

How Could They Kill Them?

An Intimate History of Political Killings During the Northern Ireland 'Troubles'

So what I wanted to talk about today in my paper is my current research. Until relatively recently the study of human violence has been a fairly under-researched field. I would argue that two vital questions exist in relation to human violence; why do humans participate in these actions and how are they able to carry out violent acts. Much of the research in this field concentrates on why it was that individuals carried out acts of violence, if you like, their socio-political motivations. Whilst recognising the importance of macro-factors my research ring fences them and concentrates mainly on the micro-dynamics of violence. This approach is underpinned by the contention that macro conditions are too often present and violence does not occur. For example it is obvious despite the levels of violence during the Troubles that only a relatively small number of individuals became directly involved in the conflict. The majority who did not become involved in the violence did so not only because they did not agree with the political objectives of the armed groups but also because they did not approve of their violent methods. Those who did become involved in the violence were those who could partake in such actions because of a natural ability or like of violence and also those who were able to become involved in these actions through certain pathways.

It therefore seems to me as a logical first step to any understanding of violence that micro dynamics must be examined. This is the approach of my research in relation to the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland where there has been no study which has attempted to explain how it was that individuals were able to kill. In essence my research attempts to fill this gap by exploring the processes which enabled people to participate in such actions through a minute reconstruction of events. It will examine a number of 'low profile' murders that occurred during the Troubles which I consider vitally important for our understanding of the violence

that took place. It is hoped that the examination of these ‘forgotten murders’ will help victims and survivors, and society in general, to come to a better understanding of these events. My research will also examine three major events of the ‘Troubles’, Bloody Sunday 1972, the Corporal Killings 1988 and the murder of Billy Wright 1997, which I hope will also further our understanding and help demonstrate the usefulness of this approach.

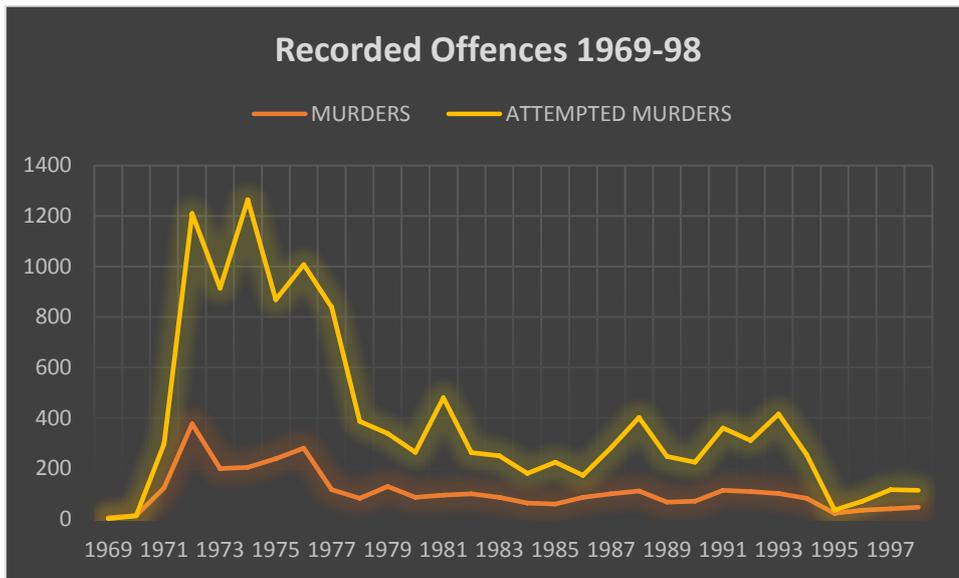
I suppose the starting point for this research is the simple assertion that most human beings dislike and are not particularly good at violence. As well as having a natural dislike for violence they also fear violence, or it is probably more precise to say that they fear a violent reaction from whoever they are targeting; they may also fear failure in their desired objective. As a consequence on most occasions when humans feel that it necessary or choose to resort to offensive violence they do so on the principle of having the advantage, or a perceived advantage, over their intended target. Furthermore even those good at, or who like, violence base their strategy on this same *attacker advantage* premise.

At this point I would just like to make an important distinction in relation to the successful use of violence and that is that there is a difference between attacking the weak and having an attacker advantage. If we consider the Troubles it is clear that some attacks did not involve what could be considered a weak enemy. For instance in the case of the two corporals who were attacked in 1988 at the funeral of IRA man Kevin Brady. Both men were armed with Browning Automatic Pistols and had up to 48 rounds of ammunition available to them. So they certainly could not be considered as weak opponents but the crowd attacked them because they perceived themselves to have the numerical, emotional and situational advantage over the soldiers.

I would further argue that most kinds of warfare also to a large extent are based on this *attacker advantage* principle. Opposing sides fearful of losing and wanting desperately to win attack each other with tactics which are based on finding the opponents weakest point. As Ardant Du Picq, the French Army officer and military theorist of the mid-nineteenth century outlines ‘Man taxes his ingenuity to be able to kill without the risk of being killed’. Additionally asymmetric warfare is a term that has been used to describe many conflicts including the Northern Ireland ‘Troubles’. In this type of warfare the insurgents typically use terroristic tactics to fight their stronger opponent, if you like they attack when it is advantageous to them. These tactics are often frowned upon and criticised as cowardly especially by state authorities. However it should also be understood that the stronger belligerent in the conflict, usually the state, also adopts the same technique of attacking when they have the advantage. All of this merely strengthens the assertion that the attacker having an advantage or perceived advantage is a major factor in the successful use of violence.

The sociologist Randall Collins asserts that the majority of fighters are largely incompetent in their use of violence and it is only when the strong attack the weak that most violence is successful. The incompetent performance of soldiers in combat has been noted by many scholars and is also apparent in the violence that occurred during the ‘Troubles’. During the almost thirty years of conflict in Northern Ireland according to police statistics there were 3,273 murders and 11,806 attempted murders meaning that 78% of all planned murders were unsuccessful . Moreover these figures do not take into account the number of planned attacks that never materialised.

Table 1: Murders v Attempted Murders in the Troubles



There is an abundance of literature covering the Northern Ireland ‘Troubles’ in relation to republicans, loyalists and indeed the security forces. Much of this literature describes the involvement of these respective groups in the conflict and the macro factors which provide an explanation of their roles whilst at the same time revealing some micro-dynamics of the violence that took place. However the micro-dynamics of the violence is an area which has received scant consideration from scholars this is an area that my research seeks to address by focusing of on the *attacker advantage* principle that transpired during the ‘Troubles’.

One of the main issues, in dealing with the Troubles legacy has been trying to come to some understanding of the violence that occurred. Two of the main questions that remain are, why did this happen? And how could anyone bring themselves to murder? This research will attempt to address the second question.

The research will be conducted using a qualitative historical approach, with an emphasis on the close critical reading of archival material. The key historical sources used will be coroner's reports, government files, court transcripts and newspapers helping to provide real time accounts of these events; as well autobiographies, memoirs and associated literature. The use of coroner's reports from PRONI will be a major element of this research as they can provide insights into the nature of these killings. One of the unique and original approaches of this research will be its interdisciplinary use and development of theories of violence from the fields of history, politics, sociology and psychology in relation to the 'Troubles'. As such the analytical framework employed will be informed by the work of authors such as Richard Holmes (2004), Christopher Browning (2001), Joanna Bourke (1999), Randall Collins (2008) Dave Grossman (2009) and John Horgan (2014). The main research questions will be: How did these killings occur? What can society learn to help prevent a reoccurrence of these events?

The main approach of this research will be to test the *attacker advantage* theory in relation to these murders by examining the micro-situation surrounding each murder. This research will concentrate on the short space of time surrounding these events and as a result the use of interviews is not advocated by this project because of problems associated with oral histories such as memory and post hoc justifications. Although it is recognised that interviews do have their own value it is the contention of this project that their use in this research might prove counter-productive as it is virtually impossible to expect individuals to remember the minute details of such events.

Recently Adrian Grant wrote an excellent rebuttal of Ed Moloney's ill-informed attack on Oral History. Grant rightly pointed to the immense value of such projects. He argued that the

post-conflict environment of Northern Ireland may not allow for the type of oral history projects that we have seen in other places and times, where ex-combatants have bared their soul, especially in light of the controversy over the Boston College Oral History Project; but that does not mean that other oral histories are not important. With ex-combatants reluctant to tell their story one of the other questions which victims and survivors have, may never be answered namely, who killed their loved one? This is something we may have to accept. However this does not mean that we should not ask the question how were individuals able to kill during the Troubles and this is something I think can be achieved through my approach and without the use of interviews.

Despite my assertion that most humans are not violent I think there is no denying that we live in a violent world, and that violence has been part of man's experience from he came into existence. Indeed as argued by the psychoanalyst Erich Fromm 'Man's history is a record of extraordinary destructiveness and cruelty...and man is, in contrast to most animals, a real 'killer'. This research sets out to examine how and under what circumstances men become 'real killers' in the context of political violence and what that can tell us about the nature of human beings and the environment which gives rise to these violent actions. For to understand these variables can ultimately help us to better understand how they might be removed and the conflict diminished.

All groups which contributed to the conflict will be included in this research and a number of different types of murders will be examined including shootings and bombings.

I just wanted to show two examples of some of the material my research is uncovering. Here we have a photo of two men shot dead by the IRA in 1974 Hugh Slater and Leonard Cross.

Their bodies were found on a grass verge covered by blood stained hoods with their hands tied together, they had been shot at the scene through the head at close range.

And here we have a police sketch of the scene of the murder of Samuel Lundy; actually I want to take a closer look at this case. Samuel Lundy/ Protestant X-UDR/ Shot by the IRA/12th May 1980. He was the fifth gun victim of the year and was shot 300 yards from the site of the Kingsmill massacre, he was also the third member of his immediate family to be murdered in the Troubles.

Also Known as Clifford, he was a married man who worked as a lorry driver. He was 62 years old and a former member of the UDR, he had left the regiment two years earlier in 1978. He normally drove to work at 7:50 am each morning and usually travelled the same route to and from work. Although he arrived home at different times each night because he called at local bar for drink almost every night. On the day of his murder he left work at 5:45 and left the bar at approximately 7:35 arriving home at 7:45 in his Chrysler Sunbeam car.

Sometimes when violent acts occur witnesses remember small details that seem irrelevant as his wife told the inquest he always brought his lunch box into the house but it was found in the back seat of the car something which she couldn't understand. In reality this probably meant that he had seen his attackers coming and had made a run for it. The cause of death was gunshot wounds to the trunk, he was found lying on his back and had a bullet wound in the vicinity of the heart.

He had been approached by three armed men and one opened fire with an automatic weapon from approximately four feet away (See Map). The gunman was 5ft 8 in in height of stout build with straight medium length black hair. He was approximately 30/35 years old and was

wearing dark trousers and a checked jacket. He got into the back seat of a mark 1 Ford Cortina with Republic of Ireland number plates and escaped after the shooting.

It is clear from the nature of the attack that *attacker advantage* principle is central to the murder. Lundy being an ex-UDR man was probably not as careful about his security. As a consequence he followed same route home every night calling at the same bar, he was a creature of habit and this was probably his undoing. Man in his sixties, had taken alcohol, 3 men armed with automatic weapons had been involved in the attack and had shot him from close range.

A few other processes come into play here also.

So I would argue that the process of killing Lundy was made easier because of the logistical considerations/ absorption in technique undertaken by the attackers. He had to be followed and his movements recorded, weapons for his murder had to be retrieved from wherever they were concealed and prepared for use, transport had to be arranged, a site chosen for the murder with an easy escape route, most probably a 'dummy-run' was undertaken, he had to be followed on the day of the murder and weapons/ clothing/ car had to be disposed of after the murder. As we know from extensive research on republican and loyalist paramilitaries the aftermath of any killing was the time when they were most exposed. 'The most dangerous time was in the immediate aftermath of an attack', as one IRA volunteer told reporter Kevin Toolis. 'You had to change your clothes, give them a wash, get rid of the forensics. You also had to dump your weapons away from where you were' Effective logistical actions/absorption in technique necessary not only help prevent the attacker from being caught but the concentration on the process actually diffuses their fear of being caught and thus makes their violent actions easier.

Another process which enables individuals to murder is de-humanisation which was a common trait of many conflicts including the Troubles. The victims of an attack were no longer human beings but just the enemy and in many cases an ‘inferior’ enemy at that. As one PIRA member outlined in another interview with Toolis: ‘You were firing at uniforms. You do not see faces, just uniforms, you just aim for the uniform’ (Toolis, 1996: 126).

This is a process highlighted by Dave Grossman when ‘the enemy’s humanity is denied and he becomes a strange beast called a Kraut, Jap, Reb, Yank, dink, slant, slope, or raghead’. Even the language used in war is part of the denial process: ‘Most soldiers do not “kill,” instead the enemy was knocked over, wasted, greased, taken out, and mopped up’. Similarly, during the Troubles, people were ‘whacked’ or ‘stiffed’ and paramilitaries had to get the ‘gear’ to ‘stiff’ a ‘brit’, a ‘taig’, a ‘hun’ or ‘he is ex- UDR’.

As Littman and Paluck assert ‘Viewing the target of one’s violence as less than human...makes it easier to cause them harm’.

So just to recap what I am arguing is that the actions of those involved in the violence during the Troubles were facilitated by a number of processes which included absorption in technique, logistical considerations and dehumanisation. Perhaps more centrally my research argues that the pathways to violence, which enabled individuals to carry out violent acts, were based on the overriding principle of *attacker advantage* and that furthermore this premise is the basis for many other forms of violence.

