

RUNNING HEAD: Radicalization or Reaction

Radicalization or Reaction: Understanding Engagement in Violent Extremism in Northern
Ireland

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Since the terror attacks on 9/11 and the bombings on the train and underground networks in Madrid and London in 2004 and 2005 respectively, there has been a major growth in research exploring the routes in violent extremism or terrorism and the mechanisms which lead to individuals and groups to committing these acts, while the recent rise of Islamic State (ISIS) and the recent terror attacks across Europe, Canada, the US and elsewhere have renewed policy interest in these processes and further accelerated research in this area (Jasko, LaFree & Kruganski, 2016). While there are clear developments in the field and, in particular in the design of models or pathways exploring radicalization (for example, McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Moghaddam, 2005; Borum, 2011, Kruglanski et al, 2014; Ferguson & Binks, 2015). The research in this area is still marred by the same problems which have been well discussed for twenty years (e.g., Silke, 1998; 2001; Horgan, 2003; Victoroff, 2005; King & Taylor, 2011; Jensen, et al., 2016; Nacos, 2016), such as, a lack quality primary data, lack of direct contact with violent extremists, problems with defining ‘radicalization’ and ‘terrorism’, the complex multifaceted range of factors involved, methodological shortcomings, researchers working in isolation, or interloping in the area and then returning to their primary fields leading to a lack of consistent theory development.

Northern Ireland, like many countries across the globe has born witness to a prolonged period of civil unrest, inter-communal strife and politically motivated violence, commonly viewed as terrorism. While the levels of violence in Northern Ireland had reduced dramatically since the signing of the Good Friday (or Belfast) Agreement in 1998 (The Agreement: Agreement Reached in the Multi-party Negotiations, 1998) the society is still highly segregated and community relations have been in decline over the past few years

(Ferguson & McKeown, 2016). Additionally, dissident Irish republicans remain committed to using violence to remove the British presence from Northern Ireland and the threat level of Northern Ireland-related terrorism is currently judged to be ‘severe’ meaning that an attack ‘highly likely’, this threat level is in line with the threat of international terrorism in the UK (MI5, 2017).

Even with these continuing tensions post-agreement Northern Ireland can still be regarded as a benign environment to research issues around violent extremism, in comparison to Afghanistan, Syria or Iraq, for example (Mac Ginty, Muldoon & Ferguson, 2007). Therefore it offers an opportunity for research to be conducted on issues around radicalization and violent extremism which have the possibility overcome many of the weaknesses in the current research reported above.

This article aims to address some of the weaknesses in this previous research, firstly by exploring the current state of research on radicalization or engagement in violent extremism, then examining the conflict in Northern Ireland and the armed groups involved before utilizing a qualitative analysis based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, 1995; 1996) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the narrative accounts of former combatants from the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), the Red Hand Commando (RHC), Official Irish Republican Army (OIRA), Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) on their route into these paramilitary groups and engagement in politically motivated violence during the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland, to explore how these accounts map onto current social science conceptions of radicalization and engagement in violent extremism.

Pathways to Violent Extremism

Research aimed at understanding the antecedent factors or processes involved in violent extremism is wide ranging and developing in its sophistication (Ferguson, Burgess &

Hollywood, 2008; Jensen et al., 2016). The conception of radicalization has been central to this research area, and while this concept is difficult to pin down, it can be viewed as a transformational process through which individuals, and/or groups, experience a conversion from contributing to the political debates by recognized legitimate political means to adopting extremist ideologies and engaging in politically or ideologically motivated violence (Borum, 2011; McDaid, Ferguson & McAuley, under review).

The pathways into violent extremism are multilevel and involve factors spanning the exo, macro, meso and micro levels of analysis, from intra-individual factors through community context and influence to the role of global ideological forces (Ferguson & Binks, 2015; Ranstorp, 2016; Schmid, 2013). Research over past twenty years has offered some insights into these processes, with some factors consistently being reported in different contexts, with different ideologically diverse armed groups and across individual extremists of all ideological and political hues (e.g., Ferguson et al., 2008; Ferguson & Binks, 2015; Ranstorp, 2016).

While there is not space in one article to deal with all these common antecedent factors in detail, they include perceptions of a grievance, an injustice or perceived discrimination (Piazza, 2006), experiences of trauma (Speckhard, 2006; Simi et al., 2015), friendship and kin ties to movements (Sageman, 2004; Bond, 2014), community support for the extremist group (Burgess, Ferguson & Hollywood, 2007), group membership offers rewards (financial, status, sexual, etc) (Horgan, 2005), desire for revenge (Crenshaw, 2003), trigger moments (Burgess, Ferguson, Hollywood, 2005), identifying with the extremist group (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2007), a quest for significance (Kruglanski, et al. , 2014), and, age and gender relationships (Silke, 2003).

While some of these factors have received volumes of support, such as a perceived grievance or injustice (Jensen, et al. 2016) others such as a need for a quest for significance

have received less to date (Jasko, et al. 2016). Even this brief list illustrates the scale of the problem involved in understanding the causal processes that move an individual to engage in politically or ideologically motivated violence. Also while many people share similar antecedent experiences only a minority become ideologically radicalized or progress to engage in extremism violence (Borum, 2011), or as Della Porta and La Free (2012) point out, much seemingly politically or ideologically motivated violence is perpetrated by people who have not been radicalized.

In the last decade researchers have begun to bring this research together to develop numerous models of radicalization and engagement in violence extremism (for example, Borum, 2003, 2004, Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010; Gill, 2007; Kruglanski et al, 2014; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Moghaddam, 2005; 2007; Psoiu, 2011; Precht, 2007; Sageman, 2008; Silber & Bhatt, 2007, Sinai, 2012; Taarnby, 2005; Taylor & Horgan, 2006; Wiktorowicz, 2005). Again, this article does not have the scope to explore each of these models in any depth, however, the similarities and differences have been explored to some extent elsewhere (e.g., King & Taylor, 2011; McDaid, Ferguson & McAuley, under review). While Jensen et al, (2016) as part of the Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR) programme at START, University of Maryland compiled many of these models and the antecedent factors discussed above, finding considerable overlap across the models.

From the analysis of the compiled models, the EADR team identified approximately 70 causal mechanisms which had been proposed as antecedent factors for radicalization and engagement in extremist violence. These ranged from intra-personal factors, through to group level factors. To make these theoretical mechanisms more manageable the causal mechanisms were split over 10 distinct conceptual constructs based on conceptual similarities. The constructs were: (a) personal crisis, these were experiences which caused the individual difficulty which could lead to a crisis driven cognitive opening to radicalization,

(b) psychological vulnerability, which make people susceptible to extremist messages and groups; (c) material rewards, such as status; (d) recruitment, access to extremists groups; (e) group biases, both ingroup and outgroup pressure, such as groupthink (Janis, 1982) and threat; (f) group norms, exposure to messages about group beliefs and role of persuasive leaders; (g) cognitive frame alignment, the process of learning and aligning with radical beliefs; (h) community crisis, external threats to the ingroup and collective crisis; (i) psychological rewards, finding significance, and recognition; and (j) physical vulnerability, physical, material or community distress.

Jensen et al's (2016) analysis of these conceptual constructs found that when cognitive frame alignment and community crisis are combined they are very close to necessary conditions for radicalization to violent extremism, or in other words, that having a sense of being a member of the community which has been collectively victimized is key to setting the contextual environment for radicalization to be possible. This also lends further support to the importance of the perceived grievance antecedent discussed earlier (Piazza, 2006).

The findings also indicate the importance of social identity, psychological and emotion vulnerabilities combined with perceptions of community victimization to persuade individuals that the problems they face are due to threats to their community. Also they demonstrate that once people join groups and these secretive groups become more insular and isolating, mechanisms of cognitive bias and groupthink create a risky shift and push the racializing individual towards violence. Jensen et al. also demonstrate that for most violent extremists material factors are rarely the main drivers of radicalization. Importantly the analysis demonstrates the complexity of these processes, as the 500 possible combinations of causal mechanisms studies by Jensen et al. (2016) only accounted for 20 of the 35 violent individuals who made up the cases studies for their analysis.

This present study aims to build on this previous research by exploring the narratives of former combatants from all the mainstream illegal armed groups from Northern Ireland to explore how their accounts of routes into paramilitary organizations and understandings of their engagement in politically motivated map onto the antecedent factors and pathway models discussed above.

The Northern Irish Conflict and Paramilitary Groups

While the conflict in Northern Ireland is often viewed as a religious war between Irish Catholics and Ulster Protestants, however, these identities are badges of convenience (Ferguson & Gordon, 2007) which mask competing economic, religious, national, political ideologies, which reflect a desire to either remain part of the United Kingdom or to unify with the Republic of Ireland. During the latest period of sustained violence between 1968 and 1998, approximately 3,600 people were killed and additional 40,000 to 50,000 were injured, in what was the worst period of violence in Western Europe since the Second World War (Fay, Morrissey & Smyth, 1998; Tonge, 2005). During the conflict and since the 1998 Agreement most of the casualties related to the security situation in Northern Ireland have been killed or injured by loyalist or republican paramilitary groups (Sutton, 2017).

It must be remembered that Northern Irish paramilitary groups are not a militarised police force or a local auxiliary militia, instead, they are illegal armed militant groups which employed politically motivated violence or terrorism, either in an attempt to force a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland (Irish republican groups), or to maintain Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom (Ulster loyalist groups). This article will analyse the data created by a series of interviews with members of both republican and loyalist armed groups. The republican paramilitaries interviewed were members of the both the Official and Provisional wings of the IRA and the smaller INLA which split from the Official IRA in 1974. The loyalist paramilitaries interviewed were members of the UDA, UVF and RHC.

Almost all of the interviewees were also former prisoners having served sentences for scheduled offences relating to their participation in politically motivated violence and/or had been interned without trial in the 1970's under the Special Powers Act.

The Current Study

This study will build on the research which had been generated to study the antecedent factors and processes involved in fuelling radicalization or moving people to engage in extremist violence and explore the individual accounts of Northern Irish militants who engaged in politically motivated violence to either remove the British from Ireland or maintain the Union with Great Britain. The study will explore how the accounts provided by the Northern Irish extremists of their journey in violent extremism map onto or reflect the models of radicalization and engagement in violent extremism, and in particular, the recent findings of Jensen et al, (2016) which compiles a substantial number of these conceptual models.

Method

Participants & Data Collection

The participants (n=) for this were all members or former members of paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland. The interviewees were either members of the Official IRA (n =) the Provisional IRA (n=) or the INLA (n=), the UDA (n=), UVF (n=) or RHC (n=). The sample was predominantly male (n=) with a small number of females who had served in the PIRA (n=). Almost all of the participants (n=) had served prison sentences for politically motivated violence, such as murder, armed robbery, use of explosives and attempted murder. While the interviewees were drawn from across Northern Ireland, the majority of the interviews took place in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. All the participants had been previously interviewed by research teams involving the first or second author as part of a variety of research projects conducted between XXXX and XXXX. The large sample was

collected to allow for variation (Langridge, 2007), so that while they were selected because they had shared the same experience (i.e., getting engaged with armed groups and committing extremism violence) we also deliberately sampled from different groups (i.e., all mainstream republican and loyalist paramilitary groups sampled from across Northern Ireland). This allowed us to investigate the underlying phenomenon regardless of the participants' ideological, national, religious or geographical background. The original research received ethical approval from both authors' universities and the reanalysis of the data gained ethical approval from the first author's university.

All of the interviews were semi-structured and allowed the participants to speak for as long as they wished on a number of topics related to the interviewees' experiences and opinions on the Northern Irish conflict, imprisonment and peace process. All of the interviews lasted between 30 and 200 minutes and had been audio recorded in a location known to the participant, and where they felt comfortable being interviewed. All participants provided oral or written consent for their participation. All the interviews were transcribed and anonymised to maintain the interviewee's confidentiality and anonymity.

Data Analysis

The collection of anonymised transcripts were analysed in line with principles and processes common to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As the research aimed to make sense of how people make sense of their lived experience the analysis was also guided by principles shared with IPA (Smith, 1995, Smith Jarmon & Osborn, 1999) and the patterns in the data were primarily identified inductively (Patton, 1990). The data analysis began with the first author reading and re-reading the transcripts, and noting down initial ideas, with a particular focus on aspects of the interview which explored accounts of getting engaged with armed groups, moving towards engagement in political violence, or engaging in violence and the understanding the participants narrated for these actions.

In the second phase of analysis, the first author analysed the transcripts line-by-line, and noted anything of psychological interest and generated an initial list of codes on the left-hand margin. These codes were grounded in the participants narrated experiences and were driven by the data. After all the transcripts had been systematically worked through, with each transcript being treated with equal importance, allowing new themes to emerge from successive transcripts (Smith et al., 1999) the third phase of analysis began. In this phase the transcripts are compared to collate, refine and reduce the different themes being raised from the data set to produce inclusive superordinate themes and check for sub-themes. While doing this the first author repeatedly returned to the transcripts and explored the narratives to ensure each theme was raised from the participant's accounts and that the themes reflected the meaning in the data.

As mentioned above, the data was analysed inductively, thus the themes raised were not related to the specific questions asked in the interviews. Thus, the analysis was data driven, without trying to fit the previous conceptualized radicalization models, or the routes into violent extremism discussed in the introduction (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After the first author completed the analysis the second author began a process of audit to enhance the qualitative validity of the findings (see Yardley, 2000). The audit involved the second author independently conducting an examination of the transcripts, summary documents, coding and themes identified by the first author in line with accepted procedures (Yin, 1989). This audit was designed to gauge the extent to which the first author's interpretations of data were grounded in participants' accounts, and to gauge the extent to which emerging themes adequately represented the data, were sensitive to the context, demonstrated rigour, and were coherent.

Results

Through the analysis it became clear that while there were many similarities amongst the themes raised by both loyalist and republican paramilitary groups, which will be the main focus of this article, there were also differences in their accounts of their routes into extremist violence. Most of this variation was related to surface content (e.g., police brutality leading to involvement with the IRA, why republican brutality led to involvement with the UDA) rather than the deeper latent content which dealt with the underlying conceptual assumptions (e.g., perceived victimization by the outgroup leads to involvement in armed violence) which shaped this surface content (Boyatzis, 1998; Patton, 1990). These differences generally related to difference across ideological groupings, there were also some geographical differences (for example, East vs. West of the River Bann), with differences in some of the accounts of mobilization amongst the rural and urban paramilitaries, and also temporal differences over the 30 years of conflict (e.g., impact of Bloody Sunday, or later the impact of the Hunger Strikes in promoting involvement). While the analysis aims to explore the themes shared across the participants, the main variations will be explored within the themes.

The four themes are presented with extracts from the participants to allow the reader to see how the themes were developed (Smith et al., 1999). The first theme is ‘reaction to local events’, and contains the sub-themes ‘naivety, identity and fear’ and ‘no alternative’. The second theme explores the role of ‘peer and family influences’ in fuelling engagement in violence. The third theme explores the role of ‘ingroup pressures’ that are created when people join these secretive small groups. The fourth theme explores the ‘imprisonment’ in radicalizing the interviewees.

Theme 1: Reaction to Local Events

It was clear from the transcripts that engagement in violent extremism was primarily driven by reactions to what was happening in the local community, rather than driven by political

ideology. For some participants they could point to a particular incident or ‘trigger moment’ which fuelled a ‘Pauline conversion’ into violent extremism, as illustrated by this volunteer.

But what happened over time was 1972 I was going into the town, the town centre and myself and all my friends used to go into the town centre on a Saturday afternoon, buying clothes and records and stuff like that – I was 15 years of age at the time. And that particular Sunday afternoon when we were going into the town and we heard about a bomb on the Shankill Road, they bombed old showrooms, a furniture showroom on the Upper Shankill there. And we made our way to the scene and we helped to dig the bodies out, and there was two babies were brought out of that bomb. It just had a real impact on me. And we didn’t actually go into town that day, we came back up home and we sat and talked about it and discussed it. And basically we just came to the conclusion that there were people out there that were wanting to kill us. It didn’t matter what sex we were or what age we were as long as we were Protestants. The people who were bombing were wanting to blow us all up. So we knew that the UDA had just formed and we knew that we had their meetings at an old hall on a Sunday morning, an old community hall on a Sunday. So we went the next day to join the Ulster Defence Association. (T84, UDA, Belfast)

It also important to note, that the trigger events is not a simple Pavlovian stimulus evoking a response, instead the critical incident creates a state of dissociation that forces the individual to consider their future, and make a conscious decision to pursue violence or join an armed group. However, for most interviewees it was a combination of the daily events they witnessed first-hand, or through discussions within their community, or through the media over months or years, which pushed them towards engaging in violence over a longer period of time.

It wasn't the UVF, it was YCV [Young Citizen Volunteers – UVF youth wing] I joined. The reasons at the time, was it was my own implicit experience of all that was going on around me. Mainly the shootings and bombings and indiscriminate attacks, etc, etc. But it sort of culminated in the strike of 1974, the Ulster Workers Council Strike, because that is when I joined. At that time violence in the streets was day and daily every night and I was involved in that. From that I actively sought out to join the YCV's.... I think on my release from prison I have reflected on that experience and tried to apply it in some way to my further study and education and that type of thing and working in the community and stuff. But at the time, I mean I had only turned seventeen a couple of weeks when I was arrested and what seventeen year old has an ideology or a political sort of thought. (T97, UVF, Belfast)

It was because of what was happening all around us at the time. We were kids. Bombay Street was getting burnt down. Before that it was student riots, student protests. There was always trouble down around the Falls anyway. There were parades even then. I remember the Divis Street riots, not really understanding them but I knew it was sort of us and them. 1969 was the central year when everything changed. I watched the streets being burnt down around us, because we lived in X street, the top of X. Dover Street wasn't that far away. We knew people in Dover Street, people in our class lived in those streets. Back to school after the holidays, I heard all the personal stories of kids who had been run out of their homes with the house on fire. Everybody was joining the Fianna [Fianna Éireann - the IRA youth wing]. That seemed to be some sort of way of reacting against it, or doing something against something that you felt you were powerless against. It gave you some sort of strength. (T51, PIRA, Belfast)

Sub-theme 1: Naivety, Identity and Fear

When the interviewees reflected on why and how they became involved with the paramilitary groups their accounts reflected how they were politically and ideologically naïve when they joined, but rather than radicalization fuelling their engagement it was a sense of identity and affinity with their community mixed with feelings of fear that their community was facing an existential threat.

I joined at sixteen...By 1971 the country had sustained two years of IRA violence. I joined to fight back against that at sixteen. I joined the YCV-stroke-UVF. It seemed to me the police and so on, had lost control over it, there was bombs going off almost daily. To me it seemed logical that you carry out a retaliatory act. That's why within days of joining I started to carry out acts. Incendiary device attacks against Catholics, attacks against chapels, attacks against anything that represented the depth of hatred I had at that particular point of time, to anybody associated with the people who were doing this. (T24, UVF, Larne)

I was 17 so I used to sit and listen to older people who were in the movement. And I got a sense of awareness that the armed struggle wasn't planned. I think we just reacted to what was happening in the street. It was as I grew up, the army coming and kicking doors. There were riots. The army were opening up with rubber bullets and tear gas. The first lad who was alleged to have thrown a petrol bomb was killed just around the corner here, Danny O'Hagan. And I think, what I'm hearing is someone said go and get a gun, got a machine gun and came out and shot the first soldier who was shot just around the corner. So I don't think there was any plan. I think it was just reacting to what was going on. (T53, PIRA, Belfast)

Sub-theme 2: No Alternative

One of the factors which pushed the interviewees towards violence, was a sense that violence was the only course of action which was going to make a political change, they did not feel

that the fear or injustice they felt could be alleviated peacefully, or that when peaceful protest had been employed it had failed in the face of opposition violence. Therefore the necessary response was to smash the state or terrorise the terrorists to remove the fear and threat to the community they identified with.

In 1969, when the Troubles broke out, all I felt was that working class loyalist communities were under threat from the IRA. I believed that the constitution was under threat and that I believed you couldn't beat IRA terrorism within the rule of law, you know. I don't believe any government can defeat terrorism within the rule of law, I believed that arms of the police and security forces were tied...we felt the only alternative was to go outside the rule of law and fight terror with terror. I subscribed to the belief that the only way to defeat terrorism was by counter-terrorism. (T22, UVF, Belfast)

I wasn't exposed to socialism in any shape or form. That bit definitely didn't come until the prison. Socialism, it did not enter my mind. Even though it was a left-wing organization that I joined, it was a case of just getting guns. It wasn't a case of this is for some great political ideology I do this. It was just to get the British out and the only way to do that was violence. (T30, INLA, Belfast)

Summary of Theme 1

The accounts of involvement in violence, illustrate that sectarianism and intergroup biases and threat perceptions were much stronger forces pushing people towards violence than adherence to a particular ideology, or even a grand strategy to win the conflict. The individuals also could not visualize a peaceful or constructive solution to the conflict, it was a zero-sum game, and they believed that only increasing the violence suffered by the other side would force them to back down or retreat.

Theme 2: Peer and Family Influences

Peer groups played important roles in pushing people into joining, this was often linked to the excitement of getting involved in the violence on the streets around them, and running with gangs of youths, who began to gravitate towards the paramilitary groups in their communities.

Every single day there was a riot after school...So it was pretty intense rioting. Then the Brits used to react with plastic bullets and rubber bullets...In fact, we used to try and catch them and stuff, it happened a few times with myself, it was like a kick in the leg... So it really was reactions on the ground that was behind my decision to join.

Plus friends as well who joined. (T31, INLA, Strabane)

The main reason for me joining the UDA was my big brother was in the UDA, so he was, family and friends were all in it. And it was kind of like more peer pressure than anything to join. I couldn't turn round and say a member of my family was killed or anything like that there. (T86, UDA, Belfast)

So for some it was a 'hip thing to do' to join the IRA, there friends were involved, it was exciting, for others they had family involved, and amongst the republican paramilitaries, many could call on a lineage of republicans in their family stretching back to 1916 and they were socialised into Irish republicanism from an early age.

I can bring my republican, my family's republican history back to James Connelly and back to the civil war, my grandfather on my mother's side worked for, for James Connelly as and, my father was in prison in the 1940's. My mother was a member of Cumann na mBan [women's wing of the IRA], three of her brothers were in prison for republican activity and two of my uncles on my father's side were in prison for republican activity. (T41, PIRA, Belfast)

While loyalists lacked this long heritage of struggle and resistance, they often pointed to a history of family joining the British Army. However, they often found less support from their families of their illegal violent activities, particularly, when their family thought they should have joined legal armed groups to combat republicanism, such as the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), or the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) instead.

We took the decision to become paramilitaries and it wasn't an easy decision, especially from the background of my family. I come from a security force background and only for an accident at work I would have joined the police or the army like my brothers and my mother. But I got injured at work and I couldn't become a policeman and I became a paramilitary. (T82, UDA, Lurgan)

However, many were socialized in the loyalist traditions, of the Orange Order or belonged to loyalist flute bands and were socialized into a very polarized Protestant, unionist, loyalist world view.

I was deeply involved in the loyal orders from when I was old enough to become involved, the orange order, apprentice boys, blacks, supporter all my life, you know, just steeped in loyalism. I would never class myself as a bigot, but I suppose deep down that I was a bigot, but I've certainly come away from all that, because the more I saw of life and the more injustices I have seen and the more death and grief that I've seen and it doesn't separate, religion doesn't separate or divide people in death and grief. (T66, UVF, Belfast)

Summary of Theme 2

For many of the individuals who joined the armed groups their route in was facilitated by family or friendship groups, many of these peer groups formed up in the excitement of the sectarian riots which were occurring across community interfaces and these activities brought them in contact with paramilitaries and assisted them in graduating from street gangs to

paramilitary groups. However, there were differences between loyalists and republicans in the role of the family, with many more loyalists encountering antagonism from their families for joining a proscribed group to combat the threat of Irish republicanism. However, many members of both loyalist and republican groups reported early socialization into republican or loyalist culture which framed the worldview and provided the environmental context for their future engagement.

Theme 3: Ingroup Pressures

In Northern Ireland's segregated society Protestants and Catholics live separate lives, in what has been described as a 'benign form of apartheid' (Nagle & Clancy, 2010), this segregation in homogenous groups has a significant impact on people's sense of identity, attitudes towards group members, perceptions of threat and biased attributions (Ferguson, Muldoon & McKeown, 2013). However, once the individuals join extremist groups within these already segregated homogeneous partisan communities the small group pressures are amplified. Inside these extremist cliques, the individuals are further insulated from the outside world and different opinions, thus the being involved in these groups create groupthink like conditions which foster conformity and remove barriers towards their involvement in extremist violence.

I was twenty-one, my lifestyle was about football, fishing. I'd just got married, and had a young daughter. But having put all that together, the pull or pressure, or the culture of what we were under at that time, that all became secondary to me, because I'd sold myself out completely to the organisation. I believed that was my most important role in my life at the time. You know, my work was there too, but the organization quickly and very easily took over every aspect of me completely. Probably the reason being, I wanted to dedicate myself to it...until your caught, imprisoned, or some of your friends are killed...you genuinely believed it was for God and Ulster, I was sold completely. (T26, UVF, Larne)

Being active in these organizations also increased sense of purpose, feelings of empowerment, efficacy and decreased moral ambiguity. Being a member also increases the sense of comradeship and brotherhood, heightening the sense of collective identity, for most these aspects were then further magnified during imprisonment. These outlooks fuelled engagement and sustained extremism as articulated by a UVF and PIRA volunteer, reflecting back on the conflict.

This may sound bad, but there are some who miss the conflict and most of them miss it in the sense of the comradeship of the sense of purpose and of belonging to something important. There are those that have that sense of comradeship, the sense of belonging, the sense of purpose, and the excitement of danger, I think those are the things that are created by conflict that people can miss that doesn't necessarily make them a bad person, it doesn't necessarily mean they want to go out and kill people but there was something created that they miss. (T90, UVF, Mid-Ulster)

People kept their spirits high and people knew where they belonged and it was easy to see, you know, it was easy to do what you did, in certain, in certain ways. It was clear what you were doing. (T37, PIRA, Female, Belfast)

Summary of Theme 3

Once the individual is a member of these groups they are subjected to small group dynamics which strengthen bonds of solidarity and feelings of efficacy and identification with ingroup members and the group's cause. As these groups become more isolated and compliant to the group consensus, radicalization and the use of violence increases.

Theme 4: Imprisonment

It was not until the paramilitaries got arrested for terror related offences and spent time in prison away from the hot conflict on the streets of Northern Ireland that they began to

develop their ideology, educate themselves, develop their political strategy and radicalize themselves and their fellow political prisoners.

Long Kesh imprisonment in those days, we did read Irish history and we did go to political lectures we did learn more about everything. It was your first chance to read books on communism, books on revolution, Ché Guevara, Connolly. All the things that you wouldn't have read when you were a teenager...But in Long Kesh, all these books were being passed around. Everybody's talking about them, everybody's debating them. So you naturally want to be informed about it. You want to understand it. We did a lot of things in Long Kesh. It wasn't just political education; it was military education. But there was also lots of sports and lots of ordinary reading and just messing about. So they were all forming some form of political understanding of what was happening. (T51, PIRA, Belfast)

The difficulty for, for myself and other young people of my generation growing up, politics never entered your thoughts. One, you were never taught it in school, you, you never knew anything about your own, your own history, Irish history. In school, you weren't taught it. It wasn't until a lot of us went to jail that we realised...I thought Northern Ireland was only shaped from day one ...and it wasn't until I went, went into prison that, that I was able to learn that it wasn't until the 1920s that it was actually formed and, and things like that and, and that was mind-blowing for myself, and there were a lot of other ones of, of my generation would've done the same and it wasn't until, as I said, we went into prison and you got a bit of time to yourself and you, and you were, you were learning about things and there's new experiences. (T98, UVF, Belfast)

As hinted at by the PIRA volunteer above, prison didn't just radicalize your thinking, it was a transformational experience that would have been impossible to have experienced in the working class communities embroiled in conflict from which they came.

[In long Kesh] you structured your own day, and my day consisted of training, playing football, music and re-educating my mind...For those ten years I lived the life of a professional athlete, I trained and trained and trained. And I became re-educated in my history of Ireland, and how things are seen from outside...I would say for me, prison was one of the most wonderful education I ever had, it was a very expensive education, but a wonderful, absolutely tremendous one. (T26, UVF, Larne)

Much of the re-education in prison lead to a move away from the sectarian, nationalistic, view of the conflict which had fuelled the interviewees' earlier violence .The space to think within Long Kesh fuelled a move towards more radical thinking heavily influenced by socialism and a rethinking of Irish history for both loyalists, particularly those from the UVF, and republicans.

At one point in the time the prisoners would have been virtually the only people within the Protestant community, certainly the working class community, who were discussing anything. You know, inside the jails with a big wire fence all around them. That was the only place where serious debate was going on. People on the outside were talking about the lost tribe of Israel and all that kind of guff. That was the standard. And the real discussion of working class politics and issues was in the prison system. (T76, PUP, Belfast)

I don't know how well I would have articulated my views before I went to jail. I think jail was brilliant in terms of giving me the time to sit down and read and clarify my thoughts...Jail gave me the time and the opportunity to clarify my own head. To have it in me. There have been times where - like the hunger strikes and things - you'll be

living in the moment, you'll be just living - I mean events would have been right and wrong for you, or things happening would have been right and wrong. You would have been just almost dealing with them in the here and now, where going to jail and going through that type of thing - you can read history properly... one thing the jail did for me, it gave me this idea of being analytical and being critical. Not just to take something at face value on the moment, where I may have when I was a teenager or when I was in the middle of it. (T48, PIRA, Belfast)

While this article is focusing on the role of prison in radicalization, the impact of incarceration is much greater than just comradeship, radicalization and self-actualization. Prison could be a very difficult situation and many of the participants reflected on the negative side of imprisonment, and how the ability to educate and radicalize was very much dependant on when and where you were incarcerated.

So going to prison was the inevitable outcome, it happens to most republicans - you get shot, you get killed or you go to prison. When I went to prison I was looking for a hotbed of knowledge of republicanism. I was deeply shocked that it was not there at that time...Prison was a disappointment in the sense that I didn't see what I had hoped to see because of the fragmentation of the republican movement inside, along with other associated groups...And there was nothing politically going on (T46, PIRA, Belfast)

Summary of Theme 4

Almost every participant spent time in prison or were interned without trial during the conflict. Imprisonment was viewed as an inevitable part of being a paramilitary, and it was viewed as just another facet of the struggle. Prison enhanced ingroup solidarity and provided the space to educate and radicalize away from the day-to-day action and reaction pressures of being a paramilitary.

Discussion

These findings reflect the core themes presented by former paramilitaries based on their accounts of how and why they got involved in politically motivated violence. While the four core themes share much similarity to the previous antecedent factors and conceptual models of radicalization (Jenson, et al., 2016; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Moghaddam, 2005) they clearly illustrate that a supportive environmental context and the role of perceiving an injustice or collective existential threat to a community the individual closely identifies with is key to pushing people towards extremism. The findings suggest engagement in extremism is primarily through reaction, rather than ideological radicalization, with ideological transformation coming much later in the process, demonstrating that there is not necessarily a connection between radicalization and seemingly ideological violence (Della Porta & Le Free, 2012). For most participants radicalization was due to their incarceration in a prison environment which promoted a political and ideological re-education, or after spending considerable time within an organization which was being radicalized by the leadership.

The findings also demonstrate that while being exposed to injustice, structural violence or direct threats to your ingroup or self is a key factor, the movement towards using violence involves individual agency and is not a linear stimulus-response reaction. It requires the individual to interpret the circumstances they are faced with and delineate their reactions based on their world view, what is happening around them, the role of peer and familial role models, and the community discourses and explanations for the circumstances they are faced with. The findings emphasise the role of emotion and biased perception in this decision making processes, in line with experimental studies exploring ‘hot cognition’ and socio-political decision making (Lodge & Taber, 2005).

Once engaged with the armed groups, small group dynamics play a significant role in pushing the individual towards extremism, and legitimising actions taken as conceptualized

in many of the current radicalization models (e.g., Sageman, 2008) and highlighted by the recent EADR research. These processes were also further amplified during imprisonment. While for most participants it was not until their incarceration that they truly radicalized, in terms of developing considered political ideologies and strategies to underpin their acts of violent extremism, which were initially primarily reactive, sectarian or ethno-national in character.

This study set out to analyse narrative accounts from interviews with paramilitaries from across the political spectrum in Northern Ireland to fill gaps in the research on radicalization and pathways into violent extremism and to explore whether these accounts would map onto existing conceptual models. In line with Jensen et al's (2016) research the accounts presented here show the significance of identifying with a community in perceived crisis in attempting to explain antecedents of extremism. Then the role of collective identity, small group dynamics and the view that violence is the only solution to the problems faced by the ingroup augment this engagement in violence. These findings are also reflective of recent research (Simi et al., 2015) with North American white supremacists which illustrates how non-ideological factors (community crisis, experiences of trauma, in this case; delinquency, childhood trauma in the US case), may be greater risk factors than ideological motivations in fuelling engagement in seemingly ideologically motivated violence.

However, it is important to acknowledge that while the interviewees were not radicalized when they began to engage in seemingly politically motivated violence, they did sustain their careers as paramilitaries through a political re-education and reanalysis of their motivations for engaging in and supporting political violence. For many this post-hoc radicalization allowed them to defend and make sense of their violent activity and the violence of the group they were affiliated with. Therefore radicalization maybe an important factor is sustaining extremism, if not initiating it.

Understanding how and/or why people understand their own pathways to radicalization is key if academics, practitioners or policy makers are to design effective counter-extremism interventions or programs. While many counter extremism interventions, such as UK Prevent strategy, are built around challenging ideology, promoting values, and safeguarding vulnerable young people; it is clear from this study that any intervention must focus on non-ideological factors and perceptions of injustice or grievances held by communities as this is the key precursor to involvement. These interventions must be able to respond to these perceptions without exacerbating them and further alienating the community.

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