountain Climber process — discussed in the previous section: RT1112-01 2011: *yaya*, Post 32. *Mellows1922*, meanwhile, continued to argue against that position: RT1112-01 2011: *Mellows1922*, Post 35. See the earlier discussion about this quote in Chapter 6.4.3.1.

the debate, it is hoped that the analysis can illustrate how the users evaluated the new evidence that they had in front of them, and why some material was seen as having greater importance. This will hopefully provide useful information about the process of discussion in a climate where people have come to distrust official sources.

6.4.4.1 Which Sources Matter?

As has been previously discussed, the way in which the online users chose which evidence to agree with and which to disagree with, and how they adapted the material available to them to suit their preferred narratives was reminiscent of the way in which folklore works within a community, changing form in line with given circumstances. The two sections about the threads from 2008 and 2009 have explored how users intentionally or unintentionally used a document from one date as evidence for something that occurred on a different, often earlier, date. Likewise, we have seen how users used formatting to change the meaning or focus of a particular document and how they sometimes subtly changed quotes so that they better supported the user's arguments. It was also shown earlier that the users commonly placed unofficial sources on the same level as official ones, creating a situation in which a friend-of-a-friend style report was given as much, or as little, validity as a document from the British Government or Northern Ireland Office. This behaviour not only reflects the distrust that many users have for the official, it reflects the idea discussed earlier that confirmation bias may play some part in how the users read and later use the evidence. As we have seen, whilst much of the evidence is written, its meaning can often be rather fluid, resulting in that users appear to feel it can be up for debate. Less common than in more recent years were examples of users preferring older sources over a newer, possibly more official one simply because they agreed with their preferred narrative, in a sense refusing to accept new information that challenges their old position.

It is possible that this conscious or subconscious behaviour of dismissing or distrusting new sources, even when they are official, became more apparent in 2011/12 largely because that was the first time that it was possible to view all or most of the relevant documents concerning the 1981 hunger strike, at least with regard to the attitudes and role of the British government.²⁸¹ In November, 2011, when the first of Duddy's notes were released to the public showing the content of the discussions between the British Government and PIRA on

²⁸¹ As part of O'Rawe's accusation against Sinn Féin, he maintained that the comm in which McFarlane agreed to the offer on 5th July and the comm that told them it had been rejected on 6th July 1981 had disappeared. See Chapter 6.2.3 for more information.

5th July, 1981, Rusty Nail wrote a new blog post favouring O’Rawe’s claims about Sinn Féin letting six of the ten hunger strikers die (Rusty Nail 2011b). This was subsequently posted to “Republican.ie” as part of the debate (RT1111-03 2011). For example, in Post 8 of said thread, the user snowy states the following:

8. snowy: What does it [Rusty Nail’s post/Duddy’s notes] show then? That o rawe was telling the truth. There was an offer there on the 5 of july, This gives more weight to his side of the story! When i first heard it i like you i didnt believe it. But the more comes out its hard not to (RT1111-03 2011: snowy, Post 8).²⁸²

From this quote we can see that snowy was very much a supporter of O’Rawe’s narrative at this time. As noted in Chapter 6.2.3, O’Rawe claimed that on 5th July, 1981, Danny Morrison communicated a substantial offer from the British government to Brendan “Bik” McFarlane which had come through a backchannel intermediary, Brendan Duddy. McFarlane subsequently discussed this offer with O’Rawe and agreed that it would be enough to end the strike. McFarlane indicated he would let the outside leadership know that the prisoners had accepted the offer, but this acceptance was then rejected by the leadership in a comm on 6th July (O’Rawe 2005: 172-179, 184; Hennessey 2014: 314-315, 328). Snowy’s post shows not only his support for the broad details — that there was an offer — but also for O’Rawe’s chronology.

However, if we look at Duddy’s notes, which were provided in both the original blog and its copy on “Republican.ie” (RT1111-03 2011: inla-supporter, Post 1; cf. Rusty Nail 2011b), Duddy does not seem to have written much that looks like a concrete offer in his notes dated 5th July 1981:

Clothes = after lunch tomorrow and before the afternoon visits.

As a man is given his clothes he clears out his own cell.

Pending the resolution of the work issue which will be worked out

[illegible] as soon as the clothes are and no later than 1 month.

Visits = [illegible] on Tuesday. Hunger strikers + some others

²⁸² Other uses echo similar sentiments throughout this period. For example: yaya, RT1112-01 2011: yaya, Post 38; RT1112-02 2011: yaya, Post 30; Newry Republican, RT1112-03 2011: Newry Republican, Post 52 (quoting [Rusty Nail 2011a]); Blanket, RT1112-03 2011: Blanket, Post 58; and Comrade Foster RT1201-11 2012: Comrade Foster, Post 34.

H.S. to end 4 hrs after clothes + work has been resolved (Brendan Duddy's notes dated 5th July as quoted in Hennessey 2014: 311-312; cf. Duddy 2011: Pol35/166 (1)).²⁸³

The above note certainly looks nothing like the offer that O'Rawe quotes in his book and which forms the basis of his accusations and his supporters' narrative (O'Rawe 2005: 176-179; cf. Beresford 1994: 292-294). It certainly does not look like an offer that the prisoners would have been willing to accept as it contains very little in relation to the Five Demands discussed in Chapter 6.2.2. Nevertheless, users such as *yaya* and *inla*-supporter earlier used Duddy's note above as supporting evidence for O'Rawe's claims. This suggests that either some users preferred O'Rawe's versions of events to the information given in Duddy's notes or that they are viewing his notes from the viewpoint of the information found in O'Rawe's book. It should also be remembered that O'Rawe's book counts as an unofficial source and that, when it comes down to it, it is little more than a personal experience narrative.²⁸⁴ Whilst he was part of the events, and whilst the book is highly important for the debate and counts as evidence, it is not official in the way Duddy's notes or the British government's documents are.²⁸⁵ Nonetheless, we can see from the preceding discussion that the status of official means little to *snowy*, and possibly others, because to their mind, O'Rawe's accusations trump the evidence which appears to be contained in Duddy's notes.

Despite the fact Duddy's released notes do not seem to support O'Rawe, users continued to maintain that his narrative was the correct one. In the same thread as *snowy*'s post, *inla*-supporter again voices their support for O'Rawe and says:

19. *inla*-supporter: Everybody and their granny now accept that there was indeed an offer but here is the following link to the offer which, by the way, Duddy confirmed at the Gasyard as being the offer he passed on to the PRM [what follows here is the "Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland(Humphrey Atkins) [*sic*]"; cf. British Government 1981c] (RT1111-03 2011: *inla*-supporter, Post 19).

As can be seen in the above quotation, *inla*-supporter continued to support O'Rawe's narrative and offered what they considers to be further strong evidence for his position, that

²⁸³ All of the additions were added by Hennessey. A transcript of Duddy's note can be see in Pol35/167 (1), Duddy 2011.

²⁸⁴ The definition of "official" and "unofficial" used in this dissertation was earlier discussed in Chapter 6.1

²⁸⁵ Duddy's notes were made during his time as the intermediary between the PIRA and the British Government. As such, they are only slightly less official than the British Government's documents. This is purely because, whilst a number of his notes are exact duplicates of the NA Documents, there are times when it is clear that he has left out information or provided his own interpretation of what has been said.

they heard Duddy confirm the statement they quoted as the offer Duddy communicated to the PIRA on 5th July, 1981. According to Duddy's notes (Duddy 2011: Pol35/166 (1); Hennessey 2014: 311-312), however, there was no offer on 5th July, but one does appear to have been made on 6th July, 1981 (Duddy 2011: Pol35/166 (2-3); Hennessey 2014: 326; see below). If we accept for a moment inla-supporter's statement, that there was an offer, there is still some difficulty about deciding which of the two apparent offers he is talking about. As indicated by the parentheses above, inla-supporter quoted the "Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland(Humphrey Atkins) [*sic*]" as being the offer O'Rawe is talking about. However, we can see that Duddy's notes regarding 5th July are nowhere near as elaborate as the "Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland(Humphrey Atkins) [*sic*]". Despite the fact inla-supporter has read Duddy's notes in the original, or the transcription of them provided by Rusty Nail, inla-supporter appears to be ignoring them in favour of their memory that Duddy orally confirmed that the "Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland(Humphrey Atkins) [*sic*]" was the offer from 5th July, 1981. What this indicates is that inla-supporter (and possibly others), felt that Duddy's oral confirmation and therefore his memory were more reliable than Duddy's own notes from the time. It moreover indicates that inla-supporter was possibly willing to ignore contradictions implied by the very evidence which they used to bolster their argument.

This process, the intentional or unintentional disregarding of one piece of evidence in favour of another, did not end after the British government documents were released in December, 2011 (National Archive Documents 2011). As was discussed in Chapter 6.2.2, Hennessey claims that these documents show that on 5th July, Thatcher and her government had yet to formalise their position towards the strike (Hennessey 2014: 310-312). However, as has been quoted earlier, on 6th July, 1981, Thatcher sent down the following position:

- (i) The clothing regime in Armagh Prison would be applied to all prisons in Northern Ireland (ie [*sic*] own clothes subject to approval) *of the Prison Governor*.²⁸⁶
- (ii) Parcels, visits and letters would be made available on the same basis as for conforming prisoners at present;
- (iii) On work, association and remission the Government's position will be as set out in the Secretary of State's statement of 30 June. However, emphasis will be laid on the Government's record of its readiness to administer the regime flexibly, and on the 'scope for yet further developments'

²⁸⁶ Italics in this section are used to denote changes made to the document by Thatcher personally before it was sent through the backchannel: see Hennessey 2014: 326. Any additions or changes by Hennessey have been indicated by square parentheses, but I have changed nothing in this document.

- (iv) *On work the Prison authorities must retain the right to decide what work shall be done.*
- (v) *On association*****[left blank]**** 30th June* (as quoted in Hennessey 2014: 326; see also Chapter 6.2.2 for the full quote; cf. National Archive Documents 2011: 27).

Despite the facts that (considering this document) O’Rawe appears to have got the date wrong and that his version of the offer (O’Rawe 2005: 176-179; Beresford 1994: 292-294) does not match the one quoted above (Hennessey 2014: 326), users continued to state that the documents verify his account (see RT1112-03 2011: inla-supporter, Post 17; Dixie Elliot, Post 37; RT1201-11 2012: MartinP, Post22; Comrade Foster, Post 34).²⁸⁷ Even if we are to take into account the issues with how the documents were originally released, and how they might have been used at the time, the discrepancy between the offer O’Rawe recounts and the one found in the British government document cannot be argued away. It seems that those users who continued to voice their support for O’Rawe’s argument must simply be ignoring the said discrepancy. A further implication of this would be that the users are apparently giving more weight to O’Rawe’s accusations than they are to the British Government’s documents. This preference for O’Rawe’s words over those of the British government would also explain the point made earlier that any evidence of an offer at any date would seem to be enough for them to confirm his accusations.²⁸⁸ Seen in this light, one can see how the core narrative becomes more important than the apparent facts laid out in the sources available to the users at the time.

Much has been made about O’Rawe’s claims and the idea that any evidence seems to be enough for his supporters. The preceding information certainly indicates that the British Government communicated something through the backchannel which might reasonably be called an offer. This is likewise borne out by Duddy’s notes which indicate that over the course of July, the British sent various iterations of their position which could be conceived as an offer (Duddy 2011; Hennessey 2014: 300-377).²⁸⁹ Nonetheless, Sinn Féin supporters, those that argue O’Rawe is either lying or mistaken, regularly attempted to use the same evidence to disprove his claims that an offer of any kind existed. In this way, they exhibit the same tendency as O’Rawe’s supporters, only in reverse. Sinn Féin’s supporters have seemed to take

²⁸⁷ It is worth noting then that not all of these posts expressly mention the dating “5th July”, instead just stating that the evidence proves O’Rawe right. From this, even though clarification is not given, it can nonetheless be inferred that they mean he is right in his claim that the offer was presented to Bik McFarlane and then him on 5th July, 1981. All of these posts can be found in Appendix B along with any other post that has been discussed throughout this project but are either left unquoted or only partially quoted.

²⁸⁸ This is also yet another indication of confirmation bias.

²⁸⁹ For more information about the offer and Duddy’s notes see Chapter 6.2 and Hennessey 2014: 300-377.

the line that if the evidence showed that O’Rawe was mistaken in any form, then he must be mistaken about everything regarding the offer. One can take the following discussion as an example:

4. LarryM: Richard O’Rawe claimed in his book that a clear British offer was produced around 5th July.

According to these documents [National Archive Documents 2011]:

Late on 5 July, Duddy rang his British contact to say the possibility of any settlement was now “seriously in doubt”.

These documents show that the prospects of an early “deal” to end the hunger strike evaporated over that July weekend.

The British never actually formulated their final statement while concessions were strongly opposed by senior NIO Ministers, led by Humphrey Atkins.

Directly contradicting O’Rawe (RT1112-03 2011: LarryM, Post 4).

14. inla-supporter: [Quoting Post 4 above]

Really? Page 27 on the link I provided above to the released documents [National Archive Documents 2011] clearly shows the offer O’Rawe referred to (RT1112-03 2011: inla-supporter, Post 14).

Post 16. Mellows1922: [Quoting Post 14 above]

O’Rawe said he accepted an offer that was brought in by Danny, these docs [National Archive Documents 2011] state that there was no formulation of any offer and certainly not when Danny went into the gaol – O’Rawe also said that the offer he accepted was substantively the 5 demands, the page 27 link you refer to is far far short of that cara (RT1112-03 2011: Mellows1922, Post 16).²⁹⁰

According to LarryM’s post (RT1112-03 2011: LarryM, Post 4; see above), the documents showed that the opportunity for a deal was seriously in doubt, but inla-supporter rightfully pointed out in Post 14 above that the NA documents (National Archive Documents 2011: 27; Hennessey 2014: 326) showed there was an offer dated 6th July (RT1112-03 2011: inla-supporter, Post 14; see above). In light of this, LarryM’s position nonetheless seems strange especially since Duddy’s notes clearly indicate that the discussion between the PIRA

²⁹⁰ Note how this was a single conversation within the thread and that more than one user participated in it, much like a pub conversation where participants join and respond to others as they like.

and the British government went on past 5th July even if a deal was never reached (Duddy 2011; Hennessey 2014: 300-377). LarryM thus exhibited the same disregard for information that is not favourable to his own narrative, in this case the ongoing narrative that there was no offer for Sinn Féin to reject. What this suggests, moreover, is that, as noted above, for LarryM, any small contradiction in O’Rawe’s narrative refuted the entirety of the said narrative. Much like O’Rawe’s supporters who only needed evidence of an offer of any kind to proclaim O’Rawe correct about everything, O’Rawe’s detractors only needed evidence that he was incorrect in some of his facts to reject him completely.

A similar line of reasoning appears to be present in Mellows1922’s post (RT1112-03 2011: Mellows1922, Post 16; see above), but is made clearer in a subsequent post in which he stated:

18. Mellows1922[In response to a post by inla-supporter]

You responded to mark [LarryM]²⁹¹ and stated that document 27 backs up O’Rawes position, document 27 dated 6th July that backs up O’Rawes position that he accepted a clear offer on the 5th ? when the recently released documents show categorically that there was no clear offer to accept ? aye

the game is well and truly up cara (RT1112-03 2011: Mellows1922, Post 18).

Note that Mellows1922 stated that “the game is well and truly up” (RT1112-03 2011: Mellows1922, Post 18; see above) because in his view, neither the NA Documents nor any of the previously released information verified any of O’Rawe’s claims about the offer having been made on 5th July 1981. In fact, at a later date, Mellows1922 explicitly stated “there was no offer to stay silent about, there was dialogue” (RT1201-08 2012: Mellows1922, Post 50). Even though the official evidence given above shows that the British government appear to have presented a number of offers to the PIRA via the backchannel,²⁹² Mellows1922 felt that the evidence in question merely reflected a dialogue taking place between the two parties rather than that any offer was made. In short, as with LarryM, the nature of the actual offer became much less relevant to the debate for Mellows1922: because O’Rawe had been proven wrong about the date and content, he must have been wrong about everything.

Seabird, another Sinn Féin supporter, acted similarly when she said that “[t]he papers released clearly show O’Rawe’s memory ain’t what it use to be and his timeline was wrong, he

²⁹¹ As mentioned in Chapter 4, the users on “Republican.ie” are able to change their usernames. LarryM was known as “MarkyMark” at this point in time.

²⁹² See Chapter 6.2 for more information about these offers.

is wrong” (RT1112-03 2011: Seabird, Post 27). In this way, we can see how Seabird behaved like Mellows1922 and LarryM: O’Rawe appears to have been incorrect about the content and the date of the offer and thus he must have been wrong about his claim that the prisoners accepted this offer and that Sinn Féin subsequently rejected their acceptance of it. They all rejected O’Rawe’s claims despite the fact the evidence shows that O’Rawe was at least partially correct and that the British Government did in fact make some kind of offer to the PIRA.²⁹³

One has to wonder whether O’Rawe might be wrong about the content and date, but still be right about the supposed acceptance of an offer the hunger strikers and its subsequent rejection by Sinn Féin? Does the former imply the latter? Is it perhaps possible that O’Rawe may be right and that he and McFarlane did accept an offer, which actually was the offer we see dated to 6th July, 1981?²⁹⁴ Is it possible that the document, dated to 6th July, was communicated to the PIRA on the 5th? These questions are not raised so much to attack Sinn Féin’s argument or suggest that O’Rawe is correct, but rather to raise the possibility that O’Rawe may be correct about some details and wrong about others and to explain why the posts above from Seabird, LarryM and Mellows1922 have been included as part of this discussion.

The above are not the only examples of users from both sides picking and choosing one source to another, with little interest in whether it is official or not. In response to Mellows1922’s assertion that the documents show that O’Rawe’s claim of an offer on 5th July, 1981 has no basis in truth (RT1112-03 2011: Mellows1922, Post 16; see above), inla-supporter responded by saying: “[p]erhaps the other document released under FOI makes it clearer” (RT1112-03 2011: inla-supporter, Post 17; see above). He then quoted the FOI Document, “Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland(Humphrey Atkins) [sic]” (RT1112-03 2011: inla-supporter, Post 17; cf. British Government, 1981c).²⁹⁵ Inla-supporter’s use of this document is nonetheless also problematic because the document in question is actively contradicted by the later NA Documents (National Archive Documents 2011). For a start, the “Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland(Humphrey Atkins) [sic]” appears to have been dated 8th July, 1981 (British Government, 1981c). The

²⁹³ That being said, it must be remembered that the fact the British made an offer had been in the public domain since Beresford first published his book in 1987: see Beresford 1994: 292-294.

²⁹⁴ We must also bear in mind that according to Hennessey’s reading of the documents, Duddy’s handler in the Foreign Office went further in his discussion of the government’s position than Thatcher seems to have wanted. If that is the case, it is possible then that Danny Morrison entered the prison and could have communicated an offer similar to the one O’Rawe claims, but which bears no resemblance to the document Thatcher agreed to. See Chapter 6.2.2 for more details.

²⁹⁵ See Chapter 6.4.3.1 for a quotation of this FOI Document.

real contradiction appears in the fact that inla-supporter used this statement as evidence for the alleged 5th July offer, whilst the NA Documents show that the first offer from the British government came on 6th July and took a far less elaborate form (National Archive Documents 2011: 27; Hennessey 2014: 326; see above). One reason why inla-supporter used this later-dated document is because, as discussed earlier,²⁹⁶ the FOI Document, “Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland(Humphrey Atkins) [*sic*]” was presented to Brendan Duddy at the Gasyard Debate, at which time he confirmed that it was the offer he presented to the PIRA on 5th July.²⁹⁷ This shows that the older evidence (Duddy’s oral statement) was seen as being far more valid in inla-supporter’s eyes than the newer evidence.²⁹⁸ This might be another example of confirmation bias (Sherman & Cohen 2002: 119). It is, nonetheless, a strong indication of how the users evaluate evidence or sources. In this particular instance, both O’Rawe and Duddy’s memory seem to be taken as more valid or reliable than the British documents.²⁹⁹

Newry Republican exhibited similar behaviour when he quoted an article by Rusty Nail (Rusty Nail 2011a):

52. Newry Republican: Danny Morrisons Position

[Danny Morrison outlines his position to Brian Rowan in today’s Belfast Telegraph](#)
[Rowan 2011]³⁰⁰

:

“At the time of my visit to the prison on the afternoon of Sunday July 5, 1981, the British Government had yet to even formulate its position, never mind proposing a ‘deal’.”

This is quite different from what is already well documented, both by Morrison himself and in *Ten Men Dead*, as well as being verified by Brendan Duddy at the Gasyard Debate when

²⁹⁶ See Chapter 6.4.3 for more information.

²⁹⁷ It is worth noting here that at the Gasyard Debate, Duddy apparently called into question the veracity of the document after it was handed to him. According to Faoi Driocht, Duddy “challenged the scholars present [at the Gasyard Debate] to check when that so called document that was presented to him at the gasyard debate was actually produced[.] He verified the contents of the document, but as a summary but not an accurate summary. But again, stressed that no document was ever produced at the time” (RT0908-01 2009: Faoi Driocht, Post 8).

²⁹⁸ This is also an example of a less official source being trusted more than an official one.

²⁹⁹ This might also be tied to the natural distrust of the British Government which reigns in the Republican community. After the NA Documents were released, Slainte50 stated for example “The more I read of these 30 year FOI documents [NA Documents] -the more convinced I become that much of their contents were written in a retrospective manner in some regards and in others totally fabricated or forged to suit the British intelligence machine....believe all in these documents at your peril.// They should not be relied on as reliable sources to uphold anyone argument” (RT1112-03 2011: Slainte50, Post 5).

³⁰⁰ A hyperlink to the original article has been removed.

he confirmed the content of the the FOI documents as containing the offer he relayed to McGuinness.

In 2006 and 2009, [Morrison created a timeline of events](#),³⁰¹ published in *Daily Ireland* and *An Phoblacht*, in which he wrote:

“5 July

After exchanges, Mountain Climber’s offer (concessions in relation to aspects of the five demands) goes further than ICJP’s understanding of government position. Sinn Fein’s Danny Morrison secretly visits hunger strikers. Separately, he meets prison OC Brendan McFarlane, explains what Mountain Climber is offering should hunger strike be terminated.”

The details of that offer are outlined in [Ten Men Dead on pages 292-294](#).³⁰²

According to him now, ‘the British had yet to even formulate its position, never mind proposing a deal’. What then, was his purpose in visiting the prison on July 5 under special arrangements made by the British (Rusty Nail as quoted in RT1112-03 2011: Newry Republican, Post 52)?

The original blog post by Rusty Nail was posted on “Slugger O’Toole” on 31st December, 2011 (Rusty Nail 2011a), by which point the NA Documents had already been released to the public and been made available online (RT1112-03 2011: inla-supporter, Post 3). As can be seen from Newry Republican’s post, Rusty Nail relies heavily on older statements from Morrison and the book by Beresford, *Ten Men Dead*, which was first published in 1987 (Beresford 1994), long before the NA or FOI Documents were released. In fact, despite being readily available, Rusty Nail, and by association Newry Republican, makes no use of the newly released NA Documents, which indicate that Morrison is correct and that the British had not formulated their position by 5th July, 1981 (Hennessey 2014: 311-312).³⁰³ Whilst Twomey (Rusty Nail) has stated that she had not given the NA Documents more than a cursory overview due to her commitments to the Belfast Project (Twomey: personal communication), the same cannot be assumed of Newry Republican. By posting Rusty Nail’s article, they tacitly give approval of the information contained therein and with the NA Documents in the public domain, it is surprising that Newry Republican made no mention of them in their post.

³⁰¹ A hyperlink to the original article has been removed. I was unable to find the original source for either article.

³⁰² A hyperlink to the quotation has been removed.

³⁰³ See Chapter 6.2.3 for more information.

It should be stressed once again that I do not believe that any of the users were playing with the facts intentionally. Whilst they used the evidence to say what they wanted it to say rather than on the basis of what it actually said, I do not believe they willingly set out to misrepresent the evidence. The fact that the behaviour is found on either side of the debate suggests that this is a tendency that is found in everyone, rather than in any one particular group of people.³⁰⁴ As people, we tend to read evidence through the lens of our own beliefs and the information that we have read previous to the evidence. We never approach a topic from a totally impartial angle.³⁰⁵ Nonetheless, it might be argued that the behaviour exhibited in these discussions by the community, intentional or not, has interesting implications for Folkloristics as it might help to explain why certain events have numerous folk narratives which mention them whilst others have none.

Users' preference for one piece of evidence over another returns us to the degree to which this online debate and the various conflicting narratives it reveals are very much like spoken historical narratives, not least those narratives that were already part of tradition, such as Sinn Féin's narrative. The importance of preferred content or the "well-made story" over reality is reminiscent of how people commonly adapt a folk narrative, such as a historical legend, to suit their contemporary needs and those of the audience.³⁰⁶ As the various quotations from the website have shown, whilst the internet appears to be a semi-formal medium due to its emphasis on the written word (and because official material is regularly presented on it), much of it is also often highly informal and un-vetted. Many of the posts in question are very close in form to the spoken word. They seem to have been written quickly with little consideration for their long-term preservation. This is evident from those quotations that have been given which show all kinds of spelling and formatting errors (many of them accidental). In a similar way, the grammar of the postings tends to take the form of more informal, spoken language than formal, written language. Finally, it is also interesting to see, as noted above, the way that formatting, such as italics or emboldened words, often seems to be used to replicate tone of voice, as a means of placing emphasis on information that is deemed to be more important. If we ignore the fact that the forum is primarily a written one, the image of the discussion on the threads is rather like that of the discussions in the spoken *ceili* that Cashman recorded during his time in Aghyaran (Cashman 2011: 52-93).

³⁰⁴ It could be argued that this thesis is a good example of confirmation bias because it looks only at posts which support its argument.

³⁰⁵ I include myself in this statement. This feature will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.0.2.

³⁰⁶ For example, Glassie states that "different people are free to create personal places within a tradition, whether of storytelling or novel-writing by synthesizing uniquely to suit their own taste an opinion. There will be more to [the story of] Mackan Hill. Different people will know and emphasize differently" (Glassie 1995: 229).

In short, this is further evidence that such internet discussion like that analysed in this sub-chapter should be regarded essentially as a new manifestation of oral discussion rather than formal expressions of standpoints (even though it is automatically preserved for others to see and use later, like official materials). This has quite important implications because it shows, first of all, the way in which all kinds of material can be used alongside each other as fodder for a community's folk narratives, not least when the community has lost its trust in official materials. Here we have seen again and again official documents being treated as having little more value than oral narratives. At the same time, not least because they are preserved in writing, we also find these essentially "oral" postings being treated as if they are official sources. A great deal of blurring is taking place, which can have some dangerous implications in a society like Northern Ireland which has a long history of violence. In fact, it may be that the processes discussed here have helped prolong the violence in the country as each group creates their own narratives about the same event. Another significant aspect of the preceding discussion about offers made or not made to the hunger strikers is that it implies that official documents are seen as being useful if they serve the community's purpose (and the narratives the community espouses). Seen in this way, the official documents are being treated like pieces of folklore by the community: if they run counter to the narrative the community or person wishes to tell, they will be disregarded in favour of more appropriate sources.

6.4.4.2 The Debate Continues into 2013

For all that one might have assumed that the release of the NA Documents in 2011 would have seen an end to the debate, it is clear that the Republican community continued to debate the evidence and O'Rawe's claims of an alleged offer being accepted and later rejected. By this point in the debate, it seems that pretty much everyone had chosen a side and entrenched themselves, and the debate had simply become simply a matter of trying to convince the other side that they and their narrative were wrong. At the same time, those that supported O'Rawe's version of events began to demand that the question be taken further and be investigated in a public inquiry like that concerning the events of Bloody Sunday. This idea was first broached in 2009 (*cf.* RT0911-01 2009; RT0911-02 2009), but little seems to have been done about it. A recurrent theme throughout the threads of 2011 and 2012 was that a public inquiry or a truth commission should be set up to decide the truth of the events once and for all. Sinn Féin, however, has as yet never responded to these calls and without their participation little can be done. In the end, the debate appears to have become stuck there.

Little new information has since been provided, and neither side has conceded ground to the other. The debate will naturally continue as long as uncertainty is allowed to flourish, allowing the story to remain in the realm of historical legend.

6.4.5 2013-Present: A Conclusion of Sorts

Since the end of 2012, roughly ten new threads have been made dealing with the hunger strike debate. Six of these threads were made in 2013, garnering at least 555 replies, whilst the four which have so far been posted in 2014 have at present amassed only 49 replies.³⁰⁷ The content of these postings shows that there has been little movement in the debate since 2012 and the number of posts clearly indicates that the community on “Republican.ie” has become bored with the debate. If one compares the number of threads and posts made in 2009 with the number made since 2013, one sees that 18 threads dealing with the subject of the hunger strikes were begun in 2009, receiving a total of 3,039 replies, but only ten threads have been made since January, 2013, attracting fewer than 1,000 posts overall over the space of 16 months.³⁰⁸ The apparent lack of interest in the debate is clearly indicated in RT1402-01 (2014) about a recent conference, held in February, 2014 (Pádraig 2014). According to Mellows1922, whilst the conference was attended by O’Rawe and others who support him,³⁰⁹ very few people turned up to listen to them speak (RT1402-01 2014: Mellows1922, Post 8 and Post 11). Furthermore those few threads that have so far been made in 2014 all seem to reflect the community’s apathy towards the subject, as they seem to have garnered very little attention.³¹⁰ It may be that either the community has had enough of a discussion that goes nowhere or that it knows that very little will come from continuing to debate the issue as neither side will change its mind. This apathy is also likely supported by the fact that Sinn Féin is currently still refusing to participate in an inquiry.³¹¹ As noted above, without their participation in an inquiry, the results will mean nothing and the public will not get the answers they want. This leaves the community on “Republican.ie” with nothing new to discuss and only old arguments to rehash.

³⁰⁷ This was the true at the time of writing: Wednesday, 7th May, 2014.

³⁰⁸ Using these numbers as a reference, the thread to post ratio is also noticeably different. In 2009 there were roughly 167 posts for each thread made, but since 2013 there have only been roughly 60 posts for each thread posted. That is less than half of the number of posts per thread from 2009.

³⁰⁹ The other speakers were Tommy McKearney, Carrie McIntyre, Gerard Hodgkins, Thomas ‘Dixie’ Elliot — the same Dixie Elliot who took part in the debate on the website — and Gerard Foster, see Pádraig 2014.

³¹⁰ See RT1402-01 2014; RT1403-01 2014; RT1403-02 2014; RT1404-02 2014. RT1403-01 has since been moved to the sub-forum “Activism” and RT1403-02 to the sub-forum “Videos”.

³¹¹ Sinn Féin have ignored the calls for any inquiry into the matter. Whilst they have not outright refused, their silence is indicative of a refusal.

Despite these recent indications of general apathy, it is nonetheless worth noting those aspects that can still awaken some degree of interest in 2013. As can be seen from one thread (RT1403-01 2014),³¹² Carrie Twomey (Rusty Nail)³¹³ intended to speak publically in April 2014 about her series of blog posts which deal with the hunger strike entitled “55 Hours” which were first published on “The Pensive Quill”, Anthony McIntyre’s blog (Twomey 2013e).³¹⁴ The four original blog posts caused the largest amount of recent responses on “Republican.ie”. Roughly 402 of the 555 posts from that year were made on the four threads which referred to and discussed the individual blog posts.³¹⁵

What is perhaps most noticeable about the posts in these four threads, and the other recent postings on the website dealing with the hunger strike debate is that they add little to what has gone before. This section will not belabour the points already made in this chapter with any close analysis of the similar threads posted in 2013 or 2014. Not only would such a discussion involve the simple reiteration of points made before, it would involve essentially giving further examples of the same type of arguments and behaviour, albeit from a later date, without providing any further evidence. For example, we find Comrade Foster making the same claims as others have made in the past — that McFarlane has admitted that he accepted an offer from the British government, as O’Rawe has claimed (RT1305-02 2013: Comrade Foster, Post 36) — whilst Mellows1922 continues to argue against this claim (RT1305-02 2013: Mellows1922, Post 39).³¹⁶ More than a year has passed since the National Archives released the British government’s documents (National Archive Documents 2011) and the National University of Ireland, Galway, published Duddy’s notes online (Duddy 2011), but the users continue to make the same arguments as before. The new evidence seems to have had little effect: Posters like Seabird and Mellows1922 continue to support Sinn Féin’s narrative, and inla-supporter, Comrade Foster and others continue to support O’Rawe. Whilst the posts are certainly relevant to the project, their implications have already been discussed in depth in earlier sections and there is little need to go into them in any detail. Very little has changed over the six years since the first thread appeared in 2008.

³¹² Twomey spoke at Connolly Book Store, Dublin on 5th April, 2014, RT1403-01 2014: Mise Éire, Post 1. This post will not be quoted in Appendix B as all it is a picture advertising the information presented here.

³¹³ As has been noted earlier, Anthony McIntyre is Twomey’s husband and a known critic of Sinn Féin. Both he and Twomey are known supporters of O’Rawe’s article. See Chapter 6.4.2 for more information.

³¹⁴ Twomey 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; 2013d. These four blog posts have since been combined into a unified blog post on the same website, Twomey 2013e.

³¹⁵ See RT1305-01 2013; RT1305-02 2013; RT1305-03 2013; RT1305-04 2013.

³¹⁶ This debate involves a statement made by McFarlane about the Mountain Climber process which was misquoted by Rusty Nail in an article from 2009: see Rusty Nail 2009c. See Chapter 6.4.3.1 for more information about this quotation and the discussion surrounding it.

Perhaps little needs to have changed, however. It has been argued throughout this sub-chapter that the treatment of the two core narratives and the various pieces of evidence has been very reminiscent of how a community tends to treat their folk narratives. Whilst users have changed, they nonetheless seem to take on the received traditions, adopting one of the two core narratives, and then using the available evidence (official or otherwise) to suit the narrative they support, disregarding anything they cannot accept. We have previously noted this behaviour in Chapter 6.4.4.1 which attempted to highlight how the users accepted or rejected new and old evidence depending on which of the narratives they prefer. In short, as has been noted earlier, fed by the lack of hard evidence, the said narratives seem to be very similar to earlier oral folk narratives told about historical events. They also behave in a similar way. Furthermore, if we accept the argument that all folklore is a manifestation of a community's identity (*cf.* Oring 1994a and 1994b), there is little likelihood that these narratives or the standpoints behind them are going to change in the near future. They feed identity, and identity feeds them. Those Republicans who are generally opposed to Sinn Féin's direction or feel that they have been betrayed by Sinn Féin since the Good Friday Agreement have found further indication of Sinn Féin's duplicity in O'Rawe's book (O'Rawe 2005) and the subsequently released evidence.³¹⁷ In a similar way, for those Republicans who support Sinn Féin, the evidence either invalidates parts of O'Rawe's claims (and therefore all of them) or is not conclusive enough, meaning that little has changed for them either. The debate changes little because it does not need to; it serves its purpose in allowing the various sides to strengthen their barricades as has been witnessed on "Republican.ie". The same seems to be going on elsewhere, both online and off, and in this way, this debate is just part of the cultural-hegemonic battle between pro-Sinn Féin Republicans and anti-Sinn Féin Republicans. discussed previously in Chapter 6.3.

Perhaps what this period of the debate shows us is that whilst not reaching a clear conclusion, the matter has come to a impasse of sorts. As mentioned above, all that has changed is that the narrative which uses O'Rawe's original claims as its foundation now appears to be fully-formed. Before the debate focussed on details relating to particular events, such as the Gasyard Debate; to statements made by a politician or person involved in the strike, such as Brendan "Bik" McFarlane; or the wording of a document, such those contained in the FOI Documents or NA Documents. As Twomey's newly republished blog posts

³¹⁷ See Chapter 4.0.3 for a brief discussion about the split in the Republican community, and Chapter 6.3.3 for a discussion about how this is relevant to the debate about the hunger strike.

indicate, however, the debate now seems to have moved past this piecemeal approach, to settle on a general narrative which she claims uses:

the timeline created with documents from ‘Mountain Climber’ Brendan Duddy’s diary of ‘channel’ communications, official papers from the Thatcher Foundation Archive, excerpts from former Taoiseach Garrett Fitzgerald’s³¹⁸ autobiography, David Beresford’s *Ten Men Dead*, Padraig O’Malley’s book *Biting at the Grave*, and *INLA: Deadly Divisions* by Jack Holland and Henry McDonald, Danny Morrison’s published timelines, as well as first person accounts and the books of Richard O’Rawe and Gerry Adams (Twomey 2013e).

It is worth noting that each recent thread about Twomey’s series of blog posts has been posted by inla-supporter, a known supporter of O’Rawe, and Twomey is Rusty Nail,³¹⁹ the author of a number of pro-O’Rawe articles on the “Slugger O’Toole” site, some of which have been discussed in this chapter. With this in mind, it may come as no surprise that the article quoted above (Twomey 2013e) generally supports O’Rawe’s claims that there had been an offer on 5th July or that it uses the available evidence in a way which best presents its case. The four articles, and the unified version referenced above, are, in a sense, the culmination of a debate which has raged since 2005. As can be seen from the above quote, Twomey makes use of a large range of sources, some more official than others. As has frequently been remarked upon throughout this sub-chapter, the participants in the debate seem to hold *all* both official and unofficial sources as being of equal weight. This is possibly one of the first truly overt examples of such behaviour. It is also a good example of how other narratives influence the two core ones. Here we see Twomey using Adams’, FitzGerald’s and others’ narratives in order to create her own. She takes bits and pieces from each and moulds these smaller narratives into a much longer one which tells the story she wants told. From its humble beginnings in one man’s book (O’Rawe 2005), the narrative has gradually developed over time, through its manifestations in numerous articles in newspapers, and postings on blogs and websites, all of these versions eventually coalescing into the form that can be seen in Twomey’s blog which adds little new but simply firmly shapes it in line with a range of earlier voices that have added comments. It would thus seem O’Rawe and his supporters now have a fully formed account about the hunger strikers to rival that of Sinn Féin’s. It is probably quite safe to say that Twomey’s blog post will serve as further inspiration if not

³¹⁸ “Taoiseach” is the title of the Irish Prime Minister and Garrett FitzGerald held that position in Ireland during the time of the hunger strike.

³¹⁹ See Chapter 6.4.2 for more information about this.

foundation for subsequent versions of this narrative which will appear both on the internet and offline.

6.5 The Role of Hindsight in the Debate and in the Research

Where the directly preceding section summarises the present state of the debate, this sub-chapter will add some concluding thoughts about both the analysis and the debate on “Republican.ie”. Rather than meaning to form a core part of the analysis itself, it means to explore an interesting side-effect of the said analysis which has come to light over the course of the research, partially because it involves a discussion about myself as a researcher. It is intended to be an addendum to the research, one which explores how hindsight on the events under discussion might have influenced both the ongoing debate and the project as a whole. In many ways, hindsight is a powerful influence on the way we think about the past and it can be difficult to ignore or fully take into account. By discussing these issues, it is hoped that necessary attention will be drawn to them and their effect on both the posters and the researcher, and the methods employed to try and negate them in this project. It will, however, be left up to the reader to decide whether or not these methods have been successful.

First let us focus on the role of hindsight in the debate. It may not have been obvious from the various posts that have been discussed throughout this chapter, but some of the users feel that hindsight might have had some effect on how people view the contemporary evidence. The issue is first raised in 2009 and is mentioned only sparingly after that, but it is nonetheless an interesting point. We can take the following posts as examples:

240. Mellows1922: I honestly believe that context has been removed from the discussion and people are viewing things far differently with hindsight than they would have viewed them at the time. Talking about settling for anything better than what were the conditions etc. This from my understanding is not the kind of motivation that those undertaking the strike had at the time (RT0905-02 2009: Mellows1922, Post 240).

1,401. Mellows1922: So you would have went against Bobbys wishes ?³²⁰ It's lucky it was Bik that was in that position then chara is it not ? It's also an easy position you are making that decision from with nearly thirty years of hindsight to alter your perspective (RT0905-02 2009: Mellows1922, Post 1,401).

³²⁰ “Bobby” is Bobby Sands, the man who first went on the hunger strike in 1981 and was the first to die. Sands ordered that any offer from the British should have cast-iron guarantees on it. See Chapter 6.2 for more information.

13. peonyrose: Now and at the time are a generation apart. I see that all the time.

People cannot go back from now and make the same decision as they would at the time because they have changed. They are different, older, more experienced, alive, and aware of it. No-one can actually know what they would have said and done as individuals (RT0904-01 2009: peonyrose, Post 13).

6. peonyrose: Sometimes we may look back and see a lost opportunity in the past. But the situation was complex, trust was low, players were tired, and there was a determination from the very beginning of this hunger strike led from Bobby Sands to avoid the disappointing outcome of the previous aborted hunger strike.

The reality is that if the republican leaders as they are today were transported back to that time, it is doubtful that the same choices would be made. But that is not reality. We are all doing the best we can at any point to achieve the social and political change which is a lifelong commitment for us. It doesn't work to behave as though we have a personal Tardis. Because we don't (RT0904-02 2009: peonyrose, Post 6).

619. peonyrose: When people tell the same story a number of times, small details change. That is normal - either we remember things that we didn't earlier or we forget things that once were clear. And these were very difficult times that were also a lifetime ago (RT0905-02 2009: peonyrose, Post 619).

65. Mellows1922: No, I'd say Duddy is telling the truth when he says he took an offer from the Brits to the Army which contained a set of proposals and a demand by the Brits for the hunger strike to be called off before they would make any moves. A "trust us lads, you know you can do that" set of proposals. Something arch opponents of the Brit state seem to think in hindsight was a great deal (RT0906-02 2009: Mellows1922, Post 65).

995. peonyrose: My perspective is that the truth will never come out because even if you had complete transcripts of every phone call or face to face murmur either at H block or outside, whether with the Mountain Climber or Bik, all of those conversations would have taken place within the context of the time. And that context is different from today (RT0905-02 2009: peonyrose, Post 995).

These posts make a very valid point about the nature of the debate. 30 years after the protest it is perhaps easy to accept something which did not seem so palatable back then, or reject it without understanding the earlier context. It is also possible to reify the Five Demands (see Chapter 6.2.1) to the point where legitimate overtures from one side are no

longer seen as constituting an offer as they do not meet present expectations as to what that offer should contain. It is often easy to make decisions or draw new conclusions based on information partially removed from its original context. Whilst the evidence that has been slowly released over the years has provided new information about some of the context, simultaneously allowing other information to be inferred, the emotional and social context originally surrounding the strike is difficult to recreate or fully understand. The community and the participants have moved on.

Of course, not every poster on “Republican.ie” or member of the Republican community in Northern Ireland took part in the strike or the associated protest, but they were most certainly touched by it at the time or when growing up.³²¹ Therefore the more recent cult of martyrdom (*cf.* Ballard 1984: 6) which has come to surround the hunger strikers and the importance that has been placed on these individuals as near legendary figures is bound to influence how both younger and older members of the community today will respond to any information about the strike in 1981. It is easy to see how hindsight might play an important role in the discussions, as the quotes above suggest.

Hindsight has similarly played an important part in my own reaction to the posts I been reading read. When I first started reading all the various threads about the hunger strike debate, I had very little background knowledge of the events. Whilst I was aware of who the strikers were, many of the names of the key figures who have been regularly mentioned throughout the debate meant nothing to me. Moreover, as much of the evidence was quoted from other sources, sometimes poorly and without context, I often felt adrift in a sea of information.³²² I was able to read the books by O’Rawe (2005), Beresford (1994) and O’Malley (2001), but they were all written before any of the official evidence was released, which meant that the nature of much of the evidence was still unclear. Then in late 2013 I found Hennessey’s work which aimed to tackle the very questions raised by O’Rawe and had access to all the relevant documents (Hennessey 2014).³²³ Hennessey’s work is possibly the first scholarly work by a historian or academic to discuss O’Rawe’s claims with all the evidence at its disposal. After reading this systematic review of the evidence, a new issue arose for me. Whereas before late 2013 the evidence had been confusing and unclear, it was

³²¹ Chapter 6.2 provides an overview of the events in 1981, and Chapter 6.3 provides a discussion of the near legendary importance of the hunger strikers to the Republican community.

³²² It can be imagined that readers of this thesis may well have faced a similar issue, as numerous names, dates and documents have been referred to over the course of the analysis. It is hoped that that Chapter 6.2 and the bibliography will limit the degree of confusion they suffer.

³²³ In a quirk of fate, Hennessey’s book was on sale in Waterstones, a bookstore, in Belfast in December 2013 even though its copyright began in 2014.

now all placed in its proper context, meaning that often when writing this thesis I have had greater access to it than the users on “Republican.ie” in the past had. This meant that I could read a post from 2009, whilst being fully aware of information released in 2011 (which was, of course, unavailable to the poster). This is unavoidably going to influence how I initially responded to the post. This greater knowledge has sometimes made it tempting to make full use of my better-informed hindsight and ignore the original less-informed context of the post in order to make a point. After all, the more recent information would enable me to “show” how the posters were right or wrong about events, depending on my point of view, “indicating” how the extant evidence supported or contradicted their narratives. This issue has been compounded by the fact that I have not always known which documents were released when, which would have made it easy to use this confusion as a smokescreen. If I had taken such an approach I would of course have been allowing hindsight to influence my research. The issue has therefore become one of how to avoid the influence of hindsight and give an unfair image of the way the users saw events at the time of their postings.

In order to be fair to both the users and my own project, I have needed to make sure that hindsight has had as little influence as possible. The most obvious answer to this problem has been to limit myself to considering the evidence that existed at the time of the users’ posts. As mentioned above, one problem in this regard has been that it has not always been possible to find out which documents existed at any given time or in what form. For example, as mentioned earlier, the FOI Documents from 2009 which were published in Liam Clarke’s article on *The Times*’ website are no longer available in their original form (Clarke 2009b) and I have been unable to procure a copy from the website. Similarly, despite emails to *Londonderry Sentinel*, it has not been possible to obtain a copy of the NIO Documents in the form that they received them in 2010 (Londonderry Sentinel 2010). Whilst it has been possible to find copies of the individual documents elsewhere on the internet³²⁴ and in Hennessey’s book (Hennessey 2014), the form they took when first released now appears lost or unavailable for one reason or another. This has had important implications for the project as it means that it has been impossible to be fully certain exactly which documents the users had access to before 2012, something that makes it even harder to take my hindsight into account. Furthermore, how could I make sure that hindsight did not affect my own argument if I could not know exactly what the users knew at any given time?

Since it was difficult to be sure which documents had been made available at any given time before the end of 2011, I have decided to trust the users themselves. That is not to

³²⁴ The Margaret Thatcher Foundation’s online archive has been invaluable in this regard.

say that I would always believe whatever they said,³²⁵ but rather that when they claimed they were quoting, say, an FOI Document, I would have to trust that they were telling the truth. This has in turn meant that when interested in discussing how they adapt the source material, I have limited myself by relying on quotations made by that user or others at that time. Moreover, if I refer to evidence which seems to contradict or disagree with a given post, I have always tried to be reasonably certain that the author of the post has actually read that piece of evidence before making their statement. This is one of the reasons for why all the quotations of FOI Documents in this dissertation come from posts made by the users, rather than more official sources.

In some ways, trusting the users in this way has proven to be a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it has meant that I have been able to use their own posts as evidence for the apparent manipulation of the facts, since I can show that they know of one piece of evidence but have ignored it. On the other, it is impossible to know for certain exactly which documents the users chose to ignore, if any. Nonetheless, by trusting the users, even if at the expense of losing interesting material, it has been possible to avoid at least this potentially problematic aspect of hindsight.

6.6 Summary

This chapter has necessarily been long. Chapter 6.2 presented a historical narrative about the hunger strike in 1981; Chapter 6.3 exploring the social and political importance of the strike; Chapter 6.4 examining over five years of the on-line debate about the strike and the processes found therein; and Chapter 6.5 discussing the role that hindsight might have to play in the preceding discussion, both for the participants in the debate and the research involved in this dissertation. Whilst it might have been possible to separate these parts into own individual chapters, it was felt that as each subsequent section influenced the previous ones, making a thematic whole, it was best to keep them together. This has meant that the chapter has covered a number of complicated topics in perhaps less space than they deserve. This has been unavoidable, but it is hoped that this has not had a negative effect on the clarification of the various ideas and concepts discussed within the chapter.

Before moving to the concluding chapter, it is perhaps best to discuss once more the stance that the project has taken towards the debate that has taken place on “Republican.ie”.

³²⁵ This does mean, however, that I did not disbelieve them either. As noted elsewhere, “truth” has never been an interest of this project.

The debate has so far spanned more than five years, over fifty threads and more than 5,000 posts. The topic is clearly highly important to the users and one that many of them, if not all, feel strongly about. The aim of this thesis has never been to give a complete picture of the debate as a whole. Such would have been impossible even for a project with more space available. The project has not attempted to indicate which side of the debate has emerged victorious or been more successful in making its case, if any. Whilst I am aware that it may appear at times that the discussion has taken sides because one side is quoted more than another at any given time, it cannot be stressed enough that taking sides in the debate has never been the intention of the project, which is more interested in answering the seven research questions listed in Chapter 1.0.1 and Chapter 6.1. In spite of this attempt to remain impartial, it is, of course, quite possible that my own interpretation of the events in 1981 might have unconsciously influenced which posts I chose to examine and those I chose to leave alone. Nonetheless, any post that has been referenced or quoted was essentially chosen because it appeared to offer the best or clearest example of the process under discussion. Should there appear to be any partiality, as has often been noted above, this has been quite unintentional, and I offer my apologies to any user who feels they have been misrepresented or unfairly quoted.

7. Conclusion

7.0.1 Introduction

As mentioned at the start, this thesis has been an exploration of an idea that struck me whilst reading *Blanketmen* by Richard O’Rawe (2005). Whilst reading the book, it seemed that if one looked beyond the written and relatively developed nature of the narrative,³²⁶ there was little difference between O’Rawe’s account and an oral folk narrative.³²⁷ One could easily imagine a group of people in a pub discussing the hunger strike in 1981 and O’Rawe providing an oral version of the account given in his book. In many ways, his work has the ring of a conspiracy theory to it: the idea of a shadowy cabal who worked behind the scenes without support from the greater Republican movement; people who were killed for the cabal’s benefit; the distortion of the original aim of Irish Republicanism; and the image of one man willing to put his head above the wall and denounce this aforementioned cabal and their secret. Whilst this thought was not the original impetus behind the project, it has been the key inspiration for a number of the topics discussed.

In order to discuss this topic, however, it was necessary to lay down the proper foundations of the subject matter in the first five chapters so that the reader would not get lost. Chapter One discussed the history of the project and my personal history in order to provide an explanation for why this project exists in the first place. Chapter Two provided a further explanation of the project by reviewing previous research on folklore which has been conducted in Northern Ireland and indicated that there was a serious lack of scholarship concerning folklore about the conflict. Chapter Three dealt with the methodology behind this project and its theoretical underpinnings so that the reader might understand how exactly the source material was obtained and the lens through which it was interpreted. Chapter Four served as an introduction to “Republican.ie” and the Republican community as a whole and

³²⁶ O’Rawe’s account diverges from a simple account of his own personal experience in that he goes into detail about a number of the key people’s lives and reasons for being in the prison. Such a multi-strand narrative is a lot harder to achieve in an oral narrative and is principally a characteristic of a written one: see Ong 2000: 139-155.

³²⁷ If I were to attempt to classify his narrative in folkloristic terms, I would argue that his book is a highly developed form of the “memorate” in that it is mostly a retelling of his own personal experiences: see Dégh and Vázsonyi 1974; and von Sydow 1948: 74-77, 87.

provided an example of a thread from the website so that the reader might understand how exactly discussions take place there. Chapter Five provided the historical context to the hunger strike in 1981 and gave the reader a grounding in Northern Irish history so that the greater issue surrounding the hunger strike debate would be more understandable. Together, these five chapters should have provided enough background knowledge for the discussion in Chapter Six to be understandable and far less esoteric than it might otherwise have been.

Chapter Six represents the “meat” of this thesis and accounts for just under a half of its page count. The chapter’s length was deemed necessary because each sub-chapter forms part of a thematic whole revolving around the case-study in Chapter 6.4. Chapter 6.2 was based on the same idea as Chapter Five, but provided a more detailed history focussed on the hunger strike in 1981 and its immediate historical context both before and after the event, which was somewhat different to Chapter Five which provided the greater historical context. Chapter 6.3 attempted to show why the hunger strikers were so important for the Northern Irish Catholic community, by arguing that they were essentially the embodiment of the Republican counter-hegemony in Northern Ireland. Chapter 6.4 was the core of this thesis: it presented both the new source material and the analysis of the said material. Over the course of the sub-chapter, six years of material were covered, albeit somewhat superficially, in order to analyse how the community on “Republican.ie” has responded to O’Rawe’s claims.

The analysis in Chapter 6.4 attempted to show how the users treated the source material, official and unofficial, much like they would oral narratives. Originally there were two potentially cultural-hegemonic narratives from which the users could choose: Sinn Féin’s narrative or O’Rawe’s. Over time these narratives have come to be supplemented by outside evidence. Sometimes this evidence has taken the form of personal experience narratives, or memorates, from people who participated in the strike in some form, such as Brendan Duddy or Danny Morrison. At other times, this evidence has come in the form of official documents from the British Government or Brendan Duddy’s notes from his time as the intermediary between the PIRA and the British Government. With the revelation of each new piece of evidence the users have been forced to either change their core narrative or change the evidence, much like a storyteller might change their story to suit new contexts. In this way, Chapter 6.4 highlighted how users have changed the core narratives to fit the evidence: by changing the date of the offer of a deal from O’Rawe’s original date or by admitting that there had been an offer but that it had taken the form of a dialogue rather than a formal offer. It also showed how users have attempted to change or ignore pieces of evidence to better fit these core narratives, amongst other things through the clever use of formatting which can draw the

reader's attention to positive information in a document and away from contradictory statements. Sometimes they have simply ignored the evidence of an offer. By doing so, the users have seemed to imply that the core plot of their chosen, established narrative is more important than the smaller details, much like the core plot of a folk narrative tends to be more important than the individual motifs. Moreover, the way in which the users have treated official documents or statements, changing their meaning or dating, would likewise appear to indicate that to the users these documents were no more fixed than any other source in the debate, meaning that they too took on the characteristics of oral narratives in their minds. This is, of course, a serious matter not least because it implies a general lack of trust in official sources by the community.

The analysis in Chapter 6.4 only sought to examine this behaviour and what it signified; it did not attempt to discuss the implications of this behaviour. It intended more to prove the theory that the debate surrounding the hunger strike in 1981 and the narratives about it found on "Republican.ie" were comparable to oral narratives. The analysis shows us, amongst other things, how legends come into being and maintain themselves. Due to this, the discussion in Chapter 6.4 and the rest of Chapter Six may have felt somewhat underdeveloped, an issue this concluding chapter hopes to rectify to some degree. In order to do this, this chapter will review three major strands which have been prominent throughout the analysis in Chapter 6.4: History³²⁸ and folklore; the internet and oral tradition; and the role of the two Republican hegemonies.³²⁹ However, before this final discussion can begin, it is best to begin by presenting my personal position on the debate itself, so that the reader might be fully aware of which "side" I now fall on, if any.

7.0.2 My Position on the Debate

It was mentioned in Chapter Six that although the project was uninterested in taking part in the debate as such, I, as a man from Northern Ireland, cannot be a disinterested party. Certainly as a Constitutional Irish Nationalist and weak Sinn Féin supporter,³³⁰ the material lies close to my realm of experience and so it naturally touches me in some manner. However, as mentioned in Chapter 1.0.2, as someone who was brought up in a Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community with a Unionist family, the topic does not affect me as greatly as it might a member of the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community. The

³²⁸ "History", with a capital "H", is used to denote the academic discipline, the systematic, objective and academic study of history, and any accounts produced by such a study.

³²⁹ See Chapter 6.3 for more information.

³³⁰ See Chapter 1.0.1 for more information about my political views.

hunger strikers are not as important to the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist identity in Northern Ireland as they are to the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican one and have very little, if any, presence in their cultural heritage.³³¹ For me, the strikers are less embodiments of my personal cultural values and more examples of the lengths people went to during the conflict to achieve what they felt was necessary. Nonetheless, even if we were to ignore my cultural and political background, it is impossible to study a topic such as this without developing some kind of opinion based on both the users' posts and the various pieces of evidence mentioned throughout the debate. It is better to acknowledge this than to pretend it does not exist in the interests of the appearance of objectivity.

My position is simple and has been heavily influenced by Hennessey's reading of the evidence (Hennessey 2014).³³² This is likely because his was the first scholarly work available which dealt with the matter and the one which presented all the available evidence in an understandable manner. Like many of the users,³³³ I do not feel that the truth will ever come out about what exactly happened in July, 1981, as too much time has passed and memories will now remember the events through the lens of contemporary knowledge. Nonetheless, I believe that O'Rawe believes in everything that he says in *Blanketmen* (2005) and I do not feel he has any hidden motives in publishing the work. His account has found some support from the documents released by both Brendan Duddy (Duddy 2011) and the British Government in the form of the FOI Documents and the NA Documents (British Government 2011).³³⁴ With all that said, his account has also been contradicted in small ways by the documents released by the British Government and to my mind these inconsistencies make it hard to believe him fully.

As I understand matters, it is very clear that the British did offer the PIRA something and that it was either rejected by the PIRA for some reason or the PIRA's response was deemed not good enough by the British and they rescinded the offer. It seems clear from the evidence available today that this offer was made after 5th July; the earliest documented is dated 6th July, 1981, and therefore it would seem impossible for O'Rawe and McFarlane to accept an offer on the 5th when one had not been formally made. Due to this fact, I do not believe that Sinn Féin, or Gerry Adams, rejected an acceptance from the prisoners, nor do I believe that Adams would have been willing to sacrifice six men's lives purely to gain more votes in future elections. I am personally more inclined to believe that McFarlane supported

³³¹ This is based on personal experience rather than any empirical evidence.

³³² See Chapter 6.2 for more information about what happened in 1981.

³³³ See Chapter 6.5 for more information about this.

³³⁴ See Chapter 6.4.1, Chapter 6.4.3 and Chapter 6.4.4 for more information.

the backchannel communications and that Adams or someone else pushed too hard when the British Government were very firm that they had no intention of negotiating. This push from the PIRA eventually led the talks to collapse because neither side was willing to compromise, which ultimately meant that six more men died before the strike was ended by the surviving strikers' families. It was extremely unfortunate that this happened, but it does not make Sinn Féin culpable in the way that O'Rawe claims they are. In short, to my mind, the truth lies somewhere between the two narratives.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that this position is not final. It is partially based on the fact that O'Rawe has been unable to provide any evidence of the two comms between McFarlane and Adams in which he claims the prisoners accepted the offer and then had it rejected. It is also based on the fact that O'Rawe claims that the prisoners on the wing celebrated after hearing his conversation with McFarlane (O'Rawe 2005: 181), yet very few have come forward to verify this.³³⁵ Some might argue that since O'Rawe was correct about the offer, should he not also be correct about the acceptance and rejection? As the evidence contradicts his chronology and even suggests that the content of the offer was different, I find it hard to accept this line of reasoning either. If more people came forth and admitted to having heard the conversation or the comms could be produced, I would definitely change my mind, but until then I do not find enough in the evidence to agree with O'Rawe that the prisoners accepted an offer and had it rejected by Sinn Féin.

It is hoped that by showing my hand, as it were, any bias present in my choice of posts will be readily apparent and can be taken into account when reading the analysis. It is quite possible that I have unintentionally chosen material which disagrees with the position detailed above precisely so that the analysis can indicate how the material is wrong. The only defence to that is to repeat that the posts quoted in Chapter 6.4 have been those which seem to present the best examples of whichever process is being discussed at the time. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that such an influence from my position on O'Rawe's claims should impact the analysis or its conclusions as they are all based on posts made by the users themselves (as was discussed in Chapter 6.5), even if better examples of the behaviour discussed through Chapter 6.4 could be found amongst those who agree with my position. There is no real way of

³³⁵ Some might argue that the taped transcript should be enough, but, as noted in Chapter 6.4.3.3 it is shrouded in mystery and no one knows who is on it. I find myself unable to accept it as a valid source for this reason. The only person who seems to have come forward was Gerard Clarke in 2009: see RT0906-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 1; Elliot 2009. Colm Scullion, who shared O'Rawe's cell, states that an offer came in on 6th July, 1981, but that no deal was made: see RT0803-01 2008: Liam Lynch, Post 233; and Derry Journal 2008.

knowing how much influence my position has had on this thesis, but each reader can now decide for themselves.

7.0.3 History and Folklore

History and folklore have always been intertwined. According to the Jakob Grimm, “legends are more historical” than wonder-tales (Grimm 1981: 1); E. Estyn Evans felt that “folktales may throw light on some of the dark places and problems of archaeology and culture history” (Evans 1965: 363); and two key studies of folk narratives in Northern Ireland have found themselves revolving around historical accounts (Glassie 1995; Cashman 2011). Even categories such as “historical legend” and “memorate” indicate the importance of history and memory of past events to folklore. This project is thus only following on from an age old tradition in Folkloristics, but hopes to shine new light on the old relationship by examining the interplay between History and folklore in modern weblore.

History, the discipline, its methods and products, is not the same as history, which refers simply to a narrative or account of events in the past.³³⁶ Whilst the difference between them can often be slight and both inform each other, there is a difference between the History of the hunger strikers and the history of the hunger strikers. The former is represented by Hennessey’s work (2014) or Beresford’s account (1994) for instance. The latter finds itself in autobiographies and the discussion on “Republican.ie”.³³⁷ The former attempts to provide a scholarly and neutral account of the events in 1981 and account for all the evidence. The latter seems to be more concerned with the truth as the teller, or their audience, sees it and only uses the evidence most suited to it (*cf.* Oring 2008). For this reason, we are trained as children in school to respect Historical accounts more than historical ones.

There are nonetheless ways in which History affects history and in doing so affects the folklore that is closely tied up with history. As part of the study in Chapter 6.4 it was shown how the community has made use of a range of sources in order to find out the truth of what happened in 1981 during the hunger strike. What was hopefully readily apparent was that two core narratives had evolved: one which was called “the Sinn Féin narrative” and the other called “O’Rawe’s narrative”. The former maintained the version of events which was set forth in Beresford’s work, *Ten Men Dead* (1994), which stated that the British had let the ten men die and there had never been any workable deal. O’Rawe’s narrative challenged this and said

³³⁶ For other works which look at the interplay between History/history and folklore: see Beiner 2004; and 2009.

³³⁷ The users on “Republican.ie” fall into a role similar to Glassie’s historians: see Glassie 1995: 69-70, 111-114, 650-651.

not only that had there been a workable deal, but also that the prisoners had accepted the said deal and that Sinn Féin, specifically Gerry Adams, had rejected this acceptance and subsequently let six men die for political gain. As we have seen throughout the analysis, the users on “Republican.ie” have heavy use of any source readably available, such as first-hand accounts from Brendan Duddy, Danny Morrison, Brendan “Bik” McFarlane and documents released by the British Government. By behaving in this manner, the users on “Republican.ie” have used Historical methods in order to build their histories of the hunger strike in 1981. They are, however, “histories”, rather than “Histories”, because, as Chapter 6.4 clearly showed, the users have not treated their source material objectively. Those accounts which have favoured the user’s narrative have been more likely to be quoted, whilst those that have contradicted it have been more likely to be ignored. Quotations have been changed as have dates in an effort to prove one narrative or the other correct. As was discussed in Chapter 6.4, it seems that the message or agenda behind the narrative has been more important than the facts, making them histories rather than Histories.

This behaviour nevertheless indicates that even though the end-product appears to the academic (if not the user) to be a history, the users have wanted to present a History. One reason for this is that this would give their particular narrative more weight and thus make it easier to believe.³³⁸ This adoption of Historical methods, such as referencing and quoting, has been part of the debate ever since O’Rawe first published his book. In his work, O’Rawe similarly commonly quotes other sources and provides a bibliography at the end of his book. Although his work might not quite pass academic muster, it does assume the trappings of an academic work in order to make it more believable in the same way that legend tellers use certain phrases to make their stories more believable (*cf.* Oring 2008). The attempt to convince is nonetheless one feature that makes O’Rawe’s work comparable to folk narratives, in this case memorates. In their discussion of memorates, Dégh and Vázsonyi (1974) offer a number of examples of tellers using a number of different techniques to increase the reliability of their tale (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1974: 227, 230-231). It would thus appear that by borrowing the trappings of History, O’Rawe was engaged in the similar behaviour as someone who changes a story from “he told me” to “this happened to me” in that he uses certain techniques to make his tale appear more believable.. Moreover, as the users engage in

³³⁸ By separating History and history, I may have implied that the former is more worthy than the other and in this way suggested that the latter is false. As Glassie puts it, “[t]he problem in our definition of the historical legend [or history] rises out of our need to see the history of other people as inferior to our own” (Glassie 1995: 746). I can only state that I feel neither is more worthy than the other and that the only true difference between the two is the checks and balances which History has in order to make an account “objective”. Both are equally worthy and both have equal value since value and worth are determined on a personal basis.

the same behaviour throughout the discussion, their behaviour would seem to be an even clearer an example of this. If we accept the argument made earlier that O’Rawe’s account is essentially a literary memorate then it stands to reason that this is an example of how History has influenced (folk) history.

This discussion raises an interesting question: does all History end up as history when it leaves the hands of those who write it, and is all history then just a form of folk history, when it comes down to it?³³⁹ What is meant by this is: Does a community like that in Northern Ireland regularly use Historical accounts, documents or methods to create a historical account which they feel is more accurate than the former? Like Glassie says:

There is one past by many histories [...] they are either all histories or all folk histories. All involve collecting facts about the past and arranging them artfully to explore the problems of the present. Academic historians create a history appropriate to their needs, and the no less serious historians of places like Ballymenone [and “Republican.ie”] do the same: they create one that suits theirs (Glassie 1995: 650).

Much of the material discussed in Chapter 6.4 has shown what Glassie talks about above: that the users were actively looking for material which confirmed, rather than disproved, their respective narratives. In doing so, they moved out of the realm of History and into history, which was argued above to be within the realm of folklore. If we accept Elliot Oring’s argument that folklore is ultimately an expression of a community’s or person’s identity (Oring 1994a; and 1994b), then it makes sense that someone would use History up to the point that it threatened this identity. As history is not held up to the same standards as History,³⁴⁰ it is easier to disregard evidence which does not suit one’s narrative or to change it so that it becomes more suitable. By making sure that the evidence suits the narrative, the person protects their identity and continues to express it in a way that makes them feel comfortable. This behaviour was highlighted throughout the analysis in Chapter 6.4, where most often it appeared that, for the posters, proving that the user’s preferred narrative was right in some regard seemed often to be more important than following the totality of the evidence. What the discussion on “Republican.ie” seems to suggest is that History will always turn into folk history once freed from the confines of academic rigor, because people are more likely to adapt the evidence to suit themselves or their audience. People’s attitudes towards

³³⁹ This question has the corollary: Does the distinction between folk history and other forms of history, such as popular history, have any theoretical merit? This project does not intend to discuss that particular issue however.

³⁴⁰ A user on “Republican.ie” does not have to have their narrative about the hunger strike peer-reviewed, for example.

the official sources and even History itself will also have an effect on this process as was shown earlier in Chapter 6.4.

This project has joined a number of other projects which have used History to explore folk history and memory.³⁴¹ By highlighting how the users have changed, adapted or ignored pertinent evidence throughout the debate, the analysis in Chapter 6.4 has attempt to show how the users on “Republican.ie”, and thus possibly all of us, choose what they will remember and what they will forget or disregard. By examining how the community remembers an event and how they make use of evidence to create the history of the said event, we can see what ideas, concepts or beliefs they feel are important to them.³⁴² Moreover, by paying attention to the Historical record, we can see those events in a community’s past which they do not tell stories about either. Silences are often important and History can provide us with a good way of locating them. With regards to Northern Ireland, this is extremely important because it could explain why the two main communities continue to fight each other and why paramilitary violence remains an issue in the region. By examining both their folk histories and their silences, folklorists might be able to explore the issue of how culture contributes to the conflict in Northern Ireland. This thesis has not gone that far, but it has provided a window into the smaller conflict between Sinn Féin’s supporters and anti-GFA Republicans.

7.0.4 Internet and Oral Tradition

According to Dr Trevor J. Blank, “the same scholarly attention that folklorists have given to reporting the manifestations of creativity and the traditional knowledge of people in the “real world” has not yet been fully applied to Internet contexts” (Blank 2013: 106). This project takes a small step towards changing that because whilst the internet has not been the main focus of this project’s case-study, it has proven an important factor nonetheless. This thesis has regularly made the argument that the discussions seen on “Republican.ie” have clear resonances with the kind of oral discussion one might have at a pub or a ceili. In this regard, it would appear the internet has not had an significant effect on the narratives told by people, but it could be argued that it is precisely this which makes the internet so important. What this discussions shows us is how the internet, whilst also allowing room for new forms of folklore, also creates new hybrid forms of older types of folklore such as the oral tradition.

³⁴¹ Guy Beiner has done similar work on the folk history of the 1798 United Irishmen rebellion: Beiner 2009. Bryndís Björgvinsdóttir has likewise done related work on the folk memory of the attacks by Turkish sailors in 1627: Bryndís Björgvinsdóttir 2006.

³⁴² The relevance of this to this particular project will be discussed in Chapter 7.0.5.

It has been argued throughout Chapter 6.4 that the discussion on “Republican.ie” reflected an more informal one than might otherwise have been expected from a primarily a written medium. We are trained both through school and social convention to expect a certain level of formality from written language, with demands of correct spelling and grammar,³⁴³ which we might not otherwise demand of spoken language. The internet as a written medium, however, does not demand any level of formality in our language and individual sites are forced to make their own rules about the style of language they would prefer, if any. People are free to write as they wish and on many occasions, people write in the way that they speak. This is quite obvious just by reading the comments on a YouTube video, where things like text-speak³⁴⁴ and new verb forms³⁴⁵ are quite common. A similar attitude towards formality can be seen on “Republican.ie”. The users’ posts have been full of language errors, formatting mistakes and strange grammar which have reflected spoken language more often than they do our typically formal, written language. If we accept that the internet reflects spoken language more than it does our traditional image of written language, it might be time for us to accept that the limits of the concept of “oral tradition” are in need of redefinition.³⁴⁶

The concept of “oral tradition” has been a cornerstone of folklore for a long time, especially where folk narratives are concerned. There was an idea that folklorists should go out and record narratives in their original context even if many did not do this. Even now, despite our dependence on the internet, some folklorists still suggest that research conducted on the internet is not “real” field-work, that the internet cannot replace the “real” field where people speak and tell more authentic folk narratives.³⁴⁷ This thinking implies that even now folklorists still remain enamoured with the idea of the oral tradition as being a more

³⁴³ As an aside, it would be particularly interesting to research how many people on the internet identify as “grammar Nazis”, that is people who demand to see correct grammar and punctuation to the point of pedantry, despite the lack of any formal institution governing language policy in English.

³⁴⁴ Text-speak is a type of orthography which attempts to shorten words through the use of number and letters to imply the pronunciation. Examples include “ur” for “you’re” and “your”, “l8r” for “later” or “y” for “why”. The principal motivation behind it was to allow people to write more in their text messages which often have a character limit.

³⁴⁵ My favourite is the new form of “have”. It is quite common to see “would of”, “should of” and “could of” on the internet instead of “would have”/“would’ve”, “should have”/“should’ve” or “could have”/“could’ve”.

³⁴⁶ This argument echoes the work done by John Miles Foley on the similarities between oral tradition and the internet: see Foley 2010 and 2012. Although, interestingly Foley does not discuss the similarities between spoken language and certain types of written language found on the internet, like the type discussed in this thesis, but focusses on other areas where the two overlap.

³⁴⁷ This is based on personal experience. In a panel at the ISFNR Conference, 2013 in Vilnius, a number of people expressed dismay at the idea that internet research would replace what they viewed as the “real” fieldwork of folklorists. This is not to suggest that most folklorists think this way, but rather that this line of thinking is still current within the field and accepted by many.

“authentic” form of folklore.³⁴⁸ The attitude towards the internet *vis à vis* oral tradition is perhaps best summed up in the first half of the following statement from Jan Brunvand:

I have at times disparaged such Internet lore as too static and stereo- typed to be interesting to a folklorist; after all, many people simply forward the material that they find amusing, delivering it simultaneously to everyone on their address list without variation or commentary. But in collecting some of this cyberlore I've found that people still do interact in the good old folk manner in whatever way the medium allows (Brunvand 2001: 65).

Brunvand's original position was that folklore on the internet was not varied enough to be of interest. He originally had the same bias towards written language discussed earlier in Chapter 6.4: the idea that written material is fixed, that we cannot change it or perhaps we do not try to change it.

Nonetheless, he goes on to admit “that people still do interact in the good old folk manner” (Brunvand 2001: 65; see above), by which one assumes he means that folklore on the internet is as variable online as it is offline. This is exemplified by the discussion on “Republican.ie” over the “correct” narrative about the hunger strike in 1981, in which a user would post their preferred narrative or a piece of evidence supporting it and people would comment on it in a negative or positive manner. The discussion on the forum thus embodies all the traits we would usually associate with oral tradition. Internet chat sites, blogging, and interactive media (amongst others), just like text messages, clearly allow for a type of communication more that is like the spoken language than the written. As a result of this, perhaps we should begin to redefine the concept of “oral tradition” which no longer fully encapsulates the nature of folklore transmission in the digital age and the ever-increasing presence the internet has in our lives and its influence on orality.³⁴⁹

There is one final comment to be made about the internet. Whilst it was argued above that the debate on “Republican.ie” would have almost certainly occurred offline (in pubs, on the street and at work) if the internet had not existed,³⁵⁰ it is clear that the internet has most certainly facilitated the debate in various ways. Not only has the internet given a greater

³⁴⁸ This position is particularly surprising considering the work done by Dundes and Pagter or Dégh on folklore in modern media: see Dundes and Pagter 1992; and Dégh 1994.

³⁴⁹ The internet is almost omnipresent in the lives of most people in Europe and North America, at least, with most people owning a smart-phone and/or personal computer of some kind. Communication between friends can take place more often on the internet than it does over the phone or face-to-face as people connect with others across the globe and create long-distance friendships and even relationships.

³⁵⁰ This is evident from the fact the debate also occurred in newspaper articles and conferences, and public debates continue to be held discussing the topic.

number of people access to the debate, thereby spreading the message further afield in a shorter time than before, it has also granted the users of “Republican.ie” unparalleled access to the source material that they might not have had before. This is important because it means that people now have greater direct access to source information, both right and wrong, than before, material which before might have come to them only second or third hand. This will naturally have an effect on how modern folk narratives develop around certain events although it is not possible to guess in what way.³⁵¹ It is interesting to compare the discussion about historical events in Glassie’s *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* to what this thesis has been discussing as it shows that the processes Glassie described are very similar to the ones discussed in Chapter 6.4. It certainly does mean that the boundaries between History and folk history might shrink even further in the future as communities are better able to access all the information needed to build their narratives. Whether this happens or not remains to be seen. Whatever the case, as Chapter 6.4 shows, it is clear that even in the digital age with more source material at hand, people are still adapting the evidence to suit their preferred narratives. Whilst allowing users such direct access to sources, it might be remembered that the internet also provides folklorists better access to analyse at first-hand how exactly communities take up and reject this new information in their new digital and oral narratives. This provides a range of new opportunities for the future.

7.0.5 Republican Hegemony and Northern Ireland

Chapter 6.4 showed that the debate investigated in this thesis revolves around whether or not Sinn Féin, and especially Gerry Adams, allowed six men to die so that they could gain more votes. That being said, at the very heart of the debate is an issue of power in the Republican community in Northern Ireland. As was discussed in Chapter 4 and later in Chapter 6.3, the Republican community has essentially been split into two major groupings: those Republicans who accept and support Sinn Féin as a Republican party and those Republicans who reject Sinn Féin as a Republican party. The latter group is comprised mostly of then smaller Republican parties such as 32 County Sovereignty Movement, Republican Sinn Féin, éirígí and others. At the moment, these groups form a minority in the greater Republican community³⁵² and are constantly challenging Sinn Féin’s hegemony, both cultural and

³⁵¹ Another point is that the discussion on “Republican.ie” has demonstrated that even on the internet, one can still find tradition-bearers and community representatives, despite being a multi-vocal medium which does not necessarily favour the voice of one person over another.

³⁵² “The greater Republican community” is here used to denote anyone who identifies themselves as Republican, which would include Sinn Féin supporters if they so choose.

political, within this community. As discussed in Chapter 6.3.3, the hunger strike debate can be viewed as actually a cultural-hegemonic battle in which Sinn Féin's opponents are attempting to break Sinn Féin's hegemony within the Republican and Catholic/Nationalist/Republican communities by attacking one of Sinn Féin's key legends to show how they have betrayed the Republican cause.

As has been noted earlier, it is unlikely that O'Rawe wrote the book with this conflict originally in mind, but his accusations do provide a powerful weapon with which to attack Sinn Féin. As was discussed in Chapter 6.3, the hunger strikers are viewed in an almost saint-like manner by the Republican community. They are paragons of Republican virtue and Sinn Féin has built a legacy around them. After the hunger strike ended, Thatcher appeared to have been beaten by the strikers because the British Government quickly implemented changes to the prison regime which reflected a number of the Five Demands.³⁵³ For the Republican community, the strike thus proved to be a great victory since Thatcher's concessions, as they appeared to the Republicans, granted them the legitimacy which they had been searching for. Not only had a number of the strikers been elected to either the British or Irish parliaments during the process of the strike, but the British Government had also tacitly recognised the Republican prisoners' political status. Sinn Féin has since used this to slowly gain recognition, acceptance and further legitimacy in Northern Ireland to the point at which they are now the largest Nationalist/Republican political party in the region. To question Sinn Féin's narrative about the hunger strikers is thus to question Sinn Féin's position within the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Republican communities. In this way, it might be said that O'Rawe has threatened Sinn Féin's hegemony and presented the other Republican groups with a means to promote their own causes.

Seen in this light, it might be said that O'Rawe's narrative taps into, or possibly represents the alternative form of Irish Republicanism at present being propagated by the anti-GFA parties in Northern Ireland. This may be one of the reasons for why the book and its argument have gained such strong support amongst Sinn Féin's detractors, such as the IRSP and Carrie Twomey (Rusty Nail). The narrative which O'Rawe first released, and which has later been developed by others such as Twomey, Dixie Elliot and inla-supporter, gives credence to the claims that Sinn Féin has in recent years betrayed Republicanism by joining with the DUP in the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive.³⁵⁴ It does this by indicating

³⁵³ See Chapter 6.3 for more information about this.

³⁵⁴ The Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive refer to Northern Ireland's regional parliament and cabinet respectively. Both of these are British institutions and thus part of the British Government and State.

that Sinn Féin's betrayal has roots deeper in the past, running back at least as far back as 1981, for the narrative not only suggests that Sinn Féin were in secret talks with the British Government (of which not even everyone in the Army Council was aware), but also that they allowed six men to die in a move that was for the profit of Sinn Féin rather than in accordance with any Republican principle. If they betrayed the hunger strikers, the argument goes, is it so surprising that they might have been in bed with the British Government? In short, O'Rawe's narrative can be seen as providing more evidence of Sinn Féin's apparent duplicity, thereby falling in line with the alternative to Sinn Féin's hegemony offered by their opponents.

With regard to Northern Ireland as a whole, the results of this project have further importance because they indicate that even within the Republican community the past continues to be highly contested. It is clear that the ways in which the various communities remember the conflict needs greater examination, not least because it has an effect on the way the coming generations see and react to this history (as can be seen in the recent flag protests). As noted in Chapter 2.0.2, folk narrative research about the conflict in Northern Ireland is sorely lacking. With the exception of Carson Williams' mostly unused project for the Community Relations Council (Carson Williams 2000; and 2001) and Ballard (1984), few folklorists appear to be actively researching folk narratives related to The Troubles. Issues over the past nonetheless continue to cause tensions between the two major communities; indeed dealing with the past was one of the issues which recently derailed the cross-party talks led by Richard Haass (BBC 2014). The work by Glassie (1995) and Cashman (2011) indicates that stories of historical events are regularly told within the community, and not least stories which use the conflict as a frame of reference. The prevailing existence of Republican songs is well known to anyone who has set foot inside an Irish pub. Folklorists are thus encouraged to follow in the footsteps of Madeleine Leonard (*cf.* Leonard 2006) and research the way in which folk narratives such as those mentioned by Glassie and Cashman and revealed by this thesis have contributed to tensions between the two communities and the ways in which people in Northern Ireland continue to discuss the conflict in their daily lives and upbringing of their children. Perhaps folklorists can help to shine a light on the processes behind this form of remembering by highlighting the way in which communities discuss their history on and off line, and also those things that they try to forget.

If one community cannot come to some form of agreement over the narrative of an event which happened just over 30 years ago, within living memory for many people, how is it possible for two opposing communities ever to come to an agreement? By exploring exactly how these communities communicate the past to their members, folklorists might be able to

help with this process.³⁵⁵ This thesis is not meant to be an example of such a project. Nonetheless, the material shows that it is possible for folklorists to explore the divisions between the various communities in Northern Ireland and the role folklore plays in maintaining them. Perhaps if we better understood why each side thinks the way they do we might be more able to find some kind of compromise.

7.0.6 Final Thoughts

This project has come a long way since it was first envisioned as an exploratory project which would collect any and all folk narratives relating to the present conflict in Northern Ireland. Over the past two years, it was refined and focused for various reasons until it reached the form it is found in today. It is thus the culmination of a project which has been ongoing in one shape or another since 2010, but also hopefully represents the beginning of a far larger project on modern Northern Irish folklore about the conflict. It is hoped that the ideas and concepts discussed within the project have been logical and that they have made sense. It is furthermore hoped that they have stimulated thought on the issues raised and topics discussed, and that they will hopefully inspire others to learn more about Northern Ireland and The Troubles, and research Northern Irish folklore both on and off line. As has been noted above, too few folklorists seem to be pursuing research into this area which encourages allows the possibility of important comparative research into how the folklore of Northern Ireland parallels that of other regions which have seen wide-scale inter-ethnic conflicts. There is certainly little question that this project has but scratched the surface of the folkloristic materials that can be found both online and offline in Northern Ireland.

All things come to an end and so too must this thesis. Perhaps the best way to end it is to return to the start and look at the project's research questions:

1. Can this debate be considered to involve folklore?
2. Does this debate tell us anything about the formation of folk narratives in communities?
3. As the debate involves a historical event, which has been documented, is there any interplay between Historical discourses about the event and folk discourses about it?

³⁵⁵ There is, of course, a possibility that the thesis could exacerbate the problem rather than helping to resolve it, which is always a risk when people participate in any form of social work through scholarship. It could well be that the material will cause the debate on "Republican.ie" to flare up anew, users using this project to provide yet more material for their respective narratives.

4. Might the internet have had any influence on this debate? If so, in what way?
5. What does the debate surrounding the hunger strike of 1981 tell us about the Irish Republican community?
6. Can we safely assume that the online community on “Republican.ie” is representative of the greater Irish Republican community in Northern Ireland?
7. Does this research project have any relevance for Northern Ireland and the ongoing community tensions and violence in the region? If so, what?

All of these questions have been answered to some degree throughout this project. Question 1 can only be answered with a yes and in fact the debate itself could be considered as “legendry”, as it is part “of a range of expressions which gravitate around such narratives” (Oring 2008: 128). The answer to Question 2 can be found through Chapter 6.4 and this current chapter, but in short it can be stated that the debate has told us much about the formation of folk narratives. Question 3 was succinctly answered in Chapter 7.0.3 and no more need be said about it. The same might be said about Question 4, which is answered in Chapter 7.0.4. With regard to Question 5, the debate about the hunger strike of 1981 tells us that the Republican community is deeply fractured and that this debate is just one more cultural-hegemonic battle in the fight for dominance between Sinn Féin and their opponents. Question 6 has proven harder to answer because the very nature of the internet means that there are users on “Republican.ie” who do not come from the Irish Republican community in Northern Ireland. Be that as it may, I would argue that it is representative of that community because the website was chosen on the basis of providing the best possible cross-section of the Republican community. Moreover, the discussions in Chapter 6.4 showed how the users drew on other Republican sources, such as blog posts and friends, and so it can be assumed that the website’s community is representative of the wider Irish Republican community in Northern Ireland. The issues discussed in Chapter 4.0.3 do not negate these points. Finally, Question 7’s answer can be found in the previous section, Chapter 7.0.5. In short the project indicates how folklore research can explore the ongoing tensions between the two major communities in Northern Ireland, and the violence that continues to erupt in the region. Hopefully, if nothing else, the research in this thesis will serve as inspiration for further research into this matter.

Appendix A: Users' Responses to the Draft-Thesis

In this appendix can be found the entirety of the thread “Research- Draft Thesis” (RT1404-01 2014) up to 1st May, 2014, in which a draft of this current thesis was presented to the community on “Republican.ie” with the intention of letting them view and comment on it before it was handed in to the University of Iceland. Due to space restraints, it was not possible to put the users’ responses to the draft in the main body of the thesis. Instead they have been put here, so that the reader may see them if they so wish. The posts will be treated in the same way as they have been throughout the main text of the thesis with the exception that individual posts will not have a reference after them. In this way, the treatment posts in this appendix will mirror the treatment of the posts in Chapter 4.0.4.

“Research- Draft Thesis” (RT1404-01 2014)

1. Rikki: So, after a long wait, my thesis has been completed. Or rather, a draft of it has been completed. A very rough draft, which needs a lot of work. My deadline is 8th May and over the next four weeks I will be reworking rather a lot of it.

So, I bet there are some who’ve been wondering what I’ve been doing with my time and the results of that survey. So, I’m going to give you a rundown of everything and explain it all.

Basically, when I first came to the website, I wasn’t sure what I was going to find. I’m a folklorist by trade; I’m specifically interested in the stories people tell each other. As someone from Northern Ireland, I’m really interested in the stories we tell each other about The Troubles, how these stories help create group identity and how these stories help maintain the tensions between the PUL and CNR communities. I grew up mostly outside this. My parents are Protestants, but they mostly tried to keep me away from anything and I have friends across the board. Politically I’m a Constitutional Nationalist, I believe in a United Ireland and would like one, but ultimately it’s not high on my list of priorities. Believe in electoral means as the only way to achieve it. When I vote, which is rarely, I normally choose Sinn Féin, but I am more likely not to vote and Sinn Féin have a tendency to lose in my constituency which is a Unionist stronghold.

Anyway, so I had no idea what I would find on here. I had done some interviews with various people before I came here and I wasn't getting too far along with my research, living in Iceland made it hard to meet people, which is why I came to the internet and someone pointed me in the direction of this website. I spent my first few months just

reading “General Discussion” from the start and seeing what I could see. I noticed a lot of really interesting stuff.

You guys all have interesting stories that you allude to, but never really discuss outright. The allusion alone was really interesting. You guys use newspapers to create discussion and it spirals off into discussions about stuff you all know, but don’t need to mention openly or prefer not to. It was all so cool, but it wasn’t what grabbed me. I really wanted to talk about cultural hegemony, à la Gramsci, and how the stories you tell helped challenge the British/PUL hegemony in NI and keep your community somewhat separated from the larger community in the region. Then I noticed the divisions between the two camps: anti-GFA and pro-GFA or possibly more accurately anti-SF and pro-SF and so I wanted to discuss that and then expand to the other stuff. Wanted to discuss the competing hegemonies within the Republican community and then show how the same processes were used to keep you separate from the rest of us in NI.

That’s when I really started noticing all the threads on the hunger strike in 1981 and O’Rawe. There have been a lot. Over 50 and more than 5,500³⁵⁶ posts about the topic since 2008. There was a thread made about a week ago on the topic. It is hugely important to you all and that drew me in like a magnet. So I started looking at the debate. I’ve read just about every thread you have made on the hunger strike issue since 2008. All the ones I could find, including the massive one from 2009 which has 2,346 replies. I looked at how you looked at the evidence; what you did with the evidence; what the debate was about; what its deeper issue might be; and what role the internet played in it all. I first had to educate myself on the issue and gulped down any book I could find on the matter. Came to some interesting conclusions, feel I’ve read some really interesting stuff. Ended up that I had so much material from that alone that I didn’t have room to look at anything else. So this thesis is a case-study of the debate surrounding O’Rawe’s claims and the hunger strike and how it relates to folklore.

I’m presenting it here, in its draft form, because I want you guys to have the chance to read over it before I hand it in for marking so if you want me to add any of your comments in, I can if I have enough room. So with that in mind, you’ve got roughly three weeks, until 1st May to read it and if you want to write a response, whether to disagree with me or whatever, I’ll put it in, space permitting. After that date, I will be rushing to finish and won’t have time to add anything new to it. The thesis is really long, though. It’s 181 pages, over 75,000 words, which is basically the length of a doctoral thesis. For you guys, I’d say the chapters most important to you are Chapters 1, 4, 6 and 7. I warn you, over the next

³⁵⁶ This number is, in fact, wrong and there have been roughly 5,085 posts made, rather than over 5,500. The figure in the post is based on a number which included threads which were not directly related to the hunger strike debate, but mentioned it in some way. These have since been removed from the thread and reply counts elsewhere in the thesis.

four weeks, this draft is probably going to change substantially, but the core arguments should remain the same, so bear that in mind when making any comments.

Finally, I want to say two things. Thank you for allowing me to come on the website and carry out my research. I appreciate it more than words can say. Thank you for the survey answers (see Chapter Four) and thank you for just putting up with me. I know I didn't really talk and that's kind of explained in Chapter Two (which needs badly rewritten to suit the actual thesis and not the planned thesis it was originally written for). Secondly, I want to apologise for any possible offence my thesis may cause. I don't want or intend to offend anyone, but I realise that this topic is highly sensitive for you guys and I am intruding in a big way by researching it and writing my thesis on it. I have tried to be as fair and unbiased as possible in my treatment of your posts and what I thought people said. Hopefully no one will be offended, but if anyone is, I am truly sorry and it was never my intention.

Anyway, the thesis can be downloaded from here: <http://tinyurl.com/pmznhkv>³⁵⁷

2. hammer and sickle: I will look forward to reading it over the next few days.

3. Laochra Uladh: A very original project, great stuff Rikki

4. Che1916: Some great reading Rikki, even though I personally do not agree with your overall evaluation of the HS deal. It's a shame that we won't have a project again like this - at least for awhile.

Really liked your bit about McIvor as well!

I also liked the fact a part of my contribution to the survey was included (this is not my 1st account on here).

5. inla-supporter: I only scanned it quickly but would also disagree with your evaluation and conclusions. I noticed that you don't believe an offer went in to the prison on July 5th - you can listen on the link to what Duddy says about that in the interview.

<https://m.youtube.co...h?v=2kEVdaUcCgY>

6. Mellows1922: aul Dungiven Sur singled out for being a grumpy bollix

7. Rikki: [Quoting Post 2 above]

³⁵⁷ This link remained active until 1st May, 2014, at which point the file was removed from the location the link led to.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts when you're done.

[Quoting Post 3 above]

Thanks. Good to hear.

[Quoting Post 4 above]

That's fair. We can't all agree.

There was something interesting stuff in the survey, things that surprised me. It was a pity that that I didn't get to use all of it, but it was designed to answer slightly different questions than this project.

[Quoting Post 5 above]

I'm aware that Duddy's said various things about the matter, but his own notes and the British documents disagree with that from mine and Hennessey's reading of them .

And ultimately, I have to use something as my baseline. In my own evaluation, I prefer what the documents from the time say, rather than what people's memories tell us. But that's my own personal opinion on the matter. The thesis is essentially an examination of how you, the community on this website and thus the greater Republican community (maybe all of us), evaluate all these bits of evidence, especially when they appear to contradict each other and how people end up disagreeing with each other over the same sentence or whatever.

[Quoting Post 6 above]

Ha, not singled-out, but he was the one who didn't want me asking for interviews, so. My field really likes interviews and stuff, so it was important to explain why I didn't do any. He was perfectly right to say what he did. Don't blame him. Made for a more interesting project in my mind.

8. Mellows1922: his was the first forum name I read so I commented on it, I quickly realised a lot of others were quoted further on

very interesting read

I suspect your thesis will be used in arguments similar to the ones you used for your thesis

9. Red_Maggie: Just downloaded this and will look forward to reading it over the next couple of days. It's this sort of thing where us on here can really show what we're made of.

Keep this thread alive, the discourse over the next few days could make great reading in itself.

10. Rikki: [Quoting Post 8 above]

Of that, I am in no doubt.

It was such an interesting topic. It's why I really want to research folklore on The Troubles. I want to see what we remember; how we remember it; why we remember it that way; but also what we forget or try to ignore. This project was my first attempt at doing that.

I am not saying it's very good. Especially not in this form and if anyone feels I've made a serious error somewhere, please let me know and I'll take your point under consideration.

It was really hard, to be honest. I'd read a post from 2009, but had knowledge of everything up to 2013/14. I had to spend ages making sure I didn't evaluate the posts using knowledge which wasn't available at the time they were posted. It was really hard to do. I'm not even sure if I've succeeded. It may be that my entire thesis is based on flawed methodology or flawed logic. I don't really have time to change it, though, so.

I've tried my best to do right by you, guys. That's always been high on my list of priorities.

[Quoting Post 9 above]

Look forward to your thoughts.

I like the forum. I like the people on here. You have interesting debates and you've really opened my eyes to the nature of Irish Republicanism and how varied it really is.

11. Mellows1922: I think it's a very good read Rikki, my one issue is maybe identifying a posters (alleged) real world identity to a username, only one instance that I saw, but still, unless it was the poster identifying himself that resulted in your conclusion ?

12. Red_Maggie: [Quoting Post 11 above]

I'd agree with Mellows on this. If the poster has identified themselves then that's one thing, although I'm even unsure about repeating it. I'm also mindful of the fact that you've identified yourself as well.

13. Rikki: [Quoting Post 11 above]

There were three posters identified. One has since confirmed that they are that person and it appears to be fairly common knowledge anyway. One announced their name on here,

repeatedly, and their screen name identifies them anyway. The other's identity was deduced from how people talk about them on here and how they responded to a particular post. All three people have been prominent in the offline debate as well, so I didn't think it would be too much of a problem.

Do you think it best that I remove this person's name? Perfectly happy to if you think it's best.

[Quoting Post 12 above]

It was mostly to provide background information and context for their posts. It wasn't done with any malicious intent, but I can see why it might be problematic.

I did think about whether or not to identify myself. In the end, I have to though. You'll all find out my name eventually, this thesis will be accessible from a special university website unless people want me to block access to it. More than that, though, it was about being genuine and repaying you for allowing me to conduct my research. You know, so I'm not accused of being a spy again. 😊

14. Irishmo: Been reading thru it today though haven't read all of it yet. It really is very interesting and I think you did a great job in trying to present the topic in an objective (as possible) way. One thing I have always thought it would be very interesting to do a study on an internet "community" such as this one. Well I realize that is not the main focus of your thesis it lends a modern element to it that could very well be groundbreaking. Best of luck and well done - well so far anyway - lol.

PS - Regarding identities of posters, I would definitely contact each one personally and make sure they are okay with it.

15. Seabird: I find it strange there is no level of debate happening now after posting your thesis. I am sure there are some disgruntled readers in the house and further afield. I have only read a portion of it but will give it dedicated time in the upcoming days.

16. michael-mcivorYour some researcher Rikki- if I did not know any better I would say that you are -----/-----who cares-

See you have Leo Green down as a INLA Volunteer during the 1980 Hunger Strike-(page 80)-during this week also- another of your old coincidence's-

Clear your head and go for a Troll - sorry I meant Stroll-

17. Mellows1922: [Quoting Post 16 above]

he gave his name in the thesis

did you read all of it ?

18. michael-mcivor: [Quoting post 17 above]

I read it all- I am on about his username elsewhere –

19. Mellows1922: [Quoting Post 18 above]

what were your thoughts on it mo chara ?

overall, rather than specific criticisms

20. Rikki: [Quoting Post 14 above]

The internet is an interesting field and one that my discipline is only really coming to grips with. It poses a lot of different questions, new genres and methodologies. I like it, personally, but that may be because I have spent a lot of my life online.

Thanks for the support.

[Quoting Post 15 above]

Whilst I know people may use it in the debate, it's not my intention. I have to admit, I am kind of curious to see what will develop after I'm finished.

[Quoting Post 16 above]

My old coincidences? I'm afraid you've lost me there. If you have something you'd like to say go for it.

The Leo Green mistake is just that, a mistake and either came from me misreading whichever book gave the information or from me editing the order of the names and not catching the brackets. Thanks for pointing it out though. I'll make sure to change that when I get round to that section.

[Quoting Post 18 above]

Again, I'm afraid you'll have to be rather specific. I have a lot of usernames across the internet. None of them are double-barrelled though. I prefer to use single word screen-names, so I think you may have me confused with someone else.

21. michael-mcivor: [Quoting Post 19 above]

I Enjoyed most of it to be honest-although the writer likes to back Sinn Fein by allowing others to have a good kick at them- which is fair-

22. Mellows1922: [Quoting Post 21 above]

It's a thesis though, it is by a long stretch the most impartial dissection of this issue thus far, up to now everybody has had a dog in the fight so motives etc were questioned as a default position depending on what version of events you came down on, I think this largely unbiased view adds a lot to the dialogue

23. Seabird: [Quoting Post 22 above]

You are right, it also takes the facts and strips away all the spin that has been added by Carrie and O'Rawe and the rest, to sway others into following them down the gangplank! I feel he hit the nail on the head when he said that he went on the facts of what was written in the Duddy notes. I always said that people needed to realise the many years that have past; memories are not as good as they use to be. At the end of the day, his conclusion aligns with our stance on the event.

24. OpenFire: Well done, Rikki.

A well structured, well analysed and well presented thesis. I found the objectivity refreshing. It made me view the issues discussed in a new light. The objectivity is not something I have in my repertoire.

See to be honest though....yer man Mellows was only writing what Seabird told him to lol.

I'm still sceptical...primarily because I'm a bastard.

Enjoyed that and will pass on the final version with your permission.

25. inla-supporter: To be frank, though admittedly I only scanned it, my first thoughts were 'what a load of shite'. I would suggest reading '55 hours' which is a more concise, analytical postmortem of the debate/revelations. If this is a thesis to counter '55 hours' it fails miserably though I'd agree with one point made and that being that the debate here has, for the time being, run its course with little desire to regurgitate the same old.

26. Mellows1922: [Quoting Post 25 above]

55 Hours is not more analytical on any level, this is, 55 Hours has far too much slant and bias and distorted "facts" to ever be accused of being analytical, 55 Hours has a premise and everything is adapted to fit that premise, this thesis takes the opposite approach which makes it far more reliable

27. inla-supporter: [Quoting Post 26 above]

Really?

28. Rikki: [Quoting Post 25 above]

This thesis has very little to do with “55 Hours”, to be honest. “55 Hours” seeks to create a timeline of the events based on all the relevant evidence. My thesis seeks to evaluate the debate and the way people on here have created narratives based on contradicting evidence. That I have a section which outlines one sequence of events doesn't mean it's the basis of the entire project.

If I were to recommend any work on the subject it would be *Hunger Strike: Margaret Thatcher's Battle with the IRA, 1980-1981* by Professor Thomas Hennessey, but I do not hide the fact that I have lent heavily on that work throughout my thesis.

Is there anything you think is particularly bad or needs changing? Any input is appreciated.

[Quoting Post 24 above]

Thank you. The final version will be accessible on a website some point in May. I'll provide the link when it is.

29. Seabird: [Quoting Post 28 above]

Rikki,

In fairness to you, if you had slammed SF reeling them in for their actions concerning the death of the HSers this thread would be hopping with debate (if you choose to call it that). However, you did not therefore they are going to ignore this and let it go away. That is really it in a nutshell, they cannot tolerate anyone to oppose their mode of analysis/thinking. They are right, the rest of us are either stupid or sheep. Simple as that.

I have not read the book you mentioned above but did scan through it. I really wanted to purchase it but chose food instead. LOL Thought it was a bit pricey. How much did you purchase it for, the one I was looking at was marked at 22.95.

30. inla-supporter: [Quoting Post 29 above]

Really cara? His whole thesis stands or falls around his claim that there was no offer on July 5th. In the two links below it is clear that both Duddy and Danny Bangers state otherwise-albeit Danny changed his position on that a number of times. In the documentary below Danny goes into a bit of detail about bringing in an offer on July 5th and claims that he was told by the prisoners that a Brit needed to come in to stand over that offer. In the

second clipping Duddy also goes into detail on Danny bringing in the offer on July 5th. Rikki claims this didn't happen and that Morrison and Duddy's accounts are wrong and down to memory lapses. That's why I thought his thesis was shite and not even worth studying.

<http://m.youtube.com...h?v=RtXCfLT9WdU>

<https://m.youtube.co...h?v=2kEVdaUcCgY>

31. inla-supporter: Rikki, as you know Dixie is no longer a member of the forum but here is what he has to say about the July 5th offer you claim never went in to the prison on that day.

Guest writer Thomas Dixie Elliot examining the paucity of Danny Morrison's version of events for July 5th 1981, when Morrison took an offer from the British into the prison.

Danny Morrison, writer, political commentator and former director of publicity for Sinn Féin in an Aussie bush hat, was recently interviewed by Michael Reade. Or rather he went walkabout, as they say Down Under.

This whole interview was another classic example of 'put that gun down Danny before you shoot yourself several times in both feet...' In this case the gun being a microphone.

The first half contained nothing other than people attacking, singling out, opposed to and vocal in their criticisms and denunciations of Gerry Adams and Sinn Féin.

"Anti-peace process Danny. You forgot to use fecking anti-peace process." I can hear Gerry shouting at his substitute from the dugout ...

Any new director of publicity for Sinn Féin should take note.

Then Danny stumbles off into the Hunger Strikes and this is when the shooting really begins

..

He claims Richard O'Rawe wrote a book and 'made allegations that there was a deal agreed between the British government and, and Sinn Féin...'

Richard O'Rawe said nothing of the sort: he said the British made an offer to end the

Hunger Strike which Bik and himself agreed contained enough to end it and sent word outside to that effect.

‘and particularly Gerry Adams ordered the prisoners to, not to accept it’, continued Danny.

Again Richard didn’t make that claim: he stated ‘a comm came in’ which stated, ‘that more was needed.’

‘Whereas I was in the prison on, on a particular day in July*, 1981 and...’ said Danny,

*That day was July 5th a Sunday.

And he continues...

But the whole premise of Richard O’Rawe’s book and his allegations is that I’m bringing a deal in. Whereas no offer had yet been made. And in fact no offer was made until Monday night, half past eleven Monday night, thirty six hours, thirty-six hours later. But in O’Rawe’s book he has Gerry Adams ordering the prisoners not to accept this offer on Monday afternoon.

Thats not what Brendan Duddy said at Belfast Feile while Danny sat in the audience failing to contradict what he was saying ...

In an interview with Barney Rowan at Belfast Feile Brendan Duddy said:

that although a document didn’t exist the RM had the detail of an offer, theres no argument about that. And at that particular point that offer was available to go into the prison and...and whatever. And what was not available at that time was the document.

When Rowan asked him did he ‘scribble’ the offer, Duddy replied that he wrote it very carefully.

Earlier Rowan had said to Duddy..“I think your sort of test which is to get someone into the prison on the *Sunday?”

* Note: “on the Sunday?”

Duddy took a drink of water and pointed to Danny Morrison in the audience and replied ...“Him!”

Duddy went on to say ‘that the person he wanted to get in with respect to you, Mr Morrison was Gerry Adams and they said..“No way is Adams going in. Right”!’

And [he pointed at Danny]:

so do not be offended, you were second choice. So I considered a positive way forward to get Danny Morrison in and I was also totally happy that *you were well aware of what was being said and what was on offer, so forth. So getting Danny Morrison in was, in my book, a major, major, step forward.

*Note: ‘you were well aware of what was being said and what was on offer, so forth.’

AND on Talk Back:

‘Morrison said that he explained to them [the hunger strikers] what was on offer’, adding ‘by the way, the offer that we were being offered through the Mountain Climber was a bigger and better offer than what the ICJP thought they had.’ He went on: ‘After I had seen the hunger strikers, we all agreed that this [the M/C offer] could be a resolution, but we wanted it guaranteed.’

This isn’t, to quote Danny, ‘hitting you with detail and overwhelming you...’: this is hitting you with facts and your own words.

‘But we wanted it guaranteed’ said Danny on Talk Back.

And that’s exactly what the Brits were doing on the Monday when the British were preparing the Draft Statement with Thatcher’s handwritten amendments.

This draft statement is what Danny is using to claim... ‘And in fact no offer was made until Monday night...’

Again I’ll refer you to Brendan Duddy at Belfast Feile and Danny himself on Talkback in regards to the ‘offer’ which he took in on July 5th, a Sunday.

The fact is that if someone, who had the facts of the Hunger Strikes to hand, were interviewing Danny I’d say it would be a case of Danny pulling off the mike and accusing the interviewer of ambushing him.

However what seems to be missing from all this is the comm or comms from Bik to Adams

in reference to the offer Brendan Duddy said he gave to Danny on that Sunday July 5th. Bik now admits there was something... 'And I said to Richard, this is amazing, this is a huge opportunity and I feel there's the potential here [in the British offer] to end this.'

Although there is a comm in Ten Men Dead in which Bik refers to meeting the 'Commission' (ICJP) on July 5th there, incredibly, is no comm in which Bik tells Adams about the potential to end it. I believe this 'missing' comm is the key to what happened on that occasion and for that reason I believe it won't see the light of day otherwise they'd be able to at least explain why it has either been withheld from David Beresford, the author ... or worse.

The rest of the interview had Danny, Gerry's substitute, dribbling through his own defence to score a few more own goals in regards to whether the boss was or wasn't in the IRA.
Posted in: Guest Writer,Hunger strike

<http://thepensivequi...g-bumblng.html>

32. Seabird: inla-supporter why post up Dixie's excuses, he was not in the thick nor did he hear anything ***well unless his story has changed*

All of you are leaning heavily on a woman from the United States that was not even in this country at the time nor did she visit during that time. ALL she has is hear-say and whatabouteries/could/should and would of to depend on. She is doing all in her power to destroy the movement out of anger and bitterness. And the memory of Duddy that clearly contradicts what was written on paper at the actual time of the Hunger Strike. Now I am not a betting woman but if I were, I would bet the written documentation is accurate and the memories of others has failed them.

I know how this story was spun and sold, I am not buying it. They tried to sell it to me in 2002, I did not buy it then and I am not buying it now. I am not filled with that much bitterness that I feel comfortable accusing another person of cold blooded murder off the back of spin, twist, turns and lies.....Sorry

Shame on all of you for falling for it. Sell a lie long enough and you begin to believe it yourself.

BTW I know Danny's story well, I believe him and will stand beside him in what he has to say any day than Carrie who has made her fame off of lies. I have not forgotten that bit of spin she tried to place out there on my partner a good man and a staunch republican. You won't find many to rebuke that.

33. inla-supporter: [Quoting Post 33 above]

Well cara it was Rikki who kept referring to Dixie in his 'thesis' . That's a new one for me about relying on a yank though I'm sure you don't really believe that as you have followed my input on the debate from the get go and you read the statement I gave at the gasyard outlining how and why the IRSP became involved in the controversy.

Which one of Danny's positions do you believe then cara as he has changed it several times? His position in the documentary which I linked in my last post was that he did indeed bring in an offer on July 5th and he further claimed that after discussing it with Bik and some of the Hunger Strikers what was needed was a Brit official to come in and stand over it. Are you saying now that Danny is mistaken, an aul memory lapse perhaps?

Shame on all of us-really?

34. michael-mcivor: [Quoting last sentence of Post 33 above]:

You can be ashamed of yourself as much as you want but I will be remembering the 10 Hunger- Strikers with pride who got the demands of the Brits for their comrades-

It's the same cry baby's who want around for years and years complaining that the Hunger -Strike achieved nothing who changed their story that the 5 demands were won after 4 Hunger - Strikers died -

35. Rikki: I would just like to remind everyone on here that you have until Thursday, i.e. 1st May, to make a comment on the draft for it to be included in the final project.

Inla-supporter:

I don't want you to think that I'm ignoring your posts to me, I've been busy writing revisions. I respect both yours and Dixie's positions on the matter. I just happen to disagree with them, much like you happen to disagree with my position. What I will say, though, is that whether or not I agreed with you that there had been an offer on 5th July, my thesis would still have analysed the same kind of behaviour. I would just have used other posts for it. Unless everyone had been in agreement, of course, and then I would've found another topic most likely. My thesis doesn't hang on whether there was an offer, but on how you, the users of "Republican.ie", responded to the various types of evidence about the event; which types you used; which you ignored; and how all of that went towards creating a narrative which agreed either with O'Rawe or with Sinn Féin, depending on the user.

To everyone:

I've written it in my thesis, but I'll write it here again. Thank you for letting me carry out my research on here. Thank you to those who answered my survey and who have responded to my draft here on this thread. I truly appreciate it.

Appendix B: Referenced Posts

In this appendix, the reader will find all the posts which have been referenced throughout this project, but for which no quote was provided or which were only partially quoted. The posts quoted here have been arranged by chapter and page number to provide the reader with easy references. In the interests of space, no post will be duplicated and if a more accessible version of the post can be found, such as the original article or post, the link to that will be contain in the reference provided in the main text. For similar reasons, quotations have not been included in the posts and their removal has not been indicated based on the idea that the quotation was someone else's words. Whilst this does remove context from the post and may make certain posts confusing, if every quotation were to be included, this appendix would become unwieldy. For a full view of the posts, the reader will have to register to "Republican.ie" and view them there. This is perhaps the best way, as it will allow the reader not only to see any quotations which have been removed, but the wider context in which the posts were made as the reader will have access to the entire conversation from which the posts have been taken.

Chapter Three

P.38: **1. Rikki:** Hey everyone.

As you may remember, I am currently doing some research on the use of stories on here. I'm currently looking at how you guys use newspaper articles, party statements, etc. and the kind of discussions that generates; especially the kinds of stories that pop up around them. As part of this research, I'd like to get to know the community a bit more: use of the website, political beliefs, some general background info (nothing revealing) and how much you trust/believe certain groups, organisations, etc. For all the background questions and political belief ones, there's the option to not disclose the information and no one but me will see anything specific. The results will appear ultimately in my thesis, but then they will just be statistics.

There's no pressure to take the survey. You don't have to if you don't want to, but I would appreciate it if you did. There are some instructions and some explanation on the first page, but if you have any questions, please let me know. Thanks.

A link to the survey: https://docs.google....Rm_XZI/viewform³⁵⁸ (RT1311-01 2013: Rikki, Post 1).

P.44: **1. belfast poster:** *I have added this online security tips that may help posters, It was drawn up by an RNU member to be distributed to all members but it just as relevant here Belfast 1916*

Essential technical security tips for Republicans – Version 1:

1 Make sure your password is complex for example Rats!!*2009txd by putting in capital letters and a combination of characters and numbers your password will be much stronger and difficult to guess or crack. Write it down somewhere safe and do not leave it lying around.

2 Strongly consider changing your password every 30 days it is an inconvenience but it greatly enhances your security.

3 Do not use the same password for your forum, social networking activities as the password for your e-mail or router ***ALWAYS MAKE THEM DIFFERENT*** it leads to much better security. Remember a forum administrator or technical support person may be able to see your password!

4 Ensure that you have a good up to date anti-virus program, if it is not kept up to date it will be useless.

5 Make sure you have modern firewall software installed on your laptop/ pc. Ie Microsoft Onecare is an anti virus and firewall which will run with windows vista.

6 It is critical that you download Microsoft updates . Quite often the PC will need a security update from the web make sure this is carried out because failure to do this means that all the other steps will be useless. There are programs called service packs from microsoft and you can set you pc do down load and install these automatically.

7 Using certain programs for illegal downloads bittorrent or limewire might leave you vulnerable to being hacked.

8 If you have a Virgin or BT router make sure it has wireless security enabled especially if you are using a laptop. The router must have a complex password set on it. If you don't do

³⁵⁸ This link is now inactive.

this hackers can gain easy access to your machine. If your router is unsecured not only does it make it easier for people to enter your machine but your neighbour could be stealing your internet bandwidth. In addition, your router has software on it called firmware. If required have it updated by technical person or a competent friend or family member with IT knowledge.

9 Another tip for users is never store politically sensitive/ personal / medical/ photos/ financial information on your PC, ipod, memory stick or data key. No PC is ever to be considered as secure and every hard disk can be forensically examined using specialist tools. When you are finished with your old pc get someone to take out the hard disk and smash it with a hammer. If you don't you could become the victim of identity theft or worse.

10 Consider using encryption software on your PC or portable device. There are several free packages available to the web which are excellent ie Truecrypt. Always remember that if your pc is stolen are you happy that the new owner has access to all your documents and files? Probably not!

11 Remember that every keystroke you make on the internet will be recorded first on your PC, second by your internet service provider (ISP) and finally by other state agencies. So be careful what you look up at midnight in the comfort of your own home because you are certainly not alone.

12 If you are using an e-mail address for political work we would strongly advise you to create a new account entirely with a new strong password and without your own name in it. While this is not essential it can avoid sending unnecessary material to the wrong sources or identifying yourself unnecessarily.

SECURITY AND SOCIAL NETWORKING:

Never use your own name on social networking sites choose a neutral one such as cats1990 or rats1990 etc you all get the general idea. From now on try to avoid sniperatwork etc etc. Remember every social networking site is transparent to the state so do not say anything from now on that would compromise your political integrity/ views or that of the group to which you belong. Instead of being in the comfort of your home talking to friends consider you are typing information which will be read by PSNI/ MI5 and others (immediately) and may be used in court against you. **THESE ARE FACTS!!!**

Critically, never debate anything on line that you couldn't defend at a public event ie the forum, your local bar or in a court.

Private Messages should be renamed PUBLIC MESSAGES and treated as such by all members as somebody else will be reading them.

There will be agents from other groups and security service imposters posting messages to cause conflict and sow confusion amongst different groups. Do not be drawn in these posts are there to drain your time and ferment conflict. At times we have seen the practice of users posting a controversial matter or a comment about armed struggle then log in with a different identity and argue in support or opposition to themselves!

So be warned always wait before posting ie don't shoot from the hip when something is posted because it may have been inserted to initiate an inappropriate debate by a third party. If you are in any doubt contact about any post or course of action or dangerous post contact your moderators immediately and investigate . And finally, never name individuals suspected of doing X, Y, or Z as it very bad security and may even land you or your group/ party in court with a law suit!

MOBILE PHONES:

Always remember all mobile phones remain completely active even when switched off. The only way to ensure any degree of privacy is to remove the BATTERY!, leave it at home or put it in a fully shielded environment ie high end microwave or fully shielded environment. Most modern cell phones can be GPS tracked and triangulated to within 3 feet. Iphones and the latest pda devices and laptops can be used as hypersensitive microphones up to 30 feet away. So if you need any degree of privacy we recommend you leave the phone behind!!!!

THINK AND ACT IN A SECURE MANNER!!

And post all you want and reply to any threat and exercise your right to defend your political position.

BUT DO IT IN A WISE AND CONSIDERED MANNER (RT0905-06 2009: Belfast poster, Post 1).

Chapter Four

P.53: **12. jimbojoe09:** Fair enough seany, its just that republicans have not dissented from republicanism, so they would not be “republican dissidents”. Plus the word dissident when associated with republicanism has come to create the idea of something negative. But i guess you also have a point so fair enough (RT1202-02 2012: jimbojoe09, Post 12).

Chapter Six

P.111: **22. Dixie Elliot:** What the hell do you mean ‘from our side of the house?’ a hell of a lot of former PIRA members would no longer want to be in that house of yours [Sinn Féin], however there were 10 men who died; all 10 who died were equally as brave and equally as committed to the struggle.

The committee from ‘your side of the house’ ensured that 10 men died rather than the 4 that had already broke Thatcher. History will eventually record that...Of that I’m certain (RT1201-01, 2012: Dixie Elliot, Post 22).

P.111: **61. Barrack Buster:** Your putting an argument across that is voided by the fact all of the participants in this debate are aware of the truth regarding the conclusion of the 1st Hunger Strike, and the decision to conceal that truth, or provide another explanation so as to maintain morale and sustain momentum.

The evidence is clear, the Brits were clear and concise they wanted, needed it stopped, Joe McDonnell defying his own body to buy time broke the back of Thatcher and brought Victory to the Hunger Strikers.

The response by those responsible for his care, his life was to spit on it, hide, return and ask for more. Sin é (RT1305-04 2013: Barrack Buster, Post 61).

P.113: **1. riseup:** A white line picket has been organised for wednesday 17th 12noon outside Dunville park Falls rd, in respect of the men of ‘81’ please bring picture of our courages 10 or irish tricolor, this will coincide with thatchers funeral [independent] ALL WELCOME ! We were never beaten by Thatcher -Tiocfaidh ar la (RT1304-02 2013: riseup, Post 1).

P.113: **5. Comrade Foster:** Those missing INLA comms, where could they be????????? Maybe they are with the rest of the missing Mountain Climber comms????? You know, the missing Mountain Climber comms that actually exist.....!!!!!!!!!!!! Just leaving to go to Derry for the RSM’s commemoration for the Ten Hunger Strikers that died. To think it should have been 6 less than the 10 (RT1305-04 2013: Comrade Foster, Post 5).

P.113: **18. OpenFire:** [quoting Post 17 below]
I would expect nothing less, a chara, but you are pontificating about ‘your side of the house’ so I ask again, why should there be an inquiry when the majority of families from

‘our side of the house’ don’t want one, don’t need one ? Surely, Sinn Fein are looking after the interests of their people....just as you are doing (RT1201-01 2012: OpenFire, Post 18).

- P.113: **19. Blanket:** a bit of humility and honesty could obviate the need for a formal enquiry and thus avoid the possibility of a political witch hunt - if that is what adams and co really fear.

on the issue of the families; they have enough to live with without people rapping their doors and canvassing their support for an enquiry: grief doesn’t evaporate even after thirty years; further with respect to the families this is not and nor should it be their call alone. their grief is enough to endure without adding the complexities of political and machiavelian dealings to adjudicate upon.

the evidence coupled with the linguistic sommersaults adams, morrison and bik have performed only reinforces the perception that richard o rawe is the only person who is being honest here. we deserve the truth and the desire for that truth is not motivated by an anti-sinn fein agenda, or any other agenda. it is motivated by a need to understand and come to terms with a tragic era in our history. sin e (RT1201-01 2012: Blanket, Post 19).

- P.113: **23. miley:** Some of you will take this the wrong way...deliberately.

It is not up to the families and it never was.

They were IRA Volunteers....end of.

Many others lost and wasted their lives because of The Hunger Strikes...that is the main issue,from a Republican perspective (RT1201-01 2012: miley, Post 23).

- P. 114: **17. inla-supporter:** Any independent inquiry depends on the cooperation and participation of all the parties/individuals/primary sources connected with the controversy if we really want the full truth. Of course, as you know, the major stumbling block to an inquiry is coming from those who were/are connected to the kitchen cabinet who, unfortunately, have a veto over the setting up of an inquiry. No doubt if the kitchen cabinet agreed to one then one could be set up after discussions by all of the participants as to the format and it’s modus operandi. From an IRSP point of view, and I make no apologies for saying this, our main concern is with the families of the INLA Hunger Striker’s families and their wishes as well as with the INLA/IRSP personnel/prisoners from that period who have publicly called for such an inquiry. I’m sure you’ll be hearing/reading more about that very soon regarding their views. Again, of course, we all know that for the likes of you and similar minded people who daily pontificate from on high, INLA prisoners, INLA Hunger Strikers and their families have remained in the bottom rung of the ladder to be viewed as insignificant and as collateral. However, regardless of how much you and the likes of you pontificate on

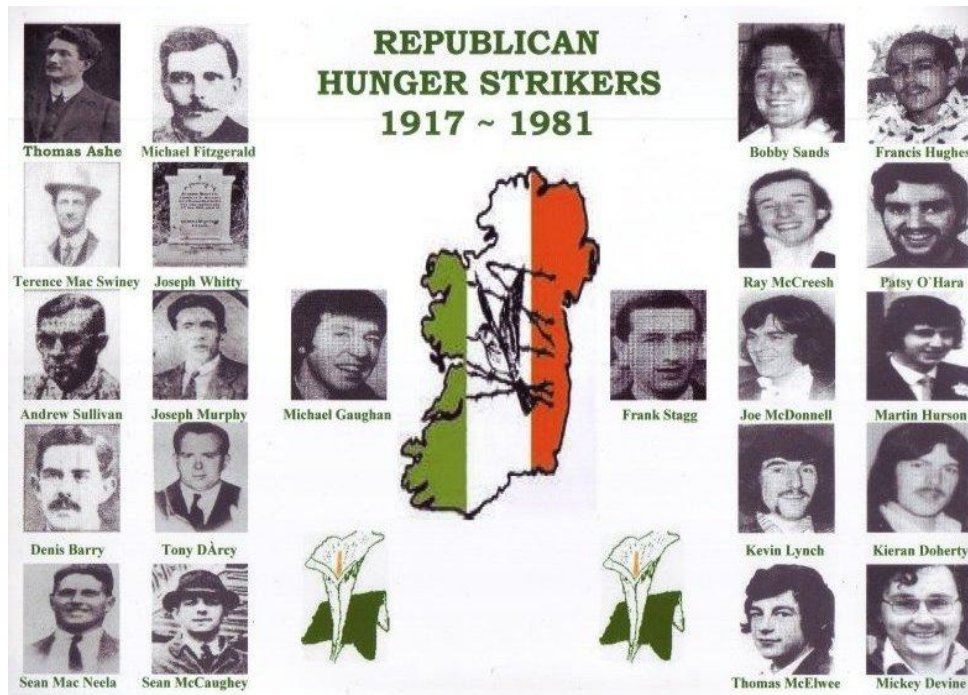
this issue we will not be deflected in speaking up and supporting the position of our families (RT1201-01 2012: inla-supporter, 17).

P.114: **20. inla-supporter:** [Quoting Post 18 above]

Would you prefer that Sinn Fein look after the interests of the INLA families? We all know how that worked out in the past. But of course it goes beyond the families' care and again I am speaking from an IRSP point of view. For example, the INLA/IRSP personnel involved in the outside were lied to and kept in the dark by the kitchen cabinet and are quite entitled to answers as are ex-INLA hunger strikers from that period. Another quick example which goes beyond the families is the INLA prisoners' OC from that time, who addressed a conference of IRSP members and ex-prisoners on this very subject in the Farcet Center a few years ago. Does he not deserve to know why he was lied to regarding his volunteers on hunger strike. Whether you (or anyone else) like it or not, we will represent our families/(ex)prisoners and past members. I would suggest that Sinn Fein are representing their own interests above that of the families. As I said, that's from an IRSP perspective but again it goes beyond that vis-a-vis non-INLA/IRSP personnel who support an inquiry for various reasons. You are being disingenuous, to say the least, in claiming this is all a conspiracy to blacken Sinn Fein, sinister agendas etc as we all recognize that whatever happened wasn't Sinn Fein driven but an element of SF who also kept the rest of their leadership in the dark and lied to them also (RT1201-01 2012: inla-supporter, Post 20).

P. 115: **35. irelands32:** We need an fully independent enquiry, it's the only way to get to the truth - whatever that may be. The only thing I'm worried about at the minute is that this may somehow reflect on the Hunger Strikers' bravery and commitment and people may think of them in a lesser light. We must never allow that to happen, no matter what (RT1112-03 2011: irelands32, Post 35).

P.118: 1. Duleek Hunger Strike Monu:



Vol Thomas Ashe - Died 25th September 1917

Vol Thomas Ashe was born and raised in Kinard, Co, Kerry. He was educated in near-by Dingle and subsequently at the De La Salle College Co, Wexford. Following his education he became a national school teacher in Corduff in Dublin. He joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood and quickly moved through the ranks. While in Dublin he trained a group of local men to fight in the planned insurrection in 1916. Ashe commanded this battalion of Irish volunteers who successfully carried out numerous operations in the north Dublin area including the "Battle of Ashbourne" in Co, Meath. He was arrested for his role in the easter rising and sentenced to death, however following public uproar this was commuted to life in prison. In the summer of 1917 he was released and carried on his speeches around the country in defiance of orders from the British authorities. He was arrested and imprisoned in Mountjoy Gaol. He was denied political status and along with other republican prisoners embarked on a hunger strike on 20th September 1917. Forcible feeding, a method for dealing with hunger strikers begun almost immediately. This was carried out by a trainee doctor. On the third day Thomas Ashe collapsed when the tube being used for this method punctured his lung. He was taken to the near-by Matter hospital where he died two days

later with lung failure. Thomas Ashe received a full military funeral and is buried in the republican plot in Glasnevin cemetery.

Vol Michael Fitzgerald - Died 17th October 1920

Vol Michael Fitzgerald was a member of the IRB which he joined at a very young age. Having being involved in numerous successful operations he was arrested and imprisoned in Cork Gaol. He went on hunger strike in protest against prison conditions in which republican prisoners were forced to live in. After spending sixty days on hunger strike Michael Fitzgerald paid the ultimate sacrifice in the hope that conditions for his comrades would be better. He died on 17th October 1920. He is buried in Kilcrumpher cemetery, Fermoy, Co, Cork.

Vol Terence Mac Swiney - Died 25th October 1920

Vol Terence Mac Swiney was born in Cork in 1879. In 1913 he founded the Cork Brigade of the Irish Volunteers. He was interned in Reading and Wakefield Gaol's from April to December 1916. In February 1917 he was deported from Ireland and interned in Shrewsbury and Bromyard internment camps until June 1917. In November 1917 he was arrested in Cork for wearing an Irish Volunteers uniform and again imprisoned in Cork Gaol where he went on a three day hunger strike before being released. In 1920 he was elected as Lord Mayor of Cork. He was arrested in Dublin on 12th August and charged with making a "Seditious" speech and he was imprisoned in England again. He immediately embarked on a hunger strike and fell into a coma on 20th October and died five days later after seventy four days on strike. Irish Volunteers escorted his casket through the streets of London where thousands of Irish exiles lined the streets to pay their last respects. Terence Mac Swiney was buried in St Finbar's cemetery Cork on 29th October 1920.

Vol Joseph Whitty - Died 2nd August 1923

Vol Joseph Whitty died on hunger strike in the Curragh Camp Co, Kildare at the young age of nineteen years. No other information is available at time of building this website but it is important that we realise the sacrifice that Joseph Whitty has made in the belief that his actions some day may lead to an island free of British occupation. Joseph Whitty is buried in Ballymore cemetery, Killinick Co, Wexford.

Vol Joseph Murphy - Died 25th October 1923

Vol Joseph Murphy was imprisoned in Cork Gaol for his republican beliefs and for being a

member of the IRB. He went on hunger strike in protest over the removal of political status from republican prisoners. Even to this day Joseph Murphy was the longest person to survive on hunger strike. After seventy six days on hunger strike he died in Cork Gaol on 25th October 1923. A huge crowd attended his funeral in Cork where he is buried in St Finbar's cemetery.

Vol Denis Barry - Died 20th November 1923

Vol Denis Barry was from Blackrock Co, Cork. Commandant Barry was a veteran of the 1916 easter rising and O.C for the republican police in Cork's 1st Brigade area. Not convicted of any crime he died on hunger strike in Newbridge camp on 20th November 1923 after just thirty four days. He was buried with full military honours in the republican plot in St Finbar's cemetery Cork.

Vol Andrew Sullivan - Died 22nd November 1923

Vol Andrew Sullivan hailed from Co, Cork. He joined the Irish Volunteers at a very young age in his life and was involved in many operations throughout the county and indeed into Co, Kerry. He was attached to the well known "Flying Colum" who carried out many "Hit and Run" attacks against enemy forces. He died on hunger strike after fasting for forty days in protest against the refusal by the authorities to grant political status to republican prisoners. Following his death on 22nd November 1923 he was buried with full military honours in Mallow cemetery Co,Cork

Vol Tony DÀrcy Died 16th April 1940

Vol Sean MacNeela Died - 19th April 1940

When Sean Russell was appointed IRA Chief of staff in 1938 he immediately appointed Sean MacNeela O.C in England and Tony DÀrcy O.C Western Command. After a few months of intense activity preparing for a bombing campaign in England, MacNeela was arrested and sentenced to nine months imprisonment. He returned to Ireland in 1939 and was appointed IRA Director of publicity and produced a weekly paper entitled War News. MacNeela was arrested three weeks later with members of the Radio Broadcast Staff and imprisoned in Mountjoy Gaol. He was O.C of the prisoners from February 1940, sharing a cell with Tony DÀrcy who had being arrested at a GHQ meeting in 40,Parnell Square in Dublin. DÀrcy was serving a three month sentence for refusing to account for his movements or give his name and address when he was arrested. A crisis developed in the prison when Mickey Doherty, of Julianstown, Co, Meath was sentenced to five years penal servitude. Instead of being transferred to Arbour Hill, where other republican prisoners had political status, Doherty was lodged in the criminal wing of Mountjoy. MacNeela as O.C of

the republican prisoners requested Doherty's transfer to Arbour Hill. The request was ignored and MacNeela and his prison council decided to launch a hunger strike until the demand was met. Four men joined MacNeela and Dàrcy on the hunger strike. They were Tomas MacCurtain, of Cork, the only son of the Martyred Lord Mayor, Jack Plunkett of Dublin, son of Count Plunkett and brother of Joseph Mary Plunkett, Tommy Grogan of Drogheda and Michael Traynor of Belfast, later Ard-Runai of Sinn Féin. Seven days into the hunger strike Special Branch detectives came to take MacNeela for trial before the Special Criminal Court. MacNeela refused to go and barricades were erected in D wing. In the riot that ensued the Special Branch and the Metropolitan Police were deployed in force against the prisoners. Dàrcy was rendered unconscious by blows by a baton and MacNeela was pummeled by blow after blow. The wounds received by the pair never healed. MacNeela was taken away that evening, tried and sentenced to two years by the Special Criminal Court. On the eve of St Patrick's day all six hunger strikers were removed to St Bricken's Military Hospital. On the 54th night of the hunger strike, Tony Dàrcy cried out "Sean I'm dieing". Sean replied "I'm coming Tony". The other prisoners appealed to MacNeela not to get out of bed as he was very weak and they felt it would kill him but Dàrcy's cry concerned him and he staggered across the room to his comrade. Later that night Dàrcy was taken to a private room. Tony Dàrcy, IRA Volunteer from Headford, Co, Galway died the following night. The day following Dàrcy's removal from the ward, Sean MacNeela's uncle, Mick Kilroy, the Fianna Fail T.D, came to see him. He attacked Sean for "Daring to embarrass deVelera" the "Heaven sent leader" by such action and demanded that MacNeela give up the hunger strike immediately. MacNeela ordered him out of the room. The next day Sean MacNeela, IRA Volunteer from Ballycroy, Co, Mayo died. An IRA order to end the hunger strike had being sent by GHQ the day before but had not arrived in time to save MacNeela. Tony Dàrcy is buried in Headford Co, Galway and Sean MacNeela is buried in Cleggan cemetery, Ballycroy, Co, Mayo.

Vol Sean McCaughey - Died 11th May 1946

Vol Sean McCaughey was born in 1916 in the border town of Aughnacloy Co,Tyrone. He moved to Belfast with his family when he was just five years of age. On the 2nd September 1941 he was arrested by the Crown Forces and charged with assaulting a self-confessed informer and IRA Chief of Staff, Stephen Hayes. After serving five years in the most inhuman conditions Sean went on hunger strike on 19th April 1946. On 11th May, the twenty third day of his fast Sean McCaughey died in his prison cell. In the graveyard in Aughnacloy lies a splendid tombstone in his memory erected by the Tyrone National Graves. Just in front of this tombstone lies another brave Irish republican and tallented ballad singer, ex-republican IRA prisoner Declan Mohan who died tragically in a car accident in 2007. Declan played many ballad sessions for Duleek republicans with his wife Marina to raise funds for republican prisoners. Duleek 1916-1981 Monument Committee

would like to take this opportunity to offer our condolences to Declan's wife, family and friends on their tragic loss.

Vol Michael Gaughan - Died 3rd June 1974

Vol Michael Gaughan was born on the 5th October 1949 in Co, Mayo. He was reared in Ballina. He was the eldest of six children. Michael was one of the earliest IRA Volunteers to be imprisoned in England in this phase of the struggle for Irish freedom. He was sentenced to seven years at the Old Bailey in London in December 1971 for his part in a fund raising bank raid. He went on hunger strike with other republican prisoners who were in English Gaols at the time in protest against the ill treatment of republicans and the conditions they were forced to live in. During the hunger strike Michael was force fed from 22nd April. He refused medical treatment and died of pneumonia. The force feeding tube had pierced his lung. He died on the 3rd June 1974 at the young age of twenty four. He was buried with full military honours in the republican plot in Ballina Co, Mayo

Vol Frank Stagg - Died 12th February 1976

Vol Frank Stagg was born on the 4th October 1942 in Co, Mayo. He attended Newbrooke Primary School and later CBS School in Balinrobe. On leaving school he worked as an assistant gamekeeper with his uncle before emigrating to England. In England he secured employment as a bus conductor and later as a bus driver. In 1970 he married a Mayo woman, Bridie Armstrong from Carnicon. He joined the IRA in 1972. Frank was arrested in 1973 and charged with conspiring to commit arson. He was sentenced to ten years imprisonment. Frank went on his fourth hunger strike in two years in Wakefield Gaol on December 14th 1975 after being denied political status. On the 12th February 1976 Frank Stagg died having fasted for sixty two days. Frank Stagg's funeral cortege was hijacked by Garda Special Branch on orders by the Dublin Government at Shannon Airport and buried in Ballina cemetery seventy yards from the republican plot. The grave was filled with concrete to prevent his coffin being removed however Frank's wishes that he be buried alongside his friend Michael Gaughan in the republican plot were fulfilled on the 6th November when IRA Volunteers moved his remains and reinterred them alongside his friend.

H-BLOCK MARTYRS 1981

Vol Bobby Sands - Died 5th May 1981

Vol Bobby Sands was born on the 9th March 1954 in the predominantly Loyalist Rathcoole area. In June 1972 Bobby's family were intimidated out of their home and moved into the

Twinbrook estate in West Belfast. Bobby joined Oglagh na hEireann when he was just eighteen years of age. In October 1972 he was arrested and charged with possession of weapons. He was released in 1976 and returned to Twinbrook where he reported back to the IRA. Within six months he was arrested again following a bomb attack in Dunmurry. In 1977 Bobby was sentenced to 14 years for possession of a revolver and was imprisoned in Long Kesh without political status. Bobby became O.C of the P.O.Ws during the 1980 hunger strike which was in protest against being denied political status and he volunteered to lead the 1981 hunger strike which he begun on 1st March. In April 1981 Bobby Sands was elected as MP for Fermanagh/South Tyrone. At 1.17am on Tuesday 5th May 1981 Bobby Sands died on hunger strike after 65 days. He was buried in the republican plot in Milltown cemetery, Belfast. He received full military honours and over one hundred thousand mourners attended his funeral.

Vol Francis Hughes - Died 12th May 1981

Vol Francis Hughes was the youngest of four brothers who lived in the village of Bellaghy, Co, Derry. He joined the IRA at a young age and a within a short time saw Active Service and was soon to go on the run. On countless occasions Francis was surrounded by British Crown Forces but he camly slipped through their nets with what was described as utter cheek and nerves of steel. He and a fellow Volunteer were walking through the Glenshane Pass to a safe house when they walked into a British Army under cover post. A gun battle ensued with Francis hitting two of the British soldiers, one fatally. Francis was seriously injured and was arrested the nexy day, 17th March. He was eventually charged and sentenced to life imprisonment. Francis Hughes joined the hunger strike and died 59 days later on 12th May 1981. He is buried in Bellaghy, Co, Derry.

Vol Raymond McCreesh -Died 21st May 1981

Vol Raymond McCreesh was born on 25th February 1957. He was an ordinary hard working and well liked young member of the community. Raymond had no doubt that the future for all the people of Ireland lay in a 32 County Republic and as a young man of seventeen he joined the IRA. In 1976 Raymond was sentenced to 14 years imprisonment following his capture on Active Service near his home village of Camlough in South Armagh. In the H-Blocks he immediately joined the blanket protest demanding Political Status. So strong was Raymond`s commitment for almost four years he took no visits until informing his family in February 1981 of his intention of going on hunger strike. Raymond McCreesh died on 21st May after 61 days on hunger strike. Volunteer Raymond McCreesh was buried in his native Camlough with full military honours.

Vol Patsy O`Hara - Died 21st May 1981

Vol Patsy O'Hara was born in Bishop Street, Derry city on the 11th July 1958. Patsy joined Na Fianna Eireann in 1970. Shortly before Bloody Sunday Patsy was wounded by British soldiers. The events that day had a lasting effect on him. In October 1974 Patsy was interned in Long Kesh. After his release in April 1975 Patsy joined the newly emerged IRSP and The INLA. In June 1975 he was arrested in Derry and held on remand for six months. In September 1976 Patsy went to live in Dublin for a number of months and returned to Derry in January 1979 and was active in the INLA. On May 14th 1979 he was arrested and charged with possession of a grenade. He was sentenced in January 1980 to eight years. He went on the blanket protest in H5 and became O.C of the INLA prisoners at the beginning of the first hunger strike in 1980. He went on hunger strike on the 22nd March 1981. On Thursday May 21st at 11.29 p.m he died after 61 days on hunger strike. Patsy O'Hara received a full military funeral and is buried in Derry city.

Vol Joe McDonnell - Died 8th July 1981

Vol Joe McDonnell was born on the 14th September 1951 in Slate Street in Belfast's Lower Falls. He married Goretti Healy in 1970 and set up home in the Lenadoon estate. He was arrested in 1972 and on his release joined the IRA in Andersonstown and by 1973 he was interned again. Joe resumed his trade as an upholsterer when he was released from prison. In October 1976 he was arrested following a bomb attack on the Balmoral furnishing company near Twinbrook. From the day he was sentenced Joe refused to take visits as it meant wearing the prison uniform, he would be criminalised. He joined the hunger strike on May 9th 1981. In June he narrowly missed being elected as a T.D for Sligo/Leitrim. At 5.15am on July 8th 1981 after 61 days of agonising hunger strike IRA Volunteer Joe McDonnell died. He was buried with full military honours in the republican plot in Milltown cemetery, Belfast.

Vol Martin Hurson - Died 13th July 1981

Vol Martin Hurson was born on the 13th September 1956. His parents Johnnie and Mary Ann Hurson raised the family on a small farm on the outskirts of Cappagh, Co, Tyrone. When Martin left school he got a job as an apprentice fitter in T.J McKenna's, a local firm. As Martin started to socialise more the Crown forces constantly harassed him. He received beatings in Pomeroy where his girlfriend Bernadette lived. Like many other young lads from the area he joined the IRA. Martin was an ordinary young lad who decided to wage war against the enemy. He was always ready to do what was needed and was involved in many operations. In 1976 he was arrested and charged with conspiracy and membership of the IRA. He was sentenced to twenty years and immediately joined the blanket protest in Long Kesh. In December 1980 he joined the first hunger strike. On 29th May he joined the

hunger strike of 1981. During his 46 days his favourite phrase was “No Problem”. On Monday 13th July 1981 at 4am Martin died in Long Kesh. His father was at the prison gate with his girlfriend Bernadette, the prison authorities refusing her entry and mocking her request to see him. Volunteer Martin Hurson is buried in Galbally, Co, Tyrone at home again amongst friends.

Vol Kevin Lynch - Died 1st August 1981

Vol Kevin Lynch was born on the 25th May 1956, a native of Park in Co, Derry. Kevin excelled at both hurling and football. His greatest passion was hurling. In 1971 he was a member of the Dungiven Club which won the Feile na nGael final in Thurles Co, Tipperary. Kevin captained the Derry U16 hurling team which beat Armagh in the All Ireland final in Croke Park in 1972. He won a special county minor award in 1974. The motto of the Kevin Lynch hurling club in Dungiven is “Misneach is dilseach”, (courage and loyalty) qualities which characterised Kevin’s life and death. He was arrested following a military operation in Dungiven during which an RUC/PSNI officer was injured. Kevin took part in the first hunger strike in 1980. While on his second hunger strike in 1981 he stood as a candidate in the Waterford constituency where he polled a remarkable number of first preference votes. The links formed between Waterford and Dungiven at that time remain strong today. Kevin died on the 1st August 1981 after 71 days on hunger strike. He is buried in St Patrick’s cemetery Dungiven, Co, Derry.

Vol Kieran Doherty - Died 2nd August 1981

Vol Kieran Doherty was born on the 16th October 1956 in Andersonstown, Belfast. Kieran attended St Theresa’s school, and the CBS on the Glen Road. He won a GAA Antrim minor medal in 1971 for St Theresa’s GAC. Kieran joined Fianna Eireann in 1971. His dedication and outstanding ability led him into the IRA very quickly. In February 1973 he was arrested and interned and remained in prison until 1975. In August 1976 Kieran was arrested and in 1978 was sentenced to 18 years imprisonment. Kieran joined the hunger strike on Friday May 22nd 1981 and in June was elected as T.D for Fermanagh/Monaghan with 9,121 first preference votes. Volunteer Kieran Doherty T.D died on 2nd August 1981 after 73 days on hunger strike. He was buried with full military honours in Milltown cemetery, Belfast.

Vol Thomas McElwee - Died 8th August 1981

Vol Thomas McElwee was the fifth in a family of twelve born to James and Alice McElwee. He went to St Mary’s Primary school Bellaghy, Co, Derry followed by

secondary education at St Mary's College Clad, Portglenone. Having an interest in cars he went to Magherafelt Technical College and then to Ballymena Training Centre to acquire a trade as a car mechanic. Thomas's hobby was stock car racing and he spent many evenings repairing old cars to take to races in Aghadowey. At weekends he went to dances. Thomas had lots of friends and was a very relaxed and friendly person. There had been raids on the McElwee home when Thomas would be dragged out of his bed in the early hours and taken to the barracks in Ballykelly, Coleraine and Derry for interrogation by the Brits. This would cause a deep hatred of British injustice in Ireland. In 1976 Thomas was injured in a premature explosion in Fair Hill Ballymena and shortly after he was arrested and taken to Crumlin Road Gaol. He was tried and convicted in a non jury Diplock Court and taken to Long Kesh where he immediately joined the blanket protest. After four years on the protest he joined the hunger strike. Volunteer Thomas McElwee died after 62 days on hunger strike and became the ninth hunger striker to die in 1981 and the 21st republican hunger striker to die since Thomas Ashe died on 25th September 1917. Thomas is buried in Bellaghy Co, Derry.

Vol Mickey Devine - Died 20th August 1981

Vol Mickey Devine was born on the 26th May 1954 in Springtown Camp in Derry. The Devine family moved to the newly built Creggan in 1960. He went to Holy Child school and St Joseph's Secondary. In July 1971 he joined the James Connolly republican club. He joined the Official IRA in August 1971. He was on the Bloody Sunday march which had a lasting effect on him. In 1974 he left the Officials and joined the INLA and was a founding member of the IRSP in Derry. On September 20th 1976 he was arrested with John Cassidy. On July 20th 1977 he was sentenced to twelve years and went on the blanket protest in H-5. He took over as O.C of the INLA prisoners when Patsy O'Hara went on hunger strike. Mickey Devine commenced his hunger strike on 22nd June and died on 20th August 1981 after 60 days. He is buried in Derry.

P.119: **1. ArdEoin Gael:** Hunger-Striking has a long and chequered history in Ireland and dates back to the Brehon Laws which was practised well before the English invasion. Fasting was originally called Troscaadh and was listed in the Senchas Mór an ancient journal. The book stipulated how Irish laws were governed. Striking was mainly used to shame an Offender or to right an injustice.

Due to the importance of hospitality in Irish culture, Troscaadh would be used against an offender with the victim starving on his or her doorstep. If the offender ignored the Striker, he or she was deemed to have inflicted the greatest of dishonour to his community. If the Striker was allowed to die outside the Offender's home, the Offender would then be ordered by a Brehon (Judge) to pay compensation to the Striker's family. He would also be

sent from the village in which he/she lived to live forever in exile. Most fasts were undertaken to recover debts or to achieve justice for a perceived wrong.

Throughout the 20th Century, Republican Prisoners used various Hunger-Strikes to achieve Political Status. Sadly some 22 POWs' died in Irish and British Gaols between 1917 and 1981. The first Republican to embark on a Hunger-Strike was Leading Trade Unionist, James Connolly. Who successfully fasted against his unfair imprisonment. He was released and went onto lead the 1916 Easter Rising. The death on Hunger and Thirst Strike of IRA Chief, Sean McCaughey in 1946 led to the fall of the Fianna Fail Government two years later. In 1972, a number of Republican Prisoners, led by Billy McKee held a successful Strike for Political Status. In 1976, the British Government revoked Political Status and attempted to treat Republican Prisoners as criminals. However, they resisted and refused to conform to the new system.

After five years of being held in atrocious conditions. The IRA and INLA Prisoners embarked on a mass Hunger-Strike for over 52 days. The Strike generated huge sympathy throughout Ireland and beyond. The British promised a deal which they later reneged on which led to another more intense fast, led by Bobby Sands. Three of the H-Block Hunger-Strikers including Sands, were subsequently elected to Westminster and the Dublin Parliaments in the summer of 1981. The plight of the prisoners achieved world-wide recognition and enabled an entirely new generation of Republican Activists throughout the Country.

Which is why the recent release of British Government documents relating to the 1981 Hunger-Strike in which ten Irish Political Prisoners tragically died is a must for anyone interested in our Nation's history.

For the past thirty most people accepted that the British Government, particularly Maggie Thatcher ignored the suffering of the Hunger-Strikers and 'allowed' them to die agonising deaths. Their untimely deaths still cause raw emotions to surface whenever the subject is mentioned in most Irish homes. The truth behind the young mens' deaths have caused Irish Republicans many sleepless nights and the Strikers are enshrined as heroes. While Maggie Thatcher is hated as much as Oliver Cromwell ever was.

In 2006, former H-Block Blanketman and the Hunger-Strikers PRO, Richard O'Rawe published his memoirs entitled; 'Blanketmen'. He courted controversy by suggesting that the IRA Leadership outside vetoed a deal offered by the British Government that would have ended the 1981 Strike. He further alleged that the reason behind the veto was to further electoral advantage for Sinn Fein.

O’Rawe’s allegations were quickly rejected by a number of former IRA Prisoners including the 1981 H-Block O/C, Bik McFarlane. As a result, of his claims, Richard has been villified, smeared and slandered by Provisional Sinn Fein.

Since the rejections however, a number of once ‘secret’ documents have been put in the public domain. Which seem to confirm O’Rawe’s allegations. One such exchange took place in Derry at a public meeting that was addressed by the once secret contact between the Provisional IRA Leadership and the British Government, Brendan Duddy.

At the meeting, Duddy confirmed that the British had relayed to him the proposed deal which he then gave to the IRA Leadership. He was asked a number of questions from the floor and he reiterated the same answer. Duddy has since lodged his papers which include the ‘deal’ with Galway University.

The former O/C of INLA Prisoners in Long Kesh also backs O’Rawe’s account. As the IRSP and its prisoners were never informed by the PIRA of a possible deal from the British. Which is very surprising given that INLA Volunteer, Patsy O’Hara had already died and another two of his comrades, Kevin Lynch and Micky Devine would also die on the Strike.

The main crux of the issue is did the British Government offer a ‘deal’ to the Strikers on the fifth of July, 1981 or not? Recent declassified documents suggest there was indeed a deal that was rejected by the IRA. In addition, senior Republican, Danny Morrison was given a visit by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) on the same day to speak with the Hunger-Strikers and the IRA O/C, Bik McFarlane.

Danny has stated that the British did not have its deal constructed properly and as such, he didn’t tell the Strikers. Although, after his visit Bik told O’Rawe that the Brits offered a good deal and that the lads should accept it. Bik rejects such an exchange took place. However, Richard claims that the deal was accepted by the Prison Leadership but was rejected by the IRA Leadership outside to gain electoral advantage for Provisional S/F.

The truth of what really occurred in 1981 is somewhere in the detail above? What is not in dispute is that ten brave Irishmen died horrible deaths in a British Prison, before Britain accepted their right to be treated as Political Prisoners.

As a former H-Block Prisoner myself, I am eternally grateful to the Blanketmen, the women in Armagh and the ten Hunger-Strikers for their courage and for achieving Political Status.

<http://ardoynerpubl...ve-demands.html> (RT1201-02 2012: ArdEoin Gael, Post 1).

P.122: **180. miley:** No not threats!

But raising why we were given a clear run in Fermanagh/South Tyrone...twice by the SDLP.

It dragged us into eloctoralism,changed the leadership,split the movement and led us to where we now are.

On its own maybe not so important..but in light of high level touts and current revelations, it needs to be revisited.

P.129: **1. ardonian:** Eamon McCann verifies Richard O’Rawe’s account of the 1981 hunger strike in which he alleges that six of the hunger strikers need not have died as the prisoners had agreed to accept an offer from the Mountainclimber, only to be over-ruled by Gerry Adams.

Evidence which has now become available helps clarify a dispute sparked three years ago by the assertion of former IRA prisoner Richard O’Rawe that terms for ending the strike, accepted by the prisoners’ leadership in the Maze/Long Kesh, were rejected by IRA commanders outside. The implication is that the lives of six of the hunger strikers might have been saved if the prisoners hadn’t been overruled.

McCann also confirms Richard O’Rawe’s account on WBAI’s Radio Free Eireann (starts @ 42mins in; right click, save as): “I have confirmation of that. I have spoken to people who are certainly in a position to know what happened, who were in a position at that time to know exactly what was going on ... Broadly speaking, the information which I now have, I am absolutely satisfied with, is that in blunt terms that Richard O’Rawe, on the key issue between himself and Danny Morrison and the others, that Richard O’Rawe was right and that those who were arguing against him were wrong.”

“I think that’s right...that Richard O’Rawe is telling the truth. ... I don’t know what the motivation for the rejection, by the outside IRA leadership, for the rejection of the offer, which was made on 6/7th of July, at that time, I don’t know what the motivation was and therefore I can’t confirm the motivation, but I can confirm that it happened, that the prisoners’ acceptance of the deal was over-ruled by the outside leadership.”

“I have also spoken to the ‘Mountain Climber’; ... of course, he didn’t know what was going on inside the prison, but the things that he did know and which he’s told me, confirm Richard O’Rawe’s account.”

From the Belfast Telegraph article:

During this period, negotiations being conducted through the Derry man known as ‘the Mountain Climber’ were stepped up.

O’Rawe’s allegation is that an offer from the Foreign Office, conveyed to McFarlane on July 5, two days before the fifth hunger-striker, Joe McDonnell, was to die, conceded three of the prisoners’ five demands and effectively conceded a fourth.

He says that McFarlane pushed a document containing these proposals along a pipe to his cell.

He maintains that it offered that prisoners could wear their own clothes, have remission restored and enjoy more visits and letters — three of the five demands — and that while prison work wouldn’t be eliminated, ‘work’ would be broadly defined so as to include educational and cultural activities. The one demand not covered was free association within the wings.

“It was a fantastic offer. I never expected it,” says O’Rawe. He recalls a shouted conversation between himself and McFarlane, two cells away.

“We spoke in Irish so the screws could not understand. I said, ‘Ta go leor ann’ — there’s enough there.

“He said, ‘Aontaim leat, scriobhfaidh me chun taoibh amuigh agus cuirfidh me fhois orthu’ — I agree with you, I will write to the outside and let them know.”

McCann spoke to a number of people who have confirmed O’Rawe’s account:

... a number of republicans, including former prisoners, have confirmed that O’Rawe did voice the allegations on more than one occasion before publication of his book.

One ex-prisoner who had been on the same wing as O’Rawe and McFarlane and who also claims to have heard the exchange says that, independently of O’Rawe, he broached the subject of the rejected deal with senior IRA figures during the 1990s.

More importantly, the man who was sharing a cell with O’Rawe in July 1981 confirms O’Rawe’s account: “Richard isn’t a liar. He told the truth in his book. I heard what passed

between Richard and Bik (McFarlane). I remember Richard saying, ‘Ta go leor ann,’ and the reply, ‘Aontaim leat.’ There’s just no question that that happened.”

O’Rawe’s account of the negotiations as seen from “inside” will not be contradicted by the account from a different perspective contained in the BBC programme to be transmitted tonight focusing on the role of the ‘Mountain Climber’, Brendan Duddy.

And, in what seems to be a recurring problem for the Sinn Fein leadership:

The suspicions which still surround the events and which have damaged the republican leadership in the eyes of many former activists arise, it seems, not so much from O’Rawe’s narrative of what happened but from an adamant refusal on the part of the IRA leadership of the time to admit to serious and, in the end, fatal errors in their conduct of the hunger strike and from determined efforts to blacken O’Rawe’s name in an attempt to obscure the truth.

Background: Blanketmen, by Richard O’Rawe

Danny Morrison

Jim Gibney

Brendan McFarlane

Brendan Hughes

Interview with Richard O’Rawe

I took this article from Slugger o Toole (RT0803-01 2008: ardonian, Post 1).

P.132: **22. Newry Republican:** I remember Republicans discussing this 2 or 3 years ago and they were pretty certain that Ó Rawes account of events were true (RT0803-01 2008: Newry Republican, Post 22).

P.132: **201. DFCRFB:** Hunger Strike account ‘vindicated’³⁵⁹

The Irish News 02/04/08

A former IRA prisoner last night claimed that he had been “totally vindicated” after a man who shared a cell with him confirmed his account that republicans rejected a deal in 1981 which could have saved the lives of hunger strikers.

³⁵⁹ All of the additions in square parentheses exist in the original post. I have made no changes to it.

Richard O’Rawe said a former cellmate’s confirmation that he had heard a conversation he shared with Brendan ‘Bik’ McFarlane to brief him on a British offer of a deal, “totally verifies my version of events”.

Mr O’Rawe attracted criticism from former colleagues for suggesting that some hunger strikers may have been sacrificed for political gain.

His claims were made in his book *Blanketmen: An Untold Story of the H-Block Hunger Strike*, which claimed that a deal was offered by the British government to end the Hunger Strike before the fifth man had died.

He said that on July 5, after the first four prisoners including Bobby Sands had died, Danny Morrison, director of publicity for the republican movement at the time, visited the IRA commander in the Maze, Brendan McFarlane, to brief him on a British offer of a deal.

Mr O’Rawe said Mr McFarlane returned to the block after his meeting and passed a communication to him detailing the offer which they both then agreed to accept.

In his book Mr O’Rawe alleged the IRA leadership outside the jail did not believe the deal was enough.

Three days later a fifth hunger striker, Joe O’Donnell [sic], died. Five more men were to starve to death before the protest ended.

The claims caused controversy in republican circles and were denied by senior figures in the movement.

Mr McFarlane strongly contested any such conversation took place or that any deal ever existed.

However, a newspaper columnist said new evidence had become available from a former-prisoner who shared a cell with Mr O’Rawe and heard his exchange with McFarlane.

“Richard isn’t a liar. He told the truth in his book. I heard what passed between Richard and Bik [McFarlane],” the former cellmate is quoted as saying.

“I remember Richard saying, ‘Ta go leor ann’ [There is enough there] and the reply ‘Aontaim leat’ [I agree with you]. There’s just no question that that happened.”

Last night Mr O’Rawe said the new evidence was “total vindication” of his claims.

“My cell mate says that its true and that he heard what I have said,” he said.

“As far as I’m concerned its done and dusted and we can’t go back on that but I hope that more will come forward now and again verify what I have said in the past.

“I’m no liar. This totally verifies my version of events, it removes all particles of contention.”

Mr O’Rawe said he believed those who rubbished his claims would “be keeping their heads down now” (RT0803-01 2008: DFCRFB, Post 201).

P.132: **202. DFCRFB:** Hunger strike deal didn’t exist

Daily Ireland 07/06/06

By Danny Morrison

In a forthcoming BBC documentary Richard O’Rawe once again will be claiming that the republican leadership rejected a deal from the British government shortly before the death of Joe McDonnell on July 8th 1981. Richard is a former blanket man and PRO in the H-Blocks. Whilst in jail Richard never raised his claims with the leadership in prison or the leadership outside. After Richard’s release he worked with me in the Republican Press Centre for a year and never mentioned the allegations he now makes.

He neither approached Brendan ‘Bik’ McFarlane, OC of the prisoners, nor me to ask us our recollections of this period when he was preparing for his book. Last year Richard alleged that in late July 1981 I sat at a meeting with hunger strikers’ families with a deal from the British government in my back pocket and didn’t tell them. When I pointed out that I had been in hospital in Dublin during that period Richard realised his memory was false and discreetly dropped the claim. He claims he wrote the book out of concern for the relatives, yet he never told them. Instead, he published extracts in a newspaper.

On July 4, 1981, four days before Joe McDonnell’s death, Richard, as PRO, issued a statement aimed at breaking the deadlock. It said that the British could settle the hunger strike without compromising their position by extending prison reforms to the entire prison population. At this time the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace was engaged in a mediation exercise. Behind the scenes the British government reopened a “back-channel” to the republican leadership.

The 1981 hunger strike came out of the 1980 hunger strike. The British sent a document to the prisoners which they claimed could be the basis for a settlement. However, the prisoners had already ended the strike before they received the document. The British reneged on their assurances almost immediately. That was why the second hunger strikers were to demand verification of any deal to end their hunger strike.

In July 1981 the British government had various public and private positions. Privately it outlined two different offers, one to the ICJP and another to the republican leadership. I was one of those who described to the hunger strikers, including Joe McDonnell, on July 5 what the British were saying to us. The prisoners told me they wanted the offer clarified and verified in person through a senior British representative. We passed this on to the British. However, the British would not verify to the hunger strikers their various 'offers'. Six times they were asked by the ICJP to explain their position to the prisoners and six times they refused before Joe McDonnell died.

In his comms [communications] from July, August and September 1981 which were released as press statements, Richard makes it clear there was no deal. On July 23, two weeks after Joe McDonnell's death, he accuses the British of deliberate ambiguity and demands clarity, yet in his book he claims that on July 6 the republican leadership rejected 'a deal'.

Richard's comms – which are contemporaneous accounts of the time – contradict the allegations he is making a quarter of a century later.

On July 7, the day before Joe's death, Richard wrote: "We are very depressed at the fact that our comrade Joe McDonnell is virtually on the brink of death – especially when the solution to the issue is there for the taking. The urgency of the situation dictates that the British act on our statement of July 4 now. Finally, we advise our supporters to be cautious and vigilant and to disregard the volume of rumours that seems to be in circulation. We ask everyone to analyse and understand our July 4th statement and to be on guard for any dilution of the situation contained in that statement."

On July 8, the day of Joe McDonnell's death, he wrote: "The British government's hypocrisy and their refusal to act in a responsible manner are completely to blame for the death of Joe McDonnell...The only definite response forthcoming from the British government [to the prisoners July 4th statement] is the death of Joe McDonnell... This morning [secretary of state] Mr Atkins has issued us with yet another ambiguous and self-gratifying statement... That statement, even given its most optimistic reading, is far removed from our July 4th statement. At face value it amounts to nothing."

On July 23, nine days before Kevin Lynch died, Richard wrote: “The [ICJP’s] proposals were vague but even at that we did not believe they contained a just settlement. After Joe McDonnell’s death on July 8th the British government issued their present policy statement which in substance and even given an optimistic reading was a dilution of the diluted package attained initially by the ICJP...

“It is vital also that everyone realises that the ICJP have been victims of British perfidity [sic] and that the ambiguity which accompanies all British statements is deliberate...

“The death of our comrade Joe McDonnell on July 8th plus the Humphrey Atkins’ statement of the same day, and the evolution of bitter claim and counter-claim between the British and the ICJP left one thing clear – that intermediaries, and this is no slight on the ICJP, are dangerous and that only direct talks between the British and ourselves based on our 4th July statement can guarantee clarity and sincerity and thus save lives...

“At present the British are looking for what amounts to an absolute surrender. They are offering us nothing that amounts to an honourable solution and they have created red herrings, that is, their refusal to allow Brendan McFarlane to represent the hunger strikers, to cover their inflexibility...

Richard ‘s own words show clearly there was no deal. All surviving hunger strikers from that period are of the same view. In his book Richard alleges that the republican leadership ordered the hunger strikers not to accept a deal, yet, as his own words of the time attest, “there was no ‘elusive chain of command’... we prisoners were in complete command of the hunger strike and protest...”

I hope this closes this sorry episode and I would like to apologise to the families of the hunger strikers for the suffering and distress that this has perpetuated, but I feel that the false claims have to be answered and settled. It was the British government which withdrew political status, introduced criminalisation and was responsible for creating the conditions for a hunger strike (RT0803-01 2008: DFCRFB, Post 202).

P.132: **203. Guest_DublinRepublican_*:** -----

Richard O’Rawe, PSF, and Events in 1981

“It only becomes the truth when it is officially denied.”

Gerard Foster • 8 July 2006

I imagine from the title of this article it would be natural to think I am writing about O’Rawes’ book, Blanketmen. Nothing could be further from the truth. I haven’t even read the book, though no doubt I will eventually get around to getting a copy of it.

I am more interested in the Provisional Movements’ Leadership’s (PML) reaction to the book and that of a few others, like Danny Morrison. I had, of course, heard about O’Rawes’ claims, but felt that they were only his opinions and he would have no way of backing them up. It was a non-starter and people would soon forget about his claims that the PML outside the prison let the last 6 Hunger Strikers, including 2 INLA Volunteers, die to promote their own political agenda. Let’s face it, this claim was so serious I did not believe it; I was wondering what agenda O’Rawe was working to, and the release of the book coming up to the 25th anniversary of the Hunger Strikers deaths smacked of commercialism.

The reactions came thick and fast from those close to Adams Plc. They were on radio rubbing the book and O’Rawe; they used their own columns in newspapers to debunk his claims; some were emotional; some tried to use “facts”, like the “comms” O’Rawe sent out of the prison during the Hunger Strike to lay the blame for the last 6 deaths elsewhere. All of this is to be expected and is understandable.

So all I got out of it was claim and counter-claim, it was going no-where. The truth was there to be got, but I believed we would never get to the bottom of it, and it was just best to get on with it rather than waste time looking for something I would never find.

As time went past, and I had nearly forgotten all about the book, I happened to find myself in Derry painting a mural to one of the INLA Hunger Strikers, Pasty O’Hara. That Tuesday evening we went to a bar to catch the second part of an RTE documentary about the Hunger Strike, the first part having been shown the previous Tuesday.

O’Rawe was interviewed and repeated his claim about the last 6 the men to die. Nothing new in that, I thought; Morrison was on also, but he said nothing new either. So as I sat watching, I thought, this is getting away from the reason that the men died, and was getting bogged down on these claims. Adams was interviewed and was doing what he does best, stroking his own ego. As the show seemed to lose its way, the people with me were talking away rather than watching the show. Even I was losing interest. Then Adams, in an answer to a question about the “Mountain Climber’s” (the British Government’s go-between to the PML) offer to the Hunger Strikers, said that he did not know about the Mountain Climber until afterwards.

At first I thought I had heard him wrong. I asked had anybody else heard what Adams had

just said. No, they all said. Surely I was mistaken in what I heard him say: “BASICALLY I KNEW NOTHING ABOUT THE MOUNTAIN CLIMBER UNTIL AFTERWARDS.”

I knew I had heard him correctly, but couldn't believe what I was hearing. Everybody who had read *Ten Men Dead* knew Adams was up to speed on all the doings of the Mountain Climber. Yet here he was on RTE saying that he was unaware of it all. My first thought, after the initial shock, was, why would he say that? Adams is not a foolish person, yet here he was committing himself on national TV to the “fact” that he was unaware of the Mountain Climber.

We were all tired after a long day painting the mural, and after only three pints, we went to our digs and I was soon asleep. When I awoke the next morning I could not think of anything else. Adams knew nothing about the Mountain Climber? Why would he say that? Even when we were working away at the mural, I kept thinking, what was the reason for him denying his role in this part of the Hunger Strike? There was a reason sure enough, but I couldn't work out why.

Then an incredible thought came to me: what if O'Rawe is telling the truth? Is Adams trying to distance himself from his part in the Hunger Strike because, if it is true, that the last 6 men died for Provisional Sinn Fein's future plans in politics, that would end his political career over night? His silence is deafening, he should be shouting from the roof tops that O'Rawe is wrong. Yet we hear nothing from the “main player” on the outside of the H-Blocks during the Hunger Strike. You would hear more noise out of a gold fish. Why?

Trying to get proof that Adams knew about the Mountain Climber during this part the Hunger Strike would not be easy. RTE didn't even try by the looks of it. My first thought was to look up the book *Ten Men Dead*. In it I found plenty of comms addressed to “Brownie,” and the book claims that this is Adams. On page 37 it states Adams [is] “writing a book, *Peace in Ireland*, and a regular column under the pen name ‘Brownie’ in *Republican News*, the weekly journal of Sinn Fein”.

All through the book there are references to Adams as “Brownie”. On page 347, a comm addressed to Brownie from Bik dated July 30, starts “Firstly it was great having a yarn with you last night”, this was in reference to a visit to the Hunger Strikers by Adams, Owen Carron and IRSP representative Seamus Ruddy the previous evening. So it is one of these three; go to the end of the comm, and Bik signs off by asking Brownie “to tell Owen and Seamus it was a pleasure meeting them”. That leaves Adams as Brownie.

Now Brownie is mentioned all the way through the book, Bik must have written to Brownie

daily. Adams went into the prison to talk to the Hunger Strikers and Bik. If Adams knew nothing about the Mountain Climber, what were they talking about? Surely it could not have been the British offer/deal as he knew “nothing about it till afterwards”.

Even more interesting is the Danny Morrison column in the Daily Ireland on June 7th, 2006. In his head-long rush to prove O’Rawe was wrong about his claims, he proves Adams is lying about his role in the Hunger Strike. Morrison was allowed into the prison on the 5th of July, before Joe Mc Donnell died, to explain the offer/deal to the Strikers and Bik; as Bik was talking to the Strikers, “Morrison is allowed to phone out from the doctors surgery. Tells ADAMS that prisoners will not take anything on trust...” Why tell Adams anything about the prisoner’s response to an offer/deal Adams knew nothing about? Surely he would have said to Morrison, ‘what offer/deal are you on about?’ Then Morrison goes on to tell us in the same column that “6 July. GERRY ADAMS confides in ICJP about secret contact and the difference in the offers”. Again, what could Adams tell the ICJP about the “secret contact” if he didn’t know about it till afterwards? So Morrison confirms also that Adams is lying about his role in the Hunger Strike.

A number of weeks after the RTE show, the BBC showed one also on the Hunger Strike. Adams was interviewed and, talking about the ending of the first Hunger Strike, says that he and others were reading the Mountain Climbers offer/deal in Clonard Monastery “when, if memory serves me correctly, Tom Hartley came in and said the Hunger Strike is over, they called it off”. So Adams wants us to believe that he was at the heart of things with the Mountain Climber during the first Hunger Strike, but knew nothing “until afterwards” during the second Hunger Strike. Who kept him out of the loop and why? It is obvious that Adams is lying.

Let’s go over some of the points I have made.

Adams says on RTE in the show in May 2006 “that he knew nothing about the Mountain Climber offer/deal until afterwards”.

June 7 2006. Morrison, in his Daily Ireland article, phones Adams from the prison hospital about offer/deal. Also says about Adams’ visit to the ICJP about offer/deal. June 27. Adams admits on BBC that he was reading Mountain Climber’s offer/deal for ending first Hunger Strike.

June 27. On the same show Adams talks about Mountain Climber during the 2 Hunger Strikes.

Ten Men Dead. As can be seen in the book, “Brownie” was involved in every aspect of the Hunger Strike. If Adams knew nothing about the Mountain Climber, why has he never denied he was “Brownie”?

The question remains why Adams would want to distance himself from his role in the Hunger Strike. Of course, this does not prove O’Rawe’s claims are true. But it does prove Adams is lying. He was fully aware of the Mountain Climber. So he has reasons to lie. Adams needs to tell, at least the families of the Hunger Strikers, why he is lying about what went on during those first few days in July 1981 when he, and a few others, were in contact with the British. If he does this, he can prove O’Rawe wrong. If not, that, at least, gives O’Rawe the moral high ground in his claim that the last 6 Hunger Strikers were allowed to die by a few people for their own political gains.

It is mind boggling, frightening even. But impossible? You decide. I am off to read O’Rawe’s book, as I have been told he makes some other claims about people who were in the leadership of the prisoners in the H-Blocks at that time, which if true, will be worth looking into (RT0803-01 2008: Guest_DublinRepublican_*, Post 203).

P.135: **248. Dúiche Néill:** The point is he [Colm Scullion] has made the statement, O’Rawe is wrong; mistaken at the very best (RT0803-01 2008: Dúiche Néill, Post 248).

P.135: **254. CMe:** [Quoting Post 248 above]

You must be reading a different letter as he has just confirmed what O’Rawe has been saying all along:

I agree with Richard that there certainly was an offer which Richard was made aware of by Bik McFarlane, who was a few cells away.

The semantics over “deal” and “offer” are just there to confuse, as they have been meant to do from the start, by Gibney and Morrison et al. The contention was over what O’Rawe said about their being an offer from the British that they could accept. His cellmate has confirmed this.

Whether it became an actual deal or not is the next issue, and why it did not. Did Bik send a comm out regarding their view on the offer, if he did, what happened, did the outside committee overrule the prisoners, if they did, why?

If it was as simple as blaming it all on the Brits, then why did the members of the outside committee not start out saying that, why the issue over what O’Rawe claimed about the conversation between him and Bik? Surely it would have been much simpler to say, yes, that did happen, but when we went back to the Brits they would not confirm or whatever. The problem is that they didn’t say that, they attempted to rubbish O’Rawe and got caught in a number of lies doing so, and the truth is coming out. So when they are shifting the ground now, it’s a case of too little, too late.

Scullion's letter and statement to the Derry Journal aren't the end of this (RT0803-01 2008: CMe, Post 254).

P.135: **256. Dúiche Néill:** They are not merely semantics and there is nothing confusing about them. The 1st Hunger Strike failed when they accepted a Brit "offer" that turned out to be a redherring. What is being spoken about is something that the Brits refused to back with any gestures of good faith, it was an offer that was nothing more than words (RT0803-01 2008: Dúiche Néill, Post 256).

P.136: **284. Dixie Elliot:** I remembered something about a Church Group, The Irish Commission for Justice and Peace which had entered into negotiations with the British on behalf of the Families around the time of Joe's death. I found a site which mentions these negotiations and found some interesting details which could prove that a deal was on the table but that the Brits stalled in bringing it into the prison and as a result Joe died.

<http://www.castletow...ungerStrike.com>

I would be grateful if someone could go to this site and cut and paste the relevant piece about those negotiations as I am not yet thus advanced.

You will see that there was two sets of negotiations going on with the Brits at the same time, one by the IRA Leadership with the Foreign Office and one on behalf of the Families by the ICJP with the NIO.

I want to see no winners in all this only the truth (RT0803-01 2008: Dixie Elliot, Post 284).

P.136: **288. Dixie Elliot:** First of all the Thatcher Government was to blame for the deaths of all 10 Hungers Strikers, no one can dispute that.

However we must ask ourselves were mistakes made during the time of joe's death and if so who was to blame?

If the Church was negotiating on behalf of the families while at the same time the IRA was negotiating on behalf of the Hunger Strikers themselves, was this not a costly mistake as it showed a split in the ranks which the brits exploited?

I do not for one moment blame the Families as they would have been grasping at straws, but we should ask ourselves should the Church not have stayed out of it and allowed the IRA to negotiate on behalf of the Hunger Strikers or should the IRA not done likewise and given the Church the freedom to pressurize the Brits given that their word on any final deal or renegeing on one by the Brits would have been accepted globally thus forcing the Brit's hands to act?

Is this were things went wrong? And if so it would put to bed the claim that the IRA Leadership allowed men to die so that Owen Carron could get elected.

If the joint negotiations were partly to blame for the deaths of the final 6 men then why can't the Church and the IRA Leadership not admit this? I for one would then accept that it was the conniving Bastards that are the Brits who let the final 6 die and leave it at that (RT0803-01 2008: Dixie Elliot, Post 288).

P.136: **224. Dixie Elliot:** During the Hunger Strikes I was in the wing with Bic and Ricky, maybe it was the passing of time or perhaps it was the stressful events that we were a part of, but my memories of that time had become blurred.

Recently while attending Dark's funeral with an old friend who was in another wing in the block we discussed Ricky's claims. I said that I could remember something about a deal at the time but I couldn't be sure. My friend remarked, 'Surely you remember the 'Buzz' at the time that there was a deal on the table and that Joe [McDonnell] wouldn't have to die?'

We both agreed that most of the lads who were in the block at that time would remember that rumour doing the rounds.

I myself don't know if a deal was on the table but I and at least one other remembers the rumours doing the rounds, sceal we called it.

The thing is it was merely rumours but what sparked them off? Earwiggers with an over active imagination or perhaps as Ricky said there was a deal on the table?

I honestly believe that there are others out there who will eventually come forward but I can understand their reluctance to do so especially in the light of what has happened to Ricky, also the Squinter episode serves to illustrate that retribution could be swift (RT0803-01 2008: Dixie Elliot, Post 224).

P.138: **15. undefeated:** I have copied this from the IRSP Forum

Dear *****,

I have recently obtained a number of documents relating to British government contacts with republicans in July 1981.

They include portions of:

- a letter from number 10 Downing Street to the NIO dated 8 July 1981.
- an undated telegram from the NIO to the Cabinet Office.
- a letter from 10 Downing Street to the NIO dated 18 July 1981.

- an undated document entitled “Hunger Strike”.
- a letter from the NIO to 10 Downing Street dated 21 July 1981.

Together, these suggest that Margaret Thatcher, as Prime Minister, proposed a deal with the IRA to end the hunger strike. It involved an offer for the prisoners to “wear their own clothes, as was already the case in Armagh prison provided these clothes were approved by the prison authorities”. This was first given “privately to the provos on July 5th” according to the documents.

A further message was approved by Thatcher on the evening of July 7th and communicated to the IRA on the afternoon of 8th July. The IRA were cool at first but later in the day said that only the tone, and not the content, of the offer was unacceptable. As a result, a further draft statement, enlarging upon the previous British statement, was communicated to the IRA for their consideration. The documents say the IRA were advised that if they accepted this statement and “ordered the hunger strikers to end their protest” then the statement would be issued immediately. Otherwise a statement would be issued reiterating the British government position of June 30th.

On the afternoon of July 18th the IRA asked for an official to go into the Maze to meet the hunger strikers. The British intention was that the official would explain the offer on clothes set out above and clarify a previous private offer that if prisoners did not want to work²⁰ in the prison workshops they would be punished only by loss of remission or some similar penalty. However, after some discussion, the British decided not to proceed without a prior indication of acceptance by the IRA.

As I mentioned, these documents are incomplete. However, they state clearly that there was a substantial offer from Thatcher which the IRA at one point indicated was acceptable in substance.

I intend publishing this information on Sunday with comment from relevant parties. It suggests that the lives of many hunger strikers were close to being saved at this stage, perhaps including Joe McDonnell and certainly all those who followed him. It seems tragic in retrospect if the full details of this offer were not made known to the prisoners.

However I am aware that I have only got a partial account from one source so I am asking interested parties to provide any perspective, information or analysis which they consider relevant.

In particular I would like to ask the IRSP and INLA to release any further documents which they considers relevant. I am also inviting them to share any observations on, or recollections of, these events,

Best Regards

Liam Clarke

IRSP Response to Downing Street Documents 02-04-09

The IRSP believe that these Downing Street documents, at face value, appear to vindicate Richard O’Rawe in the claims he made in regards to this crucial period of the Hunger Strike. These confidential 10 Downing Street letters, which were written contemporaneous, certainly contradict PSF’’s version of events from that period. The IRSP have been investigating similar claims that are contained in these documents for quite some time and will be making their conclusions public after examining the evidence in its totality.

Over the past number of days the IRSP has been speaking to relatives of the three INLA Hunger Strikers, ex-INLA Army Council members who were involved in the Strike at that time and also to the then OC of the INLA prisoners about these particular documents. All have stated that they were not aware of the ‘back-channel initiative’ or of an ‘acceptance of the content of Thatcher’s offer but not the tone’ by the PIRA in July 8th 1981 which these documents clearly indicate.

Both the then INLA Army Council and the INLA prisoners OC have stated to the IRSP that if they had have been made aware of the content of these developments at that time they would have ordered the INLA prisoners to end their hunger strike.

Many questions now arise from these documents which only the NIO, PSF, the Mountain Climber and Brendan Duddy can answer and therefore the IRSP would call on all these parties to reveal all the documentation and information that are relevant to this period. The IRSP, on behalf of some of the relatives of the Hunger Strikers, will be seeking meetings with the relevant parties in the very near future.

Michael Devine Junior speaking this morning to the IRSP has stated that -‘the families demand and deserve the truth about what really happened during this period. These latest disclosures have added substantial weight to previous claims that the last six hunger strikers lives could have been saved. Did my Father and his five comrades die because a number of

individuals didn't like the tone of Thatcher despite accepting the content of her offer? Why were the families or the prisoners themselves never told about the nature and content of these contacts? I would appeal to SF and the British Government, given their public positions on truth and reconciliation, to tell us the truth and give us closure''.

Willie Gallagher on behalf of the IRSP Executive 02-04-09 (RT0904-02 2009: undefeated, Post 15).

P.139: **39. carter:** hunger strike meeting photos. exblanketman YOUNG CLEAKY CLARK CONFIRMS ORAWES ACCOUNT. deal was on the cards from JULY 8th 1981 (RT0905-02 2009: carter, Post 39).

P.139: **58. inla-supporter:** The point is cara the IRA jail leadership accepted the offer on july 5th and outside rejected it and ever since PSF have denied this happened and covered it up. Why (RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 58)?

P.139: **72. yaya:** Give your head a shake Mellows and behave yourself ya mad thing.

So opposing PSF's direction and decisions now makes us "anti SF"? You do yourself no justice when you regurgitate 'kitchen cabinet' speak as it looks as if you don't have a mind of your own. The IRSP are not "anti SF" cara and your own lot could tell you that. While you're at it maybe you could supply some evidence?

In fact I would say the complete opposite is true but I don't bother getting involved in petty nonsense when dealing with a serious subject matter such as this. But you fire away cara if that makes you happy. We will leave such petty comments to those that seem to be losing the argument.

Ok people, time for Mellows to put up or shut up as he has ranted this sentiment quite a few times and every time I answer it he avoids going back to it.

He reckons this "story" is "based on manipulations". Right;

So it is a "manipulation" to assert that the IRSP or INLA leadership at the time were not aware of the Mountain Climber initiative, is it? Is it a "decontextualised event" to assert that the 'kitchen cabinet' made decisions that directly effected the lives and well being of INLA hungerstrikers without informing the hungerstrikers, their leadership or even their very families? Is that a "manipulation" cara?

Why did the provisional leadership not inform the very hungerstrikers, that they were

making life and death decisions on behalf, about the MC initiative? The INLA jail leadership of that time is on record as saying that had they been aware of the 5th July offer they would have “ordered” their men off the strike. But the INLA hungerstrikers were not even permitted to know about the offer let alone their leadership.

Mellows would have you all believe that what I have stated is “decontextualised” and “based on manipulations” and that the IRSM are “anti SF” for asking these questions. That line of thinking would also suggest that Mellows believes that the O’Hara and Devine families must also be “anti SF” as they are calling for an Independent Inquiry (RT0911-02 2009: yaya, Post 72).

P.140: **146. inla-supporter:** The Mountain Climber confirmed that the document Clarke showed him last night was indeed authentic and he said that it was passed in to the prison on July 5th cara. You’ll hear his words yourself when the RNU get their video of the debate put online (RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 146).

P.142: **1,420. inla-supporter:** Of this description?:

This is the document which Liam Clarke received under the Freedom Of Information Act which he read out at the Gasyard to which Duddy said was authentic and the one he communicated to PIRA on 5th July 1981. Read the Downing Street documents to get the full context cara.

Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

1. In the light of discussions which Mr Michael Alison has had recently with the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace, during which a statement was issued on 4 July on behalf of the protesting prisoners in the Maze Prison, HMG have come to the following conclusions.

2. When the hunger strike and the protest is brought to an end (and not before), the Government will:

I. extend to all male prisoners in Northern Ireland the clothing regime at present available to female prisoners in Armagh Prison (i.e. subject to the prison governor’s approval);

II. make available to all prisoners in Northern Ireland the allowance of letters, parcels and visits at present available to conforming prisoners;

III. allow the restoration of forfeited remission at the discretion of the responsible disciplinary authority, as indicated in my statement of 30 June, which hitherto has meant the restoration of up to one-fifth of remission lost subject to a satisfactory period of good behaviour;

IV. ensure that a substantial part of the work will consist of domestic tasks inside and outside the wings necessary for servicing of the prison (such as cleaning and in the laundries and kitchens), constructive work, e.g. on building projects or making toys for charitable bodies, and study for Open University or other courses. The prison authorities will be responsible for supervision. The aim of the authorities will be that prisoners should do the kinds of work for which they are suited, but this will not always be possible and the authorities will retain responsibility for decisions about allocation.

3. Little advance is possible on association. It will be permitted within each wing, under supervision of the prison staff.

4. Protesting prisoners have been segregated from the rest. Other prisoners are not segregated by religious or any other affiliation. If there were no protest the only reason for segregating some prisoners from others would be the judgment of the prison authorities, not the prisoners, that this was the best way to avoid trouble between groups.

5. This statement is not a negotiating position. But it is further evidence of the Government's desire to maintain and where possible to improve a humanitarian regime in the prisons. The Government earnestly hopes that the hunger strikers and the other protesters will cease their protest (RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 1,420).

P.142: **2,046. inla-supporter:** When are we going to hear some 'lip service' from Gerry who has, once again, run away from the debate as he was 'too busy' (over a three month period) to contribute to the article. No surprise though at no 'lip service' from Danny and Bik as they may have done more U-turns.

Comical Marty's contribution was, well, comical. Perhaps he needs reminding what exactly Duddy passed on to him as he claims today that the only concession was on clothes. He describes Duddy as an 'honourable man' and Duddy is on record as saying that the offer conceded four of the demands. Duddy also confirmed that the following document is authentic and that he passed the contents on to Marty which is a bit more than 'one

concession':

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IV. ensure that a substantial part of the work will consist of domestic tasks inside and outside the wings necessary for servicing of the prison (such as cleaning and in the laundries and kitchens), constructive work, e.g. on building projects or making toys for charitable bodies, and study for Open University or other courses. The prison authorities will be responsible for supervision. The aim of the authorities will be that prisoners should do the kinds of work for which they are suited, but this will not always be possible and the authorities will retain responsibility for decisions about allocation.

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4. Protesting prisoners have been segregated from the rest. Other prisoners are not segregated by religious or any other affiliation. If there were no protest the only reason for segregating some prisoners from others would be the judgment of the prison authorities, not the prisoners, that this was the best way to avoid trouble between groups.

5. This statement is not a negotiating position. But it is further evidence of the Government's desire to maintain and where possible to improve a humanitarian regime in the prisons. The Government earnestly hopes that the hunger strikers and the other protesters will cease their protest (RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 2,046).

P.143: **23. inla-supporter:** What were you saying cara about Duddy describing the offer Clarke showed him as being an "innacurate summary?" Between your YouTube and YaYa's tape should sort that innacuracy out. Are you claiming that document outlining the offer which was released under the Freedom of Information Act is a fraud? Surely that would be newsworthy.

No body ever claimed that the offer was in document form on the 5th so there never was a disagreement on that particular. What about the 6th or 7th? If you had have read the last post I made on the hunger strike thread about the ICJP you would have seen that it contained an internal telegramme between the 'home' office and NIO. Read it cara as you'll find it enlightening (RT0908-01 2009: inla-supporter, Post 23).

P.143: **485. inla-supporter:** That word is obviously wrong and did'nt appear in the article.

British 'had no intention of resolving the hunger strike'

Brian Rowan reports
Thursday, 4 June 2009

Brendan 'Bic' McFarlane

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The IRA jail leader during the 1981 hunger strike today said the British Government never had any intention of resolving the notorious prison dispute in which 10 men starved to death.

Brendan ‘Bic’ McFarlane accused the then Thatcher Government of trying to resolve the prison protest “on their terms” while attempting to “wreck” the IRA in the process.

McFarlane, speaking in an exclusive interview for the Belfast Telegraph, again dismissed claims that he accepted an offer secretly communicated by the British that summer, but was overruled by the Army Council on the outside.

The suggestion first emerged in the controversial book *Blanketmen* — written by former prisoner Richard O’Rawe, who was part of the IRA jail leadership in 1981.

A British offer on the prisoners’ demands was communicated in the summer of that year through a secret contact channel which was codenamed Mountain Climber.

And, on Sunday, July 5, the senior republican Danny Morrison was allowed into the Maze to separately brief McFarlane and the hunger strikers.

“Something was going down,” McFarlane said.

“And I said to Richard (O’Rawe) this is amazing, this is a huge opportunity and I feel there’s a potential here (in the Mountain Climber process) to end this.”

But he said he also made clear that more was needed — that the British had to “expand the offer, and they need to go into the prison hospital”.

McFarlane said this was key — that the Government detail its offer directly to the hunger strikers.

“They (the hunger strikers) were at pains to say the Brits need to come forward,” he said.

“They need to expand on it (the offer),” he continued, “and stand over it?and it needed to be underwritten in whatever shape, form or fashion the British chose to do that. It needed to be confirmed,” he said.

McFarlane said at the time this had also been made clear to the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace.

“They (the Commission) went directly to the British and urged them to send someone in,” McFarlane continued.

“The British indicated clearly that they were sending someone in?and it didn’t happen.

Looking back at the events of 1981, McFarlane said: “It seems very clear that they didn’t have an intention to resolve it to an acceptable degree — that we felt was acceptable.

“They were going to resolve it on their terms and wreck us in the process,” he said.

McFarlane: Key Dates

1951 – born Belfast.

1968 – left Belfast to train as a priest.

1970 – left seminary in Wales and later joined IRA.

1976 – life sentence for gun and bomb attack on Bayardo Bar in Belfast (August 1975, five killed).

1981 – IRA jail leader during hunger strike. Ten men died (7 IRA, 3 INLA).

1983 – he escaped from the Maze in IRA breakout.

1986 – re-arrested in Amsterdam, extradited and returned to Maze Prison.

1998 – release papers signed January 5.

Now – Sinn Fein party activist based in north Belfast

My crucial discussion with the Maze strikers

When Brendan McFarlane met Danny Morrison in the jail that Sunday afternoon in July 1981, four hunger strikers were dead and another Joe McDonnell “was in an appalling state”.

The jail leader knew that Morrison’s presence meant something was happening.

For months — since the first hunger strike of 1980 — he had been banned from the jail, and, now, on a Sunday when there were no visits the prison gates had opened for him.

The man from the outside was allowed in to explain the Mountain Climber contacts and the offer the British had communicated.

And the fact that the British were in contact — albeit through a conduit now known to be the Derry businessman Brendan Duddy — was progress.

After meeting Morrison, McFarlane met the hunger strikers.

“We went through it step by step,” he said. “The hunger strikers themselves said: OK the Brits are prepared to do business — possibly, but what is detailed, or what has been outlined here isn’t enough to conclude the hunger strike.

“And they said to me, what do I think?

“And I said I concur with your analysis — fair enough — but you need to make your minds up,” he continued.

The hunger strikers, according to both McFarlane and Morrison wanted the British to send someone into the prison.

McFarlane continued: “Something had to be written down. Something had to be produced to the hunger strikers, even to the extent that the Brits were saying, there it is, nothing more, take it or leave it, and that’s the way the lads wanted clarity on this.

“We were never given a piece of paper,” he added.

<http://www.belfastte...o-14324992.html>

The cover-up for the ‘kitchen cabinet’ continues but won’t wash in face of the evidence. This retreat from earlier positions is a response to the Gasyard revelations which proved that a serious offer was indeed communicated to the prisoners via Brendan Duddy (RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 485).

P.144: 521. Dixie Elliot: As we know now from the Gasyard meeting in Derry, a very concrete set of proposals went in to the prison. We also know that the conversation between O’Rawe and McFarlane accepting the offer took place because prisoners are coming forward confirming this. So the lie has shifted from complete denial to one of claiming to have given the hunger strikers in the hospital the full brief of the offer and it being rejected by them. This lie does not work because of a number of reasons.

First and foremost, it was after speaking with the hunger strikers in the hospital that

McFarlane and O’Rawe agreed to accept the offer. As McFarlane himself now says today, **“This is a huge opportunity and I feel there’s a potential here to end this”**.

In addition, the hunger strikers were not told the details of the Mountain Climber offer. As Laurence McKeown wrote in 2005, **“Whether it was the ‘Mountain Climber’ or the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace, we wanted definite confirmation, not vague promises of ‘regime change’.”** Had the hunger strikers been presented with the offer as confirmed by Duddy they would have been told more than **“vague promises of regime change”**. This is backed up by Danny Morrison’s own interview for Padraig O’Malley’s *Biting at the Grave*, page 96:

“...Danny Morrison was allowed to go into the Maze/Long Kesh to see the hunger strikers on the morning of 5 July...to apprise them of what was going on, although he did not go into detail. Morrison says that he relayed information about the contact and impressed upon them the fact the ICJP could “make a mess of it, that they could be settling for less than what they had the potential for achieving.”

Bik’s own comm to Gerry Adams on 6 July, 1981, which was sent after receiving a comm that afternoon from the Adams cadre rejecting the prison leadership’s acceptance, also confirms this: **“I spent yy [yesterday] outlining our position and pushing our Saturday document as the basis for a solution. I said parts of their offer were vague and much more clarification and confirmation was needed to establish exactly what the Brits were on about. I told them the only concrete aspect seemed to be clothes and no way was this good enough to satisfy us. I saw all the hunger strikers yesterday and briefed them on the situation. They seemed strong enough and can hold the line alright.”**

In the same comm, a suggestion to request the British to come in and detail their offer to the hunger strikers - albeit the ICJP offer - is rejected by the hunger strikers themselves: **“During the session, H. Logue suggested drafting a statement on behalf of the hunger strikers asking for the Brits to come in and talk direct, but the lads knocked him back.”**

So how can the hunger strikers on the one hand, according to Bik today, reject the offer from the British because they wanted the British to come in to explain it to them in person, while in 1981 he was telling Gerry Adams that the hunger strikers rejected asking the Brits to come in and talk to them directly? How can Bik today claim that he went through the offer with the hunger strikers step by step, yet in 1981 he clearly says he told them that the offer was vague, and the only concrete aspect was on clothes? We know now that the offer was much more substantial than that. We also know Danny Morrison “did not go into detail” with the hunger strikers during his visit to the hospital on 5 July. Laurence McKeown is on record saying the offer was

“vague promises of ‘regime change’” - which means he was told nothing about the true nature of the offer. This is also supported by Jake Jackson’s claim in *Biting at the Grave* (pg 96) that the hunger strikers didn’t know about the Mountain Climber initiative at that point - nevermind being told the full details of the offer that had come in via the link. Subsequent hunger strikers were also told nothing of the offer or rejection.

<http://sluggerotoole...re-to-end-this/> (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 521).

P.144: **523. Dixie Elliot:** “And I said to Richard (O’Rawe) this is amazing, this is a huge opportunity and I feel there’s a potential here (in the Mountain Climber process) to end this.”

Then why did he tell the Hunger Strikers the offers were VAGUE, NOTHING CONCRETE etc (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 523)?

P.146: **863. Dixie Elliot:** You are trying to twist it again I’ve never refused to answer any point you put to me and everyone [except seabird] sees this. In fact you have tried unsuccessfully to twist what I said while avoiding answering me when I continually catch you out. You said he was talking about the mountain climber initiative having the potential to end it yet when I proved you were talking nonsense you try and shift the goalposts. You know he said that in a recent Belfast Telegraph article so don’t try and nit pick.

The fact is whether you like it or not there are more and more blanket men coming forward to back up O’Rawe most importantly men who were in that wing and you can twist until you look silly cara because that is what you are doing and Seabird can give all the high fives she wants but this is boiling down to former Blanket men including Hunger Strikers against Adams and his kitchen cabinet.

Twist all you want cara because people are not blind... (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 863).

P.146: **858. Mellows1922:** and there you are twisting again, Bik said there was never a an offer/deal/whatever word you want to use that the Brits would stand over, he still has that position, nothing changed. He also has not said there was an offer that had the potential to end it, he said that the mountain climber initiative had the potential to end it. Two very very different things, but two things that you are intent on pushing together to make it seem like they are the same. So you’re accusations of others twisting are very hollow chara when you do just that yourself in tandem with your accusation (RT0905-02 2009: Mellows1922, Post 858).

P.146: **860. Mellows1922:** Ok, could you show me the text or transcript where Bik said that a specific offer “had the potential to end it” ? I’ve asked for you to substantiate similar things in the past and you have refused so we’ll see how it goes this time (RT0905-02 2009: Mellows1922, Post 860).

P.146: **864. Mellows1922:** You claimed that the IRA said that they objected to tone but not content, I asked you to please sunstantiate that, you deflected for pages and never did. Of course you couldn’t because the IRA never said such, but you couldn’t bring yourself to concede that.

This is exactly the same, Bik has said the mountain climber initiative had the potential to end it, you don’t like that so have taken it upon yuorself to claim he is actually really saying that a specific offer had the potential to end it.

Of course you could just show us where Bik stated that it was a specific deal that had potential ? Will you ?

As for more and more blanketmen coming forward to back up O’Rawe, when they do they are seemingly infallible. Those of us who question the logic of what they are saying are shouted down, even though logic clearly suggests what they are saying makes no sense at all. An acceptance to end the hunger strike by the prison leadership is overheard but nothing is thought of it because offers by the Brits were coming in all the time ? Yes, that kind of reasoning bears no serious scrutiny at all. Just accept it as gospel (RT0905-02 2009: Mellows1922, Post 864).

P.147: **1,371. Dixie Elliot:** No he said that the document which was shown to him which contained 4 of the 5 demands was the offer he gave to a member of the IRA in Derry and they rejected it please don’t try and twist it.

Why weren’t the Hunger Strikers informed of this offer and why won’t Adams etc say why it was rejected (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 1,371)?

P.147: **1,599. Dixie Elliot:** Mellows is trying to fudge the argument as usual...According to him 6 men died because they didn’t trust the Brits yet their own leadership didn’t tell them what the Brits had offered as I pointed out a dozen times they merely were told that there was only a vague offer and that the only concrete aspect was clothing...Yet Brendan Duddy delivered an offer that contained 4 out of the 5 demands why weren’t the Hunger Strikers informed of this?

Quite frankly I would no sooner trust Adams and company than I would the Brits (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 1,599).

P.147: **121. Dixie Elliot:** In short cara, this is all a change in narrative in light of last nights revelations.

Cleeky confirmed that the conversation took place and Bik accepted that the offer was enough to end the Hunger Strikes. Why did Bik make all these denials why didn't he say, we did accept it was enough but the Brits reneged on them? You quote the documents but the documents said that the IRA accepted the content but not the tone and all this meant that Joe died.

Not only that but the INLA produced extracts from a tape recording with another Blanket man who also backs this up.

PSF now realise the cat is out of the bag and they are trying to change the goal posts again (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 121).

P.147: **126. Dixie Elliot:** The document quite clearly says their response [the IRA] indicated that they did not regard it as as satisfactory and they wanted a good deal more. The Brits made it clear that as far as they were concerned that was the end of it. The IRA quickly came back and said it was not the content of the message they were objecting to but only its tone. Now don't forget that this is the same offer the prison leadership found acceptable which is now beyond doubt no matter what way you try and twist it (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 126).

P.147: **141. Dixie Elliot:** Cara they are copies of documents obtained under the FIA, which were handed out last night.

Now ask yourself why on Gods earth would the Brits want to damage PSF and likely destory the Peace process in the progress?

Brendan Duddy as I said was there last night to deliver a fudge and he started out doing so until Clarke showed him the documents which he confirmed as being those he had seen in 81.

Mountain Climber was not an MI5 or 6 agent as many thought he was but a well known Derry Business man. Several people tried to verbally attack him last night but fair play to Ricky he stood up and said the man had b-lls and played an important role in trying to resolve the Hunger Strikes.

Brendan Duddy had b-lls cara it's a pity others didn't stand beside him and give their story instead of keeping it to attacks in the papers.

The chance is there for Adams, Morrison etc to confront O'Rawe on a public platform and end it without fear nor threat if they are genuine they will do it (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 141).

P.147: **160. Dixie Elliot:** "Your Secretary of State said that the message which the Prime Minister had approved the previous evening had been communicated to the PIRA. Their response indicated that they did not regard it as satisfactory and that they wanted a good deal more. That appeared to mark the end of the development, and we made this clear to the PIRA during the afternoon. This produced a very rapid reaction which suggested that it was not the content of the message which they objected to but only its tone. The question now for decision was whether we should respond on our side. He had concluded that we should communicate with the PIRA over night a draft statement enlarging upon the message of the previous evening but in no way whatever departing from it's substance.

The underlined portion of the document was read out to Duddy last night and he was asked did he deliver this to the IRA, he said he did (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 160).

P.147: **167. Dixie Elliot:** Cara I've never seen you so desperate in all my time on this forum you are trying to pull everything down to a word, tone and make it look like I'm back tracking. It said it in the documents. Now accept it or not we have come a hell of a long way from Bik claiming there was no offer what so ever and no concrete offer to the Mountain Climber confirming he had delivered a draft document to the IRA and another blanket man backing up O'Rawe (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 167).

P.148: **1,407. inla-supporter:** No he didn't [say there was an acceptable offer]! In fact these were his first comments:

Interview by Fergal McKinney with Bik McFarlane on UTV [Ulster Television] Live 28-02-05

McKinney: "Who took the decision to reject that offer?"

Bik: "There was no offer of that description."

McKinney: "At all?"

Bik: “Whatsoever. No offer existed.” (RT0905-02 2005: inla-supporter, Post 1,407)

P.156: **413. Seabird:** Patrick Henry [Dixie Elliot],

I see that Carrie has taken a brutal beating and caught out for what she is on Slugger. She does have Liam Clarke banging away in her defence. BTW where is all the evidence we have been promised. The longer you take to place it forward the more it is going to look fabricated

[Quoting: 10 July

ICJP leaves Belfast.

Prisons Minister Michael Alison flies to Washington, D.C. He blamed the breakdown on the ICJP’s “over-eagerness” and said they had misrepresented what he had said, inflating his “privately expressed sentiments” to suggest that a solution was near. Its proposals to HMG were “wildly euphoric and wildly out of perspective.” He compared talking to hunger strikers as like talking to hijackers: “you continued talking while you figured out a way to defeat them, while allowing them to save face.”]

[Quoting: You quote Gerard Clarke as a primary source overhearing the conversation with Bik and Rickie. Rickie in his book says the conversation was in Irish. Gerard Clarke can’t speak Irish. Go asked him! If he can he must have learnt it last week.

<http://sluggerotoole...esentative/P50/>

[Quoting: Rusty

Why did Richard O’Rawe write the following in a comm on July 23rd 1981 (two weeks after the death of Joe McDonnell):

”...only direct talks between the British and ourselves...can guarantee clarity and sincerity and thus save lives...At present the British are looking for what amounts to an absolute surrender. They are offering us nothing that amounts to an honourable solution...”

Posted by Dec on May 26, 2009 @ 03:44 PM]

[Quoting: Rusy Nail you didn’t answer my question. I would like you to explain the hunger strikers continuing to hunger strike, as if none of them asked whatever happened to the offer??? Well?

The INLA has said that Bangers Morrison didn't tell Micky Devine and Kevin Lynch about the offer. What is your position on who is telling lies there, given that Bangers has a Freedom of Information document showing that he met ALL of the hunger strikers on 5th July?

Posted by blanketmanH3 on May 27, 2009 @ 06:26 PM]

[Quoting: Well I'm not a blanket man, but I was here when it happened, and I just spoke to one particular blanket man who didn't even know the meeting took place on Saturday night. Not everyone has access to the internet, and it's a pity that not all of them know of this debate.

After speaking with him his position is.

1) That he is no lover of Adams who has presided over defeat, but that O'Rawe needed a new angle for a hungerstrike book and this was it.

2) That the only people to benefit from this is the British.

3) That O'Rawe has inflated his own position, as he was no more than a report writer. (This guy ran about with O'Rawe, since St Finians' Primary school. Good primary school sent my own son there.)

4) That it has caused division and destroyed the memory of the hunger strikers.

5) That there was nothing on offer. He said to me, do you think if Bik had known of an offer it would have been dealt with out the windy between O'Rawe and McFarlane. First thing McFarlane would have done would have been to ask for access to his OC's from the wings or at least his own men, it wouldn't have finished with a shouted message out the window to O'Rawe.

6) That the whole thing (the memory of the strikers) is ****ed and O'Rawe ****ed it when he brought that book out for money, and allowed the Sunday Times to serialise it.

7) That after the death of Joe, whose family I know and respect dearly, they weren't going to achieve anything, if they hadn't achieved it with three deaths they weren't going to achieve it with four etc, and that they didn't die for monkey suits, or their own clothing, but for political status.

Excuse the language, relaying it as I heard it. What ever happened to the words 'political status' in this debate? But all I saw was more raw emotion, more anger, more hurt and


extreme sorrow that it has come to this. I saw it on Saturday night, and I saw it today. I don't know if this is Carrie Twomey, who wasn't here, that is correct, I don't know if H7 is Danny, all I know is the pain and anguish this is causing may not have been worth rousing this sleeping dog....

Posted by sj1 on May 28, 2009 @ 01:54 PM] (RT0905-02 2009: Seabird, Post 413).

P.157: **1,205. Dixie Elliot:** I have been on the phone all night with friends ringing up about the letter and congratulating me on my stand. Of course they all said to expect the smear campaign to begin soon which no doubt they will try. However I have no worries about that as I have had a long run in with Derry PSF in the past and they fully realise I don't take sh-t lying down.

Anyway the facts are out there and without doubt it will continue to come back to haunt them. Adams and Morrison knew full well that more and more former Blanket men were coming out to back Ricky especially men from H3. Do they honestly believe that these men will think any different after this stunt (RT0905-02 2009: Dixie Elliot, Post 1,205)?

P.157: **1,524. Seabird:** You keep saying this but that is not what I am hearing from various people cara, BTW the key word in your sentence is **were** (RT0905-02 2009: Seabird, Post 1,524).

P.160: **549. inla-supporter:** Duddy was a trusted interlocutor cara by both sides and continued in that role for well over a decade after 1981 perhaps closer to two. But the evidence the IRSP were presented with came from the lips of republicans albeit one of them didn't know that and who has since threatened()me with legal action if I reveal his private conversations (RT0905-02 2009: inla-supporter, Post 549).

P.167: **32. yaya:** The only way someone couldn't see any difference in "The conversation did not take place....there was no offer" to "And I said to Richard (O'Rawe) this is amazing, this is a huge opportunity and I feel there's a potential here (in the Mountain Climber process) to end this." is if they are on some serious hallucinogenic mushrooms or unless they are part of the kitchen cabinet's apologist office and who are also partaking in some hallucinogenic mushrooms or the likes.

If someone said to you that there were no offers made so therefore a conversation could not take place discussing offers that didn't exist then the next day say to you that they had a conversation with the same person they yesterday denied having one with in which they discussed an offer that they also the day before denied existed and if you can still not see any "great difference" then I refer you back to my first paragraph and, in computer programming language,

#Loop Until (sense) (RT1112-01 2011: yaya, Post 32).

P.167: **35. Mellows1922:** [Quoting Post 32 above]

no conversation took place where Bik or anybody else accepted any offer, this is clearly what he is referring to - his story has never changed, his position is as it always was - there was no offer, he accepted no offer (RT1112-01 2011: Mellows1922, Post 35).

P.169: **38. yaya:** Mellows you really need to pinch yourself cara; why do you still spew this nonsense. Can you not grasp that you appear to be the only one left that doesn't believe there was an offer? Do you accept that all of the kitchen cabinet and Brendan Duddy have all agreed or accepted that on the 5th July 1981 there was an offer made by the Brits to end the strike, the same terms that were in that offer ended up being implemented anyway after the death of Mickey Devine?

What part of 'there was an offer made by the Brits on the 5th July 1981 to the kitchen cabinet' are you not grasping cara (RT1112-01 2011: yaya, post 38)?

P.169: **30. yaya:** When Liam Clarke presented a piece of paper to Duddy of what the FOI documents claimed to be the 5th July offer Duddy agreed that it was. Remember that it was Duddy that wrote down and handed this offer to McGuinness. McGuinness is also on the record of stating that Duddy is a very genuine and honest person so I don't believe there is any question of there being an offer on the 5th July 1981 and all the FOI documents are doing is supporting Duddy's version of events.

In regards to the highlighted bit above, yes I believe they could have. We must remember that there are many different parts of the British government that work independently of each other but outside of this again there is the British state that is answerable to no one. MI6 fall under the control of the state. Governments come and go but the state remains. I would strongly believe that the every so often MI6 would be given the nod to throw a teaser out to keep SF and anyone else they chose on their toes.

We know now that Donaldson was outed to protect a higher source but I also believe that Martin Ingram, who blew Donaldson's cover, was fed the information from the Brits to act as a warning shot across the bow of whoever this higher agent is. Play ball or else.

I merely mention this because I think it would be foolish to believe that MI6 do not have any hand in this but that hand is merely to torture the kitchen cabinet with this irregular but constant drip feeding of small pieces of information to the media and press. It's like a elongated bout of silent torture. MI6 know what happened I have no doubt about this but as

long as the Adam's leadership is a protected species they will be cushioned from the full revelations that will inevitably follow when the British state no longer requires their services.

The very fact that kitchen cabinet didn't tell the IRSM of this offer suggests they were worried that they would accept it, as any right thinking person would under the circumstances, and through their acceptance this would have upset the SF applecart which ended up happening anyway when Joe died early (RT1112-02 2011: yaya, Post 30).

P.169: **58. Blanket:** nobody has an infallible memory, the years dim all of our memories to the extent small and not so small details of yesteryear fall into amnesia. an impartial examination of all the facts and personnel involved would greatly assist in the memory recall process, but only adams fears this process. do you ever wonder why?

as for the documents, they can be mauled over by others more inclined to arduous reading. they are an incomplete source and will supply occasional caveats for each side of the argument (with the added health warning that they are official british government documents, edited to the requirements of the british government).

bik and richard did have the conversation about the offer, they agreed to accept it and sent word out accordingly. at that point control of the hunger strike and the blanket protest was taken from the prisoners hands and exercised by men who refuse to this day to give us an honest account of the time. all i want is a bit of honesty and less of the propaganda: we deserve that (RT1112-03 2011: Blanket, Post 58).

P.169: **34. Comrade Foster:** Do you have concrete evidence that there was not an offer before Joe Mc Donnell died. I believe there is more than enough evidence to say there was a real offer from the British, the Brit papers released, Duddy's notes from 1981, Duddy's dairy from 1981.

The way the Provo's have tried to handle the whole issue, Adams has lied, Morrison has lied and Bik has lied. All three have been caught out with their lies. What more evidence do you actually want on this issue of the Provo's telling lies, changing story's and just plainly trying to hid away from the issue altogether now?

Maybe you could explain why you believe the Provo's changing versions of events in 1981? I know I could not believe them now they have changed their story's so often (RT1201-11 2012: Comrade Foster, Post 34).

P.170: **19. inla-supporter:** "If they had an offer..."

Cara, you're well off script with that. Everybody and their granny now accept that there was indeed an offer but here is the following link to the offer which, by the way, Duddy confirmed at the Gasyard as being the offer he passed on to the PRM.

The Five Demands

1. The Right not to wear a prison uniform;
2. The Right not to do prison work;
3. The Right of free association with other prisoners;
4. The Right to organize their own educational and recreational facilities;
5. The Right to one visit, one letter and one parcel per week.

The July offer from Thatcher

I. extend to all male prisoners in Northern Ireland the clothing regime at present available to female prisoners in Armagh Prison (i.e. subject to the prison governor's approval);

II. make available to all prisoners in Northern Ireland the allowance of letters, parcels and visits at present available to conforming prisoners;

III. allow the restoration of forfeited remission at the discretion of the responsible disciplinary authority, as indicated in my statement of 30 June, which hitherto has meant the restoration of up to one-fifth of remission lost subject to a satisfactory period of good behaviour;

IV. ensure that a substantial part of the work will consist of domestic tasks inside and outside the wings necessary for servicing of the prison (such as cleaning and in the laundries and kitchens), constructive work, e.g. on building projects or making toys for charitable bodies, and study for Open University or other courses. The prison authorities will be responsible for supervision. The aim of the authorities will be that prisoners should do the kinds of work for which they are suited, but this will not always be possible and the authorities will retain responsibility for decisions about allocation.

3. Little advance is possible on association. It will be permitted within each wing, under supervision of the prison staff.

4. Protesting prisoners have been segregated from the rest. Other prisoners are not segregated by religious or any other affiliation. If there were no protest the only reason for segregating some prisoners from others would be the judgment of the prison authorities, not the prisoners, that this was the best way to avoid trouble between groups.

<http://www.longkesh.info/> (RT1111-03 2011: inla-supporter, Post 19).

P.172: **17. inla-supporter:** Perhaps the other document released under FOI makes it clearer for you then:

Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

1. In the light of discussions which Mr Michael Alison has had recently with the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace, during which a statement was issued on 4 July on behalf of the protesting prisoners in the Maze Prison, HMG have come to the following conclusions.

2. When the hunger strike and the protest is brought to an end (and not before), the Government will:

I. extend to all male prisoners in Northern Ireland the clothing regime at present available to female prisoners in Armagh Prison (i.e. subject to the prison governor's approval);

II. make available to all prisoners in Northern Ireland the allowance of letters, parcels and visits at present available to conforming prisoners;

III. allow the restoration of forfeited remission at the discretion of the responsible disciplinary authority, as indicated in my statement of 30 June, which hitherto has meant the restoration of up to one-fifth of remission lost subject to a satisfactory period of good behaviour;

IV. ensure that a substantial part of the work will consist of domestic tasks inside and outside the wings necessary for servicing of the prison (such as cleaning and in the laundries and kitchens), constructive work, e.g. on building projects or making toys for charitable bodies, and study for Open University or other courses. The prison authorities will be responsible for supervision. The aim of the authorities will be that prisoners should do the kinds of work for which they are suited, but this will not always be possible and the authorities will retain responsibility for decisions about allocation.

3. Little advance is possible on association. It will be permitted within each wing, under supervision of the prison staff.

4. Protesting prisoners have been segregated from the rest. Other prisoners are not segregated by religious or any other affiliation. If there were no protest the only reason for segregating some prisoners from others would be the judgment of the prison authorities, not the prisoners, that this was the best way to avoid trouble between groups.

5. This statement is not a negotiating position. But it is further evidence of the Government's desire to maintain and where possible to improve a humanitarian regime in the prisons. The Government earnestly hopes that the hunger strikers and the other protesters will cease their protest.

End.

Let's not forget that the dispute between the kitchen cabinet and thatcher was over the tone and not content-which again clearly points to a credible offer to be made public once the tone is acceptable in the text (RT1112-03 2011: inla-supporter, Post 17).

P.172: **37. Dixie Elliot:** I posted this on Slugger in response to *Pat Mc Larnon*...

Pat said ...“The O’Rawe account was of a ‘deal’ brought into the camp by Danny Morrison.”

My reply

What deal Pat? You are playing on words. An offer only becomes a deal when both sides agree.

Danny Morrison said...

“After I had seen the hunger strikers, we all agreed that this [the M/C offer] could be a resolution, but we wanted it guaranteed.”

We wanted it guaranteed. Not it wasn't enough!!

Then you [Pat] said: “We have established from the recently released papers, courtesy of call no 4, that the British were waiting on Danny Morrison to come out of the camp before they formulated their position.”

But surely according to Danny and Bik what he explained to the Hunger Strikers only needed “a guarantee”?

However...

FOI Document 1: “Extract from a letter dated 8 July 1981 from 10 Downing Street to the Northern Ireland Office” •

‘Your Secretary of State said that the message which the Prime Minister had approved the previous evening had been communicated to the PIRA. **Their response indicated that they did not regard it as satisfactory and that they wanted a good deal more.**’

‘That appeared to mark the end of the development, and we had made this clear to the PIRA during the afternoon.’ •

“This had produced a very rapid reaction which suggested that it was not the content of the message which they had objected to but only its tone.”

While the Hunger Strikers only needed a guarantee.... • PIRA’s response indicated that they did not regard it as satisfactory and that they wanted a good deal more....

Note: [Didn’t O’Rawe say that it was Adams who rejected the offer not the prisoners?]

Meanwhile the guarantee the prisoners wanted...

<http://www.longkesh....2/HSArchive.pdf>

Hunger Strike: Message to be sent through channel

The British Government is prepared if, only if, it would lead to an immediate end to the Hunger Strike and protest to issue a statement which would include the following points.

[See document P27 for points]

= The Guarantee...

Pat you simply seem to be stuck with Adams recent contradiction of Bik and Morrison and can’t argue outside that. Anyone impartial would see that (RT1112-03 2011: Dixie Elliot, Post 37).

P.172: **22. MartinP:** Yes. This was apparently achieved prior to the death of Joe McDonnell. If what is being claimed by O’Rawe (claims which are seemingly backed up in recently revelations) is true, then the beard [Gerry Adams], j118, Morrison, etc. have a lot to answer for (RT1201-11 2012: MartinP, Post 22).

P.174: **50. Mellows1922:** there was no offer to stay silent about, there was dialogue taking you compromised scenario, as O’Rawe also stayed silent, are we to assume he too was compromised ? and if we accept your analysis that he was, then what purpose was his book ? if you pursue your analysis you have to filter in all theories not just the ones you like (RT1201-08 2012: Mellows1922, Post 50).

P.175: **27. Seabird:** Anyone with respect for the family would stop with this witch hunt. The papers released clearly show O’Rawe’s memory ain’t what it use to be and his timeline was wrong, he is wrong. The HS’s families have suffer while people have done all they can to keep this brewing. It is not gonna suit some until you can find something.....anything to bitch slap Adams with. Pathetic (RT1112-03 2011: Seabird, Post 27).

P.176: **8. Faoi Driocht:** I wan’t there for the questions from the floor unfortunately, but the talk was recorded independently and hopefully it will be released or on you tube.

what did you think of him when he said there never, ever, was anything in writing from the brits? anything he got was told to him, he wrote it down and then passed it on.

or where he challenged the scholars present to check when that so called document that was presented to him at the gasyard debate was actually produced? He verified the contents of the document, but as a summary but not an accurate summary. But again, stressed that no document was ever produced at the time.

This being the case, does it not show that its a load of bull that Gerry could have turned down the ‘offer’ on the basis of the tone, when there was never anything in writing - as stated by Gerry and confirmed by Duddy (RT0908-01 2008: Faoi Driocht, Post 8)?

P.177: **3. inla-supporter:** <http://www.longkesh....2/HSArchive.pdf> (RT1112-03 2011: inla-supporter, Post 3).

P.180: **8. Mellows1922:** more on the top table than in the audience from what I heard

tells it’s own story (RT1402-01 2014: Mellows1922, Post 8).

P.180: **11. Mellows1922:** the societies organised it, or facilitated it, or whatever you want to call it

Fairly quick washing your hands of it when nobody turned up (RT1402-01 2014: Mellows1922, Post 11).

P.181: **36. Comrade Foster:** Those backing Adams and Co still are so far removed from the truth they are not from this world. Mellows saying things like he hasn't changed his version etc????????

Fact, the Brits were offering a deal, Bik accepted it and sent out word saying so, to Mellows and Co this is not a fact, why? Bik has since admitted that this is the case, though at first he said he never spoke/wrote to Ricky about the offer Morrison brought into him, and him alone, the Hunger Strikers were not told of the offer.

Apart from this, Adams has admitted he in person was speaking to the British contact when Joe Mc Donnell died (Before The Dawn) but there is nothing in the public arena on what he was doing talking to the Brits and what was said.

To believe the Hunger Strikers were in control of things when they did not even know what the Brits were offering is a lie. Adams and Co were in total control of the talks not the Hunger Strikers (RT1305-02 2013: Comrade Foster, Post 36).

P.181: **39. Mellows1922:** [Quoting Post 36, up to "this is the case"]

Bik has not admitted this is the case, he is categorical that this is not the case (RT1305-02 2013: Mellows1922, Post 39).

P.184: **240. Mellows** Whatever your own motivations chara you can't claim this issue hasn't been hijacked with those with an anti SF agenda, a read of this thread shows that it clearly has been and some of the stuff I've read on other forums is a disgrace, these are serious allegations and shouldn't be just lumped in with a fevered desire to attack Sinn Fein. Clarke isn't involved out of some loyalty to the memory of dead Republicans, he is involved with an anti Republican agenda but it's tolerated because the anti Republican agenda he is pushing at this point is one with SF on the receiving end this time and not the IRSP, RSF or the 32s. He isn't writing letters to the dep issuing FIA documents because he has Republicanisms best interests at heart.

I don't believe that anything malign is at the heart of what is being alleged, I don't believe the outside leadership let men die to further a political strategy that didn't even exist at the time. I don't believe there was an acceptable offer that the Brits were willing to categorically stand over. I don't think silence at this point is an option though, too much has been said for that to be an acceptable position to adopt. I don't doubt people like Cleeky are speaking anything other than the truth as they remember it, but I honestly believe that context has been removed from the discussion and people are viewing things far differently with hindsight than they would have viewed them at the time. Talking about settling for anything better than what were the conditions etc. This from my understanding is not the kind of motivation that those undertaking the strike had at the time. But these allegations are not going to go away and everybody involved needs to step up with all the information

and knowledge they possess, it's been too distressing for too many people for it to just rumble on indefinitely (RT0905-02 2009: Mellows1922, Post 240).

P.184: **1,401. Mellows1922:** So you would have went against Bobbys wishes ? It's lucky it was Bik that was in that position then chara is it not ? It's also an easy position you are making that decision from with nearly thirty years of hindsight to alter your perspective.

As a strategy, two failed hunger strikes and start a third would have made no logical strategic sense, Bobby knew this and was explicit about why he chose Bik to do the job he did. Will you also second guess his wisdom in that (RT0905-02 2009: Mellows1922, Post 1,401)?

P.185: **13. peonyrose:** Patrick, I don't believe I am burying my head. I simply have a different point of view.

Perhaps the Brits conceded because they didn't want a recurrence of what had been a public relations disaster. Thatcher's name was never the same and I am from the other side of the world.

People lie, and the Mountain Climber statement was probably a lie. But sometimes what those individuals then go for is consistency. It may be the technique that is taught to withstand interrogation for all we know. And this certainly seems like interrogation.

Now and at the time are a generation apart. I see that all the time.

People cannot go back from now and make the same decision as they would at the time because they have changed. They are different, older, more experienced, alive, and aware of it. No-one can actually know what they would have said and done as individuals.

If they now feel cheated and excluded from important information, and if the INLA feels as though they were sidelined then those things are a great pity (RT0904-01 2009: peonyrose, Post 13).

P.185: **6. peonyrose:** The whole subtext of this information and this thread is to blame Adams for at least some of the deaths. But ultimately Thatcher was to blame. I do not believe that the same situation or dynamic would have appeared or have been sustained under a different British leader, such as Tony Blair.

I understand why people look back to that era - to the sacrifice that those young men made. But I don't understand the almost concurrent need to have a republican scapegoat.

What happened, happened. And no amount of finger-pointing will change that now.

Sometimes we may look back and see a lost opportunity in the past. But the situation was complex, trust was low, players were tired, and there was a determination from the very beginning of this hunger strike led from Bobby Sands to avoid the disappointing outcome of the previous aborted hunger strike.

The reality is that if the republican leaders as they are today were transported back to that time, it is doubtful that the same choices would be made. But that is not reality. We are all doing the best we can at any point to achieve the social and political change which is a lifelong commitment for us. It doesn't work to behave as though we have a personal Tardis. Because we don't. (RT0904-02 2009: peonyrose, Post 6).

P.185: **619. peonyrose:** When people tell the same story a number of times, small details change. That is normal - either we remember things that we didn't earlier or we forget things that once were clear. And these were very difficult times that were also a lifetime ago.

Having questions is human, but remember that those being questioned are also human (RT0905-02 2009: peonyrose, Post 619).

P.185: **65. Mellows1922:** Bik hasn't changed his story, he is saying now what he always said, there was no offer that the Brits would stand over, he never had a conversation with O'Rawe where he accepted a deal to end the hunger strikes (without even bothering to consult with the men actually on hunger strike).

No, I'd say Duddy is telling the truth when he says he took an offer from the Brits to the Army which contained a set of proposals and a demand by the Brits for the hunger strike to be called off before they would make any moves. A "trust us lads, you know you can do that" set of proposals. Something arch opponents of the British state seem to think in hindsight was a great deal (RT0906-02 2009: Mellows1922, Post 65).

P.185: **995. peonyrose:** I hope that the families are travelling OK today. I imagine that the controversy and the meeting would have stirred up what must be very sad, frustrated and angry responses.

I understand that people, particularly families, want to know 'the truth'.

My perspective is that the truth will never come out because even if you had complete

transcripts of every phone call or face to face murmur either at H block or outside, whether with the Mountain Climber or Bik, all of those conversations would have taken place within the context of the time. And that context is different from today.

So even if you could see and discuss the actual words precisely used (and that is unachievable) you could never really know today what to make of it in the same way as if it had been at the time. Because of the atmosphere of anger and frustration and grief and tiredness and resolute desire, led by Bobby Sands, already dead, not to prematurely close down this hunger strike as was perceived to have happened the year before (RT0905-02 2009: peonyrose, Post 995).

Appendix C: Trust, Belief and Republican.ie

In this appendix can be found a copy of survey³⁶⁰ discussed in Chapter 3.0.3. It has been replicated as closely as word documents will allow, but there have been some minor format changes. The survey was originally composed of five separate pages, but it is impossible to recreate that here, for example. This appendix is here purely to give reader access to the questions that were asked as part of the survey, but it will not provide any of the results. The only results which will be published are those that can be found in the main body of the thesis, specifically in Chapter 4.0.3.

Trust, Belief and Republican.ie (RS1311-01 2013)

This survey is conducted as part of an ongoing research project conducted at the University of Iceland by Richard Allen, current MA student in Folkloristics/Ethnology.

The survey will ask you a number of background questions before asking you about how much you would trust or believe a story from a range of sources, followed by some more background questions. The aim of the survey is to measure the level of trust and belief in the state, official media and various political groups and compare it with the level of trust and belief in various republican groups. The results will appear in a thesis to be handed into the University of Iceland in 2014 which is researching the role of stories in the community on Republican.ie.

Given the strong desire for security and anonymity within the userbase of Republican.ie, most of the background questions have the option “Do not wish to disclose”. Please pick this option if you do not feel comfortable answering that particular question. You are under no obligation to answer the survey and if at any point you feel uncomfortable, please close it. Furthermore, whilst there is the option to submit your username as part of the survey, that is your choice. You do not need to and again, your anonymity and security is the highest priority in this survey.

Some notes about the survey:

³⁶⁰ In neither the title of the survey nor its main body was “Republican.ie” written inside quotation marks.

As many republicans argue that Sinn Féin are no longer a republican party, they have been separated from the group “Republican parties”. This is not intended to reflect the political beliefs of the author, but rather to avoid confusion over what counts as “republican” or not. In this instance, Sinn Féin refers to the political party also known as Provisional Sinn Féin which has Gerry Adams as its president.

“Official” or “accepted” story means the story that newspapers, general media outlets, historians, academics and the general public all accept as being the correct version. It does not mean the accepted story within the republican community, but more generally. A good example of this would be the official story of Bloody Sunday which the republican and nationalist communities contested until 2010, when the Saville Inquiry agreed with them and the story changed to reflect this.

“Local knowledge” refers to the kind of knowledge spread through word of mouth by people in an area. Usually about an event or person. It may agree or disagree with the official or accepted story. As an example, local knowledge which disagreed with the then official story about Bloody Sunday spurred the calls for an independent inquiry which led to the Saville Inquiry.

If you have any questions, please contact the author on Republican.ie, username Rikki.

Section A: Republican.ie

This section will ask about your use of Republican.ie

1. What time of the day do you usually use Republican.ie: morning, afternoon, evening or night? Pick all that apply.

Morning

Afternoon

Evening

Night

2. How often do you tend to log onto Republican.ie? Pick one.

More than once a day

Once a day
One every couple of days
A few times a week
Once a week
A few times a month
Once a month
Less than once a month

3. On average, after logging on, how long do you spend on Republican.ie?

Less than half an hour
Half an hour
An hour
2-3 hours
3-5 hours
More than 5 hours

4. Why do you use republican.ie? Pick all that apply.

To learn more about Irish republicanism
To meet other Irish republicans
To socialise
To learn about republican events
Other (please state):

5. Do you use other Irish republican websites?

Yes
No

6. If you use other republican websites, which is your favourite?

Republican.ie
Don't view others
Other:

Section B: Politics

This section will ask about your political background. You do not have to answer the questions if you do not wish: please choose “Do not wish to disclose” or write it in the space provided.

Reminder: Sinn Féin refers to the party led by Gerry Adams.

7. Are you Republican, Nationalist, Unionist, Loyalist or other?

Republican

Nationalist

Unionist

Loyalist

Do not wish to disclose

Other (please state):

8. Which of the following political groups or parties do you support?

Sinn Féin

Republican Sinn Féin

Social Democratic Labour Party

32 County Sovereignty Movement

Eirigi

1916 Societies

Republican Network for Unity

Irish Republican Socialist Party

Do not wish to disclose

Other (please state):

9. In your own words, how would you define Irish Republicanism? Please limit your answer to 100 words or less.

10. In your own words, how would you define Irish Nationalism? Please limit your answer to 100 words or less.

11. In your opinion, how similar or different are Irish Nationalism and Irish Republicanism?

Very different

Quite different

Neither different nor similar

Quite similar

Very similar

Do not wish to disclose

12. In your view, who is the political opponent of Irish republicanism? Pick all that apply.

Ulster Protestants

Ulster Unionists/Loyalists

Unionist/Loyalist political groups

Unionist/Loyalist paramilitary groups

The British State

The British people

The Irish people

The Irish State

The working class

The middle class

The upper class

Do not wish to disclose

13. Do you view Sinn Féin as a republican party?

Yes

No

Do not wish to disclose

14. Why do you not view Sinn Féin as a republican party? Please limit your answer to 100 words or less.

Section C: Trust and Belief

This section will ask about your level of trust and belief in various groups, people and parties.

15. How likely are you to believe something stated by the following:

A Sinn Féin politician/ party member

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

A republican politician/party member (excluding Sinn Féin)

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

A nationalist politician/party member (excluding Sinn Féin)

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

A unionist politician/party member

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

A loyalist politician/party member

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely

Very unlikely

A Sinn Féin supporter

Very likely

Quite likely

Neither likely nor unlikely

Quite unlikely

Very unlikely

A republican party supporter (excluding Sinn Féin)

Very likely

Quite likely

Neither likely nor unlikely

Quite unlikely

Very unlikely

A nationalist party supporter (excluding Sinn Féin)

Very likely

Quite likely

Neither likely nor unlikely

Quite unlikely

Very unlikely

A unionist party supporter

Very likely

Quite likely

Neither likely nor unlikely

Quite unlikely

Very unlikely

A loyalist party supporter

Very likely

Quite likely

Neither likely nor unlikely

Quite unlikely

Very unlikely

A Sinn Féin-affiliated newspaper or media outlet

Very likely

Quite likely

Neither likely nor unlikely

Quite unlikely

Very unlikely

A republican (excluding Sinn Féin)-affiliated newspaper or media outlet

Very likely

Quite likely

Neither likely nor unlikely

Quite unlikely

Very unlikely

A nationalist (excluding Sinn Féin)-affiliated newspaper or media outlet

Very likely

Quite likely

Neither likely nor unlikely

Quite unlikely

Very unlikely

A unionist-affiliated newspaper or media outlet

Very likely

Quite likely

Neither likely nor unlikely

Quite unlikely

Very unlikely

A loyalist-affiliated newspaper or media outlet

Very likely

Quite likely

Neither likely nor unlikely
Quite unlikely
Very unlikely

A British newspaper or media outlet

Very likely
Quite likely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Quite unlikely
Very unlikely

An Irish newspaper or media outlet

Very likely
Quite likely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Quite unlikely
Very unlikely

A Sinn Féin-supporting journalist

Very likely
Quite likely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Quite unlikely
Very unlikely

A republican (excluding Sinn Féin) journalist

Very likely
Quite likely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Quite unlikely
Very unlikely

A nationalist (excluding Sinn Féin) journalist

Very likely

Quite likely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Quite unlikely
Very unlikely

A unionist journalist

Very likely
Quite likely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Quite unlikely
Very unlikely

A loyalist journalist

Very likely
Quite likely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Quite unlikely
Very unlikely

The Police Service of Northern Ireland

Very likely
Quite likely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Quite unlikely
Very unlikely

The Northern Ireland Executive

Very likely
Quite likely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Quite unlikely
Very unlikely

The Northern Ireland Assembly

Very likely
Quite likely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Quite unlikely
Very unlikely

The British Government

Very likely
Quite likely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Quite unlikely
Very unlikely

The British Armed Forces

Very likely
Quite likely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Quite unlikely
Very unlikely

A unionist/loyalist paramilitary group

Very likely
Quite likely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Quite unlikely
Very unlikely

The Irish Government

Very likely
Quite likely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Quite unlikely
Very unlikely

A nationalist/republican paramilitary group

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

A republican friend

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

A nationalist friend

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

A unionist friend

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

A loyalist friend

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

A friend who is none of these four

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

An unknown republican

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

An unknown nationalist

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

An unknown unionist

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

An unknown loyalist

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

A complete stranger

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

A Roman Catholic

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

A Protestant

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

Someone from a higher social class

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

Someone from the same social class

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely

Very unlikely

Someone from a lower social class

Very likely

Quite likely

Neither likely nor unlikely

Quite unlikely

Very unlikely

16. How strongly do you trust or mistrust the following (Reminder: “Official” or “accepted” story means the story that newspapers, general media outlets, historians, academics and the general public all accept as being the correct version. “Local knowledge” is knowledge spread through word of mouth by locals):

The British Government

Strongly trust

Mildly trust

Neither trust nor distrust

Mildly distrust

Strongly distrust

The Irish Government

Strongly trust

Mildly trust

Neither trust nor distrust

Mildly distrust

Strongly distrust

The Northern Ireland Executive

Strongly trust

Mildly trust

Neither trust nor distrust

Mildly distrust

Strongly distrust

The Northern Ireland Assembly

Strongly trust

Mildly trust

Neither trust nor distrust

Mildly distrust

Strongly distrust

The Police Service of Northern Ireland

Strongly trust

Mildly trust

Neither trust nor distrust

Mildly distrust

Strongly distrust

The Gardaí

Strongly trust

Mildly trust

Neither trust nor distrust

Mildly distrust

Strongly distrust

Unionist political parties

Strongly trust

Mildly trust

Neither trust nor distrust

Mildly distrust

Strongly distrust

Loyalist political parties

Strongly trust

Mildly trust

Neither trust nor distrust

Mildly distrust

Strongly distrust

Nationalist (excluding Sinn Féin) political parties

Strongly trust

Mildly trust

Neither trust nor distrust

Mildly distrust

Strongly distrust

Republican (excluding Sinn Féin) political parties

Strongly trust

Mildly trust

Neither trust nor distrust

Mildly distrust

Strongly distrust

Sinn Féin

Strongly trust

Mildly trust

Neither trust nor distrust

Mildly distrust

Strongly distrust

The official or accepted story (i.e. the kind of story found on BBC; see above)

Strongly trust

Mildly trust

Neither trust nor distrust

Mildly distrust

Strongly distrust

Local knowledge about an event or person

Strongly trust

Mildly trust

Neither trust nor distrust

Mildly distrust

Strongly distrust

17. How large or small an influence does from whom you heard a story (media, friend, the state, etc.) have on whether you believe it?

Very large

Quite large

Neither large nor small

Quite small

Very small

18. If the official or accepted story (i.e. the kind of story reported by BBC) contradicts local knowledge, how likely are you to trust local knowledge over the official or accepted story?

Very likely

Quite likely

Neither likely nor unlikely

Quite unlikely

Very unlikely

Section D: You

This section will ask for some general background information about you. If you do not wish to answer, you do not have to. Please choose "Do not wish to disclose" or write it in the space provided.

19. Were you brought up in a Protestant, Catholic or another community?

Protestant

Roman Catholic

Do not wish to disclose

Other (please state):

20. Were you brought up in a republican, nationalist, loyalist, unionist or another community?

Republican

Nationalist

Loyalist

Unionist

Do not wish to disclose

Other (please state):

21. Would you consider yourself working, middle or upper class?

Working class

Middle class

Upper class

Do not wish to disclose

22. How old are you?

23. Are you female or male?

Female

Male

Do not wish to disclose

24. What is your current level of education?

Post-graduate (Masters or higher)

Undergraduate

A-levels or comparable

GCSEs or comparable

Do not wish to disclose

25. What is your username on Republican.ie?

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