

Professionalization of a nonstate actor

Article

Accepted Version

Finnegan, P. (2019) Professionalization of a nonstate actor. *Armed Forces & Society*, 45 (2). pp. 349-367. ISSN 1556-0848
doi: 10.1177/0095327x17741832 Available at
<https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/74364/>

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To link to this article DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0095327x17741832>

Publisher: SAGE Publications

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Professionalization of a Non-State Actor: A Case Study of the Provisional IRA

Abstract: Can non-state militants professionalise? That is the core question of this piece. Discussions of military professionalism have spread to the state military from civilian professions such as education, medicine and law. This piece examines whether non-state actors exhibit the same fundamental processes found within these state-based organisations. These fundamentals are the creation of a recognised internal ethos, which acts as collective standard for those involved. A commitment to expertise and the punishment of those who do not reach these collective expectations reinforces this ethos. To answer this question, this piece will examine the development of the Provisional IRA during the Troubles. It will highlight consistencies and inconsistencies with traditional forces and will argue that groups like the Provisional IRA can professionalise and increase their effectiveness in doing so. This widens the field of professionalism studies and provides an additional lens through which to examine non-state groups.

Introduction

This article addresses whether a Non-State Actor (NSA) can professionalise.ⁱ This discussion aims to demonstrate the applicability of military professionalism beyond the state context. To answer this question this paper will examine the development of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) through some of the lenses used by King (2013) in *The Combat Solider*. This article seeks to expand these theories by investigating whether the same processes took place elsewhere. PIRA provides an excellent example of professionalization within a NSA that allows us to apply and clarify theories of professionalization. The article's analysis of PIRA also provides a model that researchers can fruitfully apply to similar groups, both contemporary such, as Hezbollah, ISIS, or FARC, but also groups with historically non-state origins like the People's Liberation Army.

This paper has chosen PIRA as a case study because they represented a significant threat to the British state for decades, due to their ability to adapt and reorganise when facing existential crisis. PIRA's adaptation consisted of significant downsizing, changes in structure, formalised training, specialisation, and internal regulation. It has also become practice in the literature to refer to PIRA as 'professional' without justification (Bloom, 2016). The findings of this piece will provide basis for that justification. Although there are numerous factors, which contribute to professional development, such as structure, training and various incentives, this paper will focus on the development of a professional ethos and its enforcement. Ethos is the focus of this paper as it represents the basis of other professional attributes. The extent to which an organisation maintains a particular ethos will relate directly to levels of discipline as well as commitment and self-identity within its membership. These factors are each important and directly relate to tactical conduct within the state and non-state context. It is also important to clarify that arguing a group is 'professional' does not equate to

support for that group. As this argument is significantly different from the normal case studies found in this journal, the following paragraphs provide enough context to ensure the reader has sufficient understanding of the organisation in question and its origins.

Context

PIRA waged a thirty-year campaign against Britain for Irish reunification, ultimately failing. However, the rise of their related political party, Sinn Féin, resulted in a power sharing agreement with the unionist DUP, under the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA). The conflict known as the Troubles began in 1966 (Spencer, 2015, p. 44) with a pro-state, 'loyalist', campaign aimed at sparking suppression of an imagined republican plot. Loyalists intended to frame republicans for several bombings and encourage arrests. This was a response to a nationalist, rather than republican, campaign for civil rights. This campaign sought electoral reform, fairer distribution of housing and employment that was gaining traction.ⁱⁱ While this civil rights campaign, championed by the Northern Irish Civil Rights Association, had republican support, it was not republican controlled. Regardless, pro-state groups perceived it as a threat to the status-quo.

By 1969, there was significant protests for civil reform, at times violent as protesters sought media attention and government over-reaction. Large-scale communal violence erupted following riots surrounding a loyalist march in the city of L/Derry.^{iiiiv} When nationalists confronted the marchers, a riot ensued with the police eventually forcing their way into barricaded areas. As this continued over several days, nationalists began agitation throughout Northern Ireland by establishing further barricaded areas and rioting elsewhere to relieve pressure on nationalists in L/Derry by spreading the police thin. This resulted in further conflicts and the mobilisation of loyalist groups, either paramilitary or partisan police reservists (Bourke, 2003, p. 48). In some areas, such as in Belfast, these would follow police clearances and burn nationalist homes, known as the

‘Belfast Pogroms’. These attacks occurred alongside heavy-handed policing, including the deployment of heavy machine guns and armoured cars resulting in civilian deaths (McKittrick, 2001, p. 34). These riots and the exhaustion of the police force led to the introduction of the British military to restore order. This deployment, known as Operation Banner, would last from August 1969 until July 2007. The military were essential in returning a state of normality through bringing violence to ‘an acceptable level’. Although, the army were also involved in internment sweeps, Bloody Sunday, killing civilians, suspected collusion with pro-state groups, and allegations of ‘Shoot-to-Kill’ policies.

Amidst these events, republicans struggled to come to terms with the role expected of them. The IRA had existed since the early twentieth century. Republicans had waged generational campaigns against Britain, such as the 1916 Easter Rising, the 1919 – 1921 War of Independence, bombings in Britain during 1939-1940, and along the Irish border in the 50s and 60s. Following failure in the latter, the IRA leadership decided on a political approach and began demilitarising the organisation. This resulted in an inability to defend nationalists in anything other than a small-scale, localised fashion. This demilitarisation and a failure to fulfil its traditional role as a nationalist/Catholic defence organisation resulted in a split between the ‘Official’ and ‘Provisional’ branches in December 1969, and in Sinn Féin in January 1970. While both branches waged violent campaigns, attempting to establish dominance over one another, the Officials eventually agreed to a ceasefire in 1972 and PIRA moved to the forefront, remaining there until the GFA. During this period, PIRA conducted thousands of attacks resulting in the death or injury of thousands, civilian, military, police, and paramilitaries on all sides including their own. PIRA’s initial strategy was to render Northern Ireland ungovernable through mass violence and disruption of the economic and social life of the region.^v In terms of actual members during the early 70s, White &

White (1991) claim that in Belfast alone there were over 1,000 members, ‘Volunteers’ to use PIRA’s terminology, organised into loose territorial ‘Brigades’. This strategy centred on the belief that rapid destabilisation combined with military casualties equalling previous colonial conflicts, such as Aden or Kenya, would force the British government and interests in the area to withdraw.

There was some merit in this belief as by 1972, Stormont, the devolved assembly of Northern Ireland collapsed. Crucially, PIRA’s strategy did not predict the lengths Westminster was prepared to go to maintain governance of the area. This period would see continued conflict and intermittent negotiations, but by the time PIRA declared a temporary ceasefire in February 1975, lasting until January 1976 they were ‘on their knees except in South Armagh and on the Fermanagh border’.^{vi} This ceasefire provided a number of internal ‘mavericks’ the opportunity to begin a reorganisation that would lead to professionalisation. Specifically these reforms related to leadership, structure, strategy, and operational focus, all of which had an impact on the combat effectiveness of the organisation (Northern PIRA Volunteer, 2016). In effect, PIRA sought to reorganise and adapt its practice, to professionalise, as a means to maintain its existence and relevance militarily and politically. Bloom (2016, p. 3) has shown that organisations, regardless of type, hold survival as the main goal, successful adaptation ensures survival. Part of this survival was the adoption of the ‘Long War’ strategy. This strategy, rather than focusing on rapid destabilisation, prioritised resource husbandry and fewer but more effective combatants conducting sustainable operations over a number of years, decades if necessary. Simultaneously, the republican movement should develop the political awareness of the wider community into a political tool. Collectively, these approaches became the ‘Armalite and Ballot box’ strategy. This required the development of a professional ethos within the organisation, discussed in detail below. This increased politicisation, and the emergence of a dedicated leadership

cadre, separate from the actual fighting (Moloney, pp. 153-158), occurred alongside increased levels of professionalisation, allowing for continued survival in a changing military and political environment.

While the above provides contextual information for the reader, it does not necessarily justify applying professionalism theory to PIRA. This validity comes from three sources. Firstly, PIRA itself consciously sought to professionalise along recognisable lines, therefore we should seek to understand the results, particularly if they demonstrate similar findings to other military actors. Secondly, professionalism theory first expanded to the military from the study of other professions, such as medicine and law (Thistlethwaite & Spencer, 2008; Durkheim, 2013; Brundage, 2008). Huntington makes this clear in his work (1957, p. 7). This expansion resulted in increased understanding of military organisations; the extension of these theories even farther from their original context will further test their validity, potentially expanding their utility. Finally, and most importantly, is the fact that the most recent works concerning professionalisation within the military have focused on developments and activities at the small-unit level. Terror organisations rely on success at this level, excluding perhaps the largest groups throughout history, who begin to operate more like quasi-states (Cronin, 2015, p. 88). Terror organisations rely on small-unit success to achieve their aims; they do not have the resources to operate on higher levels of strategic effect. While ISIS may have been able to deploy large formations of infantry and light vehicles, the most influential attacks throughout history, such as 9/11, relied on small units operating effectively. Understanding how these activities succeed has not been the focus of terrorism studies, which generally focus on campaigns or network analysis. By employing the methods used to track the development of professional small-unit tactics within western armed forces it will be possible to gain an insight into how these small units operate and generate success, or, indeed, fail. The remainder of

this piece will deal directly with the question at hand. This will be done through an illustration of professionalism within the military is currently understood. As stated above the various factors that denote professionalism stem from the creation of a particular ethos, as such the discussion of ethos will form the basis of this discussion.

Military professionalism

The 'military profession' has its roots in the works of Huntington (1957) and Janowitz (1961), surrounding the transformation of Western militaries from conscript forces towards all-volunteer models. Huntington (1957) defined professionalism in relation to civil-military relations. Importantly, he also identified the role of expertise and identity. Professionalism is 'a special type of vocation', distinguished by expertise, responsibility and corporateness: 'The professional man is an expert with specialized knowledge and skill in a significant field of human endeavour...The responsibility to serve and devotion to his skill furnish the professional motive. Financial remuneration cannot be the primary aim of the professional...members...share a sense of organic unity and consciousness...as a group apart...'. (1957, pp. 8-10). Professionals should devote themselves to expertise in an area including when material reward would be greater elsewhere. They will have significant experience employing this skill either through training or previous practice. Finally, individuals should identify with one another through shared expertise and through a collective ethos. Regarding military professionalism, officers in particular, expertise, responsibility and corporateness relates to the 'management of violence' (Huntington, p. 11). Corporateness and the creation of a professional ethos, is important, as this is where regulation appears. Huntington claims a 'sense of unity manifests itself in a professional organization which formalizes and applies the standards of professional competence and establishes and enforces the standards of professional responsibility' (1957, p. 8).

Huntington is not alone in identifying these aspects. King (2013, pp. 217-220) has stated similarly that: ‘The military profession is characterized by a distinctive form of expertise but the genesis, maintenance, and refinement of this expertise relies not on technical knowledge but on a collective ethos: a vocational commitment to excellence which will ensure the reputation of the armed forces in civilian society’. Briefly, King highlighted how professionalisation results in major transformations in structure, training regime, operational procedure and internal regulation of western militaries. This results in smaller, more capable forces with increased battlefield performance – better ‘cohesion’. Ultimately amounting to a ‘concentration’ of force and new forms of motivation and identification (2013, pp. 213, 338-375). Importantly, King has extended professionalism beyond the officer corps and demonstrated that western militaries, the US and UK in particular, have professionalised. This includes an expansion of professional motivation, driven by the desire for expertise, and a professional identity throughout the organisation. Through extreme attention to detail, extensive training and preparation, motivation based upon one’s identity as a ‘professional soldier’, the modern military has successfully increased its capacity even though it has significantly downsized. Included within this development has been the emergence of different forms of regulation and discipline regarding professional standing and ability. As with Huntington, King highlights organisation, identity, expertise, and self-regulation, but he also identified ethos as the focal point of professionalism.

While the above provides an understanding of military professionalism, material studying professionalism mainly concerns itself with civilian professions such as medicine, legal work, or education. However, little work focuses on how non-state organisations, of any kind, have professionalised.^{vii} This is because the state protects and accredits everyday professions (Abbott 1988, p. 10). This necessitates the questioning of how our understanding of professionalism is applicable to an anti-state

organisation. This paper would argue that professionalisation is not dependant on state recognition. While civilian populations rely upon formal accreditation, NSAs rely on practical acceptance based on their skill and informal accreditation from their peers. While they will not receive the same formal acknowledgment, their position within the group and their relationship with others will act as their accreditation. This is significant because it widens the field of professionalism studies beyond the state while simultaneously providing an additional lens with which to view these groups. Just as there are few works dealing with professionalism in non-state actors, so too are there few which examine small-unit effectiveness. Additionally, the works that do examine effectiveness and terror groups do not use the lens of professionalism. For instance, Oppenheimer (2009) considers the development of PIRA's weapons but technology only explains effectiveness so far. Some have investigated the development of certain capabilities or structures (Bloom, 2016; Corman, 2006; Forest, 2006); although they do not fully use the same analytical tools available through professionalism theory.

There are some examples available to guide this study. Higate's work on the national differences between Private Military Contractors (PMCs) and their varying levels of professionalism provides some insight. Although PMCs are predominantly staffed by former military personnel and, often, act accordingly, although not always so (Brooks, 1999; Higate, 2011). Other works, such as a RAND report conduct a discussion of the 'professionalism' of the Algerian Military (Quandt, 1972). This report discusses professionalism in a cultural sense, as Farrell (2001; 2005) would in a military transformation debate. Previously a guerrilla army, the Algerian military professionalised by mimicking the militaries of France and Russia for international legitimacy. Similarly, a number of works focus on the financial understanding of professionalism to explain the changes made by social movements (Jenkins & Eckert, 1986; Staggenborg, 1988). An illuminating example of the understanding of

professionalism presented above is Button, John, and Brearley's (2002) work on environmental-violence. The authors illustrate how a committed group of protesters have 'gained considerable experience at a number of protest sites, and become more innovative and sophisticated in the tactics they adopt' (2002, p. 19). Additionally, they argue that this body of 'professional' protestors have undergone a processes similar to professionalisation elsewhere: 'these include the emergence of full-time protesters, trained to very high standards in forms of protest, built upon a growing 'body of knowledge', and governed by codes of conduct (albeit unwritten ones)' (2002, p. 21). Another useful piece in expanding professionalism within NSAs is Ortiz's (2002) work on FARC. As Ortiz states:

'After becoming a member of FARC, the organization assumes the task of transforming the recruit into a revolutionary combatant. To move forward in this process, the insurgent group uses a three-part strategy that includes the development of an extensive political-military education plan, the imposition of rigid discipline, and the establishment of absolute control over its members. The combination of these three tools allows the organization to absorb the individual, secure his loyalty, and place all his personal resources in the service of the cause' (2002, p. 136).

Here we see commitment, development of skills and, as Ortiz makes clear earlier, acceptance and enforcement of collective standards. These works, although few in number, are important and provide a basis from which to develop the discussion further.

Before proceeding, it is important to point out two additional caveats. Firstly, there are significant differences between a professional organisation and the professionalisation of its membership as individuals. There are always cases where members of a professional organisation have acted unprofessionally, including the military (King, 2013, pp. 373-374). Secondly, the question of professionalism is not binary. Rather, organisations fill a variety of positions on a scale in relation to one another. The membership of each organisation would also represent a sliding scale rather than strict, polar positions in a binary system. Abbott sees this relationship as the source of professionalism to begin with. He argues (1988, p. 33) that the competition for

jurisdiction over particular expertise is how professions form and function. With this understanding as a basis, the remainder of this paper will illustrate how PIRA moved along the scale of professionalism through the development of a professional ethos.

PIRA's ethos

Professionalism occurs through a number of processes. These depend on the creation and maintenance of a professional ethos. This creates a 'moral sphere' (King, 2013, p. 342) within which individuals should act accordingly. There may be divergence if we examine each member individually but PIRA deliberately attempted to instil specific values and codes of conduct in its membership. As King (2013, p. 342) states: 'Professionalism may not simply be a series of practical skills...but also a morality which obligates soldiers to perform their role properly and, indeed, comport themselves generally in a manner which their professional status and colleagues demand'. By examining the evidence presented below, we can see that similar processes developed within PIRA. Ethos is important as it identifies the boundaries of what an organisation expects of its members as well as what it will not tolerate. If we correctly understand ethos as a dedication to skill that ensures the reputation of organisation, it is possible to identify several ways in which it is constructed. Firstly, those attempting to embody this ethos should be dedicated to their expertise even if personal gain may be greater elsewhere. There is also a collective identity. Importantly, there is a collective understanding that deviance is punishable, thus enforcing these expectations. Provided this ethos is maintained, its embodiment acts as the motivation for the professional membership, it becomes their 'status honour' (King, p. 363). While the development of skill itself is beyond the scope of this piece, it is possible to highlight how PIRA and its membership developed their expertise. Briefly, these advances are visible in both PIRA's increased resilience and in its ability to conduct operations. For instance, increased specialisation resulted in a dramatic decrease in self-inflicted casualties due to

mishandling of explosives, from eighty-four in the first six years of the conflict to eighteen over the remaining twenty-four. This reduction is not explainable without acknowledging the impact of professionalism. While semtex provided a safer bomb-making material, PIRA used only half of its stockpile and homemade explosives remained PIRA's primary material. Equally, this decline is not due to reduced activity. PIRA conducted more operations after its reorganisation both overall and on an average annual basis, almost double according to GTD.^{viii}

In line with Abbott, internal and external recognition motivates the development of expertise. Individuals must recognise their collective dedication to a skill in preference to any other factor. They may diverge elsewhere but they must maintain a collective dedication to form a self-regulatory community. External recognition is also important. For most professional bodies, this comes from accreditation and the awarding of qualifications. For instance, junior military officers and NCOs undergo various trials and courses before deployment and command. If candidates fail these courses, they do not progress (King, p. 240). In this case, traditional recognition was, by definition, impossible to obtain. Indeed, when states deal with non-state groups they endeavour to avoid providing them with any recognition whatsoever (English, 2009, p. 1). There are many examples of this such as refusing to negotiate or to refer to NSAs as anything but terrorists or criminals. In relation to PIRA, examples include the refusal of British authorities to use Gaelicised names for republicans, using the English translation and questioning their 'Irish-ness'.^{ix} Although, while traditional sources of recognition may not be available other options remain.

Recognition of skill

Regarding external recognition, we can look to governments who, contrary to stated policy, often engage NSAs in direct negotiation. This was the case with numerous British governments and PIRA's leadership. Although generally secret some instances,

such as in 1972, publicly provided PIRA and particular individuals with the recognition needed to claim positions within the wider community as protectors, leaders, and representatives. Various statements made by governments and their departments are linked to this. In 2006, the Ministry of Defence describes the transformation PIRA underwent during its lifetime stating ‘PIRA’s attacks were fewer; but more selective, better conducted and more effective. This period demonstrated the emergence of PIRA as a highly effective terrorist organisation’ (Chief of the General Staff, 2006, p. 2/12). This mirrors another, penned in 1979: ‘Their weapons are more powerful, and although the emphasis remains on attacks on members of the security forces and commercial targets, the attacks themselves are more carefully planned and better coordinated’.^x Both acknowledge that PIRA underwent a change resulting in expanded capacity. Additionally, at the organisational level, recognition depends on how heavily an organisation enforces its ethos. In the case of PIRA, this pressure was substantial.

One of the most significant events during the reform period was the introduction, from the late 70s onwards, of the *Green Book*. This detailed the standards expected of those involved and their rights and responsibilities. This served several purposes. Firstly, instruction in its contents occurred alongside anti-interrogation training, resulting in reduced arrests and infiltration. Secondly, it served as an entry requirement for recruits; if not ‘Greenbooked’, they could not formally serve. While this did not prevent some operating in a limited capacity, these individuals were not ‘full’ members. Additionally, those not ‘Greenbooked’, theoretically, were not subject to full disciplinary force, as General Order No. 15 of the IRA states: ‘No Volunteer convicted by a Court-martial on a capital offence can be executed if that Volunteer can show that he did not receive instructions in the Green Book.’ (Dillon, 1994, p. 274).

Thirdly, it identified to members how they and the organisation should act. Its wording is clear, in line with King’s definition of ethos, that it permeate their personal

lives: ‘The Army...claims and expects your total allegiance without reservation. It enters into every aspect of your life. It invades the privacy of your home life, it fragments your family and friends, in other words claims your total allegiance’.^{xi} Examples include being honest ‘in all matters relating to the public, both in terms of official and private business. Whilst the majority of members are from working-class backgrounds, a business-person...who provides a poor serviced [sic] to the public or who exploits the public in business dealings is no asset to the republican cause’ (Dillon, 1994, p. 281). In addition: ‘All Volunteers are expected to act in an honourable way so as the struggle is not harmed or undermined. Any Volunteer who brings the Army into disrepute by his/her behaviour may be guilty of a breach of his/her duties and responsibilities as a Volunteer...and may be dismissed’ (Dillon, 1994, p. 274). As one participant (S. A. Volunteer, 2016) stated, it was more difficult to maintain membership, through continued competence and adhering to regulations, than to gain entry. Another interesting element of PIRA’s standing regulations is the prohibition of members using their skills acquired through membership in any other organisation (Dillon, p. 274). This is interesting because it provides an example of how PIRA attempted to control their members through formal regulation. Several regulations forbade external activity. As M.L.R. Smith (1995, p. 11) reports, PIRA claimed “a monopoly on true Irish patriotism”. This is the same language used by Abbott on how professional bodies establish their claims. Practically, this was an attempt to control unsanctioned activity and the formation of splinter groups.

Micro-level recognition is also important, but is perhaps more elusive. That said evidence of this is identifiable. Firstly, it is possible to trace communal recognition through recruitment levels, especially when compared to ‘competitors’. As one participant (N. P. Volunteer, 2016) stated he chose PIRA because the Officials declared a ceasefire in 1972, removing themselves from the competition over republican

violence. Secondly, the opinions of those combatting PIRA also illustrate skill recognition. Important in this case are the British military. When asked whether PIRA professionalised British military participants responded to the affirmative. Although they found difficulty in providing PIRA with any public credibility, as professionals themselves, they recognised their skills. Responses included:

‘If they ever got someone you knew that it was because they were good...we did a big OP in South Armagh when I was there. We were all out doing out it and they [hit us hard]. Not because we were crap but because they were better than us.’ (British Infantryman, 2016).

‘We respected them because we thought they were pretty damn good at what they did. Whether it was a mutual respect and whether respect was the right word I don’t know, but we did recognise that they were skilled at what they did and they trained at what they did and they were highly effective when it all came together’ (R. M. I. Officer, 2016).

While the clandestine nature of PIRA limited the detail available to these participants, from the responses we see the state military recognised PIRA and its membership for their expertise.

Internally, there is also evidence of a micro-level recognition. When asked whether PIRA professionalised one former Volunteer responded:

‘Yes, there was a huge drive...there were guys like Brian Keenan, who was hugely instrumental in all of that. Keenan desperately wanted to professionalise it. He is the guy who introduced quality control. Getting the right people into the right jobs. There was roles for guys, he started to say, “Come on you have to approach this like you would approach any business.” The worse thing is to have the wrong people in the wrong jobs’ (P. T. Officer, 2016).

Professionalism does not stop at organisational and technical issues. As King and Bury (2015, p. 213) illustrated, emotive links and support which become attached to technical proficiency also matter. When another participant was asked about these links, he stated:

‘It was being seen as part of a big movement, seen as comrades, comradeship on the outside, comradeship in the jails, it still exists today...you look forward to seeing the old hands you were in jail with. Boys you’ll never forget, boys you operated with you’d never, ever, forget them. So yes there was a good feeling of not being let down, everybody knew what they were at and knew what they had to do. Very much, very much. There was a good professionalism about it’ (P. O. Officer, 2016).

Another participant mirrored these feelings when he detailed the development of a familial atmosphere within his unit (S. A. Volunteer, 2016).

Deviance: punishment and shame

Professionalism entails the development of status honour for participants, a pride in membership and the success of their organisation. Indeed, the *Green Book* states ‘No-one has been press-ganged into republicanism. If you cannot do the struggle the honour of your service, then do not do it the dishonour of a disservice. It is as simple as that’ (Dillon, p. 282). This poses the question of what then happens when a disservice occurs? Scholars have identified two main consequences for those deviating from accepted norms: shame and punishment. ‘Punishment’ is the physical consequences, while ‘shame’ is the social component. While professional militaries use punishment and shame to encourage particular behaviours, PIRA used them to discourage. There are many examples of how punishment played a role throughout the Troubles. Some works (Sanders, 2013; Sarma, 2007) have focused on communal policing; however, this work will focus on those directly involved in PIRA. Perhaps most important is the experiences of informants. Punishment for informing was, generally, twofold. Firstly, informants and their families were stigmatised, preventing other members from joining PIRA in the future. Secondly, informers were usually, but not always, executed. After an execution, those responsible would leave the body in a public area as a warning.

The exception to this were the ‘disappeared’, who were secretly killed and buried. PIRA integrated this ultimate sanction into its standard practice and it acted as an internal deterrent, particularly through the creation of an internal security unit. While some have called into question the extent to which this unit operated, it seems clear that they acted as internal policemen and, in professional terms, ethical enforcers (P. T. Officer, 2016). This unit, headed by a former member of the UK’s Special Boat Service, formed a part of how PIRA intended to fight its Long War by tackling infiltration

(Collins & McGovern, p. 237; Moloney, p. 575). This unit was so active that some argued Volunteers feared it more than the security forces (Collins & McGovern, p. 142). Although this unit intended to hunt informers, others (Harkin & Ingram, p. 97; Moloney, pp. 574-578) claim it was itself infiltrated and used to undermine PIRA.

Importantly, punishment is only effective if those involved fear its implementation – empty threats do nothing (King, p. 98). The fate of informers demonstrated how PIRA statements about punishment for ‘treason’ were not hollow. Regarding how PIRA informers and their punishment informs investigations of professionalism, it is interesting that although PIRA moved towards a professional mentality, its reliance on execution reflects the same reliance of mass armies during the early twentieth centuries. While ‘capital punishment was important to the citizen army...discipline has become less necessary precisely because soldiers are imbued with a sense of professional honour. The prime motivating and disciplining factor in combat is that they gain the respect of their peers for upholding professional standards’ (King, p. 368). This increased reliance on executions may point towards a lack of professionalism. Alternatively, this increased policing resulted from an increased commitment of collective standards. While paramilitaries always punish informers, PIRA built its reformation on lessening infiltration. Increased use of capital punishment, contrary to our understanding of modern militaries, might not indicate a lack of professionalism, rather a determination to enforce collective standards and practices.

Another important factor to consider when dealing with the raw numbers of those executed is the role played by agents attempting to maintain their positions in the internal security unit, based on their ability to ‘unmask’ others. The second disciplinary measure is the use of shame. Professional status honour provides the basis for recognise and the ability to collectively operate without, or in the face of, previous social connections. It allows professionals to judge one another in relation to accepted criteria.

When individuals do not act correctly, they suffer professional shame and dishonour. Two examples demonstrated the role of shame: the fates of ‘Seán’ and Billy McKee. ‘Seán’ was ‘the best OC, from the IRA’s viewpoint, that [South Down] ever had.’ (Collins & McGovern, 1997, p. 164). Although an exceptional operator, he disgraced himself by attempting to engage with another man’s wife sexually. He was court martialled and expelled for ‘immoral conduct’.

While ‘Seán’ was a low-level commander, McKee rose to command the Belfast Brigade and became president of the Provisional Army Council (PAC), PIRA’s command group. McKee was also one of PIRA’s most important original members, having cemented his reputation by personally defending St. Matthew’s Church during the Belfast pogroms. Importantly, McKee had also clashed with OIRA while commander. Although some saw the conflict between PIRA and loyalists as the conflict’s foundation, for an organisation attempting to maintain a non-sectarian, republican appearance, this was problematic, enabling observers to describe the conflict as sectarian. During the 1975 ceasefire, PIRA/OIRA skirmishes resulted in casualties on both sides. Conflict resurfaced in 1977, when OIRA attacked PIRA after mistaking a loyalist bomb for one of theirs. The reformers charged McKee with having encouraged retaliation against OIRA, without PAC permission, while loyalists were killing civilians and no retaliation occurred (Moloney, p. 167). Fundamentally, McKee’s actions brought PIRA’s reputation into question, as a ‘non-sectarian, republican movement’ and later as ‘nationalist defenders’. By feuding with other paramilitaries some claimed McKee played into British hands, who argued ‘that the Troubles were a communal conflict, not an anticolonial war’ (Moloney, p. 167). Secondly, McKee acted without PAC permission, contravening standing orders. While McKee did not face physical punishment, the reformers successfully targeted his reputation and at command-level meetings before his dismissal, only one other spoke in his defence (Moloney, p. 168).

Interestingly, McKee also provides an example of how shame could influence decisions concerning informers. McKee's reputation, before his dismissal, resulted in the situation where one of his relations, an informer, was 'disappeared' rather than being executed normally. He was the first of the 'disappeared' and the execution was carried out in such a manner to, ironically, avoid shaming a reputable figure. In the case of McKee, we can then see that shame could be used both as a tool to regulate the organisation as well as something to be avoided in certain circumstances.

Counter argument: personal gain

It is important to acknowledge that ethos maintenance was not always possible. Commentators have highlighted the role of personal gain for some republicans, a direct contradiction of PIRA's stated ethos and understandings of professionalism. This is particularly the case when activity on the Irish border are concerned. One participant stated that the various categories of threat in these areas, terrorists and criminals, were synonymous (Commander, 2016). Collins and McGovern (1997, pp. 14-15) also pointed to certain units, such as in South Down, for self-enrichment. This resulted from the kind of recruit that the unit attracted: 'social misfits and petty criminals'. They also identify individuals who took part for personal gain such as 'Hardbap', who was transferred to the border while 'on the run'. 'Hardbap' was one of several Volunteers from Belfast who had to live south of the border. Collins and McGovern (1997, p. 82) describe these individuals, who formed their own primary group within the locality, as 'A conspicuous minority [who] spent their time getting pissed, starting fights with the locals, stealing other IRA men's women, running up debts all over the town and even carrying out robberies for themselves'. They recall how during a hotel bombing, Hardbap robbed the tills, dampening Collins' opinion of the operation and 'made the IRA look like common criminals' (1997, p. 103).

While smuggling related claims are correct, PIRA controlled much, if not all, the smuggling in its areas, it is possible that there is an inversion of the order of participation. These border areas have dense social connections with republicanism a part of local culture. Smuggling occurred before and after the Troubles. With these close-knit communities, it is more likely that individuals were smuggling before they were active with PIRA, they simply continued after recruitment. One participant (P. T. Officer) argued that these social or employment connections were how recruiters identified future Volunteers: a 'recruit, say an 18-year-old from [Belfast], joins and he is fine. People sort of know him... There is a huge difference in that and the guy on the farm across from [South Armagh republican] who knows his dad, his uncles, his brother, his ma, went out with his sister'. This suggests that recruitment was not dependent upon a desire for personal gain, rather local knowledge. The question remains, however, of whether the organisation condoned this form of activity.

Referring to units on the border, particularly the unit mentioned above, it is interesting to note that although command did not disband these units, they did malign them. Collins (1997, pp. 14-15) points out that prior to joining the unit it had an 'atrocious reputation. Stating: 'They had lost their independent command and battalion status, and were run [externally] because... [they] could not be trusted to command anything... They had been responsible for the loss and theft of so much irreplaceable weaponry that they were no longer trusted with weapons of their own'. This suggests that during this period the organisation may have allowed individuals to benefit from operations, even if it would not facilitate their activities. Provided they completed their tasks, the leadership would not overtly punish them, although the removal of this unit's independent status and weapons signalled to others that they were a risk.

While certain individuals may have benefited from their activities, this is in stark contrast to the payments to lower level members. Horgan (1999, p. 16) claims: 'Weekly

PIRA wages only supplement social welfare payments, or income from part-time or full-time employment, varying from member to member, as operational roles are likewise varied'. Other participants have corroborated this. For example 'I remember [hearing a discussion between two PIRA members and one says that [the other] "depends for everything on the IRA...that is his entire life structure, down to a pair of shoes, everything". To which he replied, "My brother bought me my last pair of shoes!"' (P. T. Officer). These statements confirm that PIRA members were paid little but also that this payment was insufficient to survive, it was a token or an additional sum on top of another income or support. Indeed, there are many cases where the organisation punished low-level members for attempting to enrich themselves; these punishments included killings.^{xiii} These punishments were in line with *Green Book* regulations and warnings. Examples of the latter include: 'There is every likelihood that you will be imprisoned or killed within a short time... This is a serious business... There will be no material rewards whatsoever, now or in the future.... Remember, that you will inevitably come into conflict with your families, girlfriends and friends. This is not an easy thing...' (O'Doherty, p. 46). Another stated: 'When you join... you're told straight up, you'll either spend a long time in jail or you'll die.... I know nobody that has benefited financially, materially in any way... all I know... in most people that I know... people have suffered a lot, and given up a lot... broken families... imprisonment... people who lost their jobs' (Horgan & Taylor, p. 22). In terms of personal gain, some did seek to use their position to benefit financially, but the remainder of the organisation perceived them as self-interested and maligned them, in some cases killing them.

Conclusion

This paper has shown how PIRA developed a professional ethos, reliant upon internal and external recognition. Discipline and the threat of shame enforced this ethos. This resulted in expanded capacity through increased expertise and commitment. This

was in response to an existential crisis ignited by the 1975 ceasefire. These ‘soft’ elements of professionalism worked in concert with ‘harder’ aspects, including improved training and specialisation to ensure that PIRA adopted professional characteristics, which influenced its combat effectiveness. PIRA successfully downsized from thousands of low-trained personnel who responded to events on the ground, to hundreds of committed individuals who were motivated by being a recognised member of the organisation. This participation depended upon skill and those who embodied the professional ethos looked down upon those who sought personal gain from their activities, in some cases killing them. This paper also highlighted how reformers used shame as a disciplinary tool, similar to other professional organisations.

The above illustrates how researchers can extend professionalism theory beyond its current reach, further enhancing our knowledge of non-state actors. To achieve this, research into contemporary and historical cases is essential. Two prime candidates are FARC and Hezbollah. Both groups have shown their historic sustainability and technical skill. They have shown an ability to create a pervasive identity that regulates activity. This is the foundation of professionalism; a committed examination of these groups will prove its presence. We can examine historical actors such as the Baader-Meinhof group to highlight a lack of professionalism. Conversely, groups that later become state forces are also useful candidates for study, such as the People's Liberation Army, as they show how NSAs can develop into state forces. This expansion serves to provide both increased understanding of these groups but also the practical consequences of their actions and the response to them. Rather than viewing non-state groups as inherently different, it is possible to understand them in much the same way as other forces by using theories such as professionalism.

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Notes

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- ⁱ The author would like to thank the reviewers for their comprehensive feedback.
- ⁱⁱ Both desire unification, republicans during this period believed unification was best achieved through violence.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Nationalists use Derry while unionists use Londonderry. L/Derry is used throughout.
- ^{iv} While seeking to remain part of the UK, loyalist groups tried to violently maintain the status quo. Unionist tradition includes marches throughout Northern Ireland, some of which aim to intimidate nationalist populations.
- ^v *Activities of Sinn Fein and Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland (FCO 87/1)*, 1971-1972.
- ^{vi} *Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) ceasefires: measures to be made in response; correspondence with Headquarters Northern Ireland; Christmas ceasefire, 1974; extension and breakdown (CJ 4/1225)*.
- ^{vii} Some tenuous examples are (Button, John, & Brearley, 2002; Henriksen & Vinci, 2007; Higate, 2011) These have been described as tenuous as they do not specifically deal with professionalism, instead taking it for granted or discuss other factors associated with professionalism, without discussing it directly.
- ^{viii} Casualty information found at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/> and attack data sourced from GTD.
- ^{ix} *Activities of Sinn Fein and Irish Republican Army (FCO 87/3)*, 1972-1973
- ^x *IRELAND. Situation in Northern Ireland; part 1 (PREM 19/80)*, 1979.
- ^{xi} "Text of Irish Republican Army (IRA) 'Green Book' (Book I and II)," available at http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/ira/ira_green_book.htm
- ^{xii} *Briefing on the IRA - The IRA: Finance and Weapons (26 May 1983)*, (NIO/12/525A).