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

By Dr Thomas Leahy, Cardiff University, LeahyT1@cardiff.ac.uk

Wordcount: 9895

Acknowledgements

I thank Niall Ó Dochartaigh, Huw Bennett and other colleagues at Cardiff University and my previous institution The National University of Ireland Galway for their advice on this article. I also thank Saša Božić, Siniša Malešević, Daphne Winland, Jennifer Todd and Joseph Ruane for their feedback and for arranging the 2017 Divided Societies XX: Memory Wars event where this article was originally presented as a paper. Thanks also to Sara Leahy for ongoing support.

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 based 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. 9727.
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 (who wanted to force a United Ireland before 1998), political Ulster unionists (who want Northern Ireland to remain within the UK), the Irish government (who desire unity by consent) and British Conservative governments (who claim to uphold the majority of consent in Northern Ireland) continue to influence modern Irish and Northern Irish politics. 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 contemporary Northern Irish and Irish politics. Recent studies by McBride and Dawson on history and memory in Ireland explore why rival versions of the past exist between the main conflict protagonists. There remains, however, no comprehensive explanation for memory wars in contemporary Northern Irish and Irish politics surrounding the conflict, with the emphasis often placed on historical manipulation by former paramilitary leaders. This article explains how political, communal and generational factors interact with ongoing constitutional debates to encourage memory wars in Northern Irish and Irish politics. Politically, what is remembered and forgotten about the conflict is partly used to challenge contemporary opponents. Selective conflict memories also seek to support, but also to justify ongoing constitutional objectives regarding Irish unification in the present. In addition, individual leaders’ and communal experiences of the conflict creates divisive ‘collective memories’ in contemporary politics, but are also recalled to justify a particular position on the constitutional question. They are also recalled to assist highlight communal suffering for their justice against the other side based on. Each political group seeks to morally justify their past actions based on their conflict experience too. Finally, multiple generations of politicians have conflict experience since 1969, and continue to voice their grievances alongside their community. But the emergence of a post-conflict generation of voters also means that veteran political leaders also 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 Northern Irish and Irish and Northern Irish politics in the present continue to be aired politically between the main political groups. 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 in particular 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 agree with Walker that republicans are particularly engaged in politicising the past. By Cillian McGrattan and Stephen Hopkins agree. McGrattan and Stephen Hopkins argue that debates about the past between non-violent and previously violent Irish nationalist parties, the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) and Sinn Féin, have two motives. First, rival interpretations of the past seek to challenge the strategies of intra-communal opponents in the present. Second, the historical debates between the two parties are also based on different perspectives on the morality of past actions. In relation to Sinn Féin, McGrattan suggests that Sinn Féin seeks 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 present 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. McGrattan conflict 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, and Walker, single out Sinn Féin for manipulating the past (Hopkins 2015; McGrattan 2016). Walker’s work also overemphasises unionists’ memories. This view overlooks the multidimensional nature of memory wars in Irish and Northern Irish politics which includes the British and Irish governments. Furthermore, these also also imply that memory debates in Northern Ireland result principally from political manipulating conflict memory. In contrast, I explain why collective and personal memories of the conflict by all sides in nationalist and unionist communities, but also in Irish and

Other authors agree that divisive conflict memories are created and promoted by all sides involved in the conflict-writing about divisive memories and commemorations in Northern Ireland surrounding the conflict-argue that these selective accounts of the past are created and disseminated. They agree that The British state’s actions (or inactions) politically or militarily directly contributed to the conflict, and the peace process and the subsequent memory wars. Attempts at state ‘forgetting’ their role in the conflict, or presenting a selective view of their actions which holds the paramilitary groups still solely responsible for the outbreak or continuation of violence, are part of the ongoing memory wars in Northern Ireland and also add in Irish politics (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, to build on the example of private memorials for British security forces killed in the conflict, which are predominately located on the UK mainland as Braniff, McDowell, Graham and Whelan describe. They suggest that these private memorial parties are designed to downplay the role of the British state during the conflict and ensure that the narrative of
security forces members serving the community and being murdered by brutal terrorists can Fianna Fáil, also engage in continued memory contestation wars surrounding memory contests Sinn Fein. The role of the state in memory wars surrounding the Northern Ireland conflict in correcting of memory myths in Ireland and Northern Ireland should not be aimed at past are accepted by many nationalists and unionists. These authors argue that should be on explaining why particular versions of the past exist and are accepted in their respective communities in Ireland. (Dawson 2007, 36-47; McBride 2001, 5-42; Rolston 2002).

Nuanced accounts present various factors to account for divisions over in contemporary Northern Ireland present various factors discussed in this article to explain comprehensive exemplary comparative study that considers how commemorations and memory wars surrounding the Northern Ireland conflict societies countries. In relation to Northern Ireland, they suggest that divisions over the past exist principally between the British government, Ulster Unionism and Irish republicanism arise for various reasons between the British government, republicans and unionists for multiple reasons. Each political group wants parties’ groups’ the desire political support by using the past to justify present strategic within and outside each. 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 they addressed in the present sometimes by legal routes historical suffering and thus actions as defensive as permissible partly to support their calls for these reasons commemorations and memory debates in Northern Ireland have become a means to sustain communal identity and political support in the present (Braniff and McDowell 2014, 4-25, 41-58).

Of Bloody Sunday in Derry city in January 1972 suggests presents similar factors to McDowell for the contrasting memories accounts. He also suggests accounts of the past in a their communities a ‘folk memory’ of what happened on Bloody Sunday through various personal stories and film because the official state narrative before 2010 disputed their experience of what they saw as murder by British soldiers T via the means described (Conway 2003, 306-314). This article agrees with Conway that communal ‘folk memory’ and experience of the conflict contributes to contested memories between different political groups and communities in Northern Ireland today. Conway argues that the sectarian nature of Protestant majority rule in Northern Ireland between 1922 and 1969 resulted in Protestant unionists and Catholic nationalists forming separate and competing national identities. Eventually, these competing identities alongside discrimination by the unionist majority government led to conflict. This argument supports my suggestion that separate communal trauma and identities partly influences divergent interpretations of the past in politics, murals and commemorations today. This article also explains the political and constitutional factors influencing varying accounts of the past and selective memories.

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 Troubles. Nonetheless, some of these authors on the politics of memory in Northern Ireland surrounding the conflict by themselves 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). These accounts also do not apply their arguments to investigate the selective interpretations of the Northern Ireland conflict by the Irish state—explain memory wars.
about the Troubles between all sides including This article suggests other crucial factors too, government all contribute to the ongoing memory wars about the Northern Ireland conflict. Currently, we also lack an academic study researching the legacy of the Northern Ireland 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 mainland Britain and Ireland. There were a total of 3,538 people, including (McKittrick et al. 2007, 1559). Articles two and three of Ireland’s constitution especially sovereignty over Northern Ireland until 1998 (BBC News 2 December 1999). The Irish state were also involved in the peace process. This article also details how the Conservative Irish politics are multidimensional because the guarantors of the peace agreement, 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 influencing contemporary Irish and Northern Irish politics surrounding the conflict Troubles. First, politically what is remembered and forgotten about the conflict is utilised by politicians today in order to try to challenge both political to erode the support for political and ideological intra-communal rivals and opponents external to a community (Braniff and McDowell 2014, 38-60; McBride 2001, 5-42; Vigigliani, 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 ongoing 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 and Braniff’s comparative work on commemorations in multiple Northern Ireland to other post-conflict areas. Their work supports my suggestion that the frequency of memory wars in contemporary Irish and Northern Irish politics result partly primarily from because the constitutional question remains contested other cases and or Serbiansence(Braniff and McDowell 2014, 60-178).

The third factor accounting for divisive memories in Ireland and Northern Ireland is the conflicting communal experiences and thus interpretations of the conflict. Conflicting experiences and ‘collective memories’ of the conflict for each political community have contributed to persistent memory wars in Irish and Northern Irish society and politics in order to promote each group’s experience, this research suggests that Political leaders do not simply manipulate memory. In Halbwachs’s words: “the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society” (Halbwachs 1992, 51). The Birmingham popular memory group of cultural theorists reiterates this view. Communal memory is not simply a case of elites manipulating the past for political purposes. There is a large degree of consent and pressure from political communities on their leaders to present ‘their’ version of the 
conflict. Competing memories of the conflict clearly resonate with the electorate supporting 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). ‘Chosen trauma’ experienced by victims and survivors are in political leaders in post-conflict societies across the island of Ireland represent an ongoing unique sense of victimhood and pride for each community (for similar arguments see Braniff and McDowell 2014, 38-60; Conway 2003; Brown and Viggiani 2009; Graham and Whelan 2007; Braniff and McDowell 2014, 38-60).

The sixth factor is generational change. Mannheim’s argument is applicable to the intergenerational aspect of memory wars in contemporary Irish and Northern Irish politics surrounding the Northern Ireland conflict. Every generation of Irish Republican, Unionist, Irish and British government leaders since 1969 has had some knowledge and experience of the conflict. Yet there is an emerging electorate born after 1998 who lacks this conflict experience. The current generation of political elites who experienced the conflict emergence of a post-conflict generation of voters has led to the conflict generation of leaders to attempt to ‘bind’ this new generation to the old by drawing parallels between current and past challenges. The aim is to (Mannheim 2011, 92-98). Nonetheless, I also discuss the work of Hirsch who suggests that ‘people do not choose their relatives, they cannot choose to do away with their childhood and everything they learned at a tender age. There are aspects of identity that are not chosen, that are incorporated and implicit’. In his opinion, the result is that young people particular adopt particular identities based on their personal and communal life. This argument is particularly relevant to unionist and nationalist communities in Northern Ireland where the conflict was focused. Hirsch believes that the post-conflict generation following traumatic historical events often have ‘post-memory trauma’. He suggests that post-memory trauma occurs because those who were young or who were not born during a traumatic event still experience its effects through family, and their local community, symbols, films and other means of memory transmission. The traumatic memories can be transmitted through stories, images and symbols (Hirsch 2008, 103-128; see also Eriksen 2001, 50-56; Rolston 2010, 287-301; McAuley 2016, 122-133; Rolston 2010, 287-301). With the Northern Ireland conflict affecting multiple generational cohorts between 1969 and 1998, many younger voters in Northern Ireland in particular will have post-memories of the conflict in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Political leaders ensure to continue reminding the youth of past traumas and how these justify the group’s contemporary political and constitutional aims. The new generation of voters often appear to support the contested memories in part to try to remedy the trauma that their parents, friends or family suffered in the past.

I suggest that constitutional and political, communal, personal, moral and generational a contemporary political and constitutional dispute ideology applied to the past. But it a difference in judgement between political groups in the present about whether the morality of actions and whether they were permissible. In addition, a memory war, memory wars across the island of Ireland represent an ongoing unique sense of victimhood and pride in for each community (for similar arguments see Braniff and McDowell 2014, 38-60; Conway 2003; Brown and Viggiani 2009; Graham and Whelan 2007; Braniff and McDowell 2014, 38-60).
Rolston 2010, 286-301; Viggiani 2016). Braniff and McDowell’s comparative research implies that a memory war about the Troubles in Northern Irish and Irish and Northern Irish politics is also somewhat different because it also represents contrasting constitutional aspirations (Braniff and McDowell 2014). As Braniff and McDowell’s comparative research implies, a memory war about the Troubles in Northern Irish and Irish and Northern Irish politics is somewhat different. It is about ethical judgements, communal suffering but also continuing constitutional aspirations (Braniff and McDowell 2014).

Section 1: Memory wars in contemporary Northern Irish politics

Next year marks the twentieth anniversary of the Good Friday Peace Agreement in Northern Ireland in 1998, which ended over twenty-nine years of conflict. Almost two decades later, memory wars surrounding that conflict persist in Northern Irish politics. Under the power-sharing system in Northern Ireland since 1998, Ulster unionist (those in favour of remaining within the UK) and Irish nationalist and Irish republican political parties (those who seek Irish unification) share executive power. If the largest unionist or nationalist party withdraws from government, the institutions collapse. This situation arose in January 2017. Sinn Féin, the largest Irish nationalist party, withdrew from the power-sharing arrangement with the largest unionist party, the Democratic Unionist Party (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 the DUP’s involvement in a corrupt energy scheme (Fenton 2017; Dunbar 2017). But so divisive have debates on ‘dealing with the past’ been that this factor has contributed to the political stalemate. Martin McGuinness, the recently deceased leader of Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland, informed An Phoblacht, Sinn Féin’s newspaper, 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 2016). In February 2017, Gerry Adams, long-serving Sinn Féin President until February 2018, added that the British government’s unwillingness to address the legacy of state violence contributed to political crisis in Northern Ireland, by demonstrating to Irish nationalists that ‘[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 order to explore the factors influencing continual memory wars in contemporary Northern Irish politics, this section focuses on debates between Sinn Féin and the British Conservative party, and Sinn Féin and Ulster Unionism.

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 heorics 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 One recent example of memory government and Sinn Féin Irish republicans surrounds the legacy of Martin McGuinness. McGuinness became a leading IRA member by the early 1970s. He was convicted for carrying arms and explosives in the Republic of Ireland in 1973 (BBC News 29 April 2001). After his release, McGuinness became a leading Sinn Féin member, and helped negotiate the peace deal in 1998 alongside other political parties and the British and Irish governments. He subsequently served as the deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland between 2007 and 2017. In his later years, he engaged in undertook a number of 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 illustrated the generally divisive nature of conflict memory for Irish republicans and the British Conservatives; Party, Sir John Major was the British Conservative Prime Minister between November 1990 and May 1997. Major’s government reactivated back-channel intermediaries within the IRA to discuss a potential-political settlement. One of Sinn Féin the Irish republican movement’s negotiators was Martin McGuinness (Sinn Féin, 1993).

Reflecting on McGuinness’ death, Major said admitted that whilst McGuinness helped to bring peace to Northern Ireland after 1998, he, 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 Conservative UK Prime Minister, agreed excepted that McGuinness played a ‘defining role’ in creating peace in Northern Ireland, but added: ‘I can never condone the path [McGuinness] took in the earlier part of his life’ (McDonald 2017). Both Major and May argued that there were two sides to Martin McGuinness: First, McGuinness was a ruthless ‘terrorist’, but he also went on to become a peacemaker. Unsurprisingly, this view was rejected by Sinn Féin. For Irish republicans Sinn Féin argue that, McGuinness was a hero who fought against British and Ulster 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…at some undefined point in his life, had a ‘Road to Damascus’ conversion—abandoned his republican principles, his former comrades in the IRA, and joined the political establishment … There was not a bad Martin McGuinness or a good Martin McGuinness … 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 2017a).

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 that objective. The contrasting interpretations of McGuinness’ 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 the legacy of McGuinness’ legacy to be tarnished as he embodies their past and present arguments for Irish unification in favour of a united Ireland. 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 Irish nationalists. 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 continue to argue legacy reminds Irish nationalists that full equality will not emerge under British and unionist rule. During the funeral oration, Adams informed the crowds: ‘Martin believed that the Government’s involvement in Ireland, and the partition of our island, are at the root of British Government has no right whatsoever to have any involvement in Ireland.’

In other words, British rule has to end, and McGuinness’ life and legacy justifies that position. 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-led 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, for instance, could not say that McGuinness was a freedom fighter during the IRA years. Otherwise, they risked delegitimising British rule in Northern Ireland in the past and present. 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). These comments indicate that a British Conservative government will not commemorate Irish republicans who tried to end British rule, since the Conservative party is passionately pro-union. 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.

In addition, contemporary electoral considerations encourage rival interpretations of McGuinness’ life. Whilst Sinn Féin are very unlikely to lose votes to pro-union political parties in the north because of the historical link between Irish nationalists and Irish identity there, during the conflict Irish republicans were outperformed by the Social and Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) in elections. The SDLP are a non-violent Irish nationalist party who campaigned for power-sharing in Northern Ireland, cross-border cooperation with the Republic, and eventual Irish unification by consent (Murray and Tonge 2005). It was only in 2003 that Sinn Féin became the majority Irish nationalist party in Northern Ireland assembly elections (CAIN 2003). Republicans therefore want to disrupt British government claims that McGuinness and the IRA were previously conducting a terrorist campaign in part to prevent voters who previously backed the SDLP before 1998 switching back their allegiance. These electoral considerations explain why Adams argues that the IRA were also fighting for nationalist ‘equality’ and not just for Irish unification. Electoral results before 1998 highlight to Sinn Féin that a majority of Irish nationalists did not condone IRA violence trying to force significant progress towards unity, but they did support the SDLP’s peaceful campaign for greater equality and rights for Catholics in the north. 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). Sinn Féin realizes that what is at stake in the electoral contest with the SDLP in the north is the right to speak for northern nationalism and shape potential Irish unification.

In contrast, the Conservative party’s first-hand experience of IRA violence for the British Conservative Party 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 significant injury. Some Conservative colleagues were not so fortunate. In October 1984, the IRA exploded a bomb at the Conservative Party conference in Brighton, which five people were killed. 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 a particularly hot and unpleasant corner of hell for the rest of eternity’ (The Daily Mail 21 March 2017). In July 1990, Ian Gow, a Conservative MP from Eastbourne in England, was also assassinated by the IRA (McKittrick et al. 2007, 1204-1205). Such attacks explain Major’s cautious assessment of McGuinness. 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 at the hands of the IRA-incentivizes the British Conservative party’s rebuttal of Sinn Féin attempts to portray McGuinness or the IRA as a man of peace, or the IRA-as fighting for civil rights. To accept such representations of the past would dishonor the memory of those who suffered, some of whom still support the party such as Lord Tebbit. Even Theresa May, who was born in 1956 and has been an MP since 1997, would have lived through the conflict and killings of Conservative Party supporters and MPs, explaining her remarks about McGuinness. 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 the legacy of Martin McGuinness also generation within Irish republicanism and British Conservatism who experienced the conflict generation to their conflict narrative version of the past (Mannheim 2011, 96-98). A graveside, Gerry Adams reminded his 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 encapsulate the efforts by 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 efforts of Martin McGuinness and the Sinn Féin current leadership’s past efforts during who experienced 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, As a unionist party, the British conservative youth are hardly likely to give credence to Irish republicans anyway. Nevertheless, comments by Major, May and Tebbit in the media following McGuinness’ death demonstrate that 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 should never be accepted. 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/Irish Republicans 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).

Section one has already described Sinn Féin’s primary narrative surrounding the conflict: that IRA activities were and the struggle for Irish unification was justified following because of unionist and British state discrimination against northern Catholic nationalists in Northern Ireland in the past and present. In contrast, Lawther, Beamish, McDowell and Simpson explain the general narrative presented by Protestant-unionists’ competing conflict narrative politicians has written extensively on this topic. Lawther
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, 161-177). 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).

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 underdemocratic ‘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 2017c). 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 Sinn Féin consistently reiterates that unionist obstruction of current demands for Irish language and other equality rights needs to be seen considered alongside unionist past actions in denying nationalist civil rights. The message is clear: unionists want to discriminate and nationalist protests are vital to preventing this from happening. For example, an article in An Phoblacht shortly before the UK General Election in June 2017 recalled:
This realization can partly explain why unionist politicians remind the Northern Irish from also influence memory wars in contemporary politics. For instance, in areas such as 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 in specific areas. In north Belfast, for example, the majority of explains why republican leaders and their supporters have so far rejected an amnesty for the killed by state forces. The collective memory of violence in republican and nationalist Bloody Sunday as state murder continued through the transmission of accounts from those involved to other nationalists through stories, films and other means contrasted with the 314. As the aforementioned death statistics for the conflict also demonstrate, the security communal pride in remembering the dead from their communities too too (Rolston 2010, 300). This experience is shared by Sinn Féin leaders and members, as outlined in section example, also 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 and help to promote the past. Thus republican leaders fully support their narrative that IRA activity was justified in response to state oppression.

For unionists and those former security force members who support unionist their parties, their suffering at the hands of the IRA as part of the Protestant community which and sometimes included some of their members being targeted as allos the security forces members encourages their demands for a narrower definition of victim and immunity from prosecution for state forces. 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 eUnionists suggest that these attacks are ethnic cleansing protestants to try to tip the Catholic and Protestant balance in the former’s favour to assist the IRA’s favour (Dawson 2007, 207-260). Unionist politicians support these sentiments partly because Arlene Foster’s statement about the Kingsmill massacre represents unionist disgust at a sectarian attack on their community. Similar to republican politicians, unionist political leaders share their community’s conflict trauma. For instance, Arlene Foster’s father was shot by the IRA in county Fermanagh, but survived in 1979 (Belfast Telegraph 18 December 2015). As mentioned, Doug Beattie of the UUP served for the British forces during the conflict. Mike Nesbitt, leader of the UUP until March 2017, recalled during a speech at the Royal Irish Academy 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 collective memory of the IRA 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. (At the same time, unionists also 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). reject that Thus, any widespread in their eyes. Unionists recall William of Orange’s victory at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 against Catholics and events such as
the Protestant Ulster Covenant against Home Rule from Dublin in 1912 to show their loyalty.

Sinn Féin and unionists are motivated by generational factors too in their divisive accounts of the past. 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. Comparison of the struggle for Irish language rights today with the battles for civil rights and national rights before 1998 shows the republican voter the continuity and validity of republican past and present objectives. In a similar way, 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, and as a is to reject a consequence, will not consider voting for them or a united Ireland and Sinn Féin and the present politics of victim as political propaganda that seeks to undermine the union and give the IRA moral equivalence to the security forces. This conflict-trauma message and selective victim definitions are transmitted to the youth in both communities through the same methods as it is done 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—memory sharing that is seen by young and old voters alike to try to influence them towards supporting a particular political group in the present politics of victimhood and the political message. (Braniff and McDowell 2014, 38-58; Brown and Viggiani 2009). For example, detailing alleged and proven cases of both political groups hopes that linking past memories to present politics will ensure the emerging youth vote supports their political objectives. (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, which 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. What increased IRA and Sinn Féin support in the north following was 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 by accepting partition (Adams 1986, 37-49). Sinn Féin only took seats in the Dublin Dail in 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 main theatre of conflict in the north, the Irish Republic 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 also in Monaghan-town near the border. These attacks represented the greatest number of deaths during any single event throughout the entire conflict (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 politics and violence for various reasons, including because they felt that the Provisional IRA was a sectarian organisation, unlike the old IRA who achieved southern Irish independence. The IRA was anti-democratic because it lacked a majority of the electoral mandate in Ireland to supplement its campaign. Both parties also felt that IRA violence from 1969 was counter-productive and because it 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. The result of this attitude was that Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil governments throughout the conflict respectively backed stringent security measures against the IRA. One example is the introduction from the 1970s banning Sinn Féin and IRA representatives from Irish airwaves. The Irish government also 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 peace talks to end the conflict (Leahy 2015, 182-226; O’Donnell 2007, 1-80; Mulroe 2012). But despite security measures against republicans only ended once the Provisional IRA ceased its armed campaign in the north (O’Donnell 2007, 87-117). In this narrative of the conflict, Fine Gael’s and Fianna Fáil’s conflict narrative suggests that their role in the conflict was primarily to assist the search for peace in Northern Ireland that would end discrimination against nationalists but also excuses for IRA activity.

They support a united Ireland by consent with the people of the north. But they rejected IRA violence and saw it as undemocratic and antagonising loyalists and unionists rather than fighting for civil rights or equality. ey argue could have beamed Sinn Féin’s narrative of the Irish government’s role in the conflict significantly differs. For Sinn Féin, they suggest that conflict came because of and indiscriminate security operations. In their view, the IRA was not so necessary partly because As will be discussed further below, they suggested that 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. In this view, the IRA was left to form and to has failed to meet the republican standards set by republican forbearers who fought in the Independence against British rule. The British state by accepting partition – The sense of 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 explaining reasons-memory wars between Sinn Féin, the British government and unionists can also explain how memory wars in contemporary Irish politics about the Northern Ireland conflict. Two examples to demonstrate this argument are of memory wars in action in southern Ireland surrounding 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’s memory debates with Sinn Féin are particularly intriguing because the former styles itself as ‘the Republican Party’. Thus-Fianna Fáil reject Sinn Féin’s attempts to claim that historical republican icons of the past justify the Provisional IRA’s campaign in Northern Ireland from 1969. In one notable example comes from 18th October 2015, Micheal Martin, the Fianna Fáil leader, rebuked Sinn Féin’s account of history at the Bodenstown 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 in Dublin, 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, which Fianna Fáil descended from. Martin criticised contemporary Sinn Féin’s claims to be the heirs of Tone and the 1916 rebels:

Sinn Féin has no right to claim that it represents the men and women of 1916. Founded less than 50 years ago, the Provisional movement[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. How dare they claim to own Irish republicanism. No organisation which fails to expose...murderers can call itself republican (Martin 18 October 2015).

Martin suggests here that the Provisional IRA were ‘mafia-like’ because they lacked a sizeable democratic mandate in Ireland before 1998 to support their armed campaign (O’Brien 1999, 198-99). 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 implied that the Provisional IRA’s ‘methods...dishonoured the Republic’, alluding to its killing of some civilians in northern and southern Ireland from 1969. Their failure to own up to what he calls ‘murders’ further explains why he believes that...
had removed by British rule in southern Ireland by force. During a debate in the Dáil 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 Irish republicans 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). Adams’ opinion has changed little from 1986, where he argued: “I naturally meet many old republicans … the 26 Counties (Ireland) is not even a shadow of the republic they worked and fought for” (Adams 1986, 38).

A further memory war involves contentious topics debated politically is 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). Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael also engage in memory wars against Sinn Féin because of the Provisional IRA’s killing of Irish security force members during the conflict. As mentioned, 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. Sinn Féin’s suitability for potentially governing Ireland is therefore questioned by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil by reminding the electorate about IRA killings of Irish security force personnel. On some occasions, these memory debates are motivated by particular victims’ family members calling on Sinn Féin to provide more information about the past. 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 prison officer, that the IRA were responsible for his death killed in 1984 during the Northern Ireland conflict in 1984, that the IRA killed him, Sinn Féin were allegedly 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… the cold-blooded murder’ by claiming 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 (members of the Irish parliament) 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.’ Ellis joined in, exclaiming: ‘Come outside if you have the guts’ (Dáil Éireann debate, 7 December 2016).

Political and constitutional factors can partly help to explain competing memories. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil question Sinn Féin’s potentially governing Ireland by reminding the electorate about IRA killings of Irish security
force personnel. For example, The political rationale is clear on other occasions where Fianna 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 suggests that Garda corruption resulted from Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil ‘cronyism’ since partition. Sinn Féin’s comments are were themselves in part politically motivated to try to challenge the main other two electoral rivals. They clearly were referencing contemporary issues as supporting 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 also want to draw attention to the memory of those who died serving the state to support their contemporary political arguments against Sinn Féin on an unrelated matter on an unrelated matter. Both parties were also protecting their political reputations by deflecting attention instead towards IRA and (and thus Sinn Féin) past behaviour. Their comments suggested to the electorate that whilst there were problems in the Garda, they should not vote for Sinn Féin who use to attack the state and its defenders. In connection with the rival commemorations and memories of the legacy of Wolfe Tone or the 1916 Rising, both sides also use the past to justify their past and contemporary strategies for a united Ireland and their overall narrative of the conflict.

Whilst ultimately want both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil want Irish unification, they 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). This killing was not connected in any way to the Provisional and Provisional IRA partly for electoral purposes. They point out that the 1916 rebels who parties such as Fianna Fáil commemorate and use to justify their strategies did not have an argument 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. Alongside Sinn Féin’s argument that the Irish government forgot about northern

These memory debates are also motivated by communal, personal and moral factors. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil recall Irish security force deaths also 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; Kelly 2011). Furthermore, the conflict memories for Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil supporters contribute to contemporary memory wars against Sinn Féin. The southern Irish population, for example, provided Sinn Fein 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). Events such as the Dublin-Monaghan bombings in May 1974 by attacks that killed particular civilians, including two young boys 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).

NMorrison suggests that northern republicans argue that they had no choice but to form a new IRA because the Irish state stood ‘idly by’ and forgot about their suffering. Gerry Adams in 1986 presented a similar assessment to Morrison’s modern version about the Irish state standing ‘idly by’ (see also Adams 1986, 41-43). Of course, this narrative attempts to morally justify the IRA’s campaign against the Irish state’s counter-narrative. Nonetheless, approximately thirty percent of the northern Irish nationalist community voted for Sinn Féin during the conflict, partly demonstrating a sizeable minority of the community’s support for this narrative even during the conflict and not for the SDLP who the Irish government backed (Leahy 2015, 182-226). The references to socio-economic inequality in the Republic of Ireland are attempts to reach out politically but also to the community’s who now support Sinn Féin who feel that the Irish government has not provided socio-economic benefits so far for them. Nonetheless, republicans continue to justify the IRA’s campaign because their narrative remains that the Irish state forgot about northern Catholics based on their own experience and that particularly of the northern republican community. On other occasions, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael remind the electorate of IRA and Sinn Féin involvement in past

Finally, Morrison suggests that northern republicans had no choice but to form a new IRA because the Irish state stood ‘idly by’ and forgot about their suffering.
Conclusion

Memory wars as by each side in Northern Irish and Irish politics about between by each political group in Northern Irish and 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: furthering the paramilitaries’ objectives in particular (English 2004, 263-336; Leahy 2015, 182-226). I have suggested that Irish and Northern Irish memory wars occur primarily, for six reasons, some of which have been discussed by previous authors although not in relation to memory wars between all sides in Irish and Northern Irish politics. (McGrattan 2016; Browne 2016; Conway 2003; Hopkins 2015; Hopkins and McGrattan, 2017; Brown and Viggiani 2009; Viggiani 2016; McAuley 2016; Dona, ADD date; McBride 2001; CHECK; Graham and Whelan 2007; Rolston 2010; AAD date; Braniff and McDowell 2014, 28-50). 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 experience 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 and whether there was the political support and socio-economic and political circumstances to justify it. In addition, the fact that no side won the conflict means that these debates continue as they are part of legitimising or delegitimising the past for present purposes. Recalling conflicting memories: The politicisation of contemporary concerns with the politics of the past 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). As post-memory trauma means that the post-conflict generation of voters concluded-may conclude support rival interpretations of the past of suffering and because of the trauma experienced by their family and community -and trauma (Eriksen 2001, 50-51; Hirsch 2008).

This case study of memory wars in contemporary Irish and Northern Irish politics shows that Halbwachs is right to suggest that rival interpretations of the past are recalled in present politics in order to justify or condemn political decisions today (Halbwachs 1992, 40). What is potentially unique about Irish and Northern Irish political memory wars compared to other post-conflict situations where the constitutional question has been settled (such as Rwanda, Columbia and Croatia) is that memory contests are particularly prevalent because 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, Thedivisive conflict memories are to be discussed frequently recalled in politics in part in order to justify opposing identities and constitutional aspirations. In contrast, their work suggests that in South Africa and countries such as Croatia and Serbia, commemorations surrounding past conflict are more focused on ‘nation-building’ compared to what I term 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
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).

Furthermore, 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).

In addition, this article suggests that memory wars in contemporary Irish and Northern Irish politics are not representative of purely opportunistic politics. Rival interpretations of the past also represent each respective political communities’ conflict experience that they want addressed and promoted by their leaders. The respective leaders of Irish republicanism, unionism or British conservatism promote these selective and, borrowing Halbwachs’ term, ‘collective memories’ of the conflict because they often share that experience. The politicisation of contemporary concerns with the politics of the past is also an attempt to ensure, in the words of Mannheim, that the leaders from the age of conflict ‘bind’ the post-conflict generation to their ideological vision and leadership (Mannheim 2011, 92-98). Even amongst these separate explanations for the memory wars across the island, the determination to ensure that a particular perspective of the conflict is shared in the present is still predominately associated with promoting constitutional objectives.

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*Unpublished work*