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The Code Word Conundrum in the Northern Ireland Conflict

Heather Hamill

In March and April 1969 two explosive devices were detonated near Belfast, Northern Ireland; one at an electricity substation and another at a reservoir.[1] The press and the British and Irish security services blamed the Irish Republican Army (IRA) for these actions. Then, on 21 October 1969, Thomas McDowell, a member of a Loyalist paramilitary group called the Ulster Protestant Volunteers (UPV) was killed by a bomb he was attempting to plant at a power station near Ballyshannon in Donegal. The device was of the same type as those used to attack the electricity substation and the reservoir. The UPV had designed their actions to make people believe it was the IRA that had planted all the devices. Their aim was to discredit the IRA and the tentative reforms that were being made towards Catholics by Northern Ireland's prime minister, Terence O'Neill. This incident is the first clear example, in the Northern Ireland conflict, of one armed group mimicking another armed group of the opposite religion. These events occurred at the beginning of the conflict in Northern Ireland that became known as 'the Troubles'.

According to Diego Gambetta (2005), deceptive mimicry occurs when a mimic passes him or herself off as being someone they are not. The mimic does this by signalling to others the identity and attributes of the individual being mimicked. In the first part of this chapter, I discuss how, for the most part, paramilitaries were able to use camouflage defensively and aggressively. I then examine a series of instances of *defensive* and *aggressive mimicry*, at both the individual and group level. In the second part of the chapter, I focus on code words, which were used by paramilitaries in their communications

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with the security forces and the wider public. Code words are included in messages fore-warning of bomb explosions in commercial centres; claims or denials of responsibility for violent actions; and when making statements about strategic decisions within a paramilitary organization. I explore code words as an identity signal and its use as an anti-mimicry device.

Background to the Troubles

Northern Ireland has been the scene of the worst political violence in Western Europe since the Second World War. The death toll between 1969 and the present day is 3,386.[2] The conflict in Northern Ireland has been long-running and of low intensity relative to many other civil wars. The casualty figures are large in aggregate, but 'the Troubles' have lasted over forty years. The struggle has been between Republicans (Catholic militants) and Loyalists (Protestant militants); Republicans and the security forces (British Army and the police) and Loyalists and the security forces. Throughout the conflict, the IRA was the largest and most active paramilitary group within Republicanism. Following the IRA's first ceasefire in 1994, two dissident IRA splinter groups were formed: the Continuity IRA (CIRA) and the Real IRA (rIRA) which split again to form Óglaigh na hÉireann. These dissident groups aim to continue the armed struggle.

On the Protestant side, there are two main pro-state Loyalist paramilitary groups. The larger of the two, the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), also used the cover name of Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) to claim responsibility for killing Catholics.[3] The Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) is smaller in number than the UDA but is much deadlier.[4] Loyalist attacks are mostly sectarian against Catholic civilians and Republican paramilitaries. Republicans will attack Loyalist paramilitaries and political, economic, and military targets. Active service members of the armed groups are overwhelmingly white, male, working class and aged between eighteen and forty.

The other actors are the state security services. The police—originally the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC)—is now called the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). The British Army was deployed on active service in the streets of Northern Ireland in August 1969. The Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) was an infantry regiment of the British Army which recruited locally from the Protestant population.

[2] PSNI, 2015. www.psni.police.uk/index/updates/updates_statistics/updates_security_situation_statistics.htm (accessed 25 March 2015).
[3] CAIN, 2006. http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/uorgan.htm#uda (accessed 15 January 2007).
[4] CAIN, 2015. http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/uorgan.htm#uda (accessed 15 January 2007).

Camouflage

The religious segregation in Northern Ireland is well documented (Hughes et al. 2007). Thirty-five to forty per cent of the Northern Irish population live in completely segregated neighbourhoods (Hewstone et al. 2004, 265–292). Even in the current post-conflict phase there are forty-nine 'peace walls' in Belfast demarcating Catholic and Protestant neighbourhoods (Rutherford and Bowyer 2011). Religious affiliation is self-evident by virtue of living in the area and painted wall murals demarcate an organization's presence and residents' loyalties. But identifying a paramilitary from an 'ordinary citizen'—the 'identification problem' (Kalyvas 2006, 89–91)—is a significant challenge. Going unnoticed within their communities is effortless for paramilitaries. They are simultaneously a working-class Catholic or Protestant and a member of an armed group. They do not need to modify their appearance or behaviour to blend into the background. Membership of the IRA peaked at around 1500 in the mid-1970s. In 1994, at the time of the ceasefire, membership was approximately 500 with a smaller number being 'active' members.[5] Most of these members were inconspicuous, moving freely within their community and appearing to be nothing more than a working-class Catholic. Active service units operating in Britain and mainland Europe also adopted this strategy. Likewise, most of the 30,000 estimated members of the UDA and several hundred members of the UVF[6] remained camouflaged in their communities. The aim of this camouflage was defensive. They wanted to avoid being identified and targeted for surveillance or attack by the security forces or by a paramilitary group of the opposite religion.

Camouflage also enabled logistical actions to be carried out without interruption. Paramilitaries moved weapons in cars with their wives and children in the passenger seats. They were simultaneously an ordinary family on their way to visit their grandparents and moving weapons from one safe house to another.

While camouflage protects the paramilitary, its use puts ordinary people at risk of being targeted indiscriminately. The British Army was unable to distinguish paramilitaries from the 'ordinary' population and this led to internment: the arrest and detention without trial of people suspected of being members of illegal paramilitary groups between 1971 and 1975. During this period, a total of 1981 people were detained; 1874 were Catholic/Republican; only 107 were Protestant/Loyalist.[7] In 1978, the European Court of Human

[5] CAIN, 2015. http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/violence/paramilitary2.htm (accessed 18 February 2015).
[6] CAIN, 2015. http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/violence/paramilitary2.htm (accessed 18 February 2015).
[7] CAIN, 2015. http://www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/intern/sum.htm (accessed 23 March 2015).

Rights ruled that the use of rough interrogation techniques during internment in Northern Ireland constituted 'inhuman and degrading punishment' (Weitzer 1995, 178). The British Army relied on lists of 'suspects' drawn up by the RUC Special Branch, but their information was of extremely poor quality. Coogan (1995, 126) describes how 'The army quite often simply picked up the wrong people, a son for a father, the wrong "man with a beard living at No. 47" and so on'.

Internment—also known as Operation Demetrius—was disproportionately directed towards the IRA. Undoubtedly, this reflected the government's punitive bias towards Republicans as opposed to pro-state Loyalists. Moreover, the Protestant police force shared a religious, social, cultural, and even familial background with Loyalists and so had better information as to who was a Loyalist paramilitary. The Army had less need to apply a dragnet strategy to this side of the conflict. This differential treatment carried on throughout the Troubles and further polarized the two communities. Working-class Catholics were subjected to house raids, the use of stop-and-search powers, and detention without trial inscribed in various statutory powers enacted between 1973 and the present day (Campbell and Connolly 2006, 945–946).

The immediate effect of internment was an increase in the amount of violence. Interment began in August 1971; the number of explosions increased from 79 in July 1971 to 142, 186, 155, 117, and 123 in August to December 1971 respectively (Spjut 1986, 716). It radicalized Catholics, reduced the number of Catholic moderates, cemented a deep-rooted fear and suspicion of the police that endures today (Hamill 2011), and boosted IRA recruitment.

Paramilitaries most often used camouflage defensively, but they also used their ability to blend in, to target others. The police recorded 19,187 bombs and incendiary devices (excluding devices that were neutralized) having been used in Northern Ireland between 1969 and the time of writing[8] (excluding devices utilized in the rest of the UK and Europe). Most of these devices were placed in public places. To plant a bomb, the bomber needs to pass as a relaxed ordinary citizen. When a former IRA member planted an incendiary device in a large furniture shop he '… just walked into a shop, set the bag [containing the device] down, and walked out'.[9] Unlike in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Benmelech and Berrebi 2007), bombers were not caught in the act because of a failure to signal normality. Prior intelligence

[8] http://www.psni.police.uk/index/updates/updates_statistics/updates_security_situation_statistics.htm (accessed 23 March 2015).

[9] Interview with former IRA member, Belfast, 22 August 2012.

and technical incompetence, when bombs exploded prematurely, led to their detection.

Bombers exploited their shared physical and behavioural traits with the opposite religion and 'ordinary' British citizens. This strategy was exemplified in 1984 when Patrick Magee, a member of the IRA, planted a bomb in the Grand Hotel in Brighton. The target was Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her cabinet who were attending the Conservative Party Conference. The explosion killed five people, but Thatcher escaped unharmed. Magee had excellent camouflage. Born in Belfast, he moved to England aged four, so he had a genuine English accent (Hatterstone 2001). He used a false name of Roy Walsh when he checked into the hotel. This character was made up; he was not impersonating anyone. He also checked into the hotel twenty-four days prior to the conference and the bomb, planted under the bath in his room, had a long delay timer. By placing the bomb so far in advance, he further avoided suspicion and the intense screening put in place closer to the conference date.

Defensive Mimicry

Catholic civilians were most at risk of being murdered throughout the Troubles, and the greatest proportion of civilian murders were committed in North Belfast. This part of Belfast is a patchwork of Catholic and Protestant neighbourhoods and has more sectarian interfaces than anywhere else in the city (Sluka 2000, 136). If you happened to stray into the 'wrong' street, you were at risk from paramilitaries on the prowl looking for victims. Despite people being killed in these circumstances, there are few examples of defensive mimicry when a member of one religion mimics a member of another religion to avoid harm. There may, of course, have been unsuccessful attempts but the mimic did not live to tell the tale. As in Rwanda (see Laitin in this volume), strong group boundaries meant that there was high social knowledge of who belonged to what religion and where they fitted into the social order. In June 1973 Daniel O'Neill, a Catholic, was on his way home after a night out when he was picked up by Loyalists in a staunchly Protestant neighbourhood. He was well known in both communities because of his job as a television-rent collector (McKittrick et al. 2007, 366). His assassins knew he was a Catholic so mimicry would have been futile. As the number of victims increased, residents avoided risk by assiduously staying in their neighbourhoods. In 1974, *Republican News* published a seven-point list of precautions that Catholics should take including 'Never go out at night alone in areas

recognized to be the assassin's murder ground' (quoted in Sluka 2000, 138). Even if a victim was cool enough to be able to display the correct signs under pressure the local knowledge of who is who raised the probability of being discovered. John McIver was a Scottish Catholic who for years hid his religion from his Protestant friends by, among other things, being a staunch supporter of Glasgow Rangers Football Club.[10] Four months before his murder by Loyalists in 1992 he cried as he told a friend: 'They have found out I'm a Catholic' (*Belfast Telegraph* 2001).

Prison Escapes

Incarcerated Republicans viewed themselves as prisoners of war (POWs) and thus, in company with all POWs, had a duty to escape. IRA prisoners escaped successfully on forty-five occasions between 1971 and 1997 (Kelly 2013, 319–322). They tunnelled out of prison,[11] climbed over perimeter walls using homemade ropes fashioned from bed sheets, were lifted out by helicopter, blasted their way out, and overpowered guards with firearms smuggled in from outside.[12] They also used defensive mimicry in prison escapes. In 1973, John Francis Green escaped dressed as his brother, a priest. His brother Father Gerrard Green, who visited him prior to the escape, was found tied up in the prison (Coogan 2000, 405). Brendan Hughes escaped in 1973. In order to buy himself some time before the authorities realized he had escaped, he had another inmate mimic him, or act as his double (see Gambetta and Hegghammer, Chapter 1 this volume): 'I took my clothes off, gave them to this guy who had the same big moustache as me and black hair', he said (Moloney 2010, 159). In 1997, Liam Averill escaped from the Maze Prison dressed as a woman. He escaped after a Christmas party for prisoners' children. He took advantage of the prison authorities' belief in a 'tacit agreement with all the factions in the jail that the privilege of parties would not be abused' (House of Commons 1998, 12) and so perhaps the guards were less vigilant than normal. Averill wore a wig, make-up, and woman's clothes and five prison guards failed to spot his disguise (AnPhoblacht 1997). Escapees have also worn uniforms to mimic British soldiers and prison officers (McEvoy 2001, 54). Thirty-eight prisoners escaped from the Maze Prison

[10] Protestants support Glasgow Rangers Football Club and Catholics support Glasgow Celtic Football Club.

[11] In 1983, it was reported that there were 200 tunnels underneath Long Kesh Prison (also known as the Maze Prison), so many that the place almost collapsed (Coogan 2000, 529).

[12] Unlike Republicans, Loyalist prisoners have made very few escape attempts. For a fuller discussion of the reasons why see McEvoy (2001, 64–67).

in one break-out in 1983. The escapees and their rearguard support wore prison officers' uniforms but when fighting broke out between them and the genuine prison officers, five prison officers were stabbed and two were shot. In the confusion, the British soldiers in the watchtowers overlooking the prison could not distinguish between the genuine prison officers and the mimics (Kelly 2013, 127).

Aggressive Individual Mimicry

Aggressive mimicry is when an individual mimics another individual to harm someone else. McKittrick's (McKittrick et al. 2007) anthology of deaths in Northern Ireland describes in detail the circumstances of 3521 deaths that have resulted from the conflict between 1966 and 2006. This work contains information on the perpetrator(s), what organization they belonged to, and details as to how the murder was carried out. I coded each murder as to what organization was responsible, the status and religion of the victim, whether mimicry occurred, and what form it took. Only instances where the killer assumes another identity are counted as aggressive mimicry. For analytical clarity, bombers who did not assume another's identity or modify their appearance and killers wearing masks to hide their identity, or camouflaged as ordinary citizens are not counted in this analysis. According to this data, aggressive mimicry occurred in 124 cases or four per cent of the total number of deaths. The victims were all shot. Thirty-four per cent of these instances of aggressive mimicry occurred between 1973 and 1976, when the overall numbers of deaths also peaked. The mimics were members of the IRA (forty-four per cent), the UVF (twenty-nine per cent) and the UDA (seventeen per cent). Sixty-nine per cent of the victims of this kind of aggressive mimicry were civilians and of those sixty-three per cent were Catholic and twenty-eight per cent were Protestant. The UVF carried out forty-nine per cent of these killings of Catholic civilians, and the UDA perpetrated twenty-six per cent. We can conclude therefore that aggressive mimicry is most often used in the assassination of Catholic civilians by Loyalist paramilitaries. As Table 4.1 shows, mimics have actively posed as genuine customers seeking a taxi, service in a shop, or a delivery of fast food. Mimics have also passed as postmen, builders, hospital workers, and members of the police and army.

According to this data, the overall number of instances of aggressive mimicry is small relative to the overall number of violent events. It is likely that this kind of mimicry was more prevalent, but the use of mimicry in unsuccessful assassinations has not been recorded.

Table 4.1 Assassinations 1966–2006: Models, Mimics, and Victims (N = 124)

Model	Mimic	Victim
Genuine customer (taxi, fast food, in a shop)	IRA	Civilian/British Army
	UVF	Civilian
	UDA	Civilian /British Army
	RHC	Civilian
	IPLO	Civilian
Taxi driver	UDA	Civilian
	IPLO	Civilian
British Army	UVF	Civilian
UDR	IRA	Civilian /British Army
Council workers	IRA	Civilian
	UVF	Civilian
	UDA	Civilian
Postman	IRA	British Army/UDR
Butchers	IRA	Police
Journalist	Police*	Civilian
Friend of the victim	IRA	Civilian /British Army
Burglary victim	IRA	Police
	IRA	Police
Hitchhiker	RHD	Civilian
Shopkeeper	IRA	British Army
Police	UVF	IRA
IRA	UVF	Civilian
	UDA	Civilian
Hospital workers (wore lab coats)	UDA	Civilian
Students	IRA	Civilian
Paramedics	IRA	British Army
Cyclists	IRA	British Army
Friendly civilian asking for directions	UDA	Civilian
Gardai (Republic of Ireland police)	INLA	INLA
Arabs	IRA	Civilian
Builders	IRA	Civilian
Stranded motorist	UVF	Civilian
Fellow drinker	IRA	Civilian
Drunk	UVF	Civilian
False friend	UVF	Civilian
	UDA	UDA
	IRA	Civilian
'Good time' girls	IRA	British Army
Friend of family member	IRA	British Army
Wedding guest	UVF	Civilian

*The killer was acting alone; this was not an official police operation.
Source: created by author

Successful assassinations require that the killers get within shooting range of their victim, the victim does not sense the threat and escape or retaliate, and the assassins get away unharmed. As has been noted, Catholic civilians were most at risk of being murdered throughout the Troubles. In North Belfast, Loyalist assassins did not have to travel far to kill Catholics as they often lived just a street away from their victims. They could be back in their territory within minutes (Sluka 2000, 136). In these cases, the assassins did not need to use mimicry to affect their kill or facilitate their escape.

Fearing an attack at any time, non-civilians—the police, army personnel, and paramilitaries—took precautions. They varied their patterns of travel and were cautious about who they associated with and distrusted everyone they did not know. They also carried weapons to defend themselves. If they were suspicious, they could shoot first and ask questions later. The assassin's best strategy against these targets was to act as quickly as possible to surprise their victim and not give them any time to react and defend themselves. Drive-by shootings and ambushes worked best, and these did not require any mimicry.

Assassins used aggressive mimicry under any of the following four circumstances. The first was when assassins needed to manoeuvre themselves or the victim into a better position to kill them. Catholic taxi drivers in Belfast were especially vulnerable to acts of aggressive mimicry in this circumstance. Loyalists were willing to take the risk of going into Catholic areas to mimic ordinary Catholic passengers and hail a cab. Once inside the car, they could kill the driver with relative ease (Gambetta and Hamill 2005). Second, mimicry was used when killers needed to persuade their victim to accompany them to another location. Anne-Marie Smyth was a Catholic on her first trip to Belfast. She strayed into a Loyalist pub and, unaware of the dangerous territory she was in, she was duped by other women into believing they, too, were Catholics. They persuaded Anne-Marie to go with them to a house where she was strangled (McKittrick 1997). Third, aggressive mimicry is used when the assassins needed an extra element of surprise to kill their victim. In July 1988, three UVF men dressed as members of the police shot and killed Brendan Davidson in his home. Davidson—an experienced member of the IRA—had served a prison sentence for attempted murder and had escaped an assassination attempt by Loyalists in the previous year (Hearst 1988). If the UVF had appeared at his door in their usual operational garb—balaclavas and boiler suits—he would instantly have known what was happening and would have reacted aggressively. Instead, Davidson would have expected the police to arrest him, not kill him, and so did not immediately act in self-defence. Dressing as the police was also an act of defensive mimicry as it increased

the UVF's chances of a safe getaway. Local people would be less hostile to the police than they would be towards suspected Loyalist killers.

Finally, assassins use aggressive mimicry when there is an additional pay-off to the murder. In June 1990, the UFF assassinated Sean Keenan, a Sinn Féin councillor. Keenan lived in a Republican enclave deep within Catholic West Belfast. The hit squad disguised themselves as British soldiers on foot patrol. They dressed in full combats and camouflage and walked through the heart of West Belfast unchallenged (Adair 2007, 57). Army foot patrols were a daily occurrence in Republican areas, so residents did not suspect that there was a different and deadlier enemy in their midst. But the costs of this act of mimicry were very high. Republicans invested a considerable amount of time and effort familiarizing themselves with the movements and practices of the British Army. The UFF needed to source the correct type of uniform and weaponry, and walk in a formation akin to an Army foot patrol. The mimicry worked because Republicans never expected that Loyalists would risk such exposure to attack by trying to pass off as members of the British Army and is another example of mimicry being simultaneously aggressive and defensive. Republicans considered Loyalists an easier target than the British Army. By mimicking the British Army, the UFF reduced the likelihood of being attacked on their retreat. Why were the UFF willing to carry out such a high-risk operation when there were less costly ways to murder Keenan? There was considerable jockeying for power within the UFF at this time (Lister and Jordan 2003). Venturing into Republican territory to kill a member of Sinn Féin in this audacious way showed individual bravery and daring and gained status within the group. The additional status gained from taking part in this operation was the pay-off that made the costs of mimicry worth paying.

Intelligence Gathering

Another reason to adopt a strategy of aggressive mimicry was to gather intelligence. The renegade Loyalist paramilitary, Johnny Adair reported that he made many successful reconnaissance trips into the Catholic enclave in West Belfast. On more than one occasion, he commandeered a black taxi and drove around the area with some women and children to look like an authentic Catholic taxi driver (Adair 2007, 66). On other occasions, he wore a Celtic football club top to pass as a Catholic (Adair 2007, 67). These acts of mimicry were primarily aggressive, but they were also defensive because if he had been spotted, he would have been killed. Adair's added defensive strategy was to

avoid talking to any Catholics who might probe him for local knowledge that he may have been unable to provide convincingly.

Members of the intelligence services also mimicked ordinary citizens during surveillance operations. As in Adair's case, their acts of mimicry were primarily aggressive but were also defensive. Captain Robert Nairac was a British soldier involved in intelligence gathering on the IRA in South Armagh in the 1970s. Nairac's method was to pose as Danny McErlaine (or a similar surname), a member of the North Belfast INLA. He assumed that, in the 1970s, the distance of forty miles from South Armagh and North Belfast would impede good information on members of rival Republican paramilitary organizations from flowing smoothly. Although he was English, his Catholic education would help him deflect some probing. Nairac mingled with locals in bars and sang Republican rebel songs to pass off as Danny. However, in May 1977, while undertaking such an operation in the Three Steps Inn near Forkhill, Co. Armagh, the IRA abducted and killed him. According to some reports, IRA sympathizers in the pub became suspicious of him, alerting the IRA because he repeatedly visited the pub's toilet. As he was being abducted the IRA found his Browning pistol, the signature weapon of the British Army, and his cover was blown (*Belfast Telegraph* 2007; McKittrick et al. 2007, 722–724).

The British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS)—also known as MI5—took action to reduce the risk to the individual intelligence officers and make the defensive side of the act of mimicry more robust. For example, they established a fake holiday firm and told a number of Republicans that they had won a free holiday to Spain (Urban 1992, 105). While on these holidays, away from their cadres of support and weaponry, the duped Republicans were much less of a threat. The intelligence officers could reveal their true identity and try to recruit them as agents in relative safety.

Aggressive Group Mimicry

Their similarities in age, gender, appearance and mode of operation presented the paramilitary groups with opportunities to mimic one another. There are instances of paramilitary groups mimicking groups of the opposite religion, coreligionist rival groups, and members of the security forces. These acts of mimicry were carried out to assassinate civilians and paramilitaries of the opposite religion, to discredit other paramilitary groups of the same and opposite religion, and to avoid blame for acts of violence. Paramilitary

groups also operated under false flags whereby they used cover groups to avoid taking responsibility for the act of violence.

Mimicking Another Paramilitary Group to Carry out an Assassination

Mimicking an enemy paramilitary group in their territory is an audacious act. Johnny Adair records how the IRA mimicked the UVF to gain access to a house from which to launch an assassination attack on him (Adair 2007, 130). The mimics required courage simply to be in Adair's neighbourhood, but they did not need to do much to dupe the homeowner, who was an almost blind pensioner. Adair also describes how the UDA gained entry to a house in Catholic West Belfast to attack a Catholic by claiming to be the IRA (Adair 2007, 141). The mimics' success depended on the assumption that, to minimize the risk of discovery, paramilitaries would want to spend as little time as possible in enemy territory. When men wearing balaclavas and carrying bags containing weapons asked to use their house, the homeowners assumed they were their 'own' paramilitaries rather than those from the opposite religion.

Mimicking Another Paramilitary Group to Discredit them or Avoid Blame

Throughout the Troubles, all the armed groups disguised their involvement in violent actions. Prior to the ceasefires in the 1990s this was because: the target was a coreligionist civilian; an operation had gone wrong resulting in a higher number of casualties than anticipated; they targeted the wrong victim; the action was not sanctioned by the leadership; there was collusion with the security forces; and the action was more of a criminal than a political act. During the ceasefires in the 1990s, it was to avoid losing political concessions gained from the peace process or even being expelled from the political talks.

False Flags

The most widespread evidence of aggressive mimicry by groups was in the use of false flags. This is when an armed group establishes a separate identity by adopting a pseudonym to carry out particular actions or forms a new

group whose membership is made up of members of the parent group. This tactic is more particular to the Loyalists than Republicans. Between 1973 and 2006 the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) was a cover name or false flag used by the UDA when they killed civilian Catholics. As one senior commander in the UDA reported: 'It wasn't really a separate organization, as such. No, it was basically a flag of convenience for UDA men who were carrying out military operations'.[13] In a similar vein, the Red Hand Commando (RHC) was formed in 1972 and is thought to have acted as a false flag for the UVF. The incentives to operate under a false flag increased with the introduction of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act in July 1998 that followed the Good Friday Agreement in April 1998. This legislation allowed for the early release of paramilitary prisoners and was a key concession made by the British government to those paramilitary groups participating in the peace process. Crucially, only those organizations that were on ceasefire could benefit from the scheme. On 11 September 1998 the first seven paramilitary prisoners were released. Also in September 1998 a group called the Red Hand Defenders (RHD) appeared and claimed responsibility for a blast bomb attack that killed a police officer. In total, the RHD killed eight people (six Catholics and two Protestants) and claimed responsibility for numerous explosions and petrol bomb attacks on Catholic families. There is a widespread assumption that members of the UDA/UFF used the RHD as a false flag to avoid being blamed for attacks and jeopardizing the early release of their prisoners.

The IRA has also used false flags, but to a lesser extent. A vigilante organization called Direct Action Against Drugs (DAAD), emerged in Belfast during the IRA ceasefire in 1994. DAAD claimed responsibility for killing eleven Catholics who were all alleged drug dealers. Although the Republican Movement has always denied any connection between the two organizations, the evidence suggests that it operated as a false flag for the IRA. The IRA dominates Republican areas of Belfast. It is unlikely that a violent vigilante group could function in their territory without their knowledge and sanction, if not their direct cooperation. Apart from DAAD, most of the vigilante groups in Republican areas were disorganized and transient. DAAD'S relative longevity of four years, suggests the IRA's ease with its shows of strength and that the two organizations were, at the very least, closely linked.

Code Words as an Identity Signal

In 1966, the UVF issued a statement to the *Belfast Telegraph* newspaper claiming that three weeks earlier it had murdered John Patrick Scullion, a Catholic.

[13] Interview with member of the UDA, Belfast, 15 February 2008.

Until this declaration, the police believed that Scullion had fallen over when drunk and had died from his injuries. The police exhumed Scullion's body and discovered an abdominal wound caused by a gunshot. The intriguing thing about the UVF statement was not that it revealed police ineptitude but that it included the words 'Captain William Johnson'—a code word for the UVF. From that point onwards, newspapers reported the use of code words by paramilitary groups in warnings of impending attacks, claims and denials of responsibility for acts of violence, or publicizing a policy or strategic decisions taken within the organization. These communications were mostly via phone calls made directly to the police or a third party. Media outlets, charities like the Samaritans, hospitals, and other organizations that have staff on duty twenty-four hours a day, and will have someone to receive the phone call, have all been used.

These phone calls are particularly significant if they warn of an impending bomb attack. The IRA, whose chief terror tactic was its bombing campaign, provided warnings only in the case of an economic target where civilians might be at risk. They did not forewarn if the target was a political or military one. The IRA has repeatedly pointed to their warnings as proof of their genuine desire to prevent the loss of civilian lives. However, if the receiver does not know the caller personally then they have no way to judge whether the caller is genuine. Most of this activity occurred between the late 1960s and late 1990s, in a pre-mobile phone era. The majority of calls came from a public phone box, so it was impossible to trace the identity of the caller.

There have been numerous false or hoax calls. In 1992, for example, the British transport police received 1600 hoax calls in a twelve-month period warning that bombs had been planted. Furthermore, the number of hoax calls increased after an explosion. In February 1991, British Rail and the London Underground received eighty-five bomb threats in the week following an IRA bomb at Victoria Station that killed one person. To emphasize the difficulty in distinguishing whether the threat is genuine or a hoax, the Victoria Station bomb warning was received amongst a score of hoax calls made after an explosion at Paddington Station three hours earlier (Israelson 1991).

Hoax calls fall into two broad categories. The first is when *both the caller and the message are false*. This can take one of two forms. First is when the caller has no paramilitary connections and is motivated by malice or mischief-making. The second is when the caller is a representative of a paramilitary group but is mimicking another paramilitary group to avoid taking responsibility for their actions or to discredit the mimicked group. For example, the dissident Republican groups (the CIRA and the rIRA) have mimicked the IRA in phone calls claiming that the IRA was responsible for attacks that were carried out by the CIRA and the rIRA. These claims were

intended to discredit the IRA and disrupt the peace process. The second type of hoax call is when *the caller is genuine, but the message is false*. This is when a paramilitary group falsely warns of an impending attack or makes false claims regarding an event. A hoax bomb threat, which closes a town centre or cripples a transport system, can cause severe economic damage. For example, the estimated total cost of three IRA bomb scares in England in April 1997, including the cancellation of the Grand National horse race, was 250 million pounds (Ellin 1997). The IRA repeatedly used this strategy of causing maximum disruption with no loss of life. Hoax bombs also allow paramilitaries to monitor the security response to an imminent attack. They reveal details of what routes the police take to attend the incident; their response time; how many and what type of personnel are deployed; what vehicles they use; what size area around the incident site they cordon off; whether and when the Army accompanies them, and so forth. This information is used to plan future operations. Hoax bombs are also a way to distract the security forces and mask an even bigger action. McEvoy (2001, 56–57) records an aborted IRA attempt to escape from Crumlin Road Prison by driving a digger with a bomb in the front bucket through the exterior wall of the prison. The IRA had devised an elaborate series of hoax and real bomb threats at strategic locations throughout Belfast to stretch and distract the security forces to facilitate the escape.

Code words are used in the context of contested and competitive claims where paramilitary groups mimic one another and misinformation abounds. The following sections of this chapter will explore the evolution of code words as an identity signal and assess their usefulness in enabling the police and security forces to screen genuine calls from mimics and pranksters.

Data on Code Words

Evidence on code words has been difficult to gather, and this analysis draws on newspaper and interview data. The primary data source is the Nexis UK newspaper archive which was searched using the terms 'code word', 'IRA', 'UDA', and 'UVF'. This search yielded 332 separate incidents in which code words were used between 1973 and 2011. Each of these incidents was coded for the name of the paramilitary organization deemed to be responsible, message content, event type, receiver of the message, contested claims, and code word used. During this content analysis, I read an article in the *Birmingham Mail* newspaper referencing a log book in which the newspaper's telephonists recorded every threatening phone call they received between November

1971 and June 1992. The *Birmingham Mail* kindly gave me permission to analyse this log book. There were 401 calls recorded, and each call was coded for accent of the caller, where the call came from (call box, private phone,) gender of the caller, message content, whether a code word was used, and whether it was linked to a particular incident. I also interviewed two former members of the IRA and two former members of the UDA, four PSNI officers working in Northern Ireland, and two Metropolitan police officers, a former British Military Intelligence officer, a former Special Branch officer, one journalist who worked for the *Belfast Telegraph*, and an email exchange with an investigative journalist who has worked extensively in Northern Ireland.

Creation and Evolution of Code Words as an Identity Signal

There is evidence, predating the Troubles, of paramilitaries signing their actions. In the 1920s, individual IRA commanders signed their statements but stopped doing this when the conflict escalated in the late 1960s and the penalty for IRA membership increased. Even well-known Republicans, like Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams, used pen names. In the mid-1970s, while interned in prison, he smuggled out a series of articles that were published in *Republican News*/*An Phoblacht* depicting life inside under the name of 'Brownie' (Adams 1996, 245–249). The IRA used a *nom de guerre* from the 1940s. From the late 1960s, this was 'P. O'Neill' but it was not a code word as such and even Danny Morrison, Sinn Féin's former publicity director, did not know the exact provenance of 'P. O'Neill'.

The first recorded use of a code word—'Captain William Johnson' by the UVF in 1966—predated the first act of group mimicry: when the Ulster Protestant Volunteers mimicked the operational behaviour of the IRA in 1969 to discredit them. The temporal order of an act of group mimicry and the adoption of code words is inverted. So, while the UVF may have originally decided to use a code word as an identity signature, it was not initially used to combat mimicry. The other paramilitary organizations soon followed the UVF in using code words. The UFF have used 'Captain Black' since the beginning of the Troubles (Taylor 2000, 118). The UDA used 'The Ulster Troubles', 'Crucible', and 'Titanic' as code words (Rowan 2010). The IRA used 'Double X' for the 1974 Birmingham pub bombings and they reportedly have also used 'Michael Collins' and 'Easter Rising', and continue to use the *noms de guerre* 'P. O'Neill' and 'Óglaigh na hÉireann'. The rIRA used the code word 'Martha Pope'.

According to data from the Nexis newspaper archive, code words were used in 332 separate incidents between 1973 and 2011 and they were used with the greatest frequency between 1992 and 2003. In these data, code words were also used more often by Republicans than Loyalists: thirty-five per cent of the incidents with code words were attributable to the IRA and fifteen per cent to the rIRA. Of the code words used by the IRA, fifty-eight per cent were in messages warning of an actual bomb or explosion and fourteen per cent were in messages that subsequently turned out to be hoax calls. Among the Loyalists, code words were mostly used by the Red Hand Defenders. Twelve per cent of all incidents with a code word were attributed to this UDA-linked organization. From the available data, it is clear that the IRA used code words more than any other organization, and they used code words in messages referring to both genuine and hoax incidents. The greater proportion of code words were used in calls forewarning of a bomb attack (either real or a hoax), and the IRA were the primary bombers throughout the Troubles.

Protocol for Verifying Code Words

To ascertain whether a code word is an identity signature, there needs to be a way of verifying that the code word is linked to the paramilitary group using it. There is no evidence of joint decisions or agreements between the paramilitaries and state security or media agencies about what the code words will be. Joe Mulholland, former news director at RTE commented 'We can't be meeting with these people to work out a code word, sitting down in a pub and say, "Right, let's agree on a new code word"' (Glauber 1996). In interviews, the police denied that any code words were agreed and stated 'there is no master list of code words locked away in a filing cabinet'.[14]

Code words are verified in two ways. The first is if they are linked to an event. If the IRA forewarn of an explosion using a code word, the explosion occurs, and the IRA's authorship is confirmed using additional investigative techniques, then the code word is verified as a genuine signature. For example, the head of Scotland Yard's anti-terrorist branch, Commander George Churchill-Coleman, stated that one code word was used on sixty-one occasions, each time claiming that explosive devices had been placed. On twenty-two occasions bombs exploded, two were made safe, and the remaining thirty-seven were hoaxes of a type where the caller was genuine but the message was false (Burden 1992). This method depends on security agents

[14] Interview with member of the PSNI, Belfast, 23 August 2012.

receiving the same code words over time and sharing information within and between security agencies.

The second way in which code words are verified is when they are communicated by a known member of the relevant paramilitary group. The IRA ended a seventeen-month ceasefire in February 1996 with a massive bomb in Canary Wharf London. This attack was very significant politically and militarily. The IRA wanted the British government to be sure that it was they who had planted the bomb. Their intent was to cause maximum economic damage but to minimize the number of civilian casualties. They therefore needed their warning to be taken seriously and acted upon. The warning call was made ninety minutes before the bomb exploded; the information about the location of the bomb was accurate, and a code word was given. However, the IRA man who telephoned the warning to a Dublin newsroom called a specific journalist whom he had spoken to before. The journalist recognized his voice, knew that he was representing the IRA, and that the warning and the code word were genuine.

Verification through a known contact did not and cannot take place in all cases. The paramilitaries did not consistently use the same individuals to make phone calls using code words. A former IRA interviewee reported that the brigadier adjutant would give out the code words and would task a lower ranked individual to make the call.[15] Lower ranked members are likely to have served in an organization for a shorter period and are thus less likely to have formed long-term relationships with intermediaries who could verify their identity. Furthermore, the paramilitaries did not systematically call the same organization or individuals; they used a plurality of outlets. The data collected from the Nexis database reveals that fourteen different types of outlet including various types of media (radio, television, and newspapers), charities, and named individuals received calls. Newspapers received twenty-nine per cent of the calls followed by television stations (fourteen per cent), radio stations (ten per cent), and the Samaritans (three per cent). Individual journalists, such as Henry McDonald from the *Guardian* and Brian Rowan from the *Belfast Telegraph*, claim to have a special relationship with paramilitaries that is facilitated by code words (see McDonald 2011; Rowan 2011), but most journalists staffing a newsroom did not.[16] The inquest held in the aftermath of the 1998 Omagh car bomb planted by the rIRA which killed twenty-nine people (and two unborn twin girls) and injured hundreds of others revealed that staff at one of Northern Ireland's main television stations (UTV) who

[15] Interview with former IRA member, Belfast, 23 August 2012.
[16] Telephone interview with *Belfast Telegraph* journalist, Oxford, 10 September 2012.

received a telephone warning thirty minutes before the explosion did not have a list of recognized code words, despite regularly receiving such warnings. The phone operators at the *Birmingham Mail* also had no knowledge of any code words.

Are Communications Containing a Code Word Taken More Seriously?

In 1991–1992 British Transport Police received about 4000 bomb warnings believed to be part of an IRA campaign to disrupt British Rail and the London Underground (Clutterbuck 1997). The police did not have the resources to deal with such a large number of bomb threats. They had to judge which calls to investigate and which to ignore. Of those 4000 warnings received by the British Transport Police, in ninety-eight per cent of cases, the police let traffic continue uninterrupted. They closed a station or a line on only seventy-two occasions (under two per cent), and there was a bomb on twenty-five of these occasions (fourteen explosive and eleven incendiary) (Clutterbuck 1997). If code words were identity signatures, we would expect the police to trust messages containing a code word more than those without a code word, and we might also expect their response to be different. The security personnel who were interviewed said they assess the presence or absence of a code word alongside other notable information such as the accent of the caller, their gender, (pre-mobile phones) whether the call came from a call box, the content of the rest of the message, and whether the warning conformed to any pattern of previous warnings received. They also consider any intelligence about planned paramilitary activity. The interviewees unanimously stated that the police take all calls warning of imminent attacks equally seriously. They argued that their response was the same regardless of the presence of a code word. They cannot risk the catastrophic consequences of mistakenly assuming that a warning without a code word is a fake. However, despite this they also acknowledged that a code word increased the 'sense of urgency' when assessing how real the threat of attack.

This evidence seems contradictory, but it is nonetheless clear that the presence of a code word alone does not determine the police response. In 1997, organizers postponed the Grand National horse race and evacuated 70,000 people from the racecourse after police received a coded bomb warning which turned out to be a hoax. Coded bomb warnings were again received from the IRA before the rerun of the race two days later. However, the police and organizers decided that the race should go ahead, and it was attended by the then-prime minister, John Major. Once more the calls were hoax calls.

Code words were used not just to warn of bombs but also in claims and denials of responsibility for acts of violence. Here, too, the police use 'good old fashioned police detective work' to look for additional evidence of who authored the act, such as the timer on the explosive device.[17] According to one interviewee, only the IRA used Swiss watch timers from Libya.[18]

So we can conclude that code words are identity signatures but they are not robust. They are evidence of authorship only in conjunction with other identifying information. The difficulty in verifying their authenticity means that they can easily contribute to an act of mimicry. In a phone call, mimics can claim to be a paramilitary and issue a bomb warning with a 'code word'. A police investigation into London Underground found employees inciting others to make bomb threats using code words received in threatening calls to their office (Hunter and Bhatia 1994). When the police receive a bomb warning, they must assess whether the identity of the caller is genuine and whether the warning is real or a hoax. Paramilitaries have used code words to persuade the police that hoax calls are real bomb warnings to cause, among other things, economic disruption. The use of code words in hoax calls makes code words less trustworthy and undermines their ability to communicate reliable information about the veracity of the warning.

Conclusion

This research empirically explores the role of defensive and aggressive mimicry by individuals and groups in the Northern Ireland conflict. Protestants and Catholics share physical features and have many opportunities to observe one another, yet there are few cases of defensive mimicry, where a member of one religion mimics a member of another religion to avoid harm. The strong group boundaries that facilitate high social knowledge of who belongs to what religion constrain its use (see also Laitin, this volume). Aggressive mimicry, where the model is an individual, is also less prevalent than we might expect. We do observe mimicry when the assassins need to manoeuvre themselves or the victim into a better position to kill them; when assassins need to persuade their victim to accompany them to another location; when assassins need an extra element of surprise to kill their victim; and when there is an additional pay-off to the act of mimicry. The analysis has also shown how a single act of mimicry by individuals and groups can be deployed for both aggressive and defensive purposes.

[17] Telephone interview with member of the PSNI, Oxford, 20 April 2012.
[18] Interview with former Special Branch officer, London, 19 April 2012.

The two primary tactics employed by the paramilitary groups—bombings and targeted assassinations—could be accomplished without mimicry. Bombers who shared physical and behavioural traits with the opposite religion could plant explosive devices while remaining camouflaged. They did not need mimicry to go undetected. Murders of members of the opposite religion often required the assassins to go into enemy territory. They needed to kill and retreat as quickly as possible. Stephen Holmes (this volume) describes how mimicry allows an assassin to get a 'momentary jump' on his victim. However, the shared physical characteristics between Protestants and Catholics meant that victims could easily mistake attackers for a non-threatening third party or a member of the victim's group. Mimicry was unnecessary. Also, camouflage or blending in rather than mimicry was their best escape strategy. In general, not wearing any identifiable clothing like a uniform or any item that singled them out aided their escape (the exception to this being prison escapes).

Aggressive mimicry appears more prevalent at the group level than at the individual level. There were instances of group mimicry throughout the Troubles and the incentives to mimic other groups increased dramatically following the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Paramilitary groups mimicked each other to carry out assassinations, discredit other groups. and to avoid blame for acts of violence. They also operated under false flags.

A reduction in the amount of paramilitary violence has also led to the emergence of a different category of aggressive mimicry perpetrated by criminal extortionists who mimic being paramilitaries. As paramilitary control diminishes, and they are less able to punish those free-riding on their reputation for violence, so that free-riding has increased. Victims are particularly vulnerable if they have poor-quality information about Northern Irish paramilitaries and are duped by criminals displaying the signs or 'trademarks' of being a paramilitary (see also Mamidi, this volume). In May 2007, a criminal gang extorted £820,000 from a partner in DHK & Co Solicitors firm in London. The gang claimed to represent the IRA. To their victim, who was of Indian origin, they carried all the signs of IRA—they had Irish accents, and they issued death threats against him and his family (Lattice 2008). Perhaps a savvier victim would have distinguished the gang leader's Southern Irish accent as being different from the predominantly Northern Irish accents of IRA members and questioned their claims. But persuaded that they were the IRA and terrified by the IRA's reputation for violence, he appropriated the money and caused the collapse of his law firm. Few of these cases come to the surface. If they are successful, we may not know about them but the

incentives to free-ride on a paramilitary group's reputation for violence in a context of low-quality information exist.

This chapter also explores the evolution of code words as an identity signature. They are used by paramilitaries when they forewarn about explosions, claim, or deny acts of violence, and communicate their policy or strategic decisions to a wider audience. Code words evolved into an anti-mimicry device in the context of paramilitary groups mimicking one another and contested and competitive claims as to the authorship of acts of violence. They also evolved in a wider context of an abundance of poor-quality information circulating in the public and security domain about the authorship of acts of violence, and in an environment where information was not shared easily between various parts of the security services.

The IRA, in particular, used code words in their bombing campaign to forewarn of real bombs and in hoax bomb warnings intended to cause maximum economic disruption. It is important to be clear that the code words are designed to authenticate the identity of the caller and not the veracity of the message. However, the false content of the messages has undermined the credibility of the code words. The fact that the paramilitaries sent messages via a plurality of third parties also restricted the ability of code words to be a credible identity signal. Often code words were misheard or misunderstood and the content of the message was passed on incorrectly.

In conclusion, the evidence points to paramilitaries and police viewing code words differently. There is evidence that the paramilitaries considered code words to be a stand-alone identity signal. But, for the police, code words were only one part of a more complex identity signal that was comprised of information about the accent and gender of the caller, the location of the call, the full content of the message, whether the warning conformed to any pattern of previous warnings received, and intelligence about planned paramilitary activity.

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