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**The Politics of Troubles Memories in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland,  
1998 to 2018**

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**Biography**

Dr Thomas Leahy is a lecturer in British and Irish politics and contemporary history at Cardiff University in Wales. His previous research involved extensive archive and interview work to investigate the outcome of the British intelligence war against the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1998. An article based on this research was published in 2015. A book on this research is forthcoming. Thomas completed his PhD in history at King's College London in 2015. He has previously worked at the National University of Ireland in Galway as an Irish Research Council postdoctoral fellow.

## **Abstract**

This article explores the reasons for persistent memory wars surrounding the Northern Ireland conflict in Irish and Northern Irish politics between the leading political groups including Sinn Féin, political unionism, the Irish and British governments. I expand on existing literature on commemoration and memory in Northern Ireland to explain how constitutional, political, communal, personal, moral and generational factors together encourage conflicting memories surrounding the past to continue in Northern Irish and Irish politics. Politically, what is remembered about the conflict is used to challenge contemporary political opponents. Selective conflict memories also seek to support ongoing constitutional objectives regarding Irish unification in the present. In addition, individual leaders' and communal experiences of the conflict are recalled to assist the pursuit of justice and commemorate communal suffering. Each political group seeks to morally justify their past actions based on their conflict experience too. The emergence of a post-conflict generation of voters also means that political leaders draw comparisons between the past and present to encourage the youth to support their ongoing constitutional objectives, political strategies and leadership. The conclusion suggests that contested memories and commemorations in Irish and Northern Irish politics are particularly persistent because the constitutional question has not been resolved.

## **Introduction**

Despite the Northern Ireland conflict (also called the Troubles) concluding in 1998, divided perspectives on its legitimacy, legacy and meaning continue to be debated in contemporary Irish and Northern Irish politics. The main political groups involved in these memory disputes include Sinn Féin (who supported the IRA's campaign for Irish unification before 1998), the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) (who want Northern Ireland to remain within the UK), and the British and Irish governments (who ostensibly sought to keep the peace and abide by the majority of consent in Northern Ireland on the constitutional question) (Braniff and McDowell 2014, 38-60; Conway 2003, 306-313; Graham and Yvonne 2007, 477-492; Rolston 2010, 286-301). This article seeks to explain why competing Northern Ireland conflict memories persist in Northern Irish and Irish politics.

Various authors have attempted to explain why disputes over the Northern Ireland conflict continue in contemporary Northern Irish politics and society. Brian Walker argues that unionist parties and Sinn Féin promote historical 'myths' to consolidate ethnic divisions for contemporary political purposes (Walker 1996, 57-158; Walker 2000, ix, 101-121). Some of the more recent studies considering the use (and abuse) of Northern Ireland conflict memory suggest that republicans are particularly engaged in politicising the past. Cillian McGrattan and Stephen Hopkins argue that Sinn Féin seek to encourage a united Ireland by legitimising previous IRA actions and by reconciling with civic unionism through a republican version of the past. They also suggest that Sinn Féin reject a reassessment of the morality of IRA violence to consolidate republican political support and communal identity by emphasising instead British and unionist injustices. In their view, Sinn Féin presents this conflict narrative to support their argument that the IRA fought a defensive campaign to protect northern nationalists. Hopkins concludes that Sinn Féin's conflict narrative is a primary obstacle to dealing with the past in Northern Ireland (Hopkins 2015, 79-93; Hopkins and McGrattan 2017, 488-494; McGrattan 2016, 61-71). These authors overemphasise unionists' and Irish republicans' role in creating and sustaining divisive memories. This view overlooks the multidimensional nature of memory wars in Irish and Northern Irish politics which includes the British and Irish governments. The authors above also imply that memory

debates in Northern Ireland result principally from political elites manipulating conflict memory. In contrast, I explain why collective and personal memories of the conflict by all sides contribute to contrasting interpretations of the past.

Other authors agree that divisive conflict memories are created and promoted by all sides involved in the conflict. The British state's actions (or inactions) directly contributed to the conflict, the peace process and the subsequent memory wars (Braniff and McDowell 2014, 38-60; Cochrane 2013, 283-312; Dawson 2007, 4, 40-46; Graham and Whelan 2007, 477-492; McBride 2001, 5-6; McDowell 2007, 726-736; Rolston 2010, 286-289). This article provides further examples of the British government engaging in memory wars with Sinn Féin. I also provide examples of how the Irish government and its leading parties Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil engage in memory contestation surrounding the Northern Ireland conflict with Sinn Féin. As McBride, Dawson and Rolston suggest, academic studies focusing on correcting 'myths' in Ireland and Northern Ireland ignore why particular memories of the past are accepted by many nationalists and unionists. These authors argue that the focus should be on explaining why particular versions of the past exist and are accepted in their respective communities (Dawson 2007, 36-47; McBride 2001, 5-42; Rolston 2010, 286-289).

Nuanced accounts present various factors to explain divisions over conflict memory in contemporary Northern Ireland. Máire Braniff and Sara McDowell provide a comprehensive comparative study that considers how commemorations and the marking of territory via murals, flags and other symbols influences memory and identity contests in post-conflict societies. In relation to Northern Ireland, they suggest that divisions over the past exist between the British government, republicans and unionists for multiple reasons. Each political group wants to maintain and increase their political support by using the past to justify present strategies and to challenge opponents. There is also a competing sense of victimhood for each community based on the past and present actions of opponents. Each political group wants their community's concerns about the past addressed in the present and all sides seek to morally justify their community's historical actions as defensive. Braniff and McDowell convincingly suggest that commemorations and memory debates in Northern Ireland have become 'a war by other means' to sustain communal identity and political support in the present (Braniff and McDowell 2014, 4-25, 41-58).

Brian Conway's article on diverging nationalist, unionist and British state memories of Bloody Sunday in Derry city in January 1972 suggests similar factors to Braniff and McDowell for the contrasting memories. He suggests that nationalists formed and transmitted a 'folk memory' of what happened on Bloody Sunday through various means including personal stories and film because the official state narrative disputed their experience (Conway 2003, 306-314). Brian Graham's and Yvonne Whelan's research on how the legacy of those killed in the conflict is utilised by each side in contemporary commemorations suggests similar factors influence memory debates (Graham and Whelan 2007, 477-492). Elisabetta Viggiani's research on the politics of memorialisation in Northern Ireland suggests that competing murals and memorials are also motivated by political, communal, personal and moral factors between republicans and loyalists to justify their past actions (Viggiani 2016). Elsewhere, Bill Rolston's work on murals and memory explains how post-memory trauma is transmitted through various means to the younger generation, who see it as part of their identity. His work further states that commemorations and murals for groups such as Sinn Féin are also about 'ethnic pride and communal solidarity', a theme further explored in this article (Rolston 2010, 287-301). Graham Dawson's work on memory, trauma and the conflict also considers how political, communal and moral factors affect nationalist and

British memories of Bloody Sunday and unionist memories of the IRA campaign in the borderlands (Dawson 2007). Ian McBride concurs that these factors have influenced debates over history and memory in Ireland in the modern era. McBride supports Maurice Halbwachs' argument: that collective memories 'reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society'; or, in the case of divided nationalist and unionist communities in Ireland, memories which resonate with the current political concerns of each community (Halbwachs 1992, 40; McBride 2001, 5-42).

These authors agree with many of the factors mentioned in this article to account for continued memory wars in Irish and Northern Irish politics surrounding the conflict. Nonetheless, some of these authors underplay particular factors in explaining memory contestations, or they only apply their arguments to one or two sides of the conflict (for the latter point see Brown and Viggiani 2009, 225-248; Viggiani 2016; McAuley 2007, 122-133). I demonstrate how Sinn Féin, political unionism, the British government and the Irish government all contribute to the ongoing memory wars about the Northern Ireland conflict. Currently, we lack an academic study researching the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict in the Republic of Ireland, which the author is currently investigating (for debates between Irish political parties on other historical events see Graff-McRae, 2010). The conflict had a direct impact on Ireland. There were a total of 121 Troubles related deaths in Ireland (McKittrick *et al.* 2007, 1559). Articles two and three of Ireland's constitution even claimed sovereignty over Northern Ireland until 1998 (*BBC News* 2 December 1999). The Irish state were also involved in the peace process. Memory wars in contemporary Irish and Northern Irish politics are many sided because the guarantors of the peace agreement, the British and Irish governments, are not neutral on the past or the present (Braniff and McDowell 2014, 38-60; Dawson 2007, 4, 40-46; McBride 2001, 5-6; Rolston 2010, 286-289).

This article presents six factors to primarily explain why memory wars exist in contemporary Irish and Northern Irish politics surrounding the conflict. First, politically what is remembered and forgotten about the conflict is utilised by politicians today to try to challenge both intra-communal rivals and opponents external to a community (Braniff and McDowell 2014, 38-60; McBride 2001, 5-42; Viggiani, 1-10). Second, memory contests are encouraged by the ongoing and conflicting constitutional aspirations of each political group. In 1882, French historian Ernest Renan suggested a combination of shared sacrifices in the past, a willingness to repeat those sacrifices in the future, and the ability to forget divisive historical events created a nation's dominant national identity and history. Renan argues that 'a nation's existence' depends on a 'daily plebiscite' of an agreed memory of the past. His view partly explains memory wars in current Irish and Northern Irish politics (Renan 2011, 80-83; see also McBride 2001, 1). Contemporary debates surrounding what constitutes 'the nation' remain fiercely contested between Irish republicans, Ulster unionists, the British and Irish governments. Cochrane suggests that reaching a consensus on the past is difficult 'when the conflict is 'suspended' rather than 'ended''. Conceding considerable ground on the legitimacy of past actions for each side is feared as contributing to the advancement of the other side's constitutional objectives in the present (Cochrane 2013, 283-310). Contrasting conflict memories that each side promotes act as a 'daily plebiscite' to sustain their version of 'the nation' to the detriment of their constitutional rivals. In the conclusion, I briefly discuss Braniff's and McDowell's comparative work on commemorations in multiple post-conflict areas. Their work supports my suggestion that the frequency of memory wars in contemporary Irish and Northern Irish politics result partly from the constitutional question remaining contested (Braniff and McDowell 2014, 60-178).

The third factor accounting for divisive memories in Ireland and Northern Ireland is the conflicting communal experiences of the conflict. Political leaders do not simply manipulate memory. In Halbwach's words: 'the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society' (Halbwachs 1992, 51). Thomas Eriksen suggests that collective identities and memories cannot 'be created out of thin air. They have to be connected, in credible ways, to people's personal experiences' (Eriksen 2001, 61; see also the popular memory group 2011, 254-260). Victims' families and survivors also want their respective political representatives to redress ongoing conflict legacy grievances (Winter 2011, 426-429; Zistel 2012, 74-77). To maintain support from their constituents, political leaders in post-conflict societies have to promote the collective experience. These 'collective memories' of the conflict in each political community remain at the forefront of politics partly because the conflict lasted from 1969 to 1998 and affected the lives of multiple generations of people (Braniff and McDowell 2014, 38-60; Conway 2003, 306-314; Graham and Whelan 2007, 477-492; Viggiani 2016). Nonetheless, the fourth factor suggests that whilst political elites in Ireland and Northern Ireland are pressurised by their constituents, they often share the community's conflict experience and narrative. Factor five adds that political elites and their communities recall martyrs or commemorate past actions to demonstrate communal pride and the permissibility of past actions (Rolston 2010, 292-300; Viggiani 2016, 1-10).

The sixth factor argues that generational change potentially alters how the past is viewed and utilised in politics. The younger generation enter politics with different priorities (Mannheim 2011, 96-98). Mannheim's argument is applicable to the intergenerational aspect of memory wars in contemporary Irish and Northern Irish politics. There is an emerging electorate born after 1998 who lack conflict experience. The current generation of political elites who experienced the conflict attempt to 'bind' this new generation to the old by drawing parallels between current and past challenges (Mannheim 2011, 92-98). But Hirsch believes that the post-conflict generation following traumatic historical events often have 'post-memory trauma'. Post-memory trauma occurs because those who were young or who were not born during a traumatic event still experience its effects through family, their local community, symbols, films and other methods of memory transmission (Hirsch 2008, 103-128; see also Eriksen 2001, 50-56; McAuley 2016, 122-133; Rolston 2010, 287-301).

These six reasons suggest that in Ireland and Northern Ireland a memory war is partly a contemporary political and constitutional dispute applied to the past. But it is also a difference in judgement between political groups in the present about whether past violent actions were permissible. In addition, a memory war represents an ongoing sense of victimhood and pride in each community (for similar arguments see Braniff and McDowell 2014, 38-60; Conway 2003; Graham and Whelan 2007; Rolston 2010, 286-301; Viggiani 2016). Braniff and McDowell's comparative research implies that a memory war in Irish and Northern Irish politics is also somewhat different because it represents contrasting constitutional aspirations (Braniff and McDowell 2014).

Part one of this article considers examples of the main memory wars in contemporary Northern Irish politics between the main political parties: Sinn Féin, British Conservatism and Ulster unionism. The second section explores memory debates in contemporary Irish politics relating to the Northern Ireland conflict between Sinn Féin, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. A range of recent press releases by each political party, party political publications and parliamentary debates are used to support this argument.

## **Section 1: Memory wars in contemporary Northern Irish politics**

### *Memory wars between Sinn Féin and the British Conservative government*

Two of the principal memory war protagonists surrounding the conflict are Sinn Féin and the British Conservative government. For example, in February 2017, Gerry Adams, long-serving Sinn Féin President until February 2017, claimed that the British government were still covering-up their role in the conflict. For Adams: '[t]he British government is not neutral. It was never neutral. It is a partisan participant which always backs the unionist position' (Adams 2017). In the Sinn Féin conflict narrative, they suggest that the British government maintained Ulster Unionist majority and sectarian rule for constitutional, political and economic reasons between 1922 and 1972. Sinn Féin argue that during the conflict the British forces also frequently colluded with loyalist paramilitaries to kill innocent nationalists and IRA members to prevent the acquisition of civil and national rights. Thus Sinn Féin argue that the IRA was justified as they fought for civil and national rights and protected their community. Sinn Féin demand further equality and Irish unification because they believe that history shows British and unionist rule is discriminatory. But Sinn Féin emphasise that the armed campaign is no longer needed because there is greater equality now from which to pursue Irish unification by political means. This view opposes dissident republicans using the past to justify continuing violence (see similar points in Braniff and McDowell 2014, 38-60; Brown and Viggiani 2009; Browne 2016, 104-109; Conway 2003, 306-313; Graham and Whelan 2007, 478-485; Hopkins 2015; McGrattan 2016; Rolston 2010, 286-301; Viggiani 2016, 1-10, 87-108). Sinn Féin communicates their conflict narrative in various ways. Brendan Browne discusses how Sinn Féin commemorations of the 1916 Rising focus on justifying the peace process and how it advances the fulfilment of the 1916 rebels' objectives (Browne 2016). Kris Brown and Elisabetta Viggiani explain how Sinn Féin commemorations, memorials and murals of republicans killed whilst in the IRA are used to promote and morally justify the IRA's actions and Sinn Féin's peace process strategy today (Brown and Viggiani 2009; Viggiani 2016, 1-10, 87-108). Elsewhere, Braniff and McDowell explain how republican commemorative events and murals seek to promote the republican narrative of the conflict outlined above. Their commemorations and murals emphasise IRA heroics and British and unionist collusion or other injustices (Braniff and McDowell 2014, 1-9, 38-60; McDowell 2007, 732-734).

Unsurprisingly, the British state's conflict narrative disagrees that the IRA was fighting a defensive war. Whilst the British government admit that discrimination against the Catholic population in Northern Ireland did exist before 1969, they highlight the socio-economic and political reforms they introduced by the early 1970s. The British state portrays itself as getting caught in the middle of sectarian fighting between extremists. The British government suggests that the IRA fought an undemocratic campaign, especially as the majority of northern nationalists voted for the non-violent Social and Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) before 1998. Whilst the British state has admitted some failures such as Bloody Sunday in January 1972, they ultimately blame the IRA for initiating the conflict without any moral or political justification. But the British state does accept that Sinn Féin helped to create peace by persuading the IRA to end its campaign. This recent addition to their narrative allows the British government to continue supporting power-sharing between republicans and unionists. Nonetheless, they feel that IRA violence was not permissible and acquired no benefit for nationalists before 1998 (Braniff and McDowell 2014 55-57; Conway 2003; Graham and Whelan 2007). The British government's narrative is visible through memorials and commemorations, although to a much lesser extent than unionists or republicans. One reason is that western governments' access to media outlets and other

communication methods allows them to transmit their interpretations of the past and present in more banal ways (Rolston 2010, 286-289; see also Billig 2013). Braniff and McDowell mention private memorials to security force members killed in the conflict in Belfast and Staffordshire in England. Inscriptions on the memorials present fallen security force members as having sacrificed themselves upholding law and order against terrorists. This narrative surrounding deceased security force members supports the British state's meta-narrative that the conflict was the IRA's fault and was unjustified (Braniff and McDowell 2014, 55-57; McDowell 2007, 734-736). The authors mentioned here suggest similar reasons to this article to explain these contrasting narratives including political, constitutional, communal and moral factors.

A more recent example of a memory war between the current British Conservative government and Sinn Féin surrounds the legacy of Martin McGuinness. Born in Derry city, McGuinness became a leading IRA member by the early 1970s. He was convicted for carrying arms and explosives in Ireland in 1973 (*BBC News* 29 April 2001). After his release, McGuinness became a leading Sinn Féin member, and helped negotiate peace in 1998. He subsequently served as the deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland between 2007 and 2017. In his later years, he engaged in reconciliation acts including entering government with former enemy the Reverend Ian Paisley of the DUP in 2007, and meeting Queen Elizabeth II (McAleese 21 March 2017). These reconciliation acts show that Sinn Féin and the British government have been mindful to validate and sustain the peace process by at times downplaying past divisions to their constituents (Hopkins and McGrattan 2017, 490-494). McGuinness died in March 2017. Debates surrounding his legacy illustrate the generally divisive nature of conflict memory for Irish republicans and British Conservatives. Sir John Major was the British Conservative Prime Minister between November 1990 and May 1997. Major's government reactivated back-channel intermediaries with the IRA to discuss a political settlement. One Sinn Féin negotiator was Martin McGuinness (*Sinn Féin*, 1993). Reflecting on McGuinness' death, Major admitted that McGuinness helped to bring peace to Northern Ireland. Major, however, added that McGuinness' actions as an 'IRA boss' beforehand were 'unforgiveable and we never ought to forget what he did' (Major 2017). Theresa May, the current UK Prime Minister, agreed that McGuinness played a 'defining role' in creating peace, but: 'I can never condone the path [McGuinness] took in the earlier part of his life' (McDonald 2017).

Sinn Féin argue that McGuinness was a hero who fought against British and unionist oppression from 1969. The thousands of Irish nationalists and republicans who lined the streets of Derry for his funeral in March 2017 agreed (*The Guardian* 23 March 2017). Gerry Adams' graveside oration summarizes how republicans want McGuinness but also their armed campaign to be remembered:

Martin McGuinness was a freedom fighter ... Reading...some of the media reports...one could be forgiven for believing that Martin...abandoned his republican principles, his former comrades in the IRA, and joined the political establishment ... Martin believed in freedom and equality. He resisted by armed actions those who withheld these rights, and...helped shape conditions in which it was possible to advocate for these entitlements by unarmed strategies (*An Phoblacht* 3 April 2017).

Adams presents McGuinness as 'freedom fighter', struggling against state oppression through 'armed actions' to ensure that 'freedom and equality' for Irish nationalists was possible. McGuinness, according to Adams, achieved greater equality for nationalists so that violent



means are no longer necessary. The contrasting interpretations of McGuinness' life by Sinn Féin and the British Conservative government support their competing meta-narratives of the conflict outlined. They are motivated by political, constitutional, communal, personal, moral and generational factors.

Both sides engage in a memory war over McGuinness for political and constitutional reasons. Sinn Féin will not allow McGuinness' legacy to be tarnished as he embodies their past and present arguments for Irish unification. Before 1998, Sinn Féin and the IRA argued that campaigning for Irish unity through politics and violence was necessary to ensure discrimination was ended against nationalists (English 2004, 81-183). After 1998, the republican argument shifted slightly as demonstrated by Adams' remarks that McGuinness' 'armed actions' ensured that 'unarmed strategies' can now be used to democratically campaign for Irish unity. Yet Sinn Féin say that McGuinness' legacy reminds Irish nationalists that full equality will not emerge under British and unionist rule. During the funeral oration, Adams informed the crowd: 'Martin believed that the British Government's involvement in Ireland, and...partition...are at the root of our divisions ... The British Government has no right whatsoever to have any involvement in Ireland' (*An Phoblacht* 3 April 2017).

In addition, contemporary electoral considerations against inter-group rivals can explain Sinn Féin's account of McGuinness. During the conflict Irish republicans were outperformed by the SDLP in elections. The SDLP campaigned for equality and power-sharing in Northern Ireland and eventual Irish unification by consent and without violence (Murray and Tonge 2005). It was only in 2003 that Sinn Féin became the majority Irish nationalist party in Northern Ireland (CAIN 2003). Electoral results before 2003 highlight that most Irish nationalists did not condone IRA violence trying to force significant progress towards Irish unity. But they did support the SDLP's non-violent campaign for greater equality and rights for Catholics in the north prior to eventual peaceful unification by consent. Sinn Féin's portrayal of McGuinness and the IRA as contributing towards civil rights is recognized as a vote winner against the SDLP by assuming their mantle as the party of equality (McBride 2017). Adams' oration also presented a narrative that McGuinness' efforts in the past mean 'unarmed strategies' are now the way forward because basic equality has been achieved. This argument tries to politically challenge dissident republican suggestions that McGuinness and Sinn Féin betrayed republican principles and that further violence is required (Brown and Viggiani 2009; Browne 2016; Hopkins 2015; McDowell 2007, 729-733).

The Conservative British government also engages in memory wars over McGuinness' legacy partly for constitutional and political reasons. They seek to justify continued British rule in Northern Ireland by referring to the past. May and Major could not say that McGuinness was a freedom fighter. Otherwise, they risk delegitimising British rule in Northern Ireland. During a UK parliamentary debate on Brexit in March 2017, May said that the Conservative 'preference...[was] that Northern Ireland should remain part of the UK, and we will never be neutral in expressing our support for that' (*The Irish Times* 29 March 2017). Reminding the electorate in Northern Ireland of Sinn Féin's past shows the Conservatives trying to politically assist unionism in elections too. The Conservatives currently have a confidence and supply deal with the DUP following the UK general election in 2017.

The collective memory of the conflict and debates surrounding the morality of IRA actions equally affects how these groups remember McGuinness. Sinn Féin will not reject their past link to the IRA. Otherwise, they risk losing their original core voters in areas such as west Belfast, where Gerry Adams won elections frequently during the IRA's campaign (Brown and Viggiani 2009; Viggiani 2016, 87-108). Sinn Féin leaders such as Adams' personal conflict experience also means that the party condones the IRA's campaign against what they perceived to be British and unionist aggression. For Adams, those presenting McGuinness as a ruthless terrorist insults his own experience (Adams 1986; Adams 2004). A sign that Adams and veteran republicans applaud McGuinness' affiliation with the IRA is demonstrated by Adams' final words at the oration. He reminded the audience that McGuinness: 'was a rebel – up the rebels!' (*An Phoblacht* 3 April 2017). The republican and nationalist community largely subscribes to Sinn Féin's portrayal of McGuinness and conflict narrative because it resonates with their own experience. Nationalists were at times attacked by the state forces indiscriminately, such as Bloody Sunday in Derry in 1972 (Braniff and McDowell 2014, 38-60; Brown and Viggiani 2009; Conway 2003, 303-316). Gerry Adams was also shot by loyalist paramilitaries in 1984 in what he alleges was collusion between British security forces and loyalists (*An Phoblacht* 14 March 2014). Sinn Féin's praise for McGuinness and other deceased IRA members also demonstrates personal and communal pride (Brown and Viggiani 2009; Rolston 2010, 292-300; Viggiani 2016, 87-108). They believe IRA actions were permissible in order to defend the nationalist community and enhance their civil rights.

In contrast, the Conservative party's experience of IRA violence means that they contest any representations of McGuinness or the IRA as honorable. In 1991, the IRA mortared a cabinet meeting that John Major was hosting as the Prime Minister at Downing Street (Taylor 1998, 321-322). He escaped injury. Some Conservative colleagues were not so fortunate. In October 1984, the IRA exploded a bomb at the Conservative Party conference in Brighton, which killed five people, including Sir Anthony Berry a Conservative MP (McKittrick *et al.* 2007, 996-998). Amongst those severely disabled was Margaret Tebbit, the wife of Norman Tebbit, a Conservative MP. Following McGuinness' death, Norman Tebbit remarked: 'I hope...he'll be parked in...hell for the rest of eternity' (*The Daily Mail* 21 March 2017). Furthermore, there were 454 British Armed Forces members and 639 civilians across the UK and Northern Ireland killed by the IRA during the conflict (McKittrick *et al.* 2007, 1562). This collective experience of suffering incentivizes the British Conservative party's rebuttal of Sinn Féin attempts to portray McGuinness or the IRA as fighting for civil rights. In addition, Conservative comments on McGuinness resonate with their overall conflict narrative: that republican violence was not ethically permissible as it lacked a majority of electoral support and harmed civilians.

Political memory wars surrounding Martin McGuinness' legacy also show the older generation within Irish republicanism and British Conservatism attempting to 'bind' the post-conflict generation to their conflict narrative (Mannheim 2011, 96-98). At McGuinness' graveside, Gerry Adams reminded the audience:

Thanks to Martin we now live in a very different Ireland ... The future can now be decided by us. If you want an Acht na Gaeilge [Irish language act] campaign for it. If you want a Bill of Rights, campaign for that ... If you want freedom [Irish unification], go out and take it ... we are the stronger because of Martin (*An Phoblacht* 3 April 2017).

Adams' words show veteran republicans trying to ensure that the post-1998 generation of Irish republicans link their present concerns such as an Irish language act to the Sinn Féin leadership's past efforts during the conflict. Their message is explicit: our struggles have given you, the republican youth, a platform to campaign on contemporary issues and Irish unification today. In contrast, the conflict generation of British Conservatives want to remind the Conservative youth that Irish republicanism has a violent past that harmed the UK and Conservative party. Yet Hirsch explains that post-conflict trauma is transmitted to those who did not experience the events through films, personal stories, commemorations and other methods (Hirsch 2008; see also McAuley 2016, 122-123; Rolston 2010, 290-292). Post-memory can explain why younger Sinn Féin and Conservative leaders and supporters continue to call for justice surrounding events that they did not experience. The appearance of Ógra Shinn Féin (Sinn Féin youth), for example, at 'Tyrone Volunteers Day' commemorating Tyrone IRA volunteers killed in the 1980s and early 1990s demonstrates how post-conflict trauma partly attracts young republicans to support Sinn Féin (*An Phoblacht* 30 July 2010).

### *Memory wars between Sinn Féin and Ulster Unionism*

Under the power-sharing system in Northern Ireland since 1998, Ulster unionist and Irish nationalist political parties share executive power. If the largest unionist or nationalist party withdraws from government, the institutions collapse. This situation arose in January 2017. Sinn Féin withdrew from the power-sharing arrangement with the largest unionist party, the DUP. The political impasse in Belfast continues today. The collapse of the power-sharing institutions partly resulted from contemporary disputes surrounding an Irish language act and a corrupt energy scheme (Fenton 2017; Dunbar 2017). But so divisive have debates on dealing with the past been that this factor contributed to the political stalemate. Martin McGuinness said in January 2017: 'The British Government [and unionists] ... [have] failed to address...the legacy of the conflict' by overlooking nationalist victims of state violence (*An Phoblacht* 16 January 2017). Conflicting historical interpretations between these two groups are not new. A principal reason for the formation of Northern Ireland in 1920 was that loyalists (militant Protestants) and unionists (political Protestants) believed that Irish history demonstrated that they could never enjoy religious liberties and freedom under a Catholic and Irish government (Taylor 2000, 1-70). Contemporary memory debates often focus on competing memories about the Northern Ireland conflict from 1969.

Section one has described Sinn Féin's narrative surrounding the conflict: that IRA activities were justified following unionist and British state discrimination against northern nationalists. Lawther and Simpson explain Protestant-unionists' competing conflict narrative. Lawther comments on how various Ulster unionists believe 'they bore no responsibility' for the conflict. Whilst some unionist politicians do accept that there was discrimination in the past, they do not believe the IRA's violence was a legitimate response. In the unionist narrative, IRA violence was about forcing Irish unification on the majority of Northern Ireland's (predominately Protestant) population. One DUP representative explained to Lawther: 'unionists...were victims of a [republican] revolutionary organisation who wanted to overthrow their state'. For unionists, the IRA's campaign was undemocratic as it lacked a majority of electoral support, and was morally wrong as it killed civilians and security force members, who in unionist eyes were protecting civilians (Lawther 2012; Simpson 2013). Ulster loyalists, who used violence against the IRA and Catholic civilians in what they argue was a defensive campaign, generally concur with this narrative. The main difference is that loyalists highlight IRA sectarian killings alongside historical Ulster Protestant resistance to Irish unification by the original Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) in 1912 as legitimising their

sectarian and violent response to the IRA (Braniff and McDowell 2014, 49-52; Hearty 2015; McAuley 2016, 122-133). Due to limited space but also the electoral dominance of political unionism, this section primarily focuses on the memory contest between political unionism and Sinn Féin. Nevertheless, political unionism also uses the past to try to ensure that the Protestant community continues to support the DUP or UUP rather than loyalist parties (Lawther 2011, 2012; McAuley, 2016).

A crucial memory battleground between Sinn Féin and unionists surrounds the definition of victim. For unionists, anyone who paramilitaries killed or attacked are the 'innocent' victims, including the security forces (Lawther 2012, 161-69). Unionists reject any suggestion that there was moral equivalence between these victims and the paramilitaries who died in orchestrating undemocratic 'terrorist' violence. Recent arguments between Sinn Féin, unionists and the British government relating to potential prosecutions of former security force members illustrate these divisions. In April 2017, the UK House of Commons Defence Select Committee recommended an amnesty for security force members involved in killings during the conflict (UK House of Commons Defence Select Committee 2017). Unionists support this security force amnesty. In April 2017, Doug Beattie, an UUP representative and former British Army captain, spoke at a British Army veterans of Northern Ireland protest in Belfast. Beattie argued that current legacy investigations focused too heavily on the security forces and not the 'terrorists' (Moriarty 2017). In the DUP's Westminster election manifesto in June 2017, they supported: 'not [permitting] the rewriting of the past or the persecution of the security forces' (*DUP* 2017, 2; see also Lawther 2012; Simpson 2013). Sinn Féin reject what they believe are attempts by unionism and the British government to 'cover-up' the security forces' role in the conflict and create a 'hierarchy of victims', where those who suffered state violence are forgotten (Adams 2009; *An Phoblacht* 3 April 2017). Sinn Féin calls for an internationally-led truth and reconciliation commission to ensure equal investigation on all sides' actions and no hierarchy of victims (*An Phoblacht* 16 June 2011).

Contemporary political and constitutional factors contribute to competing memories on who were the victims of the conflict. Sinn Féin's portrayal of IRA volunteers as victims and freedom fighters is part of justifying the IRA's campaign as fighting unionist and British oppression. This argument attempts to legitimise current Sinn Féin strategy and leaders through explaining the origins of the cause for a united Ireland and civil rights for northern republicans. In addition, Sinn Féin suggest that IRA volunteers and nationalist civilians suffered because of state activities to raise doubts about the validity of continued British rule in Northern Ireland (Braniff and McDowell 2014, 38-49; Brown and Viggiani 2009; Hopkins 2015; Graham and Whelan 2007; McDowell 2007, 726-734; McGrattan 2016). The broader definition of victim also enables Sinn Féin to deflect SDLP arguments that the IRA's campaign was illegitimate (Hopkins 2015, 79-93; McDowell 2007, 726-734; McGrattan 2016). In contrast, unionists maintain a tough line on what constitutes a victim to ensure political support from Protestant-unionist voters. The Protestant unionist community rejects that the IRA or its supporters were victims (Lawther 2011, 2012; Simpson 2013). If unionists accepted that the IRA's campaign was justified by agreeing that IRA members were in some way 'victims', they would also fear that they would weaken the legitimacy of Northern Irish state (Lawther 2012).

The communities that the political leaders of unionism and republicanism originate from also influence memory wars in contemporary politics. For instance, in Derry city nationalists did face discrimination before the 1970s in terms of employment, voting and housing (Whyte 1983). Security force activity also did discriminate at particular times by

focusing predominately on the IRA and nationalist community in areas such as north Belfast, rather than loyalist violence (McBride 2017). This specific experience of state violence explains why republican leaders and their supporters want the term victim to include those killed by state forces. Conway, for instance, suggests that the nationalist ‘folk memory’ of Bloody Sunday as state murder continued through the transmission of accounts from those involved to other nationalists through stories, films and other means (Conway 2003, 306-314). The broad definition of victim promoted by republicans demonstrates solidarity and communal pride in remembering the dead from their communities too (Rolston 2010, 292-300). This experience is shared by Sinn Féin leaders and members. John Finucane, for example, unsuccessfully stood for Sinn Féin in the recent UK general election in north Belfast in June 2017. John is the son of Pat Finucane, a lawyer killed by loyalists in collusion with the UK security forces (de Silva 2012; *An Phoblacht* 3 May 2017). The fact that Sinn Féin put forward a candidate who is the son of a victim of collusion demonstrates that the party leadership fully subscribe to the communal memories of the conflict and a broad definition of victim (Braniff and McDowell, 46-49). Sinn Féin’s broad victim definition supports their narrative that IRA activity was justified in response to state oppression.

For unionists and former security force members who support unionist parties, their suffering at the hands of the IRA encourages a narrower definition of victim. Dawson has described how the border Protestant and unionist communities in areas such as Fermanagh believe that IRA attacks on off-duty security force members and Protestant civilians there were sectarian. They even suggest the attacks represent ethnic cleansing to try to tip the Catholic and Protestant balance in the IRA’s favour (Dawson 2007, 207-260). Unionist politicians support these sentiments partly because unionist political leaders share their community’s conflict trauma. Arlene Foster’s father was shot by the IRA in county Fermanagh but survived in 1979 (*Belfast Telegraph* 18 December 2015). Mike Nesbitt, leader of the UUP until March 2017, recalled during a speech in April 2016: ‘the memorable day for the Nesbitts was the 25 of January 1973; the day the family business was blown up by the Provisional IRA’ (Nesbitt 2016). This unionist conflict memory and trauma helps to explain why they will not allow Sinn Féin to defend the IRA’s campaign as a liberation struggle and claim that IRA members were victims. Neither will they accept prosecutions for security force members who tried to stop what they saw as an IRA sectarian assault on their community. Unionists do not believe attacking the state was morally permissible when political avenues were open to republicans and various civil rights reforms were implemented by the 1970s. For this reason, unionists prioritise victims killed by the IRA because IRA violence in their view caused the conflict and was ‘morally wrong’ (*News Letter* 18 September 2012; Lawther 2011, 2012; Simpson 2013).

Sinn Féin’s victim definition can also be seen as an attempt to legitimise the IRA’s actions for the younger generation. It suggests that republicans equally suffered compared to all other sides of the conflict and that their response to the suffering was permissible. On the other hand, unionist leaders recall IRA atrocities alongside security force bravery to ensure that young unionist voters realize the damage Sinn Féin caused to their community. The message to young Protestant voters is to reject Sinn Féin and the broad definition of victim as political propaganda that seeks to undermine the union and give the IRA moral equivalence to the security forces. Post-conflict trauma and selective victim definitions are transmitted to the youth in both communities through the same methods as to other voters via murals, memorials, marches and commemorative events. Hence why various conflict murals in loyalist areas focus on IRA atrocities, and republican conflict murals depict state collusion and violence against nationalists (Braniff and McDowell 2014, 38-58; Brown and Viggiani 2009; Conway 2003; Hirsch 2008; McAuley 2016, 122-123; Rolston 2010; Viggiani 2016).

## **Section two: Memory wars surrounding the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict in contemporary Irish politics.**

Memory wars relating to the Northern Ireland conflict regularly feature in the contemporary politics of the Republic of Ireland. The primary protagonists are the three dominant political parties: Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil are currently the two largest parties electorally. Both are centre-right. The two parties split from a single movement, the original Sinn Féin and old IRA, who fought the Irish War of Independence against British rule from 1918 to 1921. Republicans who went on to form Fine Gael backed a peace treaty with Britain in 1921. The treaty included partition and Ireland remaining within the UK Commonwealth at the time. A substantial minority of Irish politicians rejected the treaty, many of whom eventually founded Fianna Fáil in 1926. Conflicting views on the treaty sparked a civil war between the pro-treaty IRA (later Fine Gael) and anti-treaty IRA (primarily Fianna Fáil) in June 1922, which lasted until May 1923. The pro-treaty IRA volunteers won, and formed the first Irish government. After losing the civil war, Fianna Fáil turned to politics in 1926, advocating Irish unity by consent. The party has been in power on various occasions (O'Donnell 2007, 1-46). Currently, Fine Gael are in a minority government through a supply and demand deal with Fianna Fáil.

A small number of IRA and Sinn Féin members refused to join Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil following the Irish civil war. IRA and Sinn Féin support increased in the north following the outbreak of communal violence there in 1969. Sinn Féin did not formally recognise the Irish state until 1986, labelling it as the '26 counties' since, in their view, it betrayed the proclamation for an all-Ireland republic (32 counties) made in 1916 (Adams 1986, 37-49). Sinn Féin only took seats in the Dublin government (the Dáil) from 1986. They finished third in the last Dáil election in February 2016. The party is on the left of the political spectrum.

Despite being a periphery state to the Northern Ireland conflict, Ireland experienced 121 conflict related deaths between 1969 and 1998. This total includes thirty-four deaths on 17 May 1974, when loyalist paramilitaries exploded car bombs in Dublin and the border town of Monaghan (McKittrick *et al.* 2007, 449-454). Whilst instructed not to attack the Irish state, the Provisional IRA also killed seven Irish security force members during the conflict, including Garda officers (Irish police), Irish prison guards and Irish Defence Force members (McKittrick *et al.* 2007, 1562). The Irish government was politically involved in the conflict too, because they claimed territorial sovereignty over the north before 1998 (*BBC News* 2 December 1999).

Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil ultimately sought unification in the long-term during the Northern Ireland conflict. But they wanted power-sharing in the north first to stop the violence (Mulroe 2017). Both parties rejected Sinn Féin and the IRA for various reasons. They believed that the Provisional IRA was a sectarian organisation, unlike the old IRA, and was anti-democratic because it lacked a majority of the electoral mandate in Ireland. Both parties also felt that IRA violence from 1969 was counter-productive and deterred unionists from agreeing to a united Ireland. The Irish state feared that the IRA and Sinn Féin threatened stability in the Irish Republic too with their 'far-left' ideology and occasional killings of Irish security force members and politicians before 1998. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil governments throughout the conflict respectively backed stringent security measures against the IRA. One example is the censorship act they introduced from the 1970s banning Sinn Féin and IRA representatives from Irish airwaves. The Irish government refused to have any political dealings with Sinn Féin until the 1980s. Thereafter they assisted the emergence of the peace process by ensuring that all sides including republicans and loyalists were involved (Leahy

2015, 182-226; O'Donnell 2007, 1-80). But tough security measures against republicans only ended once the Provisional IRA ceased its armed campaign in the north (O'Donnell 2007, 87-117). Fine Gael's and Fianna Fáil's conflict narrative suggests that their role was primarily to assist the search for peace in Northern Ireland that would end discrimination against nationalists but also excuses for IRA activity.

Sinn Féin's narrative of the Irish government's role in the conflict significantly differs. In their view, the IRA was necessary partly because the Irish state abandoned the northern Catholic population after partition to unionist discrimination. For Sinn Féin, the Irish government failed to act when it had the opportunity during communal violence following civil rights marches between nationalists and unionists in the north in 1969. Furthermore, Sinn Féin argue that the Irish government has failed to meet the republican standards set by the 1916 uprising and the Irish War of Independence against British rule by accepting partition (Adams 1986, 37-4). Graff-McRae discusses these competing narratives although in relation to earlier historical events and the IRA hunger-strikes in 1981 (Graff-McRae 2010, 44-77, 160-221).

The six factors accounting for memory wars between Sinn Féin, the British government and unionists can also explain the memory wars in Irish politics. Two examples to demonstrate this argument are the commemoration of past republican martyrs and the IRA's killing of Irish police officers during the conflict. In terms of commemorations, for example, Fianna Fáil reject Sinn Féin's attempts to claim that historical republican icons justify the Provisional IRA's campaign in Northern Ireland from 1969. In October 2015, Micheál Martin, the Fianna Fáil leader, rebuked Sinn Féin's account of history at the Bodinstown commemoration of Wolfe Tone. Tone was a Protestant Irish republican who attempted to create a secular Irish republic in 1798 during an unsuccessful rebellion against British rule. For Martin, Tone wanted an 'inclusive' republicanism that deplored sectarianism. He also referred to Fianna Fáil being established by many veterans of the Easter Rising of 1916. The Easter Rising in Dublin saw Irish republicans participate in an uprising at the General Post Office, proclaim an Irish republic, before being forced to unconditionally surrender by British forces six days later. The Rising leaders were shot, leading to growing support for Sinn Féin and the old IRA guerrilla war effort against British rule from 1918. Fianna Fáil descended from the old IRA and Sinn Féin. Martin criticised contemporary Sinn Féin's claims to be the heirs of Tone and the 1916 rebels:

Sinn Fein has no right to claim that it represents the men and women of 1916. Founded less than 50 years ago, [Sinn Féin] waged a campaign in the face of the overwhelming ...opposition of the Irish people ... Theirs is not the ideology of 1798 and 1916 – it is a mafia-like organisation which is incapable of respecting anyone outside of its own ranks ... No organisation which fails to expose...murderers can call itself republican (Martin 18 October 2015).

Martin suggests the Provisional IRA were 'mafia-like' because they lacked a sizeable democratic mandate in Ireland before 1998 to support their armed campaign. In contrast, he implies that Tone and the 1916 rebels represented Irish people, which, of course, following his democratic mandate criteria is disputable. Nonetheless, he also implies that the Provisional IRA's 'methods...dishonoured the Republic', alluding to its killing of some civilians in northern and southern Ireland from 1969.

In response, Sinn Féin argues that the Provisional IRA's violence from 1969 was no different in its aims and methods than past republican rebels. During a debate in the Dáil surrounding an Irish state tribunal into potential Garda collusion with the Provisional IRA in the killing of two Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) superintendents in 1989, Gerry Adams defended the Provisional IRA's campaign as being no different to the old IRA's. Adams said:

all the main parties [here] came from...armed resistance ... [t]here is no way one can...say there was a good Old IRA back in the day throwing powder puffs at the British and...that there is an IRA [in the north from 1969] which...behaved in a more cruel way (Dáil Éireann debates, 4 December 2013).

Sinn Féin also suggest that Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have betrayed the all-Ireland election of 1918 before partition, which saw Irish republicanism win a majority across the island of Ireland (Taylor 1998, 8-68). Sinn Féin argue that Fine Gael's and Fianna Fáil's acceptance of partition abandoned the majority of consent across the island. Indeed, Gerry Adams has remarked that Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil 'know that [the] sacrifices [of 1916] were not for a partitioned Ireland or a 26-county Republic, though they rarely admit it' (*An Phoblacht* 22 May 2011; for similar comments on memory debates on 1916 and Wolfe Tone see Graff-McRae 2010, 56-76, 130-147).

A further memory war involves the IRA's killing of Irish security force members during the Northern Ireland conflict. Gerry Adams as the TD (member of the Irish parliament) for Louth apologised in January 2013 for the Provisional IRA killing Irish security force members (*Irish Examiner* 30 January 2013). Whilst the Provisional IRA leadership stipulated that the IRA should not attack Irish security forces, it did occasionally happen. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael continue to recall these killings, particularly in cases where convictions did not emerge. One example comes from a parliamentary debate in the Dáil in November 2016. The debate focused on allegations that despite admitting to the family of Brian Stack, an Irish prisoner officer, that the IRA were responsible for his death in 1984, Sinn Féin were covering-up the names of those responsible. Micheál Martin said that IRA statements trying to explain the motives behind the killing were trying 'to justify...cold-blooded murder' by saying that Stack was a brutal prison officer ('Leader's questions', Dáil debates, 29 November 2016). In a subsequent debate on 6 December 2016, Alan Farrell, a Fine Gael TD, decided to accuse two sitting Sinn Féin TD's Martin Ferris and Dessie Ellis of being involved in the Stack killing. Pandemonium ensued, with Ferris shouting: 'It is disgraceful that he has named Deputy Ellis and myself ... Come outside and do that' (Dáil Éireann debate, 7 December 2016).

Political and constitutional factors can partly explain these competing memories. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil question Sinn Féin's suitability for potentially governing Ireland by reminding the electorate about IRA killings of Irish security force personnel. For example, there are currently ongoing investigations into Garda corruption unconnected to the conflict ('Confidence in government motion', Dáil Éireann debates 15 February 2017). Alongside Sinn Féin colleagues, Adams called for an independent policing board to oversee future complaints against the Garda in February 2017. Adams said that Garda corruption resulted from Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil 'cronyism' since partition. He suggests their behaviour betrays the legacy of the 1916 rebels and an 'Ireland for everyone'. Sinn Féin's comments are in part politically motivated to challenge the reputation of their main electoral rivals. In reply, both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil argue that Sinn Féin has no right to portray themselves as



supporting Garda officers because the IRA killed a few Garda officers during the conflict. Regina Doherty, a Fine Gael TD, said:

Anyone who wants to know about the Sinn Féin way regarding An Garda Síochána [the Irish police], our Defence Forces or prison officers need only ask the widows of Detective Garda Jerry McCabe, prison officer Brian Stack or Private Patrick Kelly. Sinn Féin does not do truth, integrity or sincerity. It is full of spin, rubbish and pure political games (Dáil Éireann debates, 15 February 2017).

The individuals named were all Irish security force or prison service members killed by the Provisional IRA during the conflict. Darragh O'Brien of Fianna Fáil also wanted to draw attention to: 'the hypocrisy of...[Sinn Féin] and its new-found...concern for...An Garda Síochána ... I ask...Sinn Féin...how many...Garda...were murdered by the Provisional IRA in the cause of protecting the State' ('Confidence in government motion', Dáil Éireann debates, 15 February 2017). Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil use the memory of those who died serving the state to support their contemporary political arguments against Sinn Féin on an unrelated matter. Both parties were also protecting their political reputations by deflecting attention towards IRA and Sinn Féin past behaviour.

Whilst both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil want Irish unification, they suggest that IRA attacks on Irish state forces in the past means that Sinn Féin cannot be trusted to rule Ireland or lead a unification movement. In September 2017, Martin rejected suggestions that Fianna Fáil should go into coalition with Sinn Féin. He claimed that his party should not work with those who take 'an apologist approach to heinous crimes' (Bardon 18 September 2017). In response, Sinn Féin says that voting for Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil has led to corruption, abandonment of the north and the recent banking crash in 2008. For these reasons, Sinn Féin argues that the other two parties have abandoned the united and socially equal Ireland promoted by the 1916 rebels and should be rejected (for examples see *An Phoblacht* 3 July 2017; and Gerry Adams' speech during 'Confidence in government motion', Dáil Éireann debates 15 February 2017). Sinn Féin also suggests moral equivalence between the old IRA and Provisional IRA partly for electoral purposes. They point out that the 1916 rebels who parties such as Fianna Fáil commemorate did not have an electoral mandate. Sinn Féin also argue that the other two parties betrayed the republican majority electoral mandate of 1918 by accepting partition, and, in Sinn Féin's account, justified future IRA campaigns in the north. They conclude that they are the only all-Ireland party who can lead the effort to bring about Irish unification based on the past. In addition, Sinn Féin recognised that to advance politically they had to listen to Irish voters and apologise for killing Irish security force members.

These memory debates are also motivated by communal, personal and moral factors. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil recall Irish security force deaths because particular victims' family members want Sinn Féin to provide more information (for examples see Dáil Éireann debate, 7 December 2016; Dáil Éireann debate, 29 November 2016; *BBC News* 4 September 2017; Kelly 2011). Furthermore, the Irish population provided Sinn Féin with approximately two percent of the vote during the IRA's campaign (O'Brien 1999, 198-99). For Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, these voting patterns before 1998 means that they cannot excuse IRA actions in retrospect as it would betray previous and present voters. Fine Gael directly suffered at the hands of the IRA. Fine Gael senator Billy Fox was killed during an IRA robbery in March 1974 in Monaghan (McKittrick *et al.* 2007, 426-427). Irish citizens on occasions took part in peace rallies too following IRA attacks that killed civilians, including after two young boys

were killed in Warrington in England in 1993 (McKittrick *et al.* 2007, 1314). The Irish government believes the past shows that the Provisional IRA's campaign was unjustified because civilians were killed and Sinn Féin lacked a majority of the electoral mandate.

Sinn Féin's memories of the Irish government's role during the conflict reflects a republican community perspective particularly in the north. Danny Morrison, the former Sinn Féin publicity director, summarises this view:

[the Irish government] was all about trying to create a nation-state out of twenty-six counties, and ignoring the north ... They paid lip-service to Irish unity. To us, who were burnt out of our homes and who were being attacked by the RUC, Jack Lynch's [former Fianna Fáil Taoiseach] speech in August 1969 [where he said that the Irish government would not stand 'idly by'] read like he was coming to help us. And yet that's exactly what they did not do (Danny Morrison, interview with author, 22 May 2012).

Northern republicans argue that they had no choice but to form a new IRA because the Irish state stood 'idly by' (Adams 1986, 41-43). Of course, this narrative attempts to morally justify the IRA's campaign. Nonetheless, approximately thirty percent of the northern Irish nationalist community voted for Sinn Féin during the conflict, demonstrating a sizeable minority of community support for this narrative even during the conflict (Leahy 2015, 182-226).

Finally, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil wish to remind the post-conflict generation of voters that Sinn Féin was linked to the IRA who killed Irish citizens and security force personnel. In return, Sinn Féin wish to emphasise to new voters that current socio-economic difficulties across Ireland partly result from the behaviour of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil since partition. Post-memory trauma for each side means that some young voters based on which community they grew up in and their family experiences support a particular group (Hirsch 2008). Nonetheless, the rise of Sinn Féin suggests that the situation in the Republic of Ireland with the youth vote is different. One reason is that the Irish youth have fewer grievances against Sinn Féin because the conflict did not directly traumatise many families living in Ireland compared to the north. A growing number of young people in Ireland may also be convinced of Sinn Féin's interpretation of the conflict since republicans now have an electoral platform to disseminate their view since 1998. Indeed, amongst voters aged under thirty-four, recent opinions polls demonstrate a majority preference for a governing coalition to include Sinn Féin (Martin and Murphy 2017, 570).

## Conclusion

Memory wars between each political group in Irish and Northern Irish politics shows that recalling the past has become 'a war by other means' (Braniff and McDowell 2014, 38-59). The Good Friday Peace Agreement in 1998 only removed the violence from mainstream political debates over a united Ireland (Cochrane 2013 294-295). All sides realised that there was a political and military stalemate (to varying degrees based on electoral mandates) and that the conflict was not advancing their objectives (English 2004, 263-336; Leahy 2015, 182-226). I have suggested that Irish and Northern Irish memory wars occur primarily for six reasons. Memory wars are employed by each side partly to justify their ongoing constitutional aspirations. Rival interpretations of the past can also be used to consolidate and build political support for each group against intra-communal and external rivals.

Nonetheless, a memory war in the Irish and Northern Irish context also represents each community's competing conflict experiences and a unique sense of victimhood that they want remembered and addressed in the present. The respective leaders of each group promote these 'collective memories' because they often share the communal experience. Collective memories of each group also demonstrate a continuing debate about the morality of political violence in the past and present. In addition, recalling conflicting memories is an attempt by party leaders who experienced the conflict to 'bind' the post-conflict generation to their ideological vision and leadership (Mannheim 2011, 92-98). Post-memory trauma means that the post-conflict generation of voters may support rival interpretations of the past because of the trauma experienced by their family and community (Eriksen 2001, 50-51; Hirsch 2008).

What is potentially unique about Irish and Northern Irish political memory wars compared to other post-conflict situations is that the constitutional question remains debated. Braniff and McDowell imply that in other cases where there was not a decisive victor to determine the constitutional future of an area, including the Basque country and Israel and Palestine, divisive conflict memories are frequently recalled in politics in part to justify opposing identities and constitutional aspirations. In contrast, their work suggests that in South Africa, Croatia and Serbia, commemorations surrounding past conflict are more focused on 'nation-building' compared to nation-contestation. Memory debates do not seem to any great extent to be about the legitimacy of the South African, Croatian or Serbian states existing in the present (Braniff and McDowell 2014, 60-178). Further research could test the validity of this argument in relation to similar post-conflict situations where political debate over sovereignty remains.

Persistence memory wars are not necessarily negative for politics and society in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Allowing a multiplicity of views about the past shows the reality of the complex nature of historical events and their meaning for different groups that can be expressed in political debate (Bell 2008; Brown 2013, 495-507). In the Irish and Northern Irish context, opposing memories ensure there is not a dominant narrative forced on different communities. The contrasting memories between the main political parties also do not advocate further conflict. The memory that the conflict was a stalemate means that memories are used instead for other political and communal purposes in the present. Bell is right, however, that permitting rival interpretations of the past in politics does not mean that there is moral equivalence between all participants (Bell 2008). Significant disagreement over the past in politics in Northern Ireland and Ireland means that victims and survivors, some of whom do not support a political group, need judicial processes to deal with conflict legacy and provide justice (Brown 2013, 495-507).

The desire to maintain peace in Northern Ireland may see the younger generation decide eventually to downplay contested memories. In Ireland, the memory debates between Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin may also be put aside to build coalition governments or to promote Irish unification together in order to protect Ireland's interests from Brexit (Kelly 13 March 2017, *RTE News* 24 May 2017).

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