

# The 'Informer' and the Political and Organisational Culture of the Irish Republican Movement: Old and New Interpretations

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This article will analyse recent interpretations of the 'informer' as a subject of political and historical significance for a balanced understanding of the trajectory of the Provisional Republican movement. It will do so in part through a discussion of some recent fiction and memoir-writing devoted to the figure of the informer. Specifically, this will involve an exploration of the recent fictional re-imagining of the real-life case of Denis Donaldson, by the French journalist Sorj Chalandon (*Mon traître*, 2007 and *Retour à Killybegs*, 2011).<sup>1</sup> In the first section, the article analyses the historical evolution of the phenomenon and recent revelations regarding the apparently widespread existence of informers in the movement during the Troubles. This section engages with the academic debate concerning the effects of these revelations upon the morale and internal political culture of the republican movement; it is argued here that the 'Republican family' has been significantly affected by these disclosures in the 'post-conflict' era, and that they have become an important element in the contestation between leadership supporters and 'dissenters' within contemporary republicanism. The second section utilises old and new literary representations of 'the informer', particularly based around Liam O'Flaherty's *The Informer* and Chalandon's work, to discuss continuities and changes in the image and perception of this phenomenon. It is argued that the interweaving of fiction with real-life and factual historical detail is a particularly appropriate means of interpreting the role and effects of the informer.

## Introduction

"Do you know what the trees say when the axe appears in the forest? Look, the handle is one of our own!"<sup>2</sup>

This article begins from the premise that the republican movement in Ireland, encompassing both the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Sinn Féin (SF), in its many historical guises, has been characterised by a political and organisational culture marked by clandestine and conspiratorial behaviour. This is not surprising, given the nature of its armed campaign against the British state during the course of much of its existence. From 1970 until at least the restored IRA ceasefire of 1997, the Provisional republican movement exhibited an internal culture immersed in military elitism, which placed a significant emphasis upon the necessity of unity in action, a clear hierarchy of control within the movement, and a firm commitment to discipline within the ranks of both the ‘army’, and the political ‘party’.<sup>3</sup>

A critical element of this perceived necessity for discipline was the requirement to maintain vigilance against the ever-present danger of ‘informers’ working on behalf of one or other branch of the British state’s security forces (primarily either the Royal Ulster Constabulary Special Branch, or military intelligence); ‘paranoia about informers or “touts” within its ranks has always been endemic in the IRA, to the extent that a procedure for dealing with informers was clearly set out in its “Standing orders”.’<sup>4</sup> This procedure was supposed to involve a ‘trial’ of the suspected informer before an IRA ‘court’, and often, if the verdict was guilty, the execution of the traitor. The effort to ‘unmask’ traitors within the ranks is as old as the movement itself, and a specific culture has developed over the decades in relation to this highly sensitive issue. In his study of the IRA in Cork during the years 1916-23, Peter Hart argued that, ‘in the mythology of the Irish revolution, the heroic figure of the “rebel” had as his archetypal enemy – and polar opposite – the informer (a symbol of evil since the days of the penal laws and priest-hunters)’.<sup>5</sup> According to Toolis, ‘on the bloody stage of Irish history, the informer is the villain, a cultural bogeyman who has played his part in the downfall of endless fine and noble patriots. The informer is the Judas within, the

betrayal, the fountainhead of all Irish misery and a convenient scapegoat for centuries of glorious failure.’<sup>6</sup> Smyth has put forward a more nuanced position, and is sceptical regarding any supposed ‘national genius for deceit’; still, he recognises that betrayal is ‘deeply embedded within Irish history – the punctuation and the grammar of the Irish historical narrative.’<sup>7</sup> Dudai concurs with the idea of the informer as a ‘folk devil’, and ‘one of the last “unforgiven” categories of conflict protagonists’, with many informers still ostracised and living in exile, sometimes provided with new identities.<sup>8</sup> Dudai makes the important point that in the post-conflict era in Northern Ireland, the role and function of ‘informers’ during the conflict remains unamenable to interpretation within the prevailing ‘human rights’ or ‘transitional justice’ discourses.

There is some debate in recent literature devoted to the Provisionals regarding the extent to which the movement had been successfully penetrated by the security forces by the early 1990s. It has been argued that the use of informers by the state, allied with the new technologies of surveillance available to the security forces, had rendered IRA operations increasingly ineffective, notwithstanding the impact of ‘spectaculars’ (such as the bombings in the City of London in 1992 and 1993).<sup>9</sup> For instance, Frampton has put forward the hypothesis that the Republican movement opted for peace, at least in part due to the recognition that the IRA’s capacities had been effectively blunted by infiltration.<sup>10</sup> As IRA operator, Gerry Bradley, lamented in his memoir, ‘maybe nine out of ten’ IRA attacks were foiled, often due to prior police or army intelligence, during these years.<sup>11</sup> Matthew Teague, a freelance journalist who interviewed ‘Kevin Fulton’ (a British soldier from Newry, Co. Down who infiltrated the IRA on behalf of British intelligence), was bewildered by the extent of the informer network that was revealed to him:

‘I said [to ‘Fulton’], is there anybody in the IRA who’s *not* a British spy? And he just sort of held out his hands and he said, “You tell me.” I think that cuts right to the heart of the British

strategy. They interwove themselves so profoundly with the IRA that it became hard to distinguish between the British and the IRA members. And by that point you've diluted the movement, or at least seeded mistrust so deeply that it just can't stand anymore.'<sup>12</sup>

Urban argued in 1992 that 'it has never been in the interests either of the British government or the IRA to publicize the degree to which the republican heartlands are penetrated by informers.'<sup>13</sup> However, whilst this might have applied during the conflict, it may well be the case that in what is ostensibly a post-conflict environment, these interests could have changed. It has also been argued that as well as intelligence about military operations, the informers provided crucial details of the political thinking at the apex of the movement: 'it has become blindingly obvious that the British had a deep insight into the direction that sections of the IRA leadership, most critically its Belfast-based commanders, wished the organisation to travel.'<sup>14</sup>

However, in a partially contrasting view, Leahy has argued that the timing of the IRA's ceasefire in 1994 cannot be adequately explained by security force intelligence successes, and that the damage caused by informers was, in fact, limited. This was due to the 'closed' character of rural IRA units, the cell structure of the organisation in urban areas (particularly Belfast), and the relative isolation of the leadership from the movement's rank-and-file.<sup>15</sup> These factors 'prevented the British state from containing the IRA via spies to any considerable extent between 1976 and 1994.'<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the IRA could still operate successfully despite the existence of informers at a senior level within the movement. Indeed, for informers to be effective, and protected from exposure, certain 'operations' had to be permitted to proceed, even if there may have been prior warning for the security forces.

Although it is not the purpose of this paper to adjudicate in this argument, there is some merit in both positions: it seems reasonable to accept that *political* calculations were at least as significant in the Provisionals' decision to move away from 'armed struggle' as the

limitations imposed upon the purely *military* or operational capacity of the IRA. Nonetheless, the retrospective disclosure of the apparent scale of the British ‘human intelligence’ operation among both republican and loyalist paramilitaries (even if incomplete), does suggest that the state may have enjoyed unacknowledged access to the political thinking of the Provisional leadership, and its factional debates, as well as its relationship to the movement’s base.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, it could better judge accurately what kind of compromise was necessary and achievable to bring the vast majority of republicans into a future without the IRA. Many so-called dissident republicans would argue that this was also a future without republicanism as an ideology or set of strategic goals.<sup>18</sup> The extent to which the use of informers contributed to the strategic containment of the republican movement, if not the defeat of the IRA campaign as such, has become a key component of the post-conflict contestation within what might be broadly understood as the ‘republican family’.<sup>19</sup> The main objective of the current article, however, is to focus upon the ways in which the cultural-historical interpretation of the ‘informer’ has reflected and shaped internal republican organisation and politics.

### **The ‘Informer’ and Republican Organisation and Culture**

The Provisional IRA restored its ceasefire in July 1997, and brought a definitive end to its violent campaign in 2005. Since this development a number of high-profile historical revelations of informers within the IRA’s ranks have occurred. Critics of the leadership have sought to utilise these revelations to undermine the confidence of many of its erstwhile volunteers. IRA men of long-standing, such as Gerry Bradley and Tommy McKearney, have questioned the extent of British penetration of the IRA’s structures. These developments have also seen the movement’s cultural predisposition, to see breaches of discipline and secrecy as fundamental taboos, significantly undermined.<sup>20</sup> Of course, it must be recognised that the subject of informers remains shrouded in mystery and subterfuge, and researchers cannot take

at face-value any of the claims or counter-claims made by any of the (ex-) protagonists engaged in this demi-monde. Since 1998, a number of erstwhile informers have come forward to place their accounts in the public domain.<sup>21</sup> Recent scholarly literature has acknowledged the deep-rooted concerns about the ethics of the Northern Ireland security forces' use of human intelligence, particularly in terms of 'allegations that the police and military intelligence protected informants who were involved in the most serious criminal activity, including murders [...]'.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, it has been argued that, notwithstanding the significant ethical considerations that pertain, the use of informers has proved a 'particularly effective mechanism for addressing terrorist violence.'<sup>23</sup> It is not the purpose of this article to make judgments regarding the proper balance between ethics and effectiveness in the cultivation of human intelligence during the conflict, although this certainly constitutes a critical issue for any attempt to systematically address the vexed question of 'the past' in contemporary Northern Ireland.<sup>24</sup>

However, in sowing the seeds of paranoia, endemic distrust and fear of betrayal in the republican movement, the *search for* informers within the ranks could be another divisive element in a notoriously fissiparous organisation. The movement has regularly undergone damaging splits, often based upon ideological or strategic disputes, but also revolving around personality clashes and geographical allegiances.<sup>25</sup> These debilitating weaknesses in the organisation have only been exacerbated by the sense that informers have played a significant role in undermining the movement, especially with recent revelations of informers placed at or very near the heart of the leadership group. In this sense, whilst Leahy may be correct that the role of informers *per se* does not explain the timing of the movement's 'peace strategy', nevertheless from the late 1980s onwards, the 'habitual paranoia about informers [...] intensified [...] as more and more operations were intercepted or thwarted', and this did undermine the morale of at least some volunteers.<sup>26</sup> It also exacerbated the qualms that some

IRA personnel had regarding the military and political strategy that their leadership was pursuing, and thus became an important tool in the growing 'dissent' of some prominent figures in the republican movement.

As a recent memoir by a long-standing IRA 'foot-soldier' revealed, the unmasking of Denis Donaldson in 2005 (see below), not to mention other high-profile informers such as Roy McShane (one of Gerry Adams' drivers), produced a profound disorientation among some republicans.<sup>27</sup> The first thing Gerry Bradley told his co-author, the journalist Brian Feeney, was that: 'The one thing I know is that I'm not an informer.'<sup>28</sup> Men like Bradley had risked their lives for the IRA, but had been 'confident in the belief that the republican leadership, though they made mistakes, were immune from British influence and were directing the struggle against the British presence in Ireland with the purest of motives.' Bradley was not naive; he had always known that there were informers operating within the organisation, but 'to hear that people at the very heart of the republican movement had been acting as British agents was profoundly unsettling. It led many IRA members to question what they had been ordered to do during the campaign, why they had been doing it and who exactly had wanted it done.'<sup>29</sup> In deciding to publish his account of his experiences as a dedicated IRA volunteer, Bradley refused to follow standard procedures, and get clearance from the republican movement for this project.<sup>30</sup> As a result, he was ostracised, and even accused of acting as an informer himself, by divulging some of the secrets of the IRA's operations. In October 2010 Bradley took his own life; 'already a sick man, [Bradley] was hounded through the final months of his existence for having the audacity to tell his story in a book'.<sup>31</sup>

It has been estimated that the Provisional IRA murdered (or 'executed' in the parlance of republican press statements) approximately 70 people as alleged informers.<sup>32</sup> A significant number of these were not members of the IRA or SF, but for those that were there could be

little doubt that they knew the likely penalty for being unmasked and apprehended. Martin McGuinness was asked on the BBC's *Panorama* whether the penalty for informing would be death: 'Death, certainly' was the reply.<sup>33</sup> Hart pointed out that in the years of the War of Independence, the overwhelming majority of those punished as 'informers' by the Cork IRA were not members of the organisation. As the Cork No. 1 Brigade's intelligence officer noted, 'civilian spies were considered by us to be the most dangerous of all.'<sup>34</sup> Many were suspected (and suspicion was often interpreted as guilt, with little or no compunction) of passing on information because they were thought to be opponents of the republican movement. This was particularly the case for 'loyalists', Protestants and other 'outsiders' or social misfits, all of whom had something to fear from the IRA. It was also the case that the fear of 'informers' was widespread within the broader Catholic nationalist population, and was not confined to republicans. Marianne Elliott has argued that ' swathes of people have fallen out of the national narratives because they do not fit the identikit [...] The idea of "selling out" has been a major feature of Irish nationalism and translated easily into "informer" in times of conflict.'<sup>35</sup> However, Hart argued that, in fact, individuals belonging to these groups were less likely to have acted as informers, either because they actually had little information to impart, or because they were fearful of the consequences. Instead, 'by far the best intelligence came from inside the IRA itself', but the organisation did not tend to look seriously at its own members as the source of information.<sup>36</sup>

Clearly, although the Provisionals also punished many perceived outsiders as 'informers' (for instance, those who consorted with the police or army, or who refused to co-operate with the IRA by providing transport or safe houses, or who simply refused to conform to the prevailing communal norms<sup>37</sup>), the movement's leadership rapidly realised that much of the high-grade information finding its way to the security forces came from inside the organisation. As a consequence, the Provisionals were more concerned with



internal security than the 'old IRA' appears to have been. In order to combat this threat of internal treachery, the leadership instituted a code for members, spelling out the process of 'courts of inquiry' and 'courts martial', as well as reminding all trained volunteers of the punishment for informing. The 'old IRA' had also utilised the 'language of due process' in their decisions to either kill, expel or fine suspected spies and informers, but Townshend argues that proceedings were often less than exact.<sup>38</sup>

The Provisional IRA's 'Green book', which according to Dillon was revised in 1987, set out the organisation's disciplinary procedures, and under the General Head Quarters General Army Orders (No. 5), it was stated: 'No Volunteer should succumb to approaches or overtures, blackmail or bribery attempts, made by the enemy and should report such approaches as soon as possible. Volunteers who engage in loose talk shall be dismissed. Volunteers found guilty of treason face the death penalty.'<sup>39</sup> The British Army soldier 'Kevin Fulton', who infiltrated the IRA with the express intention of undermining it, was deeply concerned that once he had been 'green-booked' (a reference to the training that all IRA volunteers were supposed to undergo, after they had been accepted within the organisation), if his subterfuge was exposed, he 'could be investigated, tried and executed by the IRA's internal security [...] The IRA had a licence to act as judge, jury and executioner if I was suspected of being a tout.'<sup>40</sup> However, it was not always true that alleged informers were killed; a range of punishments were used over the years, including beatings and shootings (often in the knees or ankles), forced exile, curfews, 'tarring and feathering' for women in republican districts suspected of liaising with British army personnel, and so on. It was also the case that, periodically, the movement would offer time-limited amnesties, promising that anyone who came forward to the republican movement, and admitted openly they had provided information to the security forces, would not be harmed.<sup>41</sup>

The motivations that led individuals to become informers were often complex and diverse, and could change over time. Blackmail was certainly used by the security forces: the police and army could either threaten to expose misconduct by an individual, or they might offer the prospect of immunity from prosecution (or, at the least, a reduced sentence), if an individual who had been arrested was willing to work for them.<sup>42</sup> ‘Agent handlers’ would also seek to entice co-operation through the promise of financial inducements; this pragmatic consideration ought not to be under-estimated in an environment where unemployment was rife. On the other hand, the amounts concerned were usually relatively small. Chalandon, in his afterword to *My Traitor*, seems to imply that Donaldson had betrayed the cause ‘for a few thousand pounds sterling’, but the specific motivation in this case remains obscure (see below).<sup>43</sup> Personal grudges, or spite and a desire for revenge, might also provoke a willingness to inform. Psychological flaws, such as a sense of self-importance, or the thrill of danger, might play a role.<sup>44</sup>

It should also be recognised that at least some informers took a *political* decision to work for the security forces; whether through ideological conviction, or moral qualms concerning the strategy and tactics of the IRA, some saw it as their duty to aid the state in its fight against terrorism. Of course, republicans had good reason to denigrate the motivation of such informers, and particularly to deny the accusations of those such as Seán O’Callaghan, who alleged that the Provisionals had conducted a sectarian campaign of violence.<sup>45</sup> Cochrane has argued that ‘an objective examination of the literature, particularly material written by informants within the Republican movement, demonstrates that in the main, those who sought to collude with the security forces did so freely, without coercion, in a personal effort to thwart the actions of their compatriots’.<sup>46</sup> Whilst he cited the professed motivations of O’Callaghan, Martin McGartland and Ray Gilmour to support this contention, there is a need for caution in making such a sweeping judgment; those informers who have published

memoirs also have an interest in portraying their behaviour as motivated primarily, if not exclusively, by ethical considerations. The truth is hard to ascertain, but it may well be that motivations are often multiple and complex. Charters made use of a model developed during the Cold War; ‘experience suggests that the panoply of motivations for spying really can be reduced to the acronym MICE: money, ideology, coercion/compromise, or ego.’<sup>47</sup>

We can also distinguish between those who joined the republican movement in good faith, and who were subsequently ‘turned’<sup>48</sup> for whatever reason, and those (like ‘Kevin Fulton’) who were opposed to the IRA from the outset, and only joined (or, in the case of O’Callaghan, rejoined) *in order* to infiltrate the organisation. Dillon argued that the latter should be categorised as ‘agents’, and ‘Fulton’ was insistent in his memoir that he should not be considered as an ‘informer’, given his implacable opposition from the start to the republican movement, and his willingness to risk all by infiltrating the IRA: ‘I’m not a grass. I’m not someone who crossed over to the other side to save my own skin.’<sup>49</sup> There is an interesting debate in the literature concerning the extent to which informers were equally despised on all sides. Ex-republican prisoner Ronan Bennett, in a review of the film version of Martin McGartland’s memoir, *Fifty Dead Men Walking*, argued that:

No one really likes him [the informer], not even the people to whose side he has defected. No one trusts him or his motives, no one can fully find it in their hearts to forgive or overlook his past, no one really finds betrayal – even betrayal of the enemy – truly admirable. Of course, the state’s agents [...] will pretend to the informer that he is very well liked, esteemed, respected, important. Once they have identified the potential asset, they will court him with the ardour of generous and infatuated lovers [...] They will be understanding, they will be family and will promise to cherish him through thick and thin. It is all a lie. The informer’s fate is to be chewed up and spat out.<sup>50</sup>

This interpretation is supported by a fictional treatment of the subject by Frank O'Connor. In his short story of 1931, 'Jumbo's Wife', the unmasked informer 'Jumbo' applied for protection from the security forces, but was refused: 'to the military for whom he had risked his life he was only an informer, a common informer, to be left to the mercy of their enemy when his services were no longer of value.'<sup>51</sup> Others offer at least a partially contrasting judgment. For example, Peter Taylor interviewed a handler who argued, 'we told them [informers] what we would do to look after them and, in truth, our life [sic] was in their hands as much as theirs was in ours.' This was 'unlike many regular soldiers who viewed "touts" with almost as much contempt as the IRA...'; for Taylor, 'often agent and handler became very close, sharing a common danger and a common purpose.'<sup>52</sup> Toolis corroborates this interpretation; he interviewed the Derry IRA informer, Martin Hogan (who had been 'exfiltrated' out of Northern Ireland after his cover had inadvertently been blown), and from the way in which Hogan talked about his relationship with his handlers in RUC Special Branch 'it was obvious that handlers and informers, although by no means equal, shared a peculiar intimacy – as if their brief points of contact were the only honest relationship in lives given over to deception.'<sup>53</sup>

As has been established, for republicans 'the crime of being an informer outweighed all other considerations.'<sup>54</sup> In terms of the 'Green book' the only other crime for which the death penalty was specified, rather than 'dismissal' or 'dismissal with ignominy', was the unauthorised seizure of weapons or explosives under the IRA's control (General Order No.11). Even by the standards of the Provisionals, in South Armagh a notoriously enclosed culture existed within the local IRA organisation: volunteers would often come from established, well-connected republican families, with a pedigree that could, on occasion, be traced back to the Defenders and Ribbonmen of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>55</sup> Local IRA units operated with 'obsessive secrecy', and according to Eamon Collins, they were 'loath to meet

up with other people or to operate with volunteers from outside their immediate circle.<sup>56</sup> This distrust of outsiders made South Armagh especially difficult for the security forces to breach; when they were able to recruit informers from the local area, they were rarely IRA men, but they were well-integrated in the community: for instance, postman Paddy McEntee or grain merchant (and cross-border smuggler) John McAnulty. It proved extremely difficult for their handlers to meet them in safety such was the network of ‘eyes and ears’ that operated on behalf of the republican movement across the countryside. Both McEntee and McAnulty were killed, and their bodies dumped on border roads, after ‘interrogation’ in one of a number of properties that the South Armagh brigade (and later the IRA’s internal security squad) had set up specifically for the purpose.<sup>57</sup> They were two of 18 suspected informers killed in South Armagh between the early 1970s and 1997 (approximately half of whom were local men, and the other half IRA volunteers from elsewhere, who were transported to the area for interrogation, before being shot in the head).<sup>58</sup>

The question of communal response to the killings of suspected informers is also a sensitive topic for republicans. Broadly speaking, in highly supportive areas like South Armagh, the killing of informers was condoned by many, both inside and outside the movement itself: as long-time SF councillor in Crossmaglen, Jim McAllister, stated, ‘the informer is a despised creature.’<sup>59</sup> However, the killing and mutilation of informers (whose bodies often bore the marks of torture, in the effort to wring ‘confessions’ from the suspect) was regularly denounced from the pulpit, and on occasion the community could demonstrate its unease concerning specific deaths; for example, in the case of McEntee, a popular local figure, there was allegedly ‘an unprecedented wave of anger’ at his killing, although McAllister argued that this dissipated once the republican movement made clear the extent of his collusion with the authorities.<sup>60</sup> There are also some discrepancies in the accounts of the attitude of republicans and the wider community to the families of those killed as informers:

Hart recounts that a middle-aged man in a pub in Cork city was pointed out to him as ‘the informer’, when he was in fact the son of someone who had been suspected of informing seventy years earlier during the War of Independence!<sup>61</sup> The British officer, Robert Nairac, wrote a memo (*Talking to People in South Armagh*), in which he offered advice from his experience in the field, concerning how to overcome the factors which inhibited local people from co-operating with the security forces; in it, he recounted, ‘It is said that if you raped your next-door-neighbour it would soon be forgotten: if your grandfather had been an INFORMER you would be an outcast.’<sup>62</sup>

On the other hand, some have put forward the proposition that, provided it could be ascertained that an informer’s activities were unknown to his family, then the proper response should be sympathy, rather than ostracism. For instance, the IRA statement after its ‘execution’ in 1990 of Paddy Flood, accused of being an informer for the RUC, made clear that his actions were ‘all the more regrettable because of the high esteem in which the Flood family was held by the Republican Movement in Derry.’ Toolis commented that the statement was designed to prevent Paddy’s brother, David (a republican activist), from being ostracised, ‘but the trace of being the brother of a tout will linger with David Flood for the rest of his life.’<sup>63</sup> In relation to Denis Donaldson’s exposure as a ‘tout’, McIntyre argued strongly that ‘it is simply untenable to allow a diminution of respect for Donaldson’s family to take hold. Those who love him remain as decent as anyone else in these communities.’<sup>64</sup>

### **The ‘Informer’: Cultural Representations**

Informers, and their effects upon the internal culture of the republican movement, have figured prominently in fictional and filmic representations over the past century or more. In recent feature films such as *Fifty Dead Men Walking*<sup>65</sup> or *Shadow Dancer*<sup>66</sup>, the

claustrophobic world of the informer in the republican heartland of West Belfast has been powerfully evoked. In terms of fictional portrayals, the classic foundation for the ‘robust demonology’<sup>67</sup> of the informer within republican culture was Liam O’Flaherty’s novel, *The Informer* (first published in 1925, whilst the lived experience of the War of Independence and the Irish Civil War remained fresh in the minds of thousands of republicans). There have been four film adaptations of the novel, with the first in 1929 setting the action in a ‘vaguely German location.’<sup>68</sup> For Irish audiences, the most powerful version, and one which reinforced (but also altered) the message for a new generation, was produced in 1935 (directed by John Ford, the film won an Academy Award). The story has also been adapted on several occasions for the theatre, most successfully by Tom Murphy in 1981.<sup>69</sup> Whenever subsequent depictions of informers within the republican movement have been published, there is almost invariably an implicit or sometimes explicit recognition of the influence of O’Flaherty.<sup>70</sup>

However, it is significant that in his novel O’Flaherty chose not to name the IRA, or even focus upon the broader republican movement. Indeed, by setting the action in a recognisably urban, even proletarian milieu (which could pass as early 1920s Dublin), but naming the subversive political movement depicted as the ‘Revolutionary organisation’, O’Flaherty makes clear that this story should not be read as a historically accurate representation of the republican movement of the period. Indeed, for O’Connor, ‘the history of *The Informer* is symptomatic of the way communism has been airbrushed out of the ferment that went into the making of independent Ireland.’<sup>71</sup> Having been introduced to class politics and socialism whilst a soldier on the Western front, O’Flaherty came to regard Irish nationalism and republicanism (along with Christianity) as ‘diversions, in essence collusive with the bourgeois imperialist practices they ostensibly opposed.’<sup>72</sup> The ‘Revolutionary organisation’ is portrayed as part of an international network, controlled by an International Executive, based on ‘the Continent’. The language in which the movement is described is

more reminiscent of international communism than Irish nationalism: the Commandant ‘Dan Gallagher’ promotes (according to a fictional biographical sketch in a ‘leading organ of the English aristocracy’), a ‘brand of Communism [...] of the type that appeals most to the Irish nature. It is a mixture of Roman Catholicism, Nationalist Republicanism and Bolshevism.’<sup>73</sup> Except that it didn’t really appeal; the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) had perhaps twenty members in Dublin in 1922. Whilst it could be argued that left-wing ideas did exist amongst some Irish republicans of this era, it is clear that such a ‘brand of communism’ had, in reality, limited influence upon the broader republican-nationalist movement.<sup>74</sup> Nonetheless, both O’Flaherty (and his character ‘Dan Gallagher’) should be understood as revolutionaries, and not just rebels. Despite this, *The Informer* has been ‘read’ primarily as a novel of Irish republicanism; one reason for this is that ‘treachery was woven into the warp and woof of the revolutionary imagination’, and this applied to republicans as much as to communists.<sup>75</sup> In the opening of the novel, the character of ‘Gypo Nolan’ informs the police of the whereabouts of his long-time comrade and erstwhile leader of the ‘Revolutionary organisation’, ‘Frankie McPhillip’, who is subsequently killed during a shootout with a squad who had come to arrest him. Despite the ambivalence of O’Flaherty’s depiction, ‘Gypo Nolan, one of the great examples of the stock villain of native demonology, passed into Irish idiom as a republican traitor.’<sup>76</sup>

‘Nolan’'s motivation for informing is ‘wholly personal and apolitical’; it is portrayed as stemming, above all, from his dire financial circumstances; he is painted as a strong physical specimen, but without any political depth.<sup>77</sup> Whilst his extreme poverty, allied with subnormal mental faculties, are not presented as an excuse for his decision to betray his colleague, it is the case that ‘Nolan’ is shown to be both petrified and stupefied by the prospect of informing. Still, the lure of the £20 reward is enough for him to be ‘turned’; there is no role for an ‘agent-handler’, or careful consideration of the risks involved, in this



account. The decision is presented as a spur-of-the-moment one; in Ford's film, the seed of 'Nolan's' betrayal is planted when he sees an advertisement for passage to the United States (costing £10 per person). The reward money would be sufficient for him to escape with his sometime girlfriend, 'Katie Fox', herself a former member of the Revolutionary organisation expelled for 'public prostitution'.<sup>78</sup> Even though 'McPhillip' had been suspended from the movement for an incident in which the secretary of the Farm workers' union was shot dead, nonetheless 'Gallagher' is insistent that the informer must be rooted out. 'Gypo' finds himself psychologically bifurcated; he wishes to unburden himself to 'Gallagher', but realises the consequences: 'for a moment he contemplated the man who had gone into the police-station as a being apart from himself.'<sup>79</sup> For 'Gallagher', 'it's really no business of the Organisation, because Frank had ceased to be a member. He was only an ordinary civilian criminal as far as we are concerned. But an informer is an informer. He's got to be wiped out like the first sign of a plague as soon as he's spotted. He's a common enemy.'<sup>80</sup> 'Gallagher' is deeply suspicious of 'Gypo's' shifty behaviour, and new-found and unaccountable wealth; as a trap, he offers 'Gypo' a route back into the organisation, if he helps to unmask the traitor. Despite his efforts in the court proceedings of the Revolutionary organisation to pin the blame on the innocent 'Rat Mulligan', it is 'Gypo' who ends up being trapped by the wily 'Gallagher' into admitting his perfidy. O'Flaherty describes the usually rational and calculating 'Gallagher' as 'demented, drunk with the fury of his hatred' for the informer.<sup>81</sup> Eventually, despite his escape from custody, 'Gypo' is tracked down and shot dead in a church.

If *The Informer* has been interpreted as a 'mythogenic' novel, in Sheeran's suggestive phrase, and full of 'creative contradictions', it is still slightly odd that it has come to be viewed as so central to cultural representations of treachery within Irish republicanism. O'Flaherty's 'black melodrama' was written in the 'shadow of a double defeat: the failure of the IRA to deliver a united Ireland and the failure of the CPI to have the slightest impact on

the social and economic structures of the Free State.’<sup>82</sup> If O’Flaherty himself was clearly at a ‘tangent to the overwhelmingly nationalist struggle in Ireland’, then the same can be said of *The Informer* in its fictional depiction of betrayal within a communist revolutionary movement in Ireland that, in fact, barely existed.<sup>83</sup>

Of the recent fictional accounts of the Provisional movement’s attitude to the danger of informers within the ranks, perhaps the most interesting is Danny Morrison’s *The Wrong Man* (1996).<sup>84</sup> The novel begins with an IRA interrogation of a suspected informer, and ends with his killing. In-between, the reader uncovers the story of an IRA unit in Belfast, and how its activities came to be compromised. Unlike O’Flaherty, Morrison was not writing from a perspective which recognised the defeat of his politics; instead, his depiction is of the courage and fortitude of the ‘resistance community’ in the Provisional heartland of West Belfast. However, such brave ‘resistance’ comes at a cost. Morrison’s novelistic treatment is interesting, precisely for what it reveals of ‘the micro-culture of secrecy and siege of active service volunteers and their taut circles of familial and communal support.’<sup>85</sup> As one sympathetic republican critic understood, the novel captures the ‘collective trauma’ of this clandestine world: ‘the intense, often scary, kitchen-house back entry focus of republicans ever alert to betrayal.’<sup>86</sup>

The interweaving of fictional accounts and real historical events can be seen at work in this case, as in 1990 Morrison had been arrested and charged with membership of the IRA, conspiracy to murder and false imprisonment of a suspected informer, Sandy Lynch. Although found guilty and sentenced to eight years, Morrison protested his innocence, and continued to press for an overturning of his conviction, which eventually occurred.<sup>87</sup> According to Ed Moloney, Morrison had been acting, on behalf of the IRA Army Council, alongside members of the IRA’s internal security counter-intelligence unit, which was tasked with rooting out informers within the organisation.<sup>88</sup>

This was a hugely significant case, not only because a key member of the republican leadership was arrested and imprisoned, but also due to the strong suspicion that the security forces could only have known about Lynch's kidnapping, and Morrison's presence at the interrogation, if they had succeeded in placing an informer *inside* the IRA's internal security team. The fear generated within the movement was confirmed in 2003, with the exposure of a long-standing IRA operator, Freddie Scappaticci, as an alleged agent working for the British Army's Force Research Unit (FRU), code-named 'Stakeknife'. A former FRU agent-handler, under the pseudonym 'Martin Ingram', published a devastating account of the practices associated with the FRU, in particular the allegation that, in order to protect Stakeknife's identity, several murders were allowed to proceed.<sup>89</sup> In perhaps the most notorious incident of alleged security force collusion in terrorist activities designed to provide cover for an informer, it has been argued that loyalist agent, Brian Nelson, was steered away from targeting Stakeknife, and instead the Ulster Defence Association killed another (retired) republican, Francisco Notarantonio (who had the misfortune to also be of Italian descent).<sup>90</sup> Although Scappaticci denied he had been an informer, and attempted to force the UK government to publicly acknowledge that 'fact', many of those who have closely followed the case agree that his denial was unconvincing.<sup>91</sup> He fled from Northern Ireland soon after the revelations, and was thought to be in Italy.<sup>92</sup>

His unmasking was an embarrassment for the Provisional movement, which argued that the political machinations behind the outing of Stakeknife were an effort by British 'securocrats' to drive republicans into a demoralising bout of speculation and introspection; who else might be compromised? How many more informers lurked within the ranks, or even worse, within the leadership? Dissident (or dissenting) republicans certainly seized upon the Scappaticci revelations to further their argument that the infiltration of the Provisional leadership had been 'huge', and that 'Stakeknife damaged the IRA irreparably and helped

pave the way for its defeat'.<sup>93</sup> However, the allegations by 'Martin Ingram' and, later, 'Kevin Fulton', were also potentially damaging for the UK government, whose security forces were being accused of permitting highly-placed agents to commit acts of terrorism, including murder, in order to maintain their cover.<sup>94</sup> So, if one of the prime motivations for the use of informers was to render the republican community increasingly paranoid, with its energies devoted to internal soul-searching, then it followed that at least some of these informers had to be publicly unmasked, in order to sow the seeds of confusion and demoralisation within republican ranks. However, this was not cost-free for the agencies of the state; cases such as 'Stakeknife' invited unwelcome critical scrutiny of the security forces, and the ethics of their intelligence-gathering.<sup>95</sup>

As well as memoir-writing by erstwhile informers themselves, there are also now several accounts by 'agent-handlers'. It is instructive to compare these reflections upon the fraught experience of informers and their handlers: in one real-life case, that of 'supergrass' Raymond Gilmour and his RUC Special Branch handler, Alan Barker, researchers are able to read memoirs from either side of this most intense of relationships.<sup>96</sup>

### **Sorj Chalandon and Dennis Donaldson: 'My Traitor'**

Denis Donaldson was a leading official within SF who had been an important representative of the movement internationally, and more recently had run the party's administrative operation at the Stormont assembly after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.<sup>97</sup> However, at an SF-arranged press conference in December 2005, he admitted, without any clear explanation as to his motives, that he had also passed information to the British over a lengthy period, from the early 1980s onwards. As a journalist covering the conflict and the peace process in Northern Ireland (from 1974 until 2008) for the French left-wing daily, *Libération*, Sorj Chalandon had got to know, like and trust Donaldson, and he was shocked and disheartened

by this revelation. Having been immediately removed from his position at the heart of SF, Donaldson was disgraced in the eyes of all republicans, whether supporters of the Provisional leadership, or ‘dissident’ critics. He went to live in a run-down cottage owned by his family in a remote location in Co. Donegal, but was tracked down and killed by a shotgun blast in April 2006. A ‘dissident’ republican group subsequently claimed that it had carried out the killing.<sup>98</sup> The Northern Ireland Police Ombudsman undertook an investigation in 2013 into allegations that Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) officers may have contributed to his death by exposing his location.<sup>99</sup> There has also been legal action by Donaldson’s family, in an attempt to secure a journal that he had apparently been writing shortly before his killing, which was believed to be in the possession of the Irish police. By April 2016, ten years after his killing, an inquest into Donaldson’s death had been adjourned on no fewer than eighteen occasions.<sup>100</sup>

As a journalist, Sorj Chalandon had reported from Belfast for many years, building up significant contacts and friendships, particularly within the republican movement. A sense of Chalandon’s deep-rooted commitment to the republican cause is given in an epilogue published alongside the English translation of his first novel, *My Traitor*: ‘The war was cruel and dirty, a war in the shadows, which had to be put into words. As a journalist with *Libération*, I gave a balanced account of each side’s hopes. As a human, my heart went out to the Republicans.’<sup>101</sup> One of those who Chalandon grew to know and admire was Denis Donaldson. After Donaldson’s exposure as a long-time informer, Chalandon’s belief in the integrity of the republican movement was exposed as naivety. Moreover, his specific faith in the ostensibly close friendship he had developed with Donaldson was shattered. There appears to have been a degree of hero-worship in this relationship:

Denis was Catholic, funny, attentive, dazzling [...] He was one of those whom I introduced to passing journalists to convince them that commitment to the cause could sometimes rhyme with elegance. Denis

had been an IRA soldier. [...] He suffered like the others and he dreamed like the others. Ireland was his battle. He drank, he sang, he hugged you, he took your arm to tell you a secret. He was committed to the cause forever, and nothing ever betrayed him. He was the one above suspicion.<sup>102</sup>

Interestingly, *Mon traître* was published in France in 2007 without any explicit recognition that the story was inspired by the author's real-life friendship with Donaldson. But, it is clear that writing a fictionalised version of these events, based (somewhat loosely) on the factual story of Denis Donaldson's betrayal, was an attempt by Chalandon to come to terms with the 'great disarray' he had experienced as a result of the revelation. Eamon Maher has recounted that Chalandon (in an address to the annual conference of Franco-Irish Studies, in Lille in 2011) 'became very emotional when describing the heartache he endured on discovering that his friend Denis Donaldson was not the man he appeared to be.'<sup>103</sup> The narrative in *My Traitor*, and in the companion volume, *Return to Killybegs* (2013), represents an effort to understand and interpret the nature of Donaldson's *political* betrayal of the IRA and SF. However, perhaps the real power of the writing stems from Chalandon's desire, or need, to try to make sense of the intimate, *personal*, dimension of the experience. 'Antoine', the young Parisian violin-maker befriends 'Tyrone Meehan', a veteran Republican militant - Chalandon has argued strongly that 'Tyrone is not Denis. But the look in their eyes is the same. I am not Antoine. But our pain is the same.'<sup>104</sup> The publishers of the English translation of *Return to Killybegs* chose to include an afterword by author Ed Moloney, in which a very different picture of Donaldson emerges: he was 'a leadership loyalist of spaniel-type servility [...] a guy with an eye on the main chance, cynical, self-serving.'<sup>105</sup> It is difficult to imagine that Moloney and Chalandon are describing the same man, and even more difficult to think that Chalandon approved the addition of this afterword.

When Donaldson was killed he was just 56 years-old; he had 'impeccable Republican credentials', having joined the Provisionals as a 'pre-69er', before the campaign of violence

had begun, and had been born into a Republican family of long standing in the movement. His kudos, as a core member of the founding generation of Provisionals, was cemented by his role as an armed defender of St Matthew's church, in the embattled Short Strand in East Belfast.<sup>106</sup> There is an iconic photograph of him alongside the future republican hunger striker, Bobby Sands, taken in the Long Kesh internment cages in 1973.<sup>107</sup> It is interesting that in the novels, Chalandon makes 'Tyrone Meehan' 81 years-old, and a member of a very different generation of republicans. This fictional device permits Chalandon in *Return to Killybegs* to trace a potted history of the Republican movement prior to 1969. It might also be speculated that Chalandon's decision allows him to portray the relationship between 'Tyrone' and 'Antoine' as akin to a 'father-and-son' one, rather than the proximity of ages that characterised his real-life friendship with Donaldson.<sup>108</sup>

Donaldson had been arrested in 2002, along with two other SF officials, for operating an alleged 'spying ring' at the Stormont Assembly. The allegations were the trigger for the suspension of the Assembly as Unionists cried foul, and a return to direct rule from Westminster, much to the chagrin of SF. In December 2005, all the charges were suddenly dropped, prompting SF allegations that the whole episode had been concocted by 'securocrats' (within the police or Army, or both), intent on sabotaging the peace process.<sup>109</sup> Only a week later, according to the SF account, Donaldson was contacted by an unnamed security source, who told him he was about to be unmasked in the media; this led directly to his confession to SF, and the press conference (flanked by Adams and McGuinness) at which he expressed profound regret for his actions. Even if Donaldson admitted his treachery, the full extent and nature of his activities as an informer were not revealed to the public. Several academic and journalistic analysts have repeated the SF leadership view that the 'spying ring' was, 'in all likelihood, bogus', and part of a hidden agenda to undermine the peace process, and specifically to 'discredit the republican cause.'<sup>110</sup> In this view, the case raised important

questions regarding the extent to which the Westminster government might be deliberately ‘unravelling the scale of their penetration [of the IRA and SF] to demoralise the republican movement’<sup>111</sup>. A related interpretation was that ‘rogue’ elements might be at work within the security establishment, perhaps seeking to sabotage the political will of the government in London. Or, more prosaically, there were divisions between MI5, who wanted Donaldson left untouched, and Special Branch in Belfast, who believed that he had withdrawn co-operation from his handlers.<sup>112</sup>

Equally, however, this interpretation, if correct, also raised significant questions for SF: if the alleged ongoing ‘war mentality’ of elements within PSNI Special Branch was only part of a much broader British policy of ‘dirty war’ (‘an intensive counter-intelligence strategy incorporating the use of agents, electronic surveillance, various espionage tactics, black propaganda, and psychological operations’<sup>113</sup>), then it begged the question, ‘Why would SF ask its cadres only a year later to endorse such a police force?’ Sorj Chalandon also supports this version of events in his fictional recreation; he implies that British intelligence blew the cover of ‘Tyrone Meehan’, and passed him to SF in order to damage republican credibility: ‘A traitor chucks the community’s morale out the window. It’s like a grenade exploding. It tosses out little splinters in every direction. Everyone is wounded when a traitor is discovered, and it’s difficult to heal those wounds.’<sup>114</sup>

An alternative understanding of Donaldson’s demise is also possible. It could have been that he was genuinely engaged in an intelligence-gathering operation at Stormont. Effectively, this was either because he needed to preserve his cover, or perhaps he had decided to ‘turn’ again, and really work *for* the Republican cause. However, in order to rescue the peace process and bring SF successfully into government alongside the Democratic Unionists, the British needed to distance the Adams/McGuinness leadership from such criminality. Rather than put Donaldson on trial, exposing him as a long-term informer



would have the desired effect. Only a small number of people know where the truth lies in ‘Stormontgate’ and the subsequent unmasking of Donaldson, but clearly the ‘ambiguity and murkiness’ of this world is perfectly suited to the *mélange* of fact and fiction involved in Chalandon’s treatment of the subject.<sup>115</sup>

Ultimately, Donaldson’s motivations for informing remain a matter of conjecture, unless and until the journal he was keeping is made public, or the interrogation by the Republican movement he presumably underwent after his exposure is revealed. In his novel, Chalandon provides a rationale for ‘Meehan’’s treachery: the security forces have forensic evidence that he was responsible for the accidental shooting of a fellow IRA volunteer, ‘Danny Finley’. Nobody in the community had realised the truth, and ‘Meehan’ had been exalted as a hero for the staunch defence of his Catholic district in August 1969. If this information became public, then that narrative could be exposed as a lie. Interestingly, Chalandon portrays the security forces, particularly his British handler from MI5, as primarily concerned with the *political* intelligence that ‘Meehan’ can provide; he is assured by his handler that his collaboration will not lead to arrests or victims. ‘Meehan’ began to enjoy his exchanges with ‘Honoré’, the representative of British intelligence, who is probing him about the internal political evolution of SF: ‘my words weren’t killing anyone, making anyone suffer or sending anyone to prison.’<sup>116</sup> Bamford argues that penetration of the republican movement by the security forces at the ‘most senior levels’ was primarily about tapping into the thinking of the senior command.<sup>117</sup> In this sense, Donaldson would not have been engaged primarily in passing on operational details of the IRA’s military tactics, but instead in reporting the political and strategic debate at the heart of the movement. Several commentators have characterised Donaldson as an ‘agent of influence’ rather than an informer in the more traditional sense.<sup>118</sup> There is, however, some debate concerning how

much influence such agents really could exercise: ex-Provisional Tommy McKearney stated, ‘it must be admitted that agents of influence can only take people where they want to go.’<sup>119</sup>

## **Conclusion**

‘I know that for every informer or agent, there are thousands of people who aren’t.’<sup>120</sup> Martin McGuinness’ words were hardly reassuring for supporters of SF and the wider republican community, left reeling by the unmasking of Denis Donaldson in 2005. Arguably, the Adams/McGuinness leadership made little concerted effort to explain the facts of this case to its base. As Dudai has argued ‘the issue of Republican informers remains of huge practical and symbolic importance’ but it is relatively under-researched.<sup>121</sup> He maintains that ‘the function of the informer as a marker of a group’s boundaries and loyalties remained important – perhaps even intensified – in the peace-process years. [...] During the transition, retaining the informer as a constant enemy helps to maintain continuity [...]’.<sup>122</sup> For Dudai, the existence of informers, and the search to root them out, can serve to cement the movement’s solidarity and cohesion: ‘heresy is very useful in defending orthodoxy.’ However, this article has argued that if, in reality, informers operated at the highest leadership levels of the organisation, then the opposite effect may also occur: the ‘informer’ might hasten an undermining of cohesion, a loss of morale, and increased strain on the continuity of the movement’s internal political culture.

The powerful forces that once bound the Irish republican movement together in a consensual form of ‘democratic centralism’ have dissipated. The hitherto clandestine internal world of the republican movement is increasingly being exposed to scrutiny, although we still have only a patchy and incomplete picture. The Donaldson case, in particular, underlines that whilst there are several continuities regarding the impact of ‘the informer’ upon the internal politics of the republican movement, there are also significant differences in the post-peace

process era. The exposure of Donaldson has played into, and needs to be interpreted as part of, the struggle between the ‘mainstream’ Provisional movement and the variety of ‘dissident’ or dissenting elements that has characterised the period since the mid-1990s. This bitter contest is for control of the historical narrative of the IRA, and the meaning of that recent history for the contemporary strategy and future trajectory of the ‘republican family’. As Frampton put it: ‘the claims levelled against men such as Freddie Scappaticci [...] and Denis Donaldson in 2003-5 were repeatedly used to de-legitimise the leadership [...]’.<sup>123</sup> After the killing of a Catholic PSNI officer by dissidents in 2011, Martin McGuinness made an explicit call for republicans to inform on these ‘enemies of Ireland’ to the Garda or the PSNI.<sup>124</sup> As far as many dissenting voices were concerned, this was definitive proof that the leadership of the Provisionals were now compromised beyond all hope. As McIntyre stated in the wake of Donaldson’s confession: ‘when I first learned of this latest SF security debacle, my sole thought was, *And who else?*’<sup>125</sup> It is surely now a legitimate question to ask whether ‘informers’ are merely an unsavoury aspect of the historical detritus of the conflict, or whether the British state is still intent on using ‘human intelligence’ to gather information about the Irish republican movement, even if the IRA has been stood down and Sinn Féin is an integral element in the devolved government of part of the United Kingdom?

In reality, Chalandon did not see Donaldson again before his brutal killing, but in his fictional depiction, ‘Antoine’ gets to meet ‘Tyrone’ in his dilapidated cottage in Co. Donegal. He wants to know whether his friendship with the ex-IRA man, now cast out as an informer, was real at all: ‘Is a traitor a traitor all the time?’ He receives only an enigmatic response from ‘Meehan’, referring back to John Ford’s film (based on O’Flaherty’s character): ‘I do not judge Gypo Nolan. I do not judge him because I am Gypo Nolan. You are Gypo Nolan, wee Frenchie. We all have a Gypo Nolan inside us. No one is born a complete bastard, wee Frenchie. The bastard is sometimes a great guy who just gives up.’<sup>126</sup>

## Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges the helpful comments of the two anonymous reviewers, and thanks Dr Thomas Leahy, Dr Eamon Maher, Malachi O'Doherty and Patrick Gillan for comments on an earlier draft. The usual disclaimer applies.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> These novels have been translated into English as *My Traitor* (2011) and *Return to Killybegs* (2013). All subsequent references are to the English versions.

<sup>2</sup> The quotation is used as an epigraph by Chalandon in *Retour à Killybegs*, although it doesn't appear in the English translation. Chalandon suggests that it is taken from some wall graffiti in Belfast.

<sup>3</sup> See inter alia Whiting, 'Mainstream Revolutionaries'; Smith, *Fighting for Ireland?*; English, *Armed Struggle*; Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*; Patterson, *The Politics of Illusion: A Political History of the IRA*; Alonso, *The IRA and Armed Struggle*.

<sup>4</sup> Taylor, *Brits*, 133.

<sup>5</sup> Hart, *The I.R.A. and its Enemies*, 293.

<sup>6</sup> Toolis, *Rebel Hearts*, 194.

<sup>7</sup> Smyth, *The Judas Kiss*, 3-4.

<sup>8</sup> Dudai, 'Informers and the Transition in Northern Ireland', 33. Dudai also analyses the rumours surrounding informers as a theme in Irish republican communal cultures, and the idea of the informer as a manipulator or celebrity.

<sup>9</sup> McGladdery, *The Provisional IRA in England*, 158-60 and 171-2.

<sup>10</sup> Frampton, 'Agents and Ambushes', 93-4.

<sup>11</sup> Bradley with Feeney, *Insider*, 234. In Belfast, it was argued that 8 out of 10 operations mounted by the IRA were being thwarted by 1994 (see Holland and Phoenix, *Phoenix*, 391).

<sup>12</sup> Lavin, 'From Belfast with Love'.

<sup>13</sup> Urban, *Big Boys' Rules*, 101.

<sup>14</sup> McDonald, *Guns, Smoke and Mirrors*, 191.

<sup>15</sup> Leahy, 'The Influence of Informers and Agents'.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>17</sup> See McGovern, 'Informers, agents and the liberal ideology', 293; also Kirk-Smith and Dingley, 'Countering Terrorism in Northern Ireland', 51.

<sup>18</sup> See McIntyre, *Good Friday*, 177-93.

<sup>19</sup> For the scholarly debate on whether the Provisionals suffered a 'strategic defeat' or not, see the contributions by Bew and Frampton, and Dixon in the *Political Quarterly* (2012). See also Hennessey, 'The Dirty War: MI5 and the Troubles'.

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<sup>20</sup> An example of an erstwhile member of the Provisional movement wrestling with the competing demands of loyalty and conformity, on the one hand, and the desire to ask difficult questions of the leadership, is provided by Brendan Hughes, a senior IRA man from Belfast. Hughes argued that any misgivings or dissent from the leadership's position was met with a plea to 'stay within the army line [...] The republican leadership has always exploited our loyalty.' See McIntyre, *Good Friday*, 200 and Hopkins, *The Politics of Memoir*, 58-61.

<sup>21</sup> See *inter alia* O'Callaghan, *The Informer*; McGartland, *Fifty Dead Men Walking* and *Dead Man Running*; Gilmour, *Dead Ground: Infiltrating the IRA*.

<sup>22</sup> Moran, 'Evaluating Special Branch', 2.

<sup>23</sup> Sarma, 'Informers and the Battle against Republican Terrorism', 177.

<sup>24</sup> See McGovern, 'Informers, agents and the liberal ideology', for the argument that there was a deliberate ambiguity regarding the legal rules governing the use of agents, which thereby permitted a degree of political deniability, with the objective of insulating the UK state and political class from potential scrutiny concerning the role of informers and agents in illegality.

<sup>25</sup> See *inter alia* Sanders, *Inside the IRA* and Treacy, *The IRA, 1956-69*.

<sup>26</sup> See Leahy, 'The Influence of Informers', *passim*; Taylor, *Brits*, 270.

<sup>27</sup> McShane was reportedly taken into 'protective custody' by MI5, although republicans insisted he was under no threat; *Guardian*, February 9 2008. See also McDonald, *Gunsmoke and Mirrors*, 132-4.

<sup>28</sup> Bradley with Feeney, *Insider*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>30</sup> Laurence McKeown, a former IRA hunger striker, makes the point in his oral history of the jail experience of republican prisoners (*Out of Time*, 3), that they were deeply suspicious of anybody seeking to research the internal politics of the movement: 'because of the nature of their politics and the organisation they belong to, any "outsider" approaching them for research purposes is first referred to the Republican Movement for clearance.'

<sup>31</sup> See BBC News website, 28 October 2010: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-11641365>. (Accessed 31 July 2015). See also *Sunday Times*, 31 October 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Sarma, 'Informers and the Battle against Republican Terrorism', 167.

<sup>33</sup> Urban, *Big Boys' Rules*, 108.

<sup>34</sup> Cited in Townshend, *The Republic*, 263.

<sup>35</sup> Elliott, *When God Took Sides*, 16.

<sup>36</sup> Hart, *The I.R.A. and its Enemies*, 303-6.

<sup>37</sup> An infamous example, here, would be the abduction, murder and 'disappearance' in 1972 of widowed mother-of-ten Jean McConville. She had been raised a Protestant in East Belfast, but had been living in the Divis flats, a republican stronghold in the West. Her body was discovered by chance on a beach in Co. Louth in 2003. SF President Gerry Adams was arrested and questioned about this case in 2014, but was subsequently released without charge. See Keefe, 'Where the Bodies are Buried'; Moloney, *Voices from the Grave*, 124-32.

<sup>38</sup> Townshend, *The Republic*, 263. Moloney (*A Secret History* [2<sup>nd</sup> edn.], 582) argues that 'the Provisionals had long employed double standards when it came to dealing with informers.'

<sup>39</sup> Cited in Dillon, *The Dirty War*, 487.

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<sup>40</sup> Fulton with Nally and Gallagher, *Unsung Hero*, 79-83.

<sup>41</sup> Urban, *Big Boys' Rules*, 103-4.

<sup>42</sup> Boyd, *The Informers*, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Chalandon, *My Traitor*, 275. David McKittrick, a respected Belfast journalist, implied by contrast that Donaldson's 'incorrigible womanising' might have led to his being blackmailed into working as an informer (*Independent*, 6 April, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> Dillon, *The Dirty War*, 309.

<sup>45</sup> O'Callaghan, *The Informer*, 89-92. For the republican movement's efforts to denigrate O'Callaghan, see for instance, B. Campbell, 'O'Callaghan – The truth', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 27 February 1997.

<sup>46</sup> Cochrane, 'Security Force Collusion in Northern Ireland, 1969-1999', 87.

<sup>47</sup> Charters, "'Have a Go'", 218.

<sup>48</sup> Toolis points out that 'Provisionals subconsciously use the term "turn" in a unique way, to signify the irrevocable stigma attached to informing. Someone "turns" informer or they are simply "turned". The waters cleave and the life of the informer, and their kith and kin, diverges from the tribe. There is no language for, no possibility of, "turning back".' (*Rebel Hearts*, 194-5). This may be too unequivocal; many low-level informers were offered amnesties, although it was also the case that some believed these promises to be worthless – a truthful confession and expression of genuine remorse might not be enough to save an informer from the ultimate punishment.

<sup>49</sup> Fulton with Nally and Gallagher, *Unsung Hero*, xiii. Leahy ('The Influence of Informers', 123) argued persuasively that an 'informer' is already a member of a paramilitary group, who begins to provide information to the intelligence services, whilst an 'agent' is an individual who deliberately infiltrates a group for this purpose.

<sup>50</sup> Bennett, 'The trouble with the Troubles', *The Guardian*, 3 April 2009. After their 'exfiltration' from Northern Ireland, both McGartland and Gilmour have taken legal cases against the security forces, who they accuse of 'abandoning' them, and failing to support them financially or medically. See *Derry Journal*, 5 February 2013 and *The Guardian*, 22 April 2015.

<sup>51</sup> See O'Connor, *Guests of the Nation*, 40. In the story, 'Jumbo Geany' is inadvertently unmasked by his wife, and subsequently killed by his ex-comrades.

<sup>52</sup> Taylor, *Brits*, 150.

<sup>53</sup> Toolis, *Rebel Hearts*, 252. See also Urban, *Big Boys' Rules*, 106.

<sup>54</sup> Harnden, 'Bandit Country', 201.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 34. See also Fulton with Nally and Gallagher, *Unsung Hero*, 140.

<sup>57</sup> Collins, *Killing Rage*, 349-50.

<sup>58</sup> Harnden, 'Bandit Country', 197-201. See also Dillon, *The Dirty War*, 358-63; McKittrick et. al., *Lost Lives*, 762 (McEntee) and 1174 (McAnulty).

<sup>59</sup> Cited in Harnden, 'Bandit Country', 201.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>61</sup> Hart, *The I.R.A. and its Enemies*, 294.

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<sup>62</sup> Nairac was a captain in the Grenadier Guards, who operated as an undercover SAS intelligence operative in South Armagh in the mid-1970s, before he was unmasked, abducted and killed by the IRA in 1977. Harnden, *'Bandit Country'*, 367-72 reproduces his memo, and analyses the killing, 211-225. See also Dillon, *The Dirty War*, 161-87.

<sup>63</sup> Toolis, *Rebel Hearts*, 201-2, citing *Republican News*, 4 August 1990. Toolis recounted that he had heard Flood's taped confession, and despite the vehement denials of his wife, on this basis he supported the hypothesis that Flood had, indeed, acted as an informer. The view that Flood was, in fact, innocent, and had been sacrificed by the RUC in order to protect another informer in the Derry Brigade is put forward by Harnden, *'Bandit Country'*, 210-1 and Teague, 'Double Blind'.

<sup>64</sup> McIntyre, *Good Friday*, 193. Moloney (*Voices from the Grave*, 121-2) has even argued that some of those who were killed as informers, were "disappeared", 'ostensibly to spare their families embarrassment and shame. Having an informer in the family carries a special stigma in Ireland, and all the more so when the victims' families were [...] well-known for their Republican fervour and involvement [...]'].

<sup>65</sup> *Fifty Dead Men Walking* (directed by Kari Skogland in 2009) was based upon the memoir-writing of Martin McGartland, a young petty thief, who joined the IRA in the late 1980s, and was subsequently uncovered as an informer for the RUC in 1991. He managed to escape his captors during interrogation in a flat in West Belfast, by jumping through a bathroom window, and he was 'exfiltrated' from Northern Ireland, and given a new identity in England. He wrote two volumes of memoirs dealing with his experience, and also survived an attempt to assassinate him in 1999, after his true identity and whereabouts had been divulged to the republican movement. McGartland objected to the film version of his story, on the basis that it portrayed his motivation for informing as largely monetary. Instead, he argued that 'I went into the IRA to infiltrate them. Prior to being recruited as a special branch agent I wasn't in the IRA, I wanted nothing to do with them, in truth I hated them.' His real motivation had been revenge, 'I did it because I saw my friends beaten up by the IRA.' ('IRA informer attacks film of his life', *Guardian*, May 16 2008; see 'Fugitive from fury', *Guardian*, May 27 1997 and R. Bennett, 'The trouble with the Troubles', *Guardian*, 3 April 2009).

<sup>66</sup> *Shadow Dancer* (directed by James Marsh and released in 2012) was based upon the eponymous novel by Tom Bradby (1998), and dealt with a tight-knit republican family, which is devastated by one of its members being induced to turn informer for British intelligence, after the accidental shooting of a civilian in the early years of the Troubles.

<sup>67</sup> Sarma, 'Informers and the Battle against Republican Terrorism', 178.

<sup>68</sup> O'Connor, 'Identity and Self-Representation', 37-8.

<sup>69</sup> Murphy, *The Informer*. The play was first performed at the Olympia theatre, Dublin. See Sheeran, *The Informer*.

<sup>70</sup> For example, in Chalandon's novel, he imagines a meeting between the character based on Donaldson, 'Tyrone Meehan', and his own alter ego, the young French violin-maker, 'Antoine', in which Meehan explicitly refers to the John Ford film, and invites Antoine to consider the informer's motivation. (*My Traitor*, 142-3, 147-55). Magee makes a similar argument concerning O'Flaherty's enduring influence; see *Gangsters or Guerrillas?*, 29.

<sup>71</sup> O'Connor, 'Identity and Self-Representation', 38.

<sup>72</sup> Smyth, *The Judas Kiss*, 94.

<sup>73</sup> O'Flaherty, *The Informer*, 58-60. It has been argued that the 'Revolutionary organisation' was 'based in large part' upon the tiny Communist Party of Ireland, and the character of 'Dan Gallagher' was partly modelled on Roddy Connolly, the CPI's secretary during the period when O'Flaherty was a member (Smyth, *The Judas Kiss*, 104).

<sup>74</sup> It is instructive that the relevant section of O'Broin's *Sinn Féin and the Politics of Left Republicanism* is entitled, 'Left Republicanism on the Margins: 1916-26'. It is even more telling that 'communism' does not feature in the index at all.

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<sup>75</sup> Smyth, *The Judas Kiss*, 96-103.

<sup>76</sup> O'Connor, 'Identity and Self-Representation', 38.

<sup>77</sup> Connelly, *The IRA on Film and Television*, 147. Connelly argues that the film depoliticises the republican struggle, by presenting 'Gypo' as undergoing an existential crisis, but one which is divorced from the social or political context of 1920s Dublin. Despite this, Ford's script was rejected by several production companies due to its alleged politically and morally suspect material.

<sup>78</sup> In O'Flaherty's novel, the motivation behind 'Gypo Nolan's' one-off decision to inform the police is not specifically the prospect of buying a passage to America, but a more general recognition that he 'had no money to buy a bed for the night' (*The Informer*, 18-20). In Chalandon's account, 'Tyrone Meehan' tells 'Antoine' that he watched the film over and over again, and that 'the most moving moment is Nolan's face in front of the poster, a shipping company offering a one-way to America for £10.' (*My Traitor*, 142).

<sup>79</sup> O'Flaherty, *The Informer*, 69.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>82</sup> Sheeran, *The Informer*, 12, 34.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>84</sup> Danny Morrison had been a key figure in SF during the 1970s and 1980s, acting as editor of *Republican News*, and as Director of Publicity for SF. After his release from a jail sentence in 1995, he has devoted himself to writing, mainly fiction, but also a volume of memoirs (*All the Dead Voices*, 2002) and a jail journal (*Then the Walls Came Down*, 1999).

<sup>85</sup> Magee, *Gangsters or Guerrillas?* 202.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>87</sup> Lynch had worked as an informer for RUC Special Branch, and he had confessed to the IRA internal security team, making a written statement and oral recording. He was rescued by the intervention of the British Army. For Lynch's testimony, see McKittrick, 'Police informer tells of interrogation by IRA', *Independent*, October 31 1990. See also Sarma, 'Informers and the Battle against Republican Terrorism', 176-7. For Morrison's view of the trial, see *Then the Walls*, passim.

<sup>88</sup> Moloney, *A Secret History*, 334-6. Moloney alleged that Morrison was a senior figure within the IRA, and had been a member of the Army Council for 'the best part of a decade.' According to Fulton, the decision to 'execute' an informer had to be approved by 'someone on the Army Council' (*Unsung Hero*, 185).

<sup>89</sup> Ingram and Harkin, *Stakeknife: Britain's secret agents in Ireland*. See also Moloney, *A Secret History* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), 574-8.

<sup>90</sup> See Moran, 'Evaluating Special Branch', 13; McDonald and Cusack, *UDA*, 138-40; McKittrick et. al., *Lost Lives*, 1093; Moloney, *A Secret History* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), 578.

<sup>91</sup> Ingram and Harkin, *Stakeknife*, passim; Cochrane, 'Security Force Collusion in Northern Ireland', 87-8; Teague, 'Double Blind'.

<sup>92</sup> The 'Stakeknife' case has formed the real-life background to a fictional treatment by Adrian McKinty, who names his protagonist 'Freddie Scavanni' (see McKinty, *The Cold Cold Ground*).

<sup>93</sup> See Sanders, *Inside the IRA*, 239-40; McIntyre, *Good Friday*, 178.



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<sup>94</sup> There are contrasting views regarding the extent to which such collusion was the result of a ‘concerted state policy’ (Moran, ‘Evaluating Special Branch’, 20-1); McGovern (‘Informers, agents and the liberal ideology’, 307) argues that ‘this is not a situation that came about through oversight or an absence of thought’, whereas Kirk-Smith and Dingley (‘Countering terrorism’, 568) believe that ‘overt collaboration in murders may be regarded as real but also as aberrations from policy.’

<sup>95</sup> See Bamford, ‘The role and effectiveness of intelligence in Northern Ireland’, 591. See also Urban, *Big Boys’ Rules*, 245.

<sup>96</sup> Barker, *Shadows*; Gilmour, *Dead Ground*. It is instructive to compare the two accounts of the process of agent recruitment; see Barker, 137-50 and Gilmour, 68-79.

<sup>97</sup> The extent to which Donaldson was a member of the ‘inner circle’ of SF leaders post-1998 is not entirely clear. McIntyre (‘Serving the Agenda of Two Masters’, *Irish News*, 17 December 2005) argues that he was ‘closer to the SF leadership think tank than Freddie Scappaticci’. On the other hand, Brian Rowan has argued that Donaldson was ‘not a major IRA informer or agent.’ (‘Spy killing’).

<sup>98</sup> The Real IRA claimed that it had killed Donaldson in 2009. See BBC News website, 30 January 2013 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-21265659>). (Accessed 31 July 2015). See also *Sunday Tribune*, 12 April 2009; Sanders, *Inside the IRA*, 240-1. Moloney, writing before this admission of responsibility, had argued that the security forces believed that Provisional IRA members had killed Donaldson, but that ‘the operation was probably not authorized by the leadership.’ (*A Secret History*, [2<sup>nd</sup> edn], 583).

<sup>99</sup> In February 2010, the then Ombudsman, Al Hutchinson, had written to the Donaldson family, stating that no police misconduct had been identified. However, in a subsequent BBC Spotlight programme in October 2011, it was alleged that the Ombudsman had not spoken with a Special Branch handler, known as ‘Lenny’, who had been in regular contact with Donaldson in Donegal. A re-investigation was launched by the new Ombudsman, Michael Maguire. See BBC News website, 22 October 2013: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-24627399> (Accessed 31 July 2015).

<sup>100</sup> E. Moloney, ‘So, What’s in Denis Donaldson’s Journal?’ *The Broken Elbow*, April 5 2016. <http://thebrokenelbow.com/2016/04/05/so-whats-in-denis-donaldsons-journal/> (Accessed April 6 2016).

<sup>101</sup> Chalandon, *My Traitor*, 173. The epilogue is entitled ‘Why *My Traitor?*’, and was originally published as a separate commentary.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 174. It is perhaps instructive that ‘Catholic’ should be presented by Chalandon as the first positive quality associated with Donaldson. Chalandon’s own French Catholic and left-wing republican background is surely significant here.

<sup>103</sup> E. Maher, ‘An Irishman’s Diary’, *Irish Times*, 26 March 2012.

<sup>104</sup> Chalandon, *My Traitor*, 176.

<sup>105</sup> Moloney, ‘Afterword’ in Chalandon, *Return to Killybegs*, 273-6.

<sup>106</sup> See obituary notices in *Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian*, inter alia 6 April 2006.

<sup>107</sup> The photograph is reproduced in O’Hearn, *Bobby Sands*, which was published shortly after Donaldson’s unmasking.

<sup>108</sup> Chalandon was born in Tunis in 1952, and was therefore only two years younger than Donaldson.

<sup>109</sup> L. Friel, ‘Securocrat sabotage exposed’, *An Phoblacht*, 15 December 2005.

<sup>110</sup> See J. Freedland, ‘The strange collusion between Downing St. and Sinn Féin’, *The Guardian*, 21 December 2005; Dudai, ‘Informers and the Transition in Northern Ireland’, 41.

<sup>111</sup> O’Doherty, ‘Infiltration for Peace’, 6.

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<sup>112</sup> Moloney, *A Secret History* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), 580. See also Moloney, ‘So, What’s in Denis Donaldson’s Journal?’

<sup>113</sup> D. Kearney, ‘British psy ops and black propaganda – next phase of the peace process?’, *An Phoblacht*, 5 January 2006.

<sup>114</sup> Chalandon, *Return to Killybegs*, 239.

<sup>115</sup> Dudai, ‘Informers and the Transition’, 48. Moloney (*A Secret History* [2<sup>nd</sup> edn.], 579) argues that the Donaldson case remains shrouded in mystery, but ‘events followed upon each other like scenes from a spy movie.’

<sup>116</sup> Chalandon, *Return to Killybegs*, 218.

<sup>117</sup> Bamford, ‘The role and effectiveness of intelligence in Northern Ireland’, 581.

<sup>118</sup> Rowan (‘Spy Killing’) cited a ‘senior intelligence source’ to the effect that Donaldson was not a major IRA informer: “‘We just couldn’t get military stuff out of him.’” Leahy interviewed Danny Morrison, who concurred with this position.

<sup>119</sup> McKearney, *The Provisional IRA*, 143. See also McIntyre, *Good Friday*, 188-9.

<sup>120</sup> McGuinness, cited in L. Friel, ‘Donaldson admits role as British agent’, *An Phoblacht*, 5 January 2006.

<sup>121</sup> Dudai, ‘Informers and the Transition’, 33.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>123</sup> Frampton, *Legion of the Rearguard*, 162.

<sup>124</sup> *Guardian*, 5 April 2011. In 2009, after the killing of another Catholic PSNI officer in Lurgan by the Continuity IRA, McGuinness had argued that those responsible were ‘traitors to the island of Ireland.’ (Sanders, *Inside the IRA*, 238-9).

<sup>125</sup> McIntyre, *Good Friday*, 187.

<sup>126</sup> Chalandon, *My Traitor*, 141-3.

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