

UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

MA Thesis International Relations in Historical Perspective



**I am a Political Prisoner: 'Illegitimate' Securitisation During the 1981 Maze Prison
Hunger-strike**

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'I am a political prisoner. I am a political prisoner because I am a casualty of a perennial war that is being fought between the oppressed Irish people and an alien, oppressive, unwanted regime that refuses to withdraw from our land.' - Bobby Sands, March 1 1981.¹

¹ Bobby Sands, 'Prison Diary' [diary], March 1 1981- March 17 1981, in *Bobby Sands Trust* <<https://www.bobbysandstrust.com/writings/prison-diary/>> [accessed March 3 2021].

Abstract

This thesis seeks to address the problematic connection between securitisation theory and legitimacy. Specifically, this research challenges the theory's assertion that securitising actors must be 'legitimate' actors, and does so through an analysis of the 1981 Maze Prison Hunger-strike carried out by republican prisoners, specifically focusing on the hunger-strike of Irish Republican Army (IRA) member Bobby Sands. So, the central research question is: 'How does securitisation theory's hyper-focus on 'legitimate' actors fail to account for the IRA's counter-securitisation during the 1981 Maze Prison Hunger-strike, and how can an analysis of this event provide a broader understanding of legitimacy within securitisation theory?' To answer this question, a framework has been constructed based on conceptions of legitimate entities and legitimate security, as well as securitisation theory and counter-securitisation. Through a qualitative analysis of how the IRA 'spoke security' to and mobilised their audience during Sands' hunger-strike, this thesis finds that 'illegitimate' groups *can* counter-securitise, namely through the strategic exploitation of lines of communication with their relevant audience and the utilisation of cultural and religious messaging that may hold particular weight for said relevant audience. This research thus proposes amendments to securitisation theory in order to account for this, these being: understanding legitimacy as a target of (counter-)securitising moves, broadening the scope of relevant audiences within securitisation theory, and removing the prerequisite that a (counter-)securitising actor must be a state representative or political elite. The findings of this research may create the opportunity for more in-depth academic analysis of processes of securitisation carried out by groups that are considered to be illegitimate, and also may provide governments and relevant authorities with a further understanding of how 'illegitimate' groups appeal to their relevant audiences and ignite societal mobilisation.

Keywords: *Legitimacy, securitisation theory, counter-securitisation, Northern Irish conflict, Irish Republican Army.*

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List of Abbreviations

ECHR: European Convention on Human Rights

ECtHR: European Court of Human Rights

IRA: Irish Republican Army. Many sources refer to the group that is the subject of this research as the ‘Provisional Irish Republican Army’, or ‘PIRA’, since the IRA as a unitary entity experienced a split in 1970, in which the group often referred to as the PIRA adopted a hardened militant stance, while the remainder of the original group, sometimes referred to as the ‘Official IRA’ or ‘OIRA’, renounced the use of violence.² For the sake of clarity, this research shall refer to the organisation using the language which it used to refer to itself (as is evident in sources associated with the group), and thus will refer to the organisation as the IRA. Yet, it should be noted that several sources that retain an anti-republican stance utilise the terminology ‘PIRA’ to distinguish between what they contend to be a terrorist organisation and the ‘IRA proper.’³

NIO: Northern Ireland Office

POW: Prisoner of War

RUC: Royal Ulster Constabulary

SCS: Special Category Status

² John Hannigan, ‘The Armalite and the Ballot Box: Dilemmas of Strategy and Ideology in the Provisional IRA’, *Social Problems*, 33.1 (1985), 31-40, p. 32.

³ Tom Murtagh and Phillip Wheatley, *The Maze Prison: A Hidden Story of Chaos, Anarchy and Politics* (Hampshire: Waterside Press, 2018), p. xii.

Introduction

Problem and Research Question

According to Columba Peoples and Nick Vaughan-Williams, securitisation theory is ‘one of the most significant conceptual innovations to emerge out of debates over the nature of security in recent decades.’⁴ However, it has come under significant scrutiny due to what scholars have described as ‘blind spots.’⁵ Most notably, Sarah Bertrand has claimed that the subaltern cannot securitise because of subaltern voicelessness, being ‘spoken for’, and/or being misunderstood or ignored.⁶ Additionally, Lene Hansen has called attention to securitisation theory’s ‘speech problem’. Those who, for whatever reason, are constrained from voicing their insecurity are ‘therefore prevented from becoming subjects worthy of consideration and protection.’⁷ While Bertrand and Hansen highlight important issues regarding the required speech act, I contend that securitisation theory’s hyper-focus on legitimate actors constitutes an additional blind spot. This research will participate in and widen the debate surrounding the operationalism of securitisation theory during incidences of so-called ‘illegitimate securitisation’. Little has been written about this blind spot, although Ronnie Olesker has called attention to it, noting that Barry Buzan has stated that ‘a securitising actor who is seen as legitimate to speak security must present a situation as an existential threat.’⁸ This requirement essentially excludes any ‘illegitimate’ actor from securitising, yet, in practice; actors that are perceived as illegitimate *can* securitise. So, this research intends to discuss this possible ‘legitimacy’ blind spot of securitisation theory and focus on the applicability and functionality (or lack thereof) of the theory as a result of its requisite that a securitising actor be seen as ‘legitimate to speak security.’⁹ If only

⁴ Columba Peoples and Nick Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Security Studies: An Introduction* (London, New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 75.

⁵ For more critical approaches to securitisation theory, see: Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Monpetit, ‘Civilizationism, Methodological Whiteness, and Antiracist Thought in the Copenhagen School’, *Security Dialogue*, 51.1 (2020), 3-22; Holger Stritzel, ‘Toward a Theory of Securitization: Copenhagen and Beyond’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 13.3 (2007), 357-383; Claire Wilkinson, ‘The Copenhagen School on Tour in Kyrgyzstan: Is Securitization Theory Useable Outside Europe?’, *Security Dialogue*, 38.1 (2007), 5-25; among others.

⁶ Sarah Bertrand, ‘Can the Subaltern Securitise? Postcolonial Perspectives on Securitization and its Critics’, *European Journal of International Security*, 3.3 (2018), 281-299, p. 295-296.

⁷ Lene Hansen, ‘The Little Mermaid’s Silent Security Dilemma and the Absence of Gender in the Copenhagen School’, *Journal of International Studies*, 29.2 (2000), 285-306, p. 285.

⁸ Ronnie Olesker, ‘The Securitisation Dilemma: Legitimacy in Securitisation Studies’, *Critical Studies on Security*, 6.3 (2018), 312-329, p. 314.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

‘legitimate’ actors are supposedly capable of securitisation, what does this imply about so-called ‘illegitimate’ actors in securitisation theory’s analysis?

I hypothesise that this research will demonstrate that the Irish Republican Army (IRA) faced systematic delegitimisation at the hands of the British authorities. Within the theoretical realm, this would imply that they were therefore incapable of securitisation. However, as this research intends to demonstrate, the IRA successfully counter-securitised against the British government. This would suggest that securitisation theory’s requirement of ‘legitimacy’ to securitise is not justified. In summation, this research will explore the extent to which securitisation theory’s failure to incorporate illegitimate actors (even when said illegitimacy is exogenously imposed by hierarchical actors) into its analysis could be considered to constitute a blind spot within the theory, and therefore requires additional framework to account for securitisation processes carried out by said ‘illegitimate’ actors. This potential blind spot has led me to the question; ‘How does securitisation theory’s hyper-focus on ‘legitimate’ actors fail to account for the IRA’s counter-securitisation during the 1981 Maze Prison Hunger-strike, and how can an analysis of this event provide a broader understanding of legitimacy within securitisation theory?’ In answering this question, I will shed light on the systematic exclusion of the IRA from the realm of legitimate political action, which will enable me to amend and expand securitisation theory in order to account for ‘illegitimate securitisation’.

Case Study: The 1981 Maze Prison Hunger-strike

In order to answer the central research question, the case of the 1981 hunger-strike at the Maze Prison in Northern Ireland will be employed. This hunger-strike was carried out by a group of republican inmates in order to obtain ‘Special Category Status’ (SCS), which granted politically motivated prisoners several privileges before its rescission resulting from the introduction of the criminalisation policy by the British government. This case study, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters, has been selected since it presents a case of an actor, the IRA, which, although considered illegitimate, was able to successfully counter-securitise against a dominant power that had initially presented them as a security threat. An analysis of this will demonstrate that additional framework should be introduced in securitisation theory to account for securitisation processes carried out by actors that are considered to be illegitimate. Additionally, it provides a case of a prolonged interaction between two entities, the IRA and the British government, that was largely based

on the dynamics of legitimisation and delegitimation. This will allow for a thorough exploration of the relevancy of legitimacy within the enactment of security practices and within securitisation theory itself.

The Concept of Legitimacy

This research will centre upon the concept of legitimacy within the context of securitisation theory. It will utilise the works of three scholars to explore the legitimacy/security nexus in order to determine first *why* the British government delegitimised the IRA, and secondly, *why* the IRA countered this and rather portrayed the British authorities as illegitimate. In order to provide this context, the work of Thomas Hobbes and Thierry Balzacq will be utilised to provide an understanding of the legitimacy/security nexus and aid in discerning the identified entities' motivations in their interactions during the specified period. Concurrently, this thesis will employ Allen Buchanan's definition of a legitimate entity, which he describes as an entity that 'is morally justified in wielding political power, where to wield political power is to attempt to exercise a monopoly, within a jurisdiction, in the making, application, and enforcement of laws.'¹⁰ The reasons for having chosen this typology, as well as its relevance within the chosen case study, will be further discussed in the following chapter. The use of this typology will provide a framework for understanding the methods utilised by both the British government and the IRA in the legitimisation of their own causes, and the simultaneous delegitimation of their opponent.

Securitisation Theory and Counter-Securitisation

Securitisation theory, developed by members of the Copenhagen School, describes how a perceived security threat is constructed and disseminated. While the theory itself, as well as its legitimacy problem, will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter, it is first essential to highlight the problem that this thesis seeks to address. As has been previously noted, the authors of the theory contend that securitising actors must be seen as 'legitimate to speak security.'¹¹ The following chapter will address the fact that, within the theory,

¹⁰ Allen Buchanan, 'Political Legitimacy and Democracy', *Ethics*, 112.4 (2002), 689-719, p. 689-90.

¹¹ Olesker, p. 314.

securitising actors are understood to be ‘state representatives’¹² or ‘political elites.’¹³ However, as will be demonstrated through the chosen case study, groups that are considered to be ‘illegitimate’ *can* securitise. Hence, the theory must be amended to account for this. This thesis will additionally avail of Holger Stritzel and Sean Chang’s conception of counter-securitisation as resistance, and thus track the IRA’s resistance to the British government’s criminalisation policy as a form of counter-securitisation. This conceptualisation is pertinent to this case study as it pays particular attention to the struggle for legitimacy in securitisation and counter-securitisation, and the importance that being perceived as legitimate has in granting groups influence and authority ‘on the ground’.¹⁴

Research Design

The following chapter will explore the conceptual and theoretical elements of this thesis. In order to address the formulated research question, it will first explore the theoretical element, implying an in-depth discussion of securitisation theory (and counter-securitisation) and its legitimacy problem, as has been outlined above. The next chapter will also broach the concept of legitimacy within the context of security, in line with the previously discussed parameters. Following on from this, the historical analysis of this thesis will be divided into three sections, working thematically in order to track the temporal development of the IRA’s counter-securitisation. To do this, three of the most important events of the hunger-strike will be analysed in chronological order, the first being, the outbreak of the strike. This can be identified as the culmination of the efforts made to undermine the British government’s securitisation of IRA prisoners. This analysis will begin with a discussion of the British government’s initial securitisation of IRA prisoners, and then delve into an overview of resistance against the criminalisation policy since its implementation on March 1, 1976. The analysis will then focus on the period between the end of the 1980 hunger-strike (December 18) and the date when Sands began refusing food; March 1, 1981. The second thematic chapter will focus on Sands’ election, as it evidences the IRA’s capacity to securitise and mobilise the nationalist community on a large scale, as well as demonstrates the IRA’s attempt to undermine the British government’s delegitimisation of their cause. This chapter

¹² B. Buzan, O. Wæver, & J. de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998), p. 21.

¹³ Olesker, p. 314.

¹⁴ Sean Chang and Holger Stritzel, ‘Securitization and Counter-Securitization in Afghanistan’, *Security Dialogue*, 46.6 (2015), 548-567, p. 549.

will thus focus on the period between the death of MP for Fermanagh/South Tyrone Frank Maguire on March 5, 1981 and the election of Sands on April 9, as well as several reactionary statements and moves made afterwards. The final thematic chapter will centre upon Sands' death, which represents an additional moment of mass mobilisation against the British government resulting from the IRA's counter-securitising messaging. Sands passed away on May 5, therefore; this chapter will focus upon this date and the following weeks to analyse the reaction to Sands' death. In these chapters, relevant subquestions will be asked that, together, will provide a coherent answer to the main research question. Lastly, in the conclusion, the main research question is addressed through analysing the collected data, and based off of this analysis, amendments to securitisation theory are proposed in order to account for 'illegitimate securitisation'.

A wide range of primary sources will be utilised in order to track the IRA's counter-securitisation process. Sands wrote extensively while serving what was supposed to be a 14-year prison sentence. These writings, which were published both in the republican newspaper *An Phoblacht* and by Sinn Féin's Prisoner of War (POW) Department in 1981, will be essential in understanding the IRA's perception and portrayal of injustice that led to mass mobilisation against British rule. The *Bobby Sands Trust* has furthermore made his prison diary available online, in which he recounts his thoughts during the first 17 days of his hunger-strike. These sources will be essential in understanding how the IRA 'spoke security' to its audience. These sources furthermore evidence the IRA's portrayal of British presence in Northern Ireland as unjust and illegitimate, which therefore legitimised their noncompliance with British authorities.¹⁵ It is essential to note that, due to the deeply divisive nature of the Northern Irish Conflict, these sources are inherently biased and should be cross-examined with historical sources in order to reduce the effects of such bias on research. Nevertheless, an analysis of these sources will provide a thorough understanding of the IRA's counter-securitisation against the British government.

An Phoblacht proved to be an essential mouthpiece for the IRA that allowed them to appeal to and mobilise a wide audience. Thus, articles from *An Phoblacht* will provide the primary basis for the analysis of the IRA's counter-securitisation against the British government, and will allow for an understanding of how the IRA counteracted British attempts to delegitimise it by in turn portraying British rule in Northern Ireland as illegitimate and a security threat. These sources also evidence the IRA's successful dissemination of

¹⁵ Sands, 'Prison Diary'.

counter-securitising messages to their audience in order to mobilise it against British authorities. As has been noted in a publication made by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO), the IRA used publications in order to ‘exploit the Nationalist emotions of Irish Catholics in Ireland and overseas.’¹⁶ The NIO noted that the IRA spread such ‘propaganda’ through ‘secret’ press conferences, *An Phoblacht*, and the mass distribution of political pamphlets.¹⁷ As in the last group of sources, *An Phoblacht* is an unabashedly politically-associated newspaper and thus presents inherent biases in its publications. Due to this, many historical accounts conflict with *An Phoblacht*’s reporting, and so, this must be carefully considered when conducting analysis. Still, such sources remain essential in understanding how the IRA spoke security to its audience, and, through this, galvanised them into demonstrations of support.

In order to analyse the IRA’s counter-securitisation process, it is imperative to understand the British government’s initial securitisation of IRA prisoners. Margaret Thatcher is an essential figure to track, as she made several significant statements regarding the British government’s delegitimisation and securitisation of IRA prisoners. Through its criminalisation policy and the denial of SCS to republican prisoners, the British government was attempting to delegitimise the IRA. In order to understand the processes of delegitimisation and securitisation that the hunger-strikers were resisting against, it is imperative to avail of primary sources from Thatcher, as well as her colleagues in the central British government and the NIO. Given that these sources come from the British establishment, they are inherently biased against the republican movement, and often contrast with on-the-ground accounts of the Northern Irish political situation. This must be taken into account when assessing statements made by British establishment members.

Additionally, secondary literature will be utilised in order to explore the case of the 1981 hunger-strikes, as well as the theoretical and conceptual elements of this research. This literature can be divided into three categories, these being (1) literature on the concept of legitimacy, (2) literature on securitisation theory, and (3) historiographical literature on the case study. This literature will provide the necessary theoretical, conceptual, and historical knowledge to analyse the chosen case study and therefore critique securitisation theory for its lack of framework pertaining to securitisation carried out by actors that are considered ‘illegitimate.’

¹⁶ Northern Ireland Office, *The IRA: Publicity and Propaganda* (Belfast: Northern Ireland Office, 1983), in *CAIN* <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/proni/1987/proni_NIO-12-525A_1983-05-26b.pdf> [accessed March 3 2021]

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

This chapter will analyse the theoretical and conceptual elements of this research, beginning with securitisation theory and its potential legitimacy blind spot, followed by an analysis of counter-securitisation and lastly, an analysis of the concept of legitimacy and its intersection with security. The data collected in this chapter will respond to the following sub question: ‘How can we identify and repair the existing gap in securitisation theory with regard to so-called illegitimate actors in order to restore the agency and voice of subaltern groups?’ This question will be addressed through exploring critical literature on securitisation theory, understanding the concept of counter-securitisation and how the ‘voiceless’ subaltern can resist and counter-securitise, and lastly, through exploring the importance of legitimacy within the securitisation process.

Securitisation Theory and its Legitimacy Problem

Securitisation theory describes how a perceived security threat is constructed in an intersubjective manner and as a result of a series of interactions. The authors of the theory describe the securitisation process as ‘the intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects.’¹⁸ They furthermore describe the securitisation process as a ‘spectrum’, in which an issue is moved from being ‘nonpoliticised’, to ‘politicised’ (part of public policy debate), to ‘securitised’, implying that the issue is considered an ‘existential threat’, justifying extraordinary measures as a response.¹⁹ Securitisation theory essentially involves an interaction between four fundamental elements, the first being the securitising actor. The securitising actor is an actor that ‘securitise[s] an issue by declaring something- a referent object- existentially threatened.’²⁰ The referent object is anything that is ‘seen to be existentially threatened’ and has ‘a legitimate claim to survival.’²¹ The referent subject is the entity that the securitising actor claims poses an existential threat towards the referent object.²² Lastly, the audience is the collective of individuals who must be convinced by the securitising actor that the referent

¹⁸ Buzan, Waever, de Wilde, p. 25.

¹⁹ Peoples, Williams, p. 77.

²⁰ Buzan, Waever, de Wilde, p. 36.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Thierry Balzacq, ‘The Three Faces of Securitization: Political Agency, Audience and Context’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 11.2 (2005), 171-201, p. 173.

object is existentially threatened.²³ If the audience accepts the securitising actor's discourse, this can be said to be a successful securitisation.²⁴ The Copenhagen School also outlines the concept of a 'securitising move', which they define as 'a discourse that takes the form of presenting something as an existential threat to a referent object.'²⁵ In their seminal work on the theory, 'Security: A New Framework for Analysis', Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde describe the initial act in this process as 'saying security'. In brief, the process involves a securitising actor declaring a referent object as existentially threatened.²⁶ This speech act, according to the authors of the theory, entails a 'state representative' declaring an 'emergency condition.'²⁷ This requirement for securitisation indicates that those considered capable of 'saying security' are a confined group of actors, this being those considered to be 'legitimate', as previously discussed.

As noted in the introduction, securitisation theory is one of the most significant developments to have emerged from the field of security studies in recent decades. Even critics of the theory, such as Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit, recognise its merits, stating that it holds 'methodological rigour.'²⁸ However, as mentioned, the theory has come under scrutiny in the academic sphere, although, thus far, little has been said regarding securitisation theory's legitimacy problem. While Bertrand and Hansen highlight important issues regarding the required speech act, as previously discussed, this research intends to demonstrate that the theory's exclusion of 'illegitimate' actors constitutes an additional blind spot in the theory. As previously outlined, Olesker has called attention to this downfall of securitisation theory, noting that securitising actors within the theory's analysis are usually 'political elites.'²⁹ This excludes any non-elite, 'illegitimate' actor from analysis within the theory. The blind spot that this research intends to highlight is that through its hyper-focus on 'legitimate' actors, securitisation theory fails to account for securitisation processes carried out by actors that have been deemed 'illegitimate', although, as this research intends to demonstrate through the case study of the 1981 Maze Prison hunger-strike, such processes of securitisation *can occur*.

²³ Buzan, Wæver, De Wilde, p. 25.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 37.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 21.

²⁸ Howell, Richter-Montpetit, p. 4.

²⁹ Olesker, p. 314.

Counter-Securitisation: How the Subaltern Speaks Back

An essential element of securitisation theory to consider in the case of the 1981 hunger-strike is the concept of counter-securitisation, which is briefly mentioned in ‘Security: A New Framework for Analysis’³⁰, but more extensively elaborated upon by scholars such as Stritzel and Chang. As they have suggested, ‘processes of securitisation can be confronted with significant forces of resistance that can challenge securitisations through counter-securitisations.’³¹ According to Stritzel and Chang, when processes of securitisation are met with counter-securitisation efforts, ‘each side has to continuously make necessary changes and adaptations in their communicative encounters to maintain or (re-)establish legitimacy.’³² They furthermore characterise this series of interactions as ‘a prolonged and fragile political game constituted by moves and counter-moves in a continuous struggle for authority and legitimacy ‘on the ground.’³³ In this definition of counter-securitisation as resistance, the authors argue that the securitising actors can themselves be a securitised group. Their resistance can be aimed at any element of the initial securitisation process, such as the securitising actor, the securitising act, the extraordinary measures, and so on. The methods that they utilise to resist the initial securitisation process can be varied, such as delegitimisation, securitisation, or desecuritisation. Lastly, the aim of their resistance can be to delay, prohibit, or reverse any element of the initial securitisation process.

It is furthermore essential to understand the process of counter-securitisation within the context of subaltern voicelessness. When groups are excluded from the political realm and/or decision-making process by dominant actors, they may appear to be ‘voiceless’ and thus, unable to securitise, as argued by scholars such as Bertrand. However, these groups remain influential within their relative communities, and exploiting this line of communication is essential in their attempts to securitise. As noted by Stritzel and Chang, in Afghanistan, the US ‘failed... to incorporate the Afghan people as a key strategic audience’, whereas the Taliban successfully counter-securitised against US presence through ‘establish[ing] themselves for... the Afghan people... as authorised speakers.’³⁴ In line with this, the authors comment that securitising actors, in order to realise a successful securitisation, must ‘expand the scope of relevant audiences’ and ‘place more emphasis on

³⁰ Buzan, Waever, de Wilde, p. 206.

³¹ Chang, Stritzel, p. 549.

³² Ibidem.

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ Ibidem.

the active and continuous establishment of legitimate, authorised speakers during the securitisation process.³⁵ Lastly, they define counter-securitisation processes as ‘linguistically regulated process of resistance against crucial elements of the securitisation process which typically involves processes of legitimisation and delegitimation in relation to relevant audiences.’³⁶ The concept of a ‘relevant audience’ is essential in understanding how subaltern groups securitise, particularly in this case study- although IRA prisoners were both politically and physically excluded from the realms of decision-making, their efforts to communicate with their relevant audience were highly successful. Such communications include imagery and mural-painting, messaging in *An Phoblacht*, and the smuggling of information outside of prison walls, a campaign spearheaded by Sands and fellow IRA prisoner Brendan Hughes from 1978 onwards.³⁷ Through these methods of communication, the IRA retained a powerful voice within their relevant group. Thus, despite the British government’s attempts to silence the IRA through criminalisation and imprisonment, they remained capable of speaking, addressing their relevant audience, and thus; capable of securitising.

Considering Stritzel and Chang’s conceptualisation of counter-securitisation, the process of counter-securitisation carried out by the IRA during the hunger-strike can be considered as the following. The initial securitising act, against which the IRA was resisting, was the 1976 criminalisation policy. This policy was an extraordinary measure taken in order to delegitimise militant republicans and rob them of their voice and agency. By portraying republican inmates as criminals rather than political actors, the British government securitised the general public against the IRA and gained the necessary political support to rescind SCS. Next, we can understand the republican hunger-strikers to be the counter-securitising actors in this case. Despite being deemed as illegitimate by the ruling authorities, they were able to successfully counter-securitise and mobilise their relevant audience against British authorities. Through their hunger-strike, the prisoners were aiming to resist against the emergency measure brought in by the British government, the criminalisation policy. However, it can be argued the hunger-strike represented not only resistance against this emergency measure, but also against the initial securitising actor itself. Supporting this, Chris Yuill argues that the series of prison protests that began in 1976, which will be more thoroughly explored in the next chapter, were triggered both by the criminalisation policy and

³⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 552.

³⁷ Denis O’Hearn, ‘Movement Inside and Outside of Prison: The H-Block Protest’, in *The Troubles in Northern Ireland and Theories of Social Movements*, ed. by Lorenzo Bosi and Gianluca De Fazio (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), pp. 147-164, p. 151.

the wider political situation in Northern Ireland.³⁸ We can furthermore understand the hunger-strike to be a ‘securitising move’, since it had the goal of presenting British presence in Northern Ireland as an existential threat to the Irish people, something which will be further elaborated upon in the following chapters.

As outlined by Stritzel and Chang, two methods that can be used during processes of counter-securitisation are securitisation and delegitimation. In an effort to mobilise support for their cause, the IRA presented both the criminalisation policy and British rule as existential threats to the Irish people, as will be expanded upon in the following sections. Regarding their delegitimation of the British Government and its security practices, it can be argued that republican inmates were resisting the British government’s securitisation of them through delegitimising the British government’s claims that (1) the IRA were illegitimate, criminal actors and (2) that the British government had legitimate sovereignty over Northern Ireland. Evidence for this is most notably seen in the third chapter which tackles Sands’ election, which, as will be demonstrated, was an attempt by the IRA to undermine the legitimacy of the criminalisation policy and British presence in Northern Ireland.

In order to understand the counter-securitisation process carried out by the IRA during the hunger-strike, it is essential to track a series of events, actions, and reactions. Securitisation theory is a temporal theory which traces the intersubjective perception and portrayal of threats. Thus, the thematic chapters of this thesis will focus upon three significant events of the 1981 hunger-strike, (1) the outbreak of the strike, (2) Sands’ election, and (3) Sands’ death. The reasoning for this structure was previously explained in the first chapter. Through analysing this series of interactions between the IRA and the initial securitising actor, the British government, we can trace the IRA’s counter-securitisation process and demonstrate that, although they were considered to be illegitimate by ruling authorities, they were able to counter-securitise.

³⁸ Chris Yuill, ‘The Body as a Weapon: Bobby Sands and the Republican Hunger Strike’, *Sociological Research Online*, 12.2 (2007) <<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/12/2/yuill.html>> [accessed April 5 2021].

The Concept of Legitimacy and the Legitimacy/Security Nexus

In order to understand the nexus that exists between security and legitimacy, it is first imperative to understand how legitimacy, as a concept, has been discussed in scholarly writing. Max Weber's three-tiered conceptualisation of legitimacy is foundational within the social sciences.³⁹ He describes three forms of legitimate authority, these being; traditional (authority stemming from historical practices/beliefs), charismatic (stemming from an individual's extraordinary ability to capture the masses' attention), and legal-rational (based upon law, leaders are elected and must act according to these).⁴⁰ Weberian typologies of legitimate authority are further defined by an inherent belief in their legitimacy, which allows an entity to rule without the use of coercion.⁴¹ Yet, this typology has come under scrutiny. For example, Matei Dogan has stated that the 'Weberian typology is no longer helpful in the study of contemporary political regimes'⁴², primarily due to Weber's failure to identify democratic support as a requisite for legitimacy.⁴³ Additionally, he claims that traditional and charismatic authority are not useful for describing legitimacy in the modern world, since very few regimes based on these forms of legitimacy remain.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Balzacq has criticised Weber's typology since it offers three types of legitimacy, rather than one unitary definition.⁴⁵

Many scholars prescribe to Weber's assertion that legitimacy is, to a certain extent, a product of belief. In line with Weber's typology, Balzacq argues that a security practice can be considered legitimate 'if people concerned believe it to be so.'⁴⁶ He furthermore argues that legitimacy in enacting security practices is essential since 'the erosion of [a] security practice's legitimacy would weaken [an actor's] power to oblige people to conform to their

³⁹ While this research does not employ Weber's typology of legitimate authority in its analysis, a thorough understanding of it is essential in comprehending the foundations of the discussion of legitimacy in international relations. For further reading on Weber's typology of legitimacy, see: David Beetham, 'Max Weber and the Legitimacy of the Modern State', *Analyse & Kritik*, 13.1 (1991), 34-45; Craig Matheson, 'Weber and the Classification of Forms of Legitimacy', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 38.2 (1987), 199-215; Benno Nietelenbos, *Political Legitimacy Beyond Weber* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Max Weber, *Economy and Society: A New Translation* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 2019).

⁴⁰ Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Abingon: Taylor and Francis, 2013), p. 78-79.

⁴¹ David Beetham, 'Political Legitimacy', *The Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology*, ed. by Kate Nash and Alan Scott (Massachusetts, Oxford, Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), pp. 107-116, p. 108.

⁴² Matei Dogan, 'Conceptions of Legitimacy', *Encyclopaedia of Government and Politics*, ed. by Mary Hawkesworth and Maurice Kogan (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 116-126, p. 118.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁴⁵ Thierry Balzacq, *Contesting Security: Strategies and Logics* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 5.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem.*

prescriptions.⁴⁷ Balzacq highlights three factors that contribute to a security practice's legitimacy, the first being legality; security practices appear legitimate when they conform to the already existing rules of the political system.⁴⁸ Secondly, Balzacq argues that security practices require a justification to appear legitimate, and that 'without justification of why some practices of security should be followed, any measure the elites propose would probably face scepticism if not strong defiance.'⁴⁹ Lastly, consent is essential in the legitimate implementation of security practices, as it 'accords the political elite with the right to develop policies.'⁵⁰ Balzacq argues that, without these pillars that legitimate a security practice, the belief in its legitimacy will lessen, therefore decreasing the probability that citizens will comply with said practice.⁵¹ Thus, the provision of security *depends* on legitimacy. In the context of the chosen case study, it can therefore be argued that the British government delegitimised the IRA in order for the Northern Irish populace to comply with their security practices. Since the IRA was encouraging citizens not to comply with the British authorities and their security practices, as will be expanded upon in the following sections, the British government counteracted this by portraying the IRA, rather, as the illegitimate entity. Similarly, the IRA attempted to undermine the legitimacy of the British government's security practices through presenting them as illegal, coercive, and unjustified. They did so with the ultimate goal of reducing societal compliance with said security practices.

Additionally, as demonstrated by Mark Bovens et al., the reverse dependent relationship can also be argued to exist. Not only does security depend on legitimacy, but legitimacy depends upon security, as 'the provision of security can be considered as the original legitimisation for the creation of modern central states.'⁵² Bovens et al. have drawn this conclusion from the Hobbesian social contract since, as argued by Hobbes, society could only function harmoniously if people submitted to a 'social contract' where the state would guarantee their collective security in exchange for individual freedoms and liberties.⁵³ So, the provision of security legitimates the existence of authority, and it is therefore the state's responsibility to ensure collective security. The Hobbesian social contract will provide an

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 3-4.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 5-6.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 7.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 3-4.

⁵² Mark Bovens et al., 'Institutional Legitimacy in Open Societies', *Institutions for Open Societies*, Utrecht University (2020), p. 17.

⁵³ Ibidem.

important backdrop for the concept of legitimate security. This thesis will not analyse the conceptual or philosophical facets of Hobbes' social contract, but rather aims to understand what the social contract implies in practice. If a government gains its legitimacy through the provision of security, then the failure to do so could cause a legitimacy crisis for said government. In this case study, we can understand the Hobbesian social contract as so: if the British government were to legitimate its claim to sovereignty over Northern Ireland, it had to be perceived as the sole purveyor of security for its citizens. The IRA, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters, were considered by many in Northern Ireland to be legitimate purveyors of security and therefore legitimate authorities. It was thus necessary for the British government to undermine the legitimacy of the IRA in order to preserve its own position as the sole purveyor of security, and therefore the sole legitimate authority. Through presenting themselves as challengers to the British regime in Northern Ireland, the IRA were threatening its position as the sole purveyor of security, and therefore attempting to undermine its claim to legitimate sovereignty in the nation.

Buchanan defines a legitimate entity as one that 'is morally justified in wielding political power, where to wield political power is to attempt to exercise a monopoly, within a jurisdiction, in the making, application, and enforcement of laws.'⁵⁴ This conceptualisation has been chosen for the following reasons. Firstly, it involves both moral and legal perspectives, with the distinction of moral justification being highly pertinent to my case study. If the IRA were seen as morally justified in their actions by a large contingent in Northern Ireland (as evidenced by support for Sands during the by-election, and a heightened support/acceptance of militant violence resulting from the hunger-strike, as argued by Jim Smyth⁵⁵), does this suggest that their attempts to exercise authority were therefore legitimate? Moreover, does the British government's criminalisation policy suggest that they were purposefully undermining the legitimacy that the IRA held in Northern Ireland through portraying them as morally unjustified? Additionally, Buchanan's typology of legitimacy specifically applies to entities, and this thesis will analyse interactions between two entities, the IRA and the British government. Buchanan's typology, in conjunction with the aforementioned conceptualisations of legitimate security, will provide the basis for an analysis of the legitimisation/delegitimisation dynamic that occurred between the IRA and the British government during the delineated time period.

⁵⁴ Buchanan, p. 689-90.

⁵⁵ Jim Smyth, 'Unintentional Mobilization: The Effects of the 1980-1981 Hunger Strikes in Ireland', *Political Communication*, 4.3 (1987), 179-189, p. 186.

In regard to securitisation and counter-securitisation, Stritzel and Chang highlight that, since Balzacq argues that legitimacy is necessary for any security practice, legitimacy is a ‘natural target’ of counter-securitising moves.⁵⁶ Thus, the interactions that occur in a spiral of securitisation and counter-securitisation resemble a struggle between legitimisation and delegitimation, in which each actor ‘continuously aims at legitimising his own position and suggested policy while simultaneously continuously delegitimising and securitising the other.’⁵⁷ When we explore the established connection between legitimacy and security in the context of the chosen case study, we can say that what occurred between the British government and the IRA prisoners was a case of securitisation and counter-securitisation which heavily depended upon the dynamics of legitimisation and delegitimation, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters. For example, according to Mulcahy, the British government’s criminalisation policy ‘rested on the assumptions that the perpetrators of political violence were motivated by selfish and predatory criminal intentions and lacked popular support’ and ‘portrayed the prisoners as... wholly illegitimate.’⁵⁸ Through protesting to gain political status, the hunger-strikers were counteracting these assumptions and declaring their legitimacy. In the words of Mulcahy, ‘by stressing their political motivations, they sought to expand the boundaries of legitimate political activity... and become reconstituted as political actors.’⁵⁹ Mulcahy describes the criminalisation policy as predicating ‘minimal support for the hunger-strikers’, but Sands’ election was a ‘vital test of that policy’s validity.’⁶⁰ Through counter-securitising against the criminalisation policy, the IRA was challenging the British assumption that militant republicanism was a view held only by a small fringe of nationalist voters and demonstrating that their support base provided them with a legitimate platform for political action. Gerard Hodgins, in an interview with Andrew Sanders, notes the success of the republican strategy to undermine the British government’s delegitimation of their movement through electoral channels, ‘on one hand the government is saying Bobby Sands you are a criminal, you are not a political prisoner, on the other hands he’s getting 30,000 votes that say you are political, you’re an MP. You don’t get any more political than that.’⁶¹ Through hunger-striking for political status, militant

⁵⁶ Chang, Stritzel, p. 552.

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

⁵⁸ Aogán Mulcahy, ‘Claims-Making and the Construction of Legitimacy: Press Coverage of the 1981 Northern Irish Hunger-strike’, *Social Problems*, 42.2 (1995), 449-467, p. 450.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 460.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 455.

⁶¹ A. Sanders, *Inside the IRA: Dissident Republicans and the War for Legitimacy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 133.

republicans were attempting to undermine a British security practice through delegitimising it, while simultaneously legitimising their own cause.

Furthermore, there is much evidence to suggest that the IRA counter-securitised against the British Government by delegitimising their claim to sovereignty over Northern Ireland. An important aspect of the IRA's delegitimisation of British rule was the rhetoric and imagery surrounding the hunger-strike. Eva Zeilstra notes that said rhetoric and imagery closely resembled ideals of Christian martyrdom, providing the organisation with a powerful tool to portray British presence in Northern Ireland as threatening and unjust, while presenting the Irish as passive, yet ultimately resilient, victims of British intransigence.⁶² As noted by Zeilstra, 'Christian martyrdom has the discursive potential to transform the experience of being suppressed and persecuted because of one's conviction into a righteous and noble act', and that through the 1981 hunger-strike, the IRA transformed passive sufferings into 'active weapons.'⁶³ According to Gregory Goalwin, paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland turned to mural painting in order to 'construct a narrative that would legitimise their ideological claims.'⁶⁴ In 1979, Sands demanded that a widespread 'Paint and Poster Campaign' be conducted throughout Northern Ireland in order to 'put pressure on the British government and increase awareness and support for the prisoners.'⁶⁵ Thus, the importance of imagery and rhetoric in constructing legitimacy for the IRA is evident. Through portraying Sands as a Christ-like figure, the IRA was able to use this cultural image, which holds particular weight in Irish society, to portray British rule as unjust and cruel, and most importantly, to disseminate the idea that their claim to sovereignty in Northern Ireland was illegitimate. In line with this, Beatrice de Graaf contends that Sands consciously evoked a centuries-old Irish tradition of hunger-striking and martyrdom and utilised religious rhetoric in order to speak directly to his Irish, Catholic audience.⁶⁶ Congruently, *The New York Times* wrote that, 'by appearing unfeeling and unresponsive, [Thatcher] and her government are providing Bobby Sands with a deathbed gift- the crown of martyrdom'.⁶⁷ Britain's refusal to

⁶² Eva Zeilstra, 'Blessed are Those Who Hunger for Justice? A Comparative Analysis of the Functioning of the Discourse of Christian Martyrdom in the Cases of the Political Hunger Strikes of the Womens Social and Political Union (1909) and the Irish Republican Army (1981)', (Masters thesis, Utrecht University, 2018), p. 1.

⁶³ Ibidem.

⁶⁴ Gregory Goalwin, 'The Art of War: Instability, Insecurity, and Ideological Imagery in Northern Ireland's Political Murals, 1979-1998', *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 26.3 (2013), 189-215, p. 190.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 198-9.

⁶⁶ Beatrice de Graaf, *Radical Verlossing* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2021), p. 74.

⁶⁷ 'Britain's Gift to Bobby Sands', *New York Times*, April 29 1981, in *New York Times Article Archive* <<https://www.nytimes.com/1981/04/29/opinion/britain-s-gift-to-bobby-sands.html?searchResultPosition=1>> [accessed May 27 2021].

concede to the hunger-strikers' demands allowed Sands and his comrades to frame themselves as martyrs of a cruel British regime among their relevant audience, and through this, present British rule as inherently illegitimate, unjust, and an existential threat.



Figure 1: A mural of a H-Block hunger-striker in West Belfast, painted in 1981.⁶⁸ The religious nature of hunger-strike imagery is evident.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Tony Crowley, *Blessed are those who Hunger for Justice*, 1981, <<https://ccd.claremont.edu/digital/collection/mni/id/499>> [accessed 22 March 2021].

⁶⁹ For more religious-themed murals, see: Tony Crowley, 'Break Thatcher's Back Status Now' <<https://ccd.claremont.edu/digital/collection/mni/id/485>> [accessed June 1 2021]; Tony Crowley, 'H-Block the Dehumanising Factor' <<https://ccd.claremont.edu/digital/collection/mni/id/509>> [accessed June 1 2021]; Tony Crowley, 'Hunger-Strikers on Celtic Cross' <<https://ccd.claremont.edu/digital/collection/mni/id/489>> [accessed June 1 2021]; Tony Crowley, 'Their Hunger, Their Pain, Our Struggle' <<https://ccd.claremont.edu/digital/collection/mni/id/490>> [accessed June 1 2021].



Figure 2: *An Phoblacht's* May 30th edition shows four deceased hunger-strikers surrounding a cross, and a uniformed IRA volunteer within. The hunger-strikers are referred to as 'martyrs.'⁷⁰

In summation, this thesis will pay particular attention to the legitimisation/delegitimisation dynamic that occurred between the IRA and the British government during the hunger-strike and explore how this connects with the concept of security and securitisation theory. The writings of Balzacq and Hobbes will be used in order to demonstrate *why* the British government delegitimised the IRA (and vice-versa), while Buchanan's definition of legitimate entities will be utilised in order to determine how exactly this occurred during the 1981 hunger-strike. Primary sources taken from *An Phoblacht*, Sands' writings, and republican imagery will be used to demonstrate how the IRA counteracted the British government's securitisation and delegitimisation of their cause and, in turn, portrayed British presence in Northern Ireland as illegitimate.

⁷⁰ 'H-BLOCK MARTYRS', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 30 1981, p. 1.

Chapter Conclusion

The analysis conducted in this chapter has shown that securitisation theory does not account for securitisation processes carried out by actors that are considered to be illegitimate. However, as demonstrated by the chosen case study, illegitimate, marginalised, and subaltern groups have the capacity to counter-securitise, even against dominant powers, through addressing specific audiences that are relevant in order to gain the societal mobilisation that they desire. While the dominant power in this conflict, the British government, attempted to stifle the IRA's voice through delegitimisation and criminalisation; the IRA spoke back to the British government, even from within the confines of the Maze Prison. The IRA used their voice and agency to appeal to their relevant audience, and through this; successfully legitimised their cause while simultaneously presenting the criminalisation policy and the British government's sovereignty in Northern Ireland as illegitimate. As recommended by Stritzel and Chang, we must expand our conception of relevant audiences within the securitisation process, as the subaltern's voice resonates deeply with marginalised peoples, despite dominant powers' attempts to rob them of their voice.

Chapter 2: Outbreak of the Hunger-strike

This chapter will analyse the initial securitising act carried out by the British government between January 1975 and March 1976 that provoked the IRA's counter-securitisation process, this being the criminalisation policy. It will then analyse republican prisoners' resistance towards this measure between 1976-1980, before then exploring the outbreak of the 1981 hunger-strike. Then, this chapter will discuss the British government's continued delegitimisation and securitisation of IRA prisoners in response to the hunger-strike. Through this analysis, this chapter will respond to the following sub-question: 'How did the IRA counter-securitise against the British government's criminalisation policy through legitimising their own cause while delegitimising the British government?'

Historical Background: Initial Securitising Act and Republican Resistance

On August 9, 1971, the Northern Irish government introduced a policy of internment under the Special Powers Act.⁷¹ David Lowry describes this as a 'broad repressive act' originally introduced upon the partition of Ireland in 1921.⁷² According to this act, those suspected of political violence could be arrested and indefinitely detained without trial⁷³, yet were granted more privileges than regular prisoners.⁷⁴ Due to this, convicted prisoners began protests in order to gain similar privileges, and eventually succeeded. In June 1972, the British government introduced SCS, which provided convicted prisoners (guilty of politically motivated crimes) with rights that had previously been exclusive to internees.⁷⁵ These rights included the right to wear one's own clothes, to not participate in prison work, to receive food parcels and frequent outside visits, and the freedom to associate exclusively with one's own political group.⁷⁶ According to Mulcahy, this system was responsible for 'according... legitimacy' to paramilitary prisoners.⁷⁷ However, following a report published in January 1975 by the Gardiner Committee, which advised the government that 'the earliest practicable

⁷¹ David R. Lowry, 'Internment: Detention Without Trial in Northern Ireland', *Human Rights*, 5.3 (1976), 261-331, p. 285.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 271.

⁷³ Mulcahy, p. 452.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁶ Jay M. Spillane, 'Terrorists and Special Status: The British Experience in Northern Ireland', *Hastings International and Comparative Law Review*, 9.3 (1986), 481-516, p. 489-490.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 453.

opportunity should be taken to bring special category status to an end'⁷⁸, the British government began removing privileges granted to politically-motivated prisoners. They did so by rescinding SCS and introducing the criminalisation policy, under which; from March 1, 1976, all politically motivated offences would be regarded as regular crimes and those responsible would not be granted SCS.⁷⁹ This policy, as previously discussed, portrayed the IRA as illegitimate and apolitical, and according to Kieran McEvoy, was enacted to 'break the IRA in particular.'⁸⁰ We can understand this to be the initial securitising act against which the IRA would later resist. The initial speech act in this securitisation can be considered to be the Gardiner Report, which regarded the granting of SCS as a 'serious mistake' and presented 'the maintenance of law and order' as being threatened by the granting of SCS to prisoners.⁸¹ Thus, we can see the British government to be the securitising actor, with law and order being the referent object and political prisoners being the referent subject. This securitisation process allowed for the introduction of the criminalisation policy, which was announced in the House of Commons by Labour Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Merlyn Rees on November 4, 1975.⁸² The proposal received bipartisan support, with Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Airey Neave declaring that 'terrorists and murderers cannot be dignified with a political label.'⁸³ So, through this securitising act, not only were the British government portraying republican prisoners as an existential threat to law and order, but they were also simultaneously delegitimising them through portraying them as criminally motivated, therefore undermining the moral justification of their cause, which according to Buchanan is an essential foundation of any legitimate entity.

From the confines of the Maze Prison's infamous H-Block cells, the securitised group (IRA prisoners) began to speak back and challenge this securitising act through coordinated protests, beginning on September 14, 1976, with what was colloquially known as the 'blanket protest'.⁸⁴ This can be considered to be the beginning of the counter-securitisation process

⁷⁸ Gardiner Committee, *Report of a Committee to Consider, in the Context of Civil Liberties and Human Rights, Measures to Deal with Terrorism in Northern Ireland*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1975), in *CAIN* <<https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/hms/gardiner.htm>> [accessed May 20 2021].

⁷⁹ Mulcahy, p. 453.

⁸⁰ Kieran McEvoy, 'Political Prisoners, Resistance and the Law in Northern Ireland: A Paper for Palestinian Activists', *Lawyers, Conflict & Transition* (2015), p. iv.

⁸¹ Gardiner Committee, *Report of a Committee to Consider, in the Context of Civil Liberties and Human Rights, Measures to Deal with Terrorism in Northern Ireland*.

⁸² House of Commons, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: The Official Report*, (November 4 1975, vol. 899, cols. 233-294) <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1975/nov/04/northern-ireland-emergency-provisions#S5CV0899P0_19751104_HOC_170> [accessed April 7 2021].

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Hennessey, p. 15.

carried out by IRA prisoners, as they made securitising moves in an attempt to reverse the emergency measure brought in by the British government as a result of their initial securitising act. In September 1976, several IRA prisoners began the ‘blanket protests’, sparked when prisoner Kieran Nugent refused to wear the prison uniform upon entering Maze Prison. He is popularly believed to have stated ‘if you want me to wear that you’ll have to nail it to my back’ when approached by prison guards requesting him to don the prison uniform.⁸⁵ This statement evoked Christ-like imagery, given that in Catholicism, Christ is believed to have been nailed to the cross. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the imagery and rhetoric surrounding the prison protests were highly reminiscent of imagery of Christian martyrdom. Tom Murtagh and Phillip Wheatley argue that Sinn Féin profited from this particular statement⁸⁶, showing that it likely aided them in appealing to their relevant audience. Such imagery was tactical in portraying the British government as illegitimate aggressors against a noble, inherently just cause, and through this, rallying support among the Catholic populace. Nugent and hundreds of other republican prisoners refused to wear the uniform and instead wrapped themselves in their blankets, becoming known as the ‘blanketmen.’⁸⁷ On March 20, 1978, the ‘dirty protest’ began, during which prisoners refused to leave their cells to shower or use the toilet facilities.⁸⁸ During these protests, republican prisoners submitted complaints to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), and although their cases against the British government were unsuccessful, we can consider such moves to be efforts to portray the British prison regime as illegal, and resulting from this; illegitimate. For example, in 1977, several prisoners alleged that the prison had breached articles 3, 6, 10, and 13 of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR). The ECtHR would dismiss most of their claims in 1980.⁸⁹ In spite of their dismissal, the fact that the hunger-strikers lodged these complaints is evidence that they were trying to undermine the legitimacy of the British prison regime through portraying it as illegal. As outlined by Balzacq, in order for a security practice to be legitimate, it must conform with existing legal paradigms. Through suggesting otherwise, the hunger-strikers were attempting to delegitimise the British government’s prison regime. Additionally, as noted by Buchanan, an entity guilty of human rights abuses could not claim to be morally justified in its exercise of

⁸⁵ O’Hearn, ‘Movement Inside and Outside of Prison’, p. 149.

⁸⁶ Murtagh, Wheatley, p. 238.

⁸⁷ O’Hearn, ‘Movement Inside and Outside of Prison’, p. 149-150.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 153.

⁸⁹ Murtagh, Wheatley, p. 265.

power, thus, through attempting to portray the British government as immoral, the IRA were attempting to delegitimise it.

In a further attempt to gain political prisoner status, on October 27, 1980, seven republican prisoners went on hunger-strike. Through this, they were calling for their ‘five just demands’ to be met, these being: the right not to wear prison uniform; the right not to do prison work; freedom of association; the right to organise recreational facilities, have one weekly visit, one weekly letter in and out and one food parcel per week; and the restoration of all lost remission.⁹⁰ Such demands essentially equated to the rights previously offered under SCS. This hunger-strike seemed to have had a substantial impact on the perceived legitimacy of the British government’s prison regime, with various Labour Party constituency branches requesting that the government grant the prisoners SCS, and several international organisations (such as Pax Christi and Peace People) requesting audiences with Thatcher.⁹¹ In line with Balzacq’s analysis, through the IRA’s framing of the British prison regime as unjustified (through their insistence that they were political, not criminal) and illegal (through appealing to the ECtHR), they eroded the perceived legitimacy of this British security practice and encouraged scepticism of said practice. On December 18, the hunger-strike was brought to an end when medical intervention was provided to Sean McKenna, a striker who had become unresponsive. Murtagh and Wheatley note that IRA leadership was under the impression that concessions were imminent, however; concessions were never granted.⁹² The failure of the British to reintroduce SCS led to further securitising moves by the IRA, most notably; the 1981 hunger-strike.

When we consider these protests in regard to the previously outlined theoretical framework, we can understand them to be counter-securitising moves executed with the objective of reversing the emergency measure introduced as a result of the British government’s initial securitising act. However, the protests gained little momentum outside of prison walls. Sands, recognising that their efforts were not reaching their intended audience and therefore mustered insufficient societal mobilisation in favour of their campaign, wrote to IRA leadership in 1978 saying that they had ‘failed to reach a broader base of support.’⁹³ In order to achieve widespread mobilisation, the IRA had to adjust their campaign and establish themselves as authorised speakers for their relevant audience. So,

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 333-335.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 342-3.

⁹² Ibid, p. 354.

⁹³ O’Hearn, ‘Movement Inside and Outside of Prison’, p. 5.

while the IRA can be said to have counter-securitised, they did not do so successfully before the 1981 hunger-strike as they failed to reach an audience that could ‘accept’ their counter-securitising message and mobilise in accordance with this. In order to do so, Sands suggested a highly emotional call to action, as well as a broadened scope- they should pursue local, national, and international audiences.⁹⁴ They recognised the need to more efficiently appeal to their relevant audience in order to ‘engage... active support’⁹⁵ within the nationalist community. Thus, in the 1981 hunger-strike, the IRA understood the importance of reaching this audience and were able to more successfully counter-securitise.

Sands Goes on Strike

According to Denis O’Hearn, immediately after the collapse of the 1980 hunger-strike, Sands was determined to pursue another one.⁹⁶ In a letter to then-Sinn Féin vice-president Gerry Adams, after the collapse of the first strike, Sands asked the party leadership to ‘issue a statement, pointing to the inflexibility of the Brits... we embark on another hunger-strike!... The people, the movement, have taken a blow.’⁹⁷ Recognising that ending the hunger-strike without progress regarding SCS damaged the image of the IRA, Sands was determined to re-establish the prison struggle through a new securitising move: a second hunger-strike. According to Murtagh and Wheatley, the protesting prisoners tactically chose to stagger the beginning of their hunger-strikes in order to elongate its course and place the maximum amount of pressure on the British government.⁹⁸ Sands, the mastermind behind the second strike, would be the first to begin refusing food.⁹⁹

Publications made in *An Phoblacht* demonstrate how the IRA spoke security in the lead-up to the hunger-strike. On February 7, 1981, *An Phoblacht* published a statement, issued two days earlier by the ‘blanketmen’ and female republican prisoners in Armagh Prison, announcing the commencement of a second hunger-strike. In said announcement, the prisoners declared that ‘hunger-strikes to the death if necessary will begin commencing from March 1st 1981, the fifth anniversary of the withdrawal of political status... we call upon all those who supported us during the last hunger-strike to again rally to our cause and we call upon those who sat on the fence to now see the intransigence of the British and the justness

⁹⁴ Ibidem.

⁹⁵ Ibidem.

⁹⁶ Denis O’Hearn, *Nothing But an Unfinished Song: Bobby Sands, the Irish Hunger-striker Who Ignited a Generation* (New York: Nation Books, 2006), p. 301.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 305-6.

⁹⁸ Murtagh, Wheatley, p. 379.

⁹⁹ Ibidem.

of our cause.’¹⁰⁰ This can be considered to be the initial speech act of this counter-securitising move. The hunger-strikers were attempting to invoke the reversal of the criminalisation policy through calling upon its relevant audience to mobilise against this British policy. *An Phoblacht* provided a medium to mobilise nationalists through advertising protests and demonstrations and encouraging readers to attend.¹⁰¹ For example, on February 21, the newspaper’s front page displayed an advertisement of a ‘hunger-strike march and rally’ organised by the National H-Block/Armagh Committee.¹⁰² Such calls to action allowed the IRA to galvanise its relevant audience into demonstrations of support, most prominently seen in the election of Sands and mass mobilisation following his passing, as will be discussed in the following chapters. On February 28, *An Phoblacht* wrote that this hunger-strike would ‘bring into the picture the overriding question of the Irish people’s right to self-determination. It is about the right of Irish people, treated presently by the British worse than captured animals, to be treated as political prisoners. It is about the way the British treat Ireland.’¹⁰³ This messaging securitised the nationalist community against British authorities through displaying Irish people as victims of an unjust, illegitimate regime, as no regime that treats citizens ‘worse than captured animals’ could possibly claim to have a moral justification to exist. Through emphasising Britain’s cruel treatment of Ireland, this messaging furthermore presented British rule as an existential threat to the Irish people. This intensified media campaign would prove to be effective in the IRA’s mobilisation of its audience, as will be expanded upon in the following chapters.

On March 1, 1981, the following statement was released by the Republican Press Centre: ‘We, the Republican POWs in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh... are entitled to and hereby demand political status, and we reject today as we have consistently rejected every day since September 14th 1976... the British government’s attempted criminalisation of ourselves and our struggle... We have asserted that we are political prisoners and... that we are politically motivated... As a further demonstration of our selflessness and the justness of our cause, a number of our comrades, beginning today with Bobby Sands, will hunger-strike to the death unless the British government abandons its criminalisation policy and meets our

¹⁰⁰ ‘TO THE DEATH’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, February 7 1981, p. 2.

¹⁰¹ Similar incidences of *An Phoblacht* advertising demonstrations and making direct calls for action can be seen in: ‘HUNGER-STRIKE NATIONAL MARCH & RALLY’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, June 27 1981, p. 1; ‘WHAT’S ON’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, April 25 1981, p. 7; ‘WHAT’S ON’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 9 1981, p. 31, among others.

¹⁰² ‘HUNGER-STRIKE MARCH AND RALLY’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, February 21 1981, p. 1.

¹⁰³ ‘THE ONLY ROAD OPEN’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, February 28 1981, p. 12.

demands.¹⁰⁴ In this statement, the hunger-strikers were stating the motivation inherent in their strike: to counteract the British government's securitisation of them as criminal actors, and through proving that they were instead politically motivated, they were attempting to legitimise their own cause. Thus, this counter-securitising move must be interpreted as an attempt to provoke the reversal of Britain's criminalisation policy by undermining its professed justification, this being that republican prisoners were immoral criminals. Through attempting to undermine the justification for the criminalisation policy, the IRA were thus attempting to undermine its legitimacy, as Balzacq contends that a security practice must be justified in order to be legitimate.

On March 1, Sands began refusing food. That day, in his prison diary, he wrote that 'there can never be peace in Ireland until the foreign, oppressive British presence is removed, leaving all the Irish people... to control their own affairs... as a sovereign people.'¹⁰⁵ Thus, we can understand the hunger-strike to be a counter-securitising move which had the goals of reversing the emergency measures brought in as a result of the securitising actor's initial securitisation process, as well as securitising the Irish populace against British authorities by presenting British presence in Northern Ireland as an existential threat, since he stated that there can be no peace while Britain ruled the nation.¹⁰⁶ Thus, it is evident that, during their counter-securitisation process, the IRA both delegitimised and securitised the British government.

The British Response: Delegitimation and Securitisation of the IRA

In the House of Commons on March 3, 1981, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Humphrey Atkins, assured his colleagues that 'we shall not give way on the issue of political status under pressure of further protest action, whatever form that takes.'¹⁰⁷ This showed a continued dedication to preventing the IRA from legitimising their cause through gaining political status. Furthermore, on March 5, Thatcher responded to the hunger-strike with a

¹⁰⁴ 'Political Status Now!', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, March 7 1981, p. 12.

¹⁰⁵ Sands, 'Prison Diary'.

¹⁰⁶ For further evidence of this and similar counter-securitising messages, see: 'A Slow Burning Fuse', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 30 1981, p. 5; 'BRITS SLAY TWO YOUTHS', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, April 25 1981, p. 8-9; 'Dangerous Buffoon', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, February 14 1981, p. 1; 'HUNGER-STRIKE THREATENED', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, January 10 1981, p. 2; 'There will be fire and there will be fury', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, April 25 1981, p. 3; 'The Funeral of Bobby Sands', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 9 1981, p. 16-17; 'RUC LICENCE-TO-KILL', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, June 27 1981, p. 4; among others.

¹⁰⁷ House of Commons, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: The Official Report*, (March 3, 1981, vol. 1000, cols. 131-134) <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1981/mar/03/northern-ireland-prisons#S5CV1000P0_19810303_HOC_185> [accessed April 7 2021].

speech in which she declared ‘there is no such thing as political murder, political bombing or political violence. There is only criminal murder, criminal bombing and criminal violence. We will not compromise on this. There will be no political status.’¹⁰⁸ This statement evidences the British government’s continued securitisation of IRA prisoners as existential threats to law and order through framing them as dangerous criminals. Furthermore, in line with Buchanan’s conception of a legitimate entity, Thatcher was undermining the IRA’s legitimacy by publicly stating that the moral justification for their actions was non-existent, and instead of being driven by an authentic political ideology, she portrayed them as being driven by criminal motives. Since the IRA had attempted to undermine the legitimacy of the British government, and particularly its prison regime, through its hunger-strike, the British government responded with further delegitimisation in the form of portraying them as morally unjustified, criminal actors. This interaction closely mirrored Stritzel and Chang’s conceptualisation of legitimisation and delegitimisation characterising the interactions between the initial securitising actor and the counter-securitising actor.

As previously outlined, the position of the British government as the sole purveyor of security in Northern Ireland was essential in supporting its claim to legitimate sovereignty in the region. Thus, the IRA’s process of counter-securitisation through the delegitimisation of the British prison regime and British rule threatened to undermine the perceived legitimacy of British sovereignty in the region. Due to this, the British government was forced to retaliate by re-establishing its own legitimacy while delegitimising and securitising the prisoners. They did so through re-emphasising the professed justification for the criminalisation policy, and insisting that the IRA were not political actors, but rather criminal thugs. Through disseminating this message, the British government was suggesting that the IRA was therefore morally unjustified to attempt to exercise political power. Additionally, by framing themselves as the defenders of law and order through their initial securitising act and positioning the IRA as an existential threat to the same, the British government was transmitting the message that they were the sole purveyors of security, and therefore, had the legitimate right to claim sovereignty in Northern Ireland.

¹⁰⁸ Margaret Thatcher, *Speech in Belfast*, (Belfast: Margaret Thatcher Foundation, March 5 1981) in the *Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive* <<https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104589>> [accessed March 3 2021].

Chapter Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter has demonstrated that the British government's initial securitising act was met with consistent counter-securitisation attempts on behalf of republican prisoners to reverse the criminalisation policy. Through the prison protests since 1976, and most notably in the 1981 hunger-strike, the IRA were attempting to erode the perceived legitimacy of one of the British government's security practices, its criminalisation policy. In line with Balzacq's analysis, they did so by presenting the criminalisation policy as unjustified and even illegal (for example, through appealing to the ECtHR). Furthermore, the hunger-strikers securitised against the British authorities through presenting British presence in Northern Ireland as an existential threat to the Irish people. The British government met this counter-securitisation with furthered securitisation and delegitimisation of the IRA. Through continuing to insist that the IRA were criminally, rather than politically, motivated, they suggested that they had no moral justification for their actions. This interaction mirrored Stritzel and Chang's conceptualisation of processes of securitisation and counter-securitisation being defined by legitimisation and delegitimisation, in which each entity was in a constant struggle to establish and defend its legitimacy.

Chapter 3: Bobby Sands, MP

Sands' election provides an invaluable opportunity for understanding the interactions between the IRA and the British government. It represents a direct confrontation between the two entities, and allows us to compare through which methods and how successfully each group securitised its opponent vis-à-vis its relevant audience. This chapter will discuss the election of Sands as a counter-securitising move intended to delegitimise the criminalisation policy and the British government. It will do so by examining the decision-making behind his nomination, his campaign and resistance against it, and lastly, the republican and British reaction to Sands' victory. Through this analysis, this chapter will respond to the following sub-question: 'How did the election of Bobby Sands come about and demonstrate that the IRA had a legitimate platform for political action, and how did the British government attempt to counteract this through delegitimising and securitising the IRA?'

Sands' Nomination

On March 5, 1981, independent MP for Fermanagh/South Tyrone, Frank Maguire, passed away.¹⁰⁹ According to Sanders, it was quickly decided that a prisoner would stand in the by-election 'to provide the prison struggle with unprecedented legitimacy.'¹¹⁰ Were an IRA prisoner to be elected to the UK Parliament, it would no longer be possible for the British government to claim that they were not politically motivated- it would amount to a complete refutation of the professed justification of the criminalisation policy. This, in Balzacq's analysis, would undermine the legitimacy of the practice. According to O'Hearn, Adams believed that the election would 'give new credibility to the prison struggle and... to the overall Republican struggle.'¹¹¹ Thus, we see that the purpose of the election campaign was not only to undermine the British government's criminalisation of IRA prisoners, but also to grant further legitimacy to the IRA's cause in general. In an interview with *An Phoblacht*, former republican prisoner Seánna Walsh stated that an electoral campaign 'seemed like a good way to put it on public record that there was a high level of support for the prisoners and for our demand for political status.'¹¹² There was anxiety since, in the case of a loss for Sands, it would 'allow the British to present the outcome as a... rejection of the legitimacy of

¹⁰⁹ Sanders, p. 132.

¹¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹¹ O'Hearn, *Nothing But an Unfinished Song*, p. 353.

¹¹² 'Bobby Sands Continues to Inspire People Around the World', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 3 2020 <<https://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/27807>> [accessed April 26 2021].

the protest'¹¹³, meaning it would affirm the British declaration that the IRA acted without popular support, thus justifying the criminalisation policy and demonstrating the IRA's resistance to be unjustified. However, it was eventually decided that Sands should be put forward for election since, according to Walsh, 'we hoped that Bobby's election, and the clear signal this sent that republicans had significant public support, would put pressure on the British to meet the prisoners' demands.'¹¹⁴ On March 26, Sinn Féin announced that Sands would contest the election.¹¹⁵

When considering the IRA's decision to run Sands in the by-elections through the lens of the theoretical framework, we can understand the IRA's motivations to be the following. As argued by Balzacq, a security practice must be perceived as justified in order to be legitimate, yet; were an IRA member to be elected to the British parliament, this would completely erode any semblance of justification surrounding the criminalisation policy, since the IRA would prove themselves to be politically rather than criminally motivated. Thus, this election would erode the legitimacy of the criminalisation policy. Balzacq and Weber also argue that an entity can be considered to be legitimate if enough of those concerned believe it to be so. So, the election provided an opportunity to demonstrate that the majority of people in Fermanagh/South Tyrone believed the IRA (and their claim to political status) to be legitimate, therefore implying that the IRA should be considered a legitimate entity, with the British government instead being the illegitimate, occupying force. Additionally, as described by Hobbes, an authority must be perceived as the sole purveyor of security in order to legitimate its existence. Should a challenger rise in Northern Ireland, the very presence of British rule in the region would suffer from a legitimacy crisis, and would instead be considered a security threat. Furthermore, as noted by Buchanan, popular support for an IRA candidate would provide the organisation with clear moral justification to enact a mandate. It would definitively demonstrate that they were not criminals, but rather legitimate political actors, and through this; contest Britain's security and sovereignty claims. Lastly, the decision to run Sands in this election must also be considered as a counter-securitising move. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, since the commencement of the criminalisation policy, the IRA had made counter-securitising moves in order to reverse this emergency measure. Through the mass mobilisation of the Catholic community in Fermanagh and South

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ O'Hearn, *Nothing But an Unfinished Song*, p. 353.

Tyrone in this election, the IRA was further attempting to reverse the criminalisation policy through delegitimising it to its audience, as will be elaborated upon in the following section.

The Campaign

Sands' electoral campaign took place between March 30 and April 9.¹¹⁶ The British government did not allow Sands to campaign on his own behalf, and so, Owen Carron was chosen as his election agent.¹¹⁷ O'Hearn describes Sands' election campaign as a 'grassroots campaign', during which young volunteers poured into Fermanagh/South Tyrone to canvas for him.¹¹⁸ Beresford argues that the emotional atmosphere created by the Sands campaign, which flew the Irish flag on convoys and blasted republican songs, evoked 'a sense of euphoria.'¹¹⁹ This, according to Beresford, had 'an extraordinary impact on the Catholic community.'¹²⁰ The campaign's strategic, emotional communication with its relevant audience would prove to be successful in mobilising them to vote. According to *An Phoblacht*, Sands' campaign was based upon a simple yet poignant message, with the candidate declaring 'there is but a single issue at stake, the right of human dignity for Irish men and women who are imprisoned for taking part in this period of the historic struggle for Irish independence... our protest and this hunger-strike are to secure from the British government an end of its policy of labelling us as criminals.'¹²¹ This statement demonstrates that the campaign was a form of resistance against the criminalisation policy that aimed to provoke its reversal, and thus should be considered as a form of counter-securitisation by a securitised group against the initial securitising actor's emergency measures. The IRA counter-securitised through delegitimising the emergency measure and the British government's claim to legitimate sovereignty in Northern Ireland, as well as through presenting British rule as an existential threat to Irish people. The methods through which the IRA counter-securitised through delegitimation and securitisation will be elaborated upon in the following paragraphs.

¹¹⁶ O'Hearn, *Nothing But an Unfinished Song*, p. 354.

¹¹⁷ David Beresford, *Ten Men Dead: The Story of the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike* (London: Grafton Books, 1987), p. 109-110.

¹¹⁸ O'Hearn, *Nothing But an Unfinished Song*, p. 356.

¹¹⁹ Beresford, p. 111.

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹²¹ Shane MacThomáis, 'Remembering 1981: Bobby Sands Contests By-Election', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, April 6 2006 <<https://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/15055>>, [accessed April 26 2021].

Adams alleged that the election was ‘held against a background of harassment and intimidation of [Sands’] election workers by British crown forces.’¹²² Those campaigning for Sands made numerous allegations of mistreatment by British authorities. For example, *An Phoblacht* claimed that Sands’ campaign workers were purposefully delayed at a checkpoint while travelling to a meeting.¹²³ Additionally, the paper claimed that Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC, the former Northern Irish police force) shadowed campaigners’ cars while putting up election posters, and routinely tore them down.¹²⁴ While scholars such as Murtagh and Wheatley contest the validity of such claims¹²⁵, the presence of them likely impacted the perception of the British authorities among *An Phoblacht*’s audience. Additionally, on April 3, Sands campaigner Bernadette Devlin McAliskey appealed to Amnesty International, the National Council for Civil Liberties, and the House of Lords to send independent observers to ensure a ‘free and fair election.’¹²⁶ While, as previously stated, the validity of these allegations remains unclear, they disseminated the message that the British establishment was liable to act illegally during this election. Considering this in relation to Balzacq’s declaration that a security practice must conform with legal norms to be considered legitimate, we therefore can understand these allegations as an attempt to portray the government’s election practices as illegal, and consequently, illegitimate.

Zeilstra contends that Sands’ campaign was supported by his physical deterioration, which had become increasingly visible by the time of the election.¹²⁷ Images printed of Sands in *An Phoblacht* before the election show him as emaciated, long-haired, and draped in robes: all images reminiscent of the suffering Christ, which, as previously discussed, was widely-used imagery throughout the prison protests. Such imagery placed the Irish in the position of the valiant victim willing to die for a noble cause, and the British in the position of the unjust oppressor. Additionally, as previously highlighted by de Graaf, religious imagery of suffering and martyrdom was deeply enshrined within the Irish culture, and the tactical utilisation of said imagery allowed the IRA to expertly speak to its relevant audience. The highly emotional nature of this imagery furthermore encouraged the IRA’s relevant audience to mobilise against British rule.

¹²² Gerry Adams, *The Writings of Bobby Sands: a Collection of Prison Writings* (Dublin: Sinn Fein POW Dept., 1981), foreword, p. 5.

¹²³ Peter Arnlis, ‘Campaigning Against the Odds’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, April 11 1981, p. 7.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁵ Murtagh, Wheatley, p. 389.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 389-90.

¹²⁷ Zeilstra, p. 67.

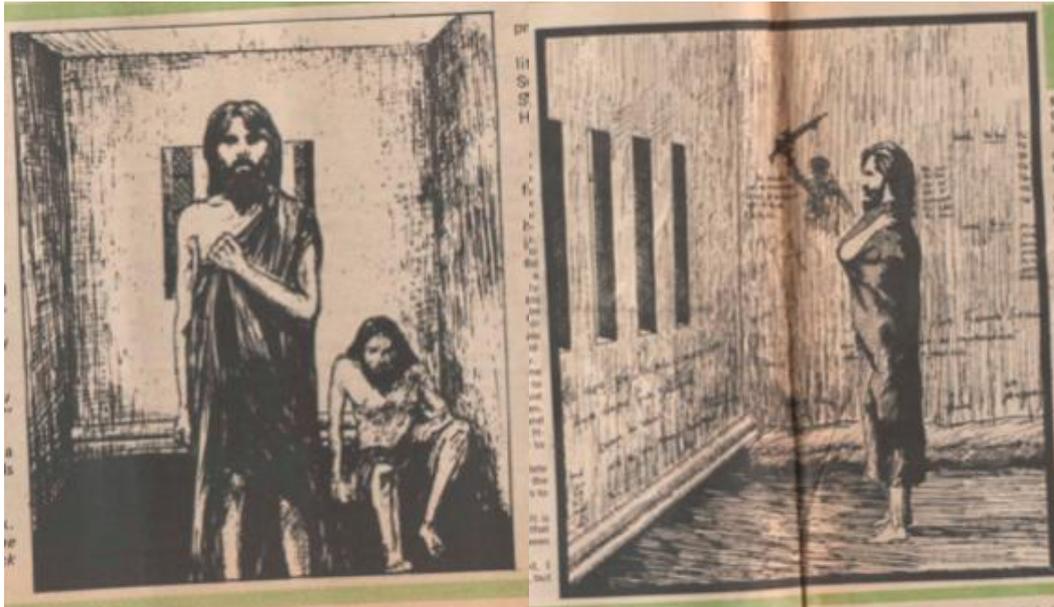


Figure 3: Drawings of Sands published in *An Phoblacht* shortly before his candidacy was announced.¹²⁸

Sands' campaign was met with resistance from British establishment forces. In the House of Commons on the day of the election, Labour MP Don Concannon stated that 'it is our view that a vote for Mr. Sands is a vote of approval for the perpetrators of the La Mon massacre, the murder of Lord Mountbatten at Warrenpoint and all the other senseless murders that have taken place in Northern Ireland over the years.'¹²⁹ According to the *New York Times*, Sands' opponent, Unionist Harry West, declared: 'if you believe in peace, democracy, law and order, vote for me... A vote for Sands is a vote for more violence and more terrorism and more death.'¹³⁰ Through these statements, we see that, once again, the British establishment delegitimised republican prisoners through repeating their initial securitising message: that republican prisoners represented an existential threat to law and order, and support for them would lead to further bloodshed. Members of the establishment continued to portray the IRA as criminal, thus delegitimising them and negating the motivation inherent in their campaign, this being the demand for political status. There was a genuine, deeply-held belief among the British government that the IRA operated without

¹²⁸ Bobby Sands, 'The Writings of Bobby Sands', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, March 21 1981, p. 6-7.

¹²⁹ House of Commons, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: The Official Report*, (April 9 1981, vol. 2, cols. 1097-1221), <<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1981-04-09/debates/046dd6ce-7197-421e-a9e3-130f71340688/CommonsChamber>>, [accessed April 26 2021].

¹³⁰ William Borders, 'I.R.A MAN'S RACE FOR COMMONS UNCOVERS OLD PAIN', *New York Times*, April 9 1981, in *New York Times Article Archive* <<https://www.nytimes.com/1981/04/09/world/ira-man-s-race-for-commons-uncovers-old-pain.html?searchResultPosition=26>> [accessed April 26 2021].

popular support. In a letter to Labour Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Francis Pym, sent on April 8, Atkins wrote that he ‘would not at the moment judge [a Sands victory] to be a likely outcome.’¹³¹ In the same letter, Atkins noted that Sands’ election would provide the IRA with ‘an enhanced opportunity of embarrassing the [Northern Irish] prison authorities, and thus the government.’¹³² Atkins recognised, much in the same way that IRA decision-makers did, that were Sands to be successful in this election, the British prison regime, as well as British presence in general, would suffer a legitimacy crisis in the eyes of those in Northern Ireland, as well as those in the UK at large. Were the IRA to prove that they held widespread support, the presence of the British government in the region would come under scrutiny, in line with Hobbesian analysis. Thus, they were pushed to delegitimise the republican candidate in order to preserve their position as the sole legitimate authority in Northern Ireland.

Murtagh and Wheatley refer to the IRA’s messaging before the election as a sleek ‘propaganda machine’ that the British government did not have the capacity to counter.¹³³ This highlights the strong foothold that the IRA held as authorised speakers among their relevant audience, which Stritzel and Chang contend to be essential in establishing legitimacy during the securitisation process. The British establishment, however, had not successfully established itself as authorised speakers within the Irish Catholic community, thus leaving them relatively ineffective in their attempts to dissuade them from voting for Sands. The April 4th edition of *An Phoblacht* displayed dramatic lettering on the cover pleading readers to ‘SAVE SANDS LIFE!’ through supporting his campaign.¹³⁴ Additionally, the accompanying article declared that ‘the thousands of votes cast for Bobby Sands will amount to a major repudiation of Britain’s criminalisation policy... and for him to be elected a member of the British parliament will make ridiculous looking... any feeble British protestations that the armed resistance in the North of Ireland is either a criminal conspiracy or without public support.’¹³⁵ This line is evidence that Sands’ electoral campaign was ideated with the explicit aim of resisting the criminalisation policy through delegitimising it, that is; eroding public belief that it is justified (i.e. based upon a genuine threat, instead of the unjust perception that these ‘freedom fighters’¹³⁶ were terrorist criminals). The IRA

¹³¹ Humphrey Atkins, [Letter to Francis Pym regarding Sands’ election], (London: April 8 1981), in *CAIN* <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/proni/1981/proni_CENT-1-10-25_1981-04-08.pdf>, [accessed April 26 2021].

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Murtagh, Wheatley, p. 390.

¹³⁴ ‘SAVE SANDS LIFE!’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, April 4 1981, p. 1.

¹³⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹³⁶ ‘The Unchanging Desire for Freedom’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 9 1981, p. 3.

recognised that, through undermining this policy, that they could make the British authorities ‘ridiculous-looking’, suggesting that the undermining of this policy would provoke a legitimacy crisis for them (since, according to Balzacq, it is more difficult for an actor to oblige people to comply with a security practice if its perception of legitimacy has been eroded). Through *An Phoblacht*, the IRA were therefore counter-securitising against the British government by calling upon their relevant audience to vote for Sands, based on a campaign of delegitimisation of the criminalisation policy.



Figure 4: *An Phoblacht* encourages its readership to vote for Sands.¹³⁷

Sands’ campaign posters were highly emotional, presenting a smiling image of Sands and declaring ‘his life is in your hands’, as demonstrated below. The nationalist population of Fermanagh/South Tyrone was therefore tasked with coming out *en masse* to vote with the explicit suggestion that the election of a unionist candidate was an existential threat to Sands’ life, and their votes would prevent a member of their community from being murdered by British intransigence.¹³⁸ This highly evocative securitising discourse would prove to be successful in mobilising Catholic communities of Fermanagh and South Tyrone to support

¹³⁷ ‘VOTE BOBBY SANDS’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, April 4 1981, p. 12.

¹³⁸ Similar appeals to *An Phoblacht*’s readership can be seen in the following articles: ‘NO MORE FUNERALS!’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, June 13 1981, p. 3; ‘SAVE THE LIVES OF THESE FOUR HUNGER-STRIKERS!’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 30 1981, p. 48; ‘Smash Britain’s H-Block Death Policy Vote the Political Prisoners No. 1’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, June 6 1981, p. 10-11.

the IRA candidate in the elections. Such methods of communication were thus essential in allowing the IRA to speak to its relevant audience and galvanise support amongst them.

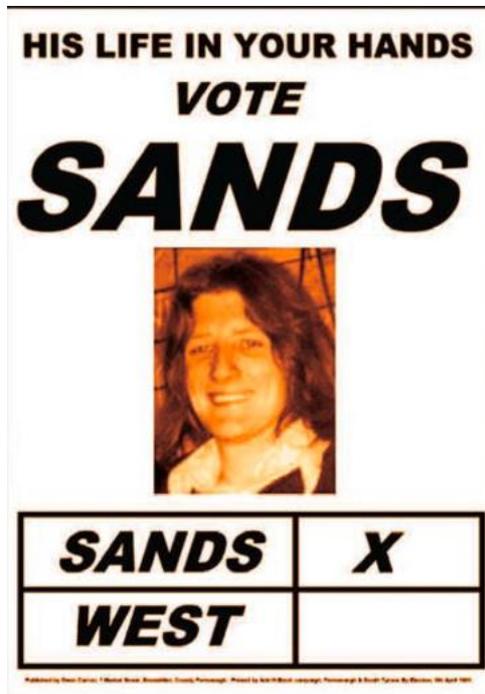


Figure 5: A digitised version of an election poster from Sands' campaign.¹³⁹

The Right Honourable Bobby Sands, MP¹⁴⁰: Irish Elation, British Anxiety

Voters in Fermanagh/South-Tyrone went to the polls on April 9, 1981. Counting was completed the following day, with the victorious Sands winning 30,492 votes to West's 29,046.¹⁴¹ The threat perception as constructed by the IRA succeeded in convincing many Catholics in the district to give their votes to Sands. The *New York Times* reported that one Catholic woman declared that her and her family, in spite of being opposed to IRA violence, 'certainly [could not] vote for a Protestant.'¹⁴² This highlights the success that the IRA had in

¹³⁹ 'Bobby Sands Continues to Inspire People Around the World', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 3 2020 <<https://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/27807>> [accessed April 26 2021].

¹⁴⁰ Nationalists, IRA members, and Sands himself often referred to Sands using the traditional nomenclature assigned to regular UK parliament members in order to satirise the IRA member's ascension into the ranks of British decision-making. See, for example: Tony Crowley, 'The Right Honourable Bobby Sands ESQ MP MURDERED BY FELLOW MEMBERS OF H.M. GOVT' <<https://ccd.claremont.edu/digital/collection/mni/id/572>> [accessed May 31 2021]; O'Hearn, *Nothing But an Unfinished Song*, p. 353.

¹⁴¹ Murtagh, Wheatley, p. 395.

¹⁴² Borders, 'I.R.A MAN'S RACE FOR COMMONS UNCOVERS OLD PAIN'.

portraying the British establishment as an illegitimate threat, and through this, they invoked a mass demonstration of support in the election. Adams later commented that the result was ‘a clear sign- for those who doubted it- that the Nationalist people recognise republican prisoners as political prisoners and support their prison struggle.’¹⁴³ O’Hearn referred to Sands’ success as ‘a major victory in their campaign to win popular acknowledgement that the IRA was a political army and they were political prisoners.’¹⁴⁴ Sands’ election demonstrated a clear fact: militant republicans were not without widespread societal support. This was a major blow for the criminalisation policy, with Beresford noting that the result ‘undermined the entire shaky edifice of British Policy in Northern Ireland.’¹⁴⁵ The *New York Times* referred to the election as a ‘stunning blow to the Protestant establishment.’¹⁴⁶ As noted by Joanne Wright, this election undermined the credibility of the British government’s criminalisation of IRA prisoners as ‘this [was] not a perception shared by wide sections of the Irish community.’¹⁴⁷ In line with this, *An Phoblacht* celebrated Sands’ victory and the implications it held for the perceived legitimacy of British rule in Northern Ireland.¹⁴⁸ Following Sands’ election, the newspaper wrote that ‘the validity of [the IRA’s] mandate...rests...upon the illegitimacy of partition and the British presence.’¹⁴⁹ This quote demonstrates that the republican interpretation of Sands’ victory closely aligned with Stritzel and Chang’s conceptualisation of securitisation and counter-securitisation resting upon dynamics of legitimisation and delegitimisation. The IRA established its legitimacy as a political actor through undermining the legitimacy of the British government’s security regime in Northern Ireland.

The IRA’s mobilisation of voters in Fermanagh/South Tyrone illustrated that their relevant audience accepted its counter-securitising messaging, and so, it can be said that the IRA successfully counter-securitised. The indication that the IRA enjoyed widespread support delegitimised the criminalisation policy through demonstrating its professed justification to be false. Also, the IRA’s consistent portrayal of British rule in Ireland as

¹⁴³ Adams, p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ O’Hearn, *Nothing But an Unfinished song*, p. 357.

¹⁴⁵ Beresford, p. 114.

¹⁴⁶ William Borders, ‘JAILED I.R.A. MEMBER WINS COMMONS SEAT’, *New York Times*, April 11 1981, in *New York Times Article Archive* <<https://www.nytimes.com/1981/04/11/world/jailed-ira-member-wins-commons-seat.html?searchResultPosition=24>> [accessed April 26 2021].

¹⁴⁷ Joanne Wright, ‘PIRA Propaganda: The Construction of Legitimacy’, *The Journal of Conflict Studies*, 10.3 (1990), p. 37.

¹⁴⁸ See also: ‘ELECTION HAMMERS CRIMINALISATION’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, June 20 1981, p. 3; ‘TWO IRA PRISONERS ELECTED: Criminalisation Continues to Crumble’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, June 20 1981, p. 1.

¹⁴⁹ Peter Arnlis, ‘Brits Back Down’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, April 18 1981, p. 5.

illegitimate and an existential threat furthermore undermined the British government's claim to legitimate sovereignty in the region. Conversely, the election legitimised the IRA as a political entity. In Fermanagh/South Tyrone, more people than not considered an IRA volunteer to be a legitimate political actor, with scholars such as Balzacq and Weber identifying the belief in legitimacy as an essential foundation of a legitimate entity. Additionally, the election signalled that the IRA had a consensual base of support, which can be considered to be a moral justification for political action.

Thatcher responded to Sands' electoral victory with a continued campaign of delegitimisation and criminalisation, saying, on April 21, 'crime is crime is crime: it is not political... there can be no question of granting political status.'¹⁵⁰ Despite the fact that Sands had been elected to parliament, Thatcher continued to delegitimise him through portraying him as a criminal, and therefore portraying him as morally unjustified to exercise political power. Even before Sands was elected, Atkins had considered this possibility, and recommended that 'the sooner Sands is expelled [from parliament in the event of his election] the better.'¹⁵¹ *An Phoblacht* reported that just hours after Sands' election, Pym 'called a meeting for representatives from all parties... to examine the ways of unseating the Irish Republican MP.'¹⁵² However, such efforts never came to fruition due to resistance within the parliament itself. For example, two Labour MPs, Ernie Roberts and Clive Soley, issued a statement in which they claimed the expulsion of Sands would 'earn international condemnation and undermine the authority of the parliament.'¹⁵³ While British leadership was anxious to oust Sands from his position since his election undermined the legitimacy of the criminalisation policy and their presence in Northern Ireland, many in government realised that disregarding the democratic process would harm their reputation both at home and abroad. On April 13, it was made clear that no further avenues to expel Sands would be explored, with Hennessey arguing that the government was placated by the fact that Sands would soon pass away and the resulting by-election could be postponed until after the introduction of legislation barring any of his comrades from running.¹⁵⁴ Despite the failure to

¹⁵⁰ Margaret Thatcher, *Press Conference Ending Visit to Saudi Arabia (IRA Hunger Strikes)*, (Riyadh: Margaret Thatcher Foundation, April 21 1981) in *Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive* <<https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104501>> [accessed April 26 2021].

¹⁵¹ Atkins, [Letter to Francis Pym].

¹⁵² Arnlis, 'Brits Back Down', p. 5.

¹⁵³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁴ Thomas Hennessey, *Hunger Strike: Margaret Thatcher's Battle with the IRA, 1980-1981* (Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2014), p. 178.

expel Sands from parliament, legislation introduced in July of 1981 would eventually construct a narrative of illegality and illegitimacy surrounding his election.

In July of the same year, the British government introduced legislation to prevent certain inmates from running for parliament. The 1981 amendment of the Representation of the People Act, passed on July 2, states that ‘a person found guilty of one or more offences (whether before or after the passing of this Act and whether in the United Kingdom or elsewhere), and sentenced or ordered to be imprisoned or detained indefinitely or for more than one year, shall be disqualified for membership of the House of Commons while detained anywhere in the British Islands or the Republic of Ireland.’¹⁵⁵ Additionally, it declares that any person previously elected to parliament who fits the aforementioned criteria shall have their seat vacated.¹⁵⁶ Through this ex post facto law, the British government posthumously nullified Sands’ victory and undermined his platform for legitimate political action. The IRA’s attempt to exercise power, despite existing upon a democratic support base, was portrayed as criminal, morally unjustified, and therefore illegitimate. This act also evidences the barriers that may be created in order to exclude ‘illegitimate’ actors from participating in the decision-making process. The by-election following Sands’ death would not occur until August 20, 1981¹⁵⁷, precluding any other republican prisoners from running and further ‘embarrassing’¹⁵⁸ the British government. We can understand this as an attempt by the British government to preserve their status as the sole legitimate authority in the region through preventing a challenger from entering the levels of decision-making and, through this, threatening their position as the sole purveyor of security. However, Carron would go on to win these elections¹⁵⁹, once again indicating the support for militant republicanism and the prison campaign in Fermanagh/South Tyrone.

Chapter Conclusion

The decision to nominate Sands for the April 1981 parliamentary by-elections was a direct attempt to undermine the justification for the criminalisation policy and Britain’s targeting of imprisoned IRA volunteers as criminals, and to therefore erode the conformity with this security practice. As an extension of this, it was also an attempt to erode the belief in the

¹⁵⁵ United Kingdom, *Representation of the People Act 1981* (c. 34) <<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/34>> [accessed April 26 2021].

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Hennessey, p. 429.

¹⁵⁸ Atkins, [Letter to Francis Pym].

¹⁵⁹ Hennessey, p. 433.

legitimacy of the British government as the sole purveyor of security in the region. Sands' election demonstrated that the IRA were able to successfully counter-securitise against the British through appealing to their relevant audience, largely through *An Phoblacht*, but also through the tactical utilisation of cultural and religious messaging that resonated deeply with their relevant audience. This occurred in spite of the British government's continued delegitimisation of the organisation. The IRA's ability to appeal to its relevant audience culminated in a shock-defeat for the British establishment, and provoked what was recognised both domestically and internationally as a legitimacy crisis, at least for the validity of the criminalisation policy.

Despite the British establishment's attempts to securitise Sands during his campaign, this messaging was not accepted by voters in Fermanagh/South Tyrone, and the IRA volunteer emerged victorious. The immediate response of several members of the British government indicates grave concern due to Sands' election. Atkins' April 8 memo furthermore suggests that the British government was aware that the election of Sands could provoke a legitimacy crisis for them, both regarding their prison regime and their very presence in Northern Ireland. While Pym's expulsion proposal never came to fruition, the fact that this was considered to be a possibility demonstrates that the British government recognised that Sands' election undermined the justification for their criminalisation policy and thus threatened to provoke a multi-faceted legitimacy crisis for them. Additionally, the rapid introduction of an amended Representation of the People Act demonstrated the British government's active efforts to exclude the IRA from the polity due to the potential they held to delegitimise British security practices and British rule.

Chapter 4: Bobby Sands, Martyr

This chapter will examine the passing of Sands in order to demonstrate that his death significantly eroded compliance with the British government's security practices on a regional, national, and international level, indicating that they were perceived to be illegitimate. Concurrently, support for the IRA and a heightened acceptance of republican militarism can be observed, leading to the assumption that the IRA's counter-securitising messaging was not only accepted by their relevant audience, but also galvanised it into further demonstrations of support, thereby bolstering the IRA in its campaign against British rule. In order to demonstrate how the IRA counter-securitised and ignited such mobilisation, this chapter will respond to the following sub-question: 'How did support demonstrated for the IRA after the death of Sands erode the perceived legitimacy of the British government's security regime in Northern Ireland, and furthermore indicate that the IRA had successfully counter-securitised against the British government?'

Sands Passes Away: Tragedy in Irish Communities

After 66 days on hunger-strike, Sands passed away at 01:17 am on May 5, 1981.¹⁶⁰ Immediately after Sands' death, the *New York Times* reported that IRA sympathisers travelled through republican neighbourhoods announcing his passing using loudspeakers and sirens.¹⁶¹ Following the news of the republican icon's death, according to O'Hearn, thousands of people poured into the streets.¹⁶² In Belfast, violent clashes occurred between Sands sympathisers and British security forces.¹⁶³ *An Phoblacht* reported that 'crowds gathered, prayed the rosary, or built barricades and fought fierce running battles with the Brits and the RUC.'¹⁶⁴ Clashes between Sands supporters and British security forces indicated that the IRA's relevant audience had accepted their securitising messages, and had thus mobilised against British authorities, which had been presented to them as an existential threat. Sands' funeral took place on May 7th, and an estimated 100,000 people attended.¹⁶⁵ The funeral

¹⁶⁰ O'Hearn, *Nothing But an Unfinished Song*, p. 373.

¹⁶¹ William Borders, 'SANDS DIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND JAIL ON THE 66TH DAY OF HUNGER STRIKE', *New York Times*, May 5 1981, in *New York Times Article Archive* <<https://www.nytimes.com/1981/05/05/world/sands-dies-in-northern-ireland-jail-on-the-66th-day-of-hunger-strike.html?searchResultPosition=26>> [accessed May 7 2021].

¹⁶² O'Hearn, *Nothing But an Unfinished Song*, p. 374.

¹⁶³ Borders, 'SANDS DIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND JAIL ON THE 66TH DAY OF HUNGER-STRIKE'.

¹⁶⁴ 'Shock and outrage', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 9 1981, p. 5.

¹⁶⁵ Beresford, p. 137.

garnered international attention, with camera crews from as far away as Africa and Asia flocking to Northern Ireland to document the event.¹⁶⁶ The mass attendance at a convicted IRA prisoner's funeral, and lessened compliance with British security forces in the wake of Sands' death, demonstrates that his death provoked reduced conformity with the British government. The British government's influence and power to oblige Northern Irish citizens to conform to their security provisions had thus been demonstrably weakened, which, as explained by Balzacq, is evidence that their security practices were seen as illegitimate. The IRA can thus be said to have successfully delegitimised the criminalisation policy to their relevant audience.

Carron spoke at Sands' funeral- the prominence of such a political figure demonstrated that this was not just the laying to rest of a fallen comrade, but also a further attempt to mobilise the Catholic community against the British establishment. Somewhat cynically, Murtagh and Wheatley argue that 'it was inevitable that Sinn Féin and the PIRA would seek to maximise the publicity and propaganda value of Sands' death and funeral.'¹⁶⁷ While this statement is rather critical, the content of Carron's speech was undeniably political and served to further securitise the IRA's relevant audience against British authorities. Carron stated that Sands was 'cruelly murdered by the British government'¹⁶⁸, and would later refer to the latter as the 'big British murder machine.'¹⁶⁹ In this, Carron was accusing the British authorities of murder and thus undermining their claim to moral justification both in their criminalisation policy and their exercise of power in Northern Ireland. So, this statement delegitimised British rule by presenting the British government as immoral, and therefore an illegitimate entity. Additionally, this rhetoric must also be understood within the IRA's counter-securitisation against the British Government. By suggesting that the British government were murderers, Carron was presenting them as an existential threat that must be countered. Carron also declared that Sands was a regular citizen who could no longer 'accept the injustice of a partitioned Ireland with all its inherent evils.'¹⁷⁰ This statement is 'speaking security' through declaring a partitioned Ireland as inherently evil, implying that it is therefore an existential threat. Additionally, in the context of legitimacy, a state that is inherently evil cannot be morally justified in its existence, and must therefore be illegitimate, as denoted by Buchanan's definition of a legitimate entity. 'So he joined the IRA and

¹⁶⁶ O'Hearn, *Nothing But an Unfinished Song*, p. 375.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 411.

¹⁶⁸ 'The Funeral of Bobby Sands', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 9 1981, p. 16.

¹⁶⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁰ Ibidem.

embarked on a life of hardship and suffering and in the end made the supreme sacrifice of his life for the cause he believed in.¹⁷¹ This line is evocative of biblical stories of martyrdom. Sands is the noble martyr of an oppressive regime, and died so that his fellow Irishmen could survive free of oppression. Conversely, as the foundation of the ‘inherent evils’ of partitioned Ireland, and the murderer of the divine Sands, the British government is portrayed as wholly evil, immoral, and consequently, inherently illegitimate. As previously explained, this imagery and rhetoric held particular weight within the Irish Catholic community, and demonstrated the expertise with which the IRA spoke to its relevant audience in order to gain their support.

Carron went on to say that ‘around the world Bobby Sands has humiliated the British government.’¹⁷² In this statement, Carron was recognising and disseminating the idea that the events of Sands’ hunger-strike had provoked a legitimacy crisis for the British government. The mass support shown for him in the April by-elections, as well as the ardent reaction of those in Ireland and around the globe after his death (this will be discussed in the following section), once and for all undermined the British mantra that the IRA acted without popular support. Through undermining this British security provision by proving it to be unjustified, which as noted by Balzacq is a requisite for a legitimate security practice, the IRA were therefore able to erode the legitimacy of this specific security provision, along with the legitimacy of the actor that introduced it. ‘Finally, I salute you, Bobby Sands... you have been victorious... your sacrifice will not be in vain. We re-dedicate ourselves and our struggle and pledge ourselves not only to win the five demands but to drive England out of our country once and for all... Victory to the Irish Republican Army!’¹⁷³ In this statement, Carron was attempting to mobilise his audience in favour of supporting the IRA. By promoting resistance to British rule in Northern Ireland, and presenting English presence in the region as an existential threat (through emphasising the necessity of ridding Northern Ireland of the English), Carron disseminated a securitising message to his relevant audience. The tangible effect of Carron’s messaging was demonstrated in an increased acceptance of and participation in the armed struggle among those in Northern Ireland, as well as international demonstrations in support of the prison campaign. These events will be elaborated upon in the following paragraph and section.

¹⁷¹ Ibidem.

¹⁷² Ibidem.

¹⁷³ Ibid, p. 16-17.

The product of Carron's (as well as the IRA's consistent messaging throughout Sands' strike) framing of the British government and its criminalisation policy as illegitimate and existential threats was an increased acceptance of and participation in the IRA's armed struggle. As argued by Smyth, the heightened tolerance of militant republicanism stemming from the hunger-strike was demonstrated by the blatant militant overtones of Sands' funeral, and how they were accepted by attendees.¹⁷⁴ For example, the image below shows IRA volunteers giving a military salute over Sands' coffin. Smyth furthermore argues that 'the hunger-strikes crystallised and focused the discontent of the nationalist minority', suggesting that the IRA expertly communicated with their relevant audience through understanding their grievances and by virtue of this, invoked mobilisation in their favour. Smyth comments that, due to this, 'support for the military campaign hardened and grew',¹⁷⁵ evidencing the IRA's successful appeal to its relevant audience. Since the IRA was an illegal organisation, official records of the number of members do not exist, however; the Irish newspaper *The Journal* reported that the IRA's 'ranks swelled after the hunger-strikes.'¹⁷⁶ On May 30th, following the deaths of not only Sands but also three other hunger-strikers, *An Phoblacht* noted an increased level of violence and discontent on the streets of Northern Ireland, and said that such sentiment 'will find no satisfactory channel until its conversion into IRA support.'¹⁷⁷ In the same article, *An Phoblacht* declared that 'people throughout Ireland are leaving behind whatever doubts or reservations they had in the past about answering our problems through the use of force', and that 'many young people... are now joining a growing queue to step into the footsteps of Bobby.'¹⁷⁸ These quotes demonstrate that the IRA's attempts to counter-securitise were successful, as they resulted in a strengthened the military campaign.¹⁷⁹ This successful counter-securitisation occurred in spite of the British government's continuous insistence that the IRA was an illegitimate organisation.

¹⁷⁴ Smyth, p. 186.

¹⁷⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁶ Seán Murray, "It doesn't diminish": The Legacy of the 1981 Hunger Strikes, 40 Years on', *The Journal*, February 27 2021 < <https://www.thejournal.ie/bobby-sands-40th-anniversary-5358326-Feb2021/>> [accessed May 9 2021].

¹⁷⁷ 'A Slow Burning Fuse', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 30 1981, p. 5.

¹⁷⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁹ For further evidence of the *An Phoblacht*'s promotion of the armed campaign during the 1981 hunger-strike, see: 'IRA IS RIGHT', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, June 27 1981, p. 1; Kevin Burke, 'The Hard Path of Peaceful Protest', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, July 25 1981, p. 8; 'The Funeral of Bobby Sands', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 9 1981, p. 16-17, among others.



Figure 6: IRA Volunteers perform a military salute at Sands' funeral.¹⁸⁰

Global Opinion Shifts in IRA's Favour

Following the death of Sands, messages of condolences began pouring in from across the globe. The US Department of State made a significant, yet ultimately uncontroversial, declaration of mourning, with a spokesman for the state department announcing 'we deeply regret Mr. Sands' death... we hope that the hunger-strike by three other inmates at the Maze prison will not end in the same tragic fashion.'¹⁸¹ However, even more noteworthy were the reactions of several prominent US politicians. For example, New York Governor Hugh Carey blamed the British government for its 'intransigence' regarding the granting of SCS and stated: 'the British government has let Bobby Sands bring his hunger-strike to its bitter conclusion.'¹⁸² In this statement, Carey suggested that the British were responsible for Sands'

¹⁸⁰ 'FINAL SALUTE', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 9 1981, p. 1.

¹⁸¹ Borders, 'SANDS DIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND JAIL ON THE 66TH DAY OF HUNGER-STRIKE'.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

death due to their unwillingness to compromise on political status. Additionally, four prominent Irish-American politicians: Carey, Senators Daniel Moynihan and Edward Kennedy, and Representative Thomas P O'Neill sent a letter to Thatcher advocating for a resolution to the hunger-strike, in which they wrote that Britain's inflexibility on the issue of SCS 'must lead inevitably to more senseless violence and death.'¹⁸³ They recommended the rapid introduction of SCS and argued that it represented 'sensible and reasonable reforms in the administrations of the prison.'¹⁸⁴ The Massachusetts House of Representatives even went so far as to pass a resolution honouring Sands¹⁸⁵, with parliaments in Italy, India, Portugal, Iran, and several US states holding minutes of silence for his passing.¹⁸⁶ Additionally, Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland, Charles Haughey, released a statement following the deaths of Sands' and the second hunger-striker Francis Hughes, saying that 'the tragic events of recent weeks have confirmed once more that Northern Ireland as at present constituted is no longer a viable political entity.'¹⁸⁷ The IRA's framing of the British government and its criminalisation policy as illegitimate and existential threats had achieved its desired effect in the international arena, demonstrated by the fact that many actors were galvanised into demonstrations of support for the prison campaign. Not only was the British government facing significant pressure to reverse their criminalisation policy, which Balzacq contends to be a natural process when a practice is considered to be unjustified and therefore illegitimate; but the very constitution of the Northern Irish State had been questioned by a significant international partner, the leader of the Republic of Ireland. It could then be inferred that the position of the British government as the sole purveyor of security in the region had been undermined, consequently undermining any legitimate claim to sovereignty that they asserted in the region, as can be determined from Hobbesian analysis. Due to international discordance with the British government following Sands' death, it can be determined that it was experiencing a legitimacy crisis.

The May 9th edition of *An Phoblacht* proudly recounted many international demonstrations made in support of Sands and the prison struggle. This highlights the

¹⁸³ William Borders, 'IN ULSTER, REMINDERS OF OLD ENMITY TOWARD DUBLIN', *New York Times*, May 14 1981, in *New York Times Article Archive* <<https://www.nytimes.com/1981/05/14/world/in-ulster-reminders-of-old-enmity-toward-dublin.html>> [accessed May 9 2021].

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Anthony Lewis, 'Abroad at Home; TERROR AND TRAGEDY', *New York Times*, May 10 1981, in *New York Times Article Archive* <<https://www.nytimes.com/1981/05/10/opinion/abroad-at-home-terror-and-tragedy.html?searchResultPosition=16>>, [accessed May 9 2021].

¹⁸⁶ O'Hearn, *Nothing But an Unfinished Song*, p. 376.

¹⁸⁷ Borders, 'IN ULSTER, REMINDERS OF OLD ENMITY TOWARD DUBLIN'.

importance of the international audience to the IRA.¹⁸⁸ In fact, they wrote that ‘the international pressure on the British government will perhaps have most effect on them.’¹⁸⁹ The IRA were aware that, were their protests to have any tangible effect, they would have to appeal to an international audience that would similarly pressure the British government to make concessions. Demonstrations highlighted by *An Phoblacht* include a crowd of ten thousand that marched to the British consulate in New York, as well as similar events in San Francisco, Boston, and Chicago.¹⁹⁰ Such a high level of unrest in the international community demonstrates that the legitimacy of the British prison regime had been eroded on an international level. International newspaper publications demonstrated the global perception that British intransigence had led to the death of Sands. *An Phoblacht* boasted that ‘the death of Bobby Sands dominated the international press on Tuesday and Wednesday with the majority blaming the British government for his death.’¹⁹¹ For example, French newspaper *L’Humanité* displayed the headline: ‘They have murdered Bobby Sands.’¹⁹² *The Hindustan Times* claimed that Thatcher ‘had allowed a member of the House of Commons, a colleague in fact, to die of starvation. Never had such an incident occurred in a civilised country.’¹⁹³ Through insisting that the British government was responsible for Sands’ death, many international news sources portrayed the British government as immoral. This, in Buchanan’s analysis, would therefore imply that the international media perceived the British government as illegitimate. The widely held opinion that the British government’s criminalisation policy was unjustified lessened compliance with the measure on an international level. Both in the international arena and ‘on the ground’ in Northern Ireland, as previously discussed, the IRA appeared to have come out of the legitimacy struggle as the victorious party. Sands’ death was framed as, and accepted as, the ultimate martyrial sacrifice, and proof of the existential threat posed to the Irish people by the British government. The product of this effective messaging was widespread mobilisation against the criminalisation policy.

¹⁸⁸ For more evidence of international support of the Irish Republican movement, see: ‘BAD NEWS FOR BRITAIN’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, June 6 1981, p. 17; ‘Dublin Press Worried- Fleet Street Hysterical’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 9 1981, p. 8-14; ‘INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 30 1981, p. 41; ‘World-wide Coverage’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 9 1981, p. 9; among others.

¹⁸⁹ ‘Shock and Outrage’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 9 1981, p. 5.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹¹ ‘World-wide Coverage’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 9 1981, p. 9.

¹⁹² Karine Deslandes, ‘Immixtion du conflit nord-irlandais dans la vie politique française: le reportage des grèves de la faim en 1981 dans *L’Humanité* et *Libérations*’, *Études Irlandaises*, 35.1 (2010) <<https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesirlandaises.1770>> [accessed May 30 2021].

¹⁹³ ‘World-wide Coverage’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 9 1981, p. 9.

British Reaction: Intransigence, Deflection, and Delegitimisation of the IRA

As demonstrated in the previous sections, Sands' death provoked a legitimacy crisis for the British government and its criminalisation policy. As outlined by Hobbes, in order to legitimate their presence in Northern Ireland, the British had to establish themselves as the sole purveyors of security in the region. However, the mass support shown for Sands throughout his strike demonstrated that many in Northern Ireland considered the IRA to be a legitimate entity, and instead considered the British government to be an illegitimate, occupying force. So, the legitimacy of British presence in the region came into question. Thus, in order to protect the legitimacy of its jurisdiction in Northern Ireland, the British government embarked upon an extended campaign of delegitimisation against the IRA through presenting them as criminal and therefore morally unjustified in their attempt to exercise power, as will be elaborated upon in the following paragraphs.

In spite of the popular support shown for Sands, the British government refused to concede on SCS. In Belfast on May 28, Thatcher referred to the IRA's 'discredited cause' as a 'failure.'¹⁹⁴ However, according to Smyth, 'the reality of the situation was rather different. Support for the prisoners was rising in its depth and intensity.'¹⁹⁵ Despite clear evidence that suggested that militant republicans enjoyed significant societal support, the British government continued to deny this and delegitimise the IRA through portraying its members as criminals, which, within Buchanan's typology of legitimacy, would imply that they were therefore illegitimate. Yet, according to O'Hearn, the mass support shown for the IRA in the wake of Sands' death 'made it harder for the British government to maintain the image of Irish republicanism as a criminal movement.'¹⁹⁶ On July 4, *An Phoblacht* wrote that 'Britain's rule in Ireland [had] been shaken irreversibly', and that the criminalisation policy 'regardless of the outcome of the hunger-strike, [was] in ruins.'¹⁹⁷ In an attempt to preserve their legitimacy and societal compliance with this security provision, the British government furthered its efforts to defend its legitimacy by reiterating the supposed justification of the policy. Yet, as noted by the northern editor for the *Irish Times* after the strike, the policy 'emerged from the experience barely intact.'¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Margaret Thatcher, *Speech at Stormont Castle*, (Belfast: Margaret Thatcher Foundation, May 28, 1981) in *Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive* <<https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104657>> [accessed May 9 2021].

¹⁹⁵ Smyth, p. 185.

¹⁹⁶ O'Hearn, *Nothing But an Unfinished Song*, p. 376.

¹⁹⁷ 'BREAK THATCHER!', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, July 4 1981, p. 2.

¹⁹⁸ Smyth, p. 186.

While many in Northern Ireland and across the globe blamed British intransigence for Sands' death, members of the British establishment insisted that Sands had chosen to take his own life. On the morning of his death, the NIO released a statement that read: 'Mr Robert Sands, a prisoner in the Maze Prison, died today at 01.17. He took his own life by refusing food and medical intervention for sixty-six days.'¹⁹⁹ The same day, in the House of Commons, Thatcher continued her campaign of criminalisation against Sands. Labour MP Patrick Duffy challenged Thatcher on the topic, asking her if she was 'aware of the widespread impression overseas... that the death of Mr Sands... will be due to the right hon. Lady's intransigence?' To this remark, Thatcher replied; 'Her Majesty's government are on the side of protecting the law-abiding and innocent citizen and we shall continue in our efforts to stamp out terrorism. Mr. Sands was a convicted criminal. He chose to take his own life. It was a choice that his organisation did not allow to many of its victims.'²⁰⁰ By deflecting the blame for Sands' death off of themselves, and rather onto Sands himself for what they insisted was an act of suicide, the British government could defend their claim to moral authority in Northern Ireland as the self-professed defenders of 'law and order.' In the meantime, they continued to emphasise Sands' criminality in order to diminish any moral justification for the republican cause and thus delegitimise it. As described by Stritzel and Chang, the British government were attempting to re-establish their legitimacy through countering the immorality of which the IRA had accused them. In this series of interactions, we see that each party was in a constant struggle to establish their moral authority, and therefore, their legitimacy.

Chapter Conclusion

Following Sands' death, there was a perceptible increase in the acceptance of militant republicanism, and the IRA even saw a surge in recruits. This is evidence of the effectiveness of the IRA's counter-securitising messaging to its relevant audience, which accepted its messaging and thus supported the IRA in its extraordinary measures to counteract the existential threats that they identified, these being the criminalisation policy and British rule. Due to this, it can be argued that the IRA successfully counter-securitised. The criminalisation policy was irreparably shaken by the mass support that the IRA mustered

¹⁹⁹ O'Hearn, *Nothing But an Unfinished Song*, p. 374.

²⁰⁰ Margaret Thatcher, *House of Commons PQs*, (London: Margaret Thatcher Foundation, May 5, 1981) in *Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive* <<https://www.margarethatcher.org/document/104641>> [accessed May 9 2021].

during Sands' strike. Through their successful portrayal of the policy as unjustified, and the simultaneous legitimisation of their own cause, the IRA sparked increased disobedience with British authorities within Northern Ireland and political discordance with the UK in the international community. This demonstrated that the policy had suffered a legitimacy crisis, since, as described by Balzacq, security practices that are not perceived as justified will likely face significant defiance, as occurred in this case. The British government's legitimacy crisis, provoked by the IRA's campaign against them, evidenced the IRA success in establishing itself as a legitimate entity 'on the ground', whereas the British government was less successful in this regard.

Conclusions

This research has aimed to determine to what extent securitisation theory's claim that securitising actors must be 'legitimate' constitutes a blind spot within the theory. It has also aimed to contribute to the debate on the functionality of securitisation theory, particularly in incidences where groups deemed to be illegitimate (counter-)securitise, with the ultimate goal of suggesting amendments to the theory that may broaden its scope of understanding when analysing processes of (counter-)securitisation executed by 'illegitimate' actors. Through examining the IRA's resistance to the British government's initial securitisation of republican prisoners, this research found that the IRA successfully counter-securitised against the British government during the 1981 Maze Prison Hunger-strike. While this thesis intended to address the delineated issues as thoroughly as possible, certain gaps may remain. This research focused on Sands' hunger-strike, however, the hunger-strike would claim nine more lives and would not come to an end until October 3, 1981.²⁰¹ The period following Sands' death is also worthy of analysis. Furthermore, two republican inmates were elected in the Irish parliamentary elections of June 11, 1981.²⁰² The processes of mobilisation used in the Republic of Ireland may differ to those seen in Northern Ireland, and a study of this may result in differing or furthered conclusions than those presented in this thesis. Nevertheless, this conclusion will sum up the principal findings of this research in order to respond to the central research question, this being; 'How does securitisation theory's hyper-focus on 'legitimate' actors fail to account for the IRA's counter-securitisation during the 1981 Maze Prison Hunger-strike, and how can an analysis of this event provide a broader understanding of legitimacy within securitisation theory?'

The IRA's successful mobilisation of its relevant audience during the hunger-strike demonstrates that groups that are widely perceived as illegitimate remain capable of securitising. The three historical chapters, analysed through the determined theoretical framework, have led to this conclusion. The first historical chapter elaborated upon the British government's securitisation of republican prisoners, and demonstrated that, in turn, the IRA counter-securitised against the British government and its criminalisation policy, which was enacted as a result of its initial securitisation process. This policy portrayed the IRA as illegitimate, and so, in response, the group began a campaign of counter-securitisation based on the legitimisation of their own cause and the simultaneous delegitimisation of the

²⁰¹ Beresford, p. 420.

²⁰² Murtagh, Wheatley, p. 431-433.

British government. While early attempts at counter-securitisation were unsuccessful due to a failure to appeal to their relevant audience, the IRA successfully spoke to their relevant audience during the 1981 hunger-strike. Through its persistent media campaign in *An Phoblacht*, as well as through aligning itself with cultural and religious imagery that holds particular weight among their target audience, the IRA successfully established itself as a legitimate speaker to a wider portion of their relevant audience than ever before. Through this line of communication, the IRA framed the British prison regime and British government as illegitimate. The IRA also portrayed both the prison regime and British rule as existential threats to the Irish people. This counter-securitising messaging was accepted by their relevant audience, as evidenced by Sands' electoral victory, increased support of the IRA's armed struggle, and international condemnation of the British prison regime (seen in the political realm, as well as through grassroots protests). These incidences of mass mobilisation are evidence of a successful counter-securitisation.

Sands' election demonstrated that the IRA was motivated by the desire to undermine the perceived legitimacy of the British criminalisation policy and British rule. Additionally, it amounted to a refutation of the British government's professed justification of the criminalisation policy, which sparked a legitimacy crisis for them. Sands' electoral success indicated that the IRA had the capacity to securitise and mobilise their relevant audience against what they framed as existential threats: the British government and its criminalisation policy. The response to Sands' death demonstrated that the IRA effectively won the legitimacy battle during the hunger-strike, and gained increased influence on the ground at a huge cost for the British government. The IRA's successful framing of the criminalisation policy as illegitimate resulted in reduced compliance with this security provision both in Northern Ireland and in the international arena. This is evidence that their counter-securitising messaging was accepted by a large audience, and thus supports the conclusion that the IRA successfully counter-securitised.

Due to securitisation theory's failure to encompass groups that are perceived as illegitimate into its analysis, it fails to account for how the IRA (and, in general, 'illegitimate' groups) successfully counter-securitised- this being through the tactical exploitation of lines of communication with their relevant audience. Thus, the theory fails to accurately describe how security threats are framed by so-called illegitimate groups, even though these groups *can* (counter-)securitise. It can therefore be determined that securitisation theory presents a significant blind spot in its disregard of 'illegitimate' securitisation. Through amending this, scholars could more accurately understand the methods that allow said groups to securitise.

This conclusion therefore not only holds importance within the academic realm, but also holds considerable societal significance, as it may allow governments to more accurately assess the influence yielded by these groups within their communities and thus understand how they can invoke widespread mobilisation.

This research has demonstrated that, during the 1981 Maze Prison Hunger-strike, legitimacy was not a constant variable. As outlined by Stritzel and Chang, legitimacy proved to be a battleground between opposing entities. The perception of a legitimate entity depends highly upon the (counter-)securitising actor's capacity to establish themselves as an authoritative speaker for their relevant audience, and furthermore to maintain this position throughout the (counter-)securitisation process. Hence, it may be favourable to understand legitimacy not as a constant variable that an entity either possesses or does not before the (counter-)securitisation process begins, but to rather consider it to be a 'target'²⁰³ of (counter-)securitising actors, to use the language promoted by Stritzel and Chang. Including legitimacy as a prerequisite for securitisation does not fully encompass the fluidity of the concept, and ignores the essentiality of appealing to a relevant audience during this interaction. Therefore, additional framework should be introduced within securitisation theory to account for this. Instead of requiring that a securitising actor must be seen as 'legitimate to speak security'²⁰⁴, it may be recommendable to instead claim that a successful (counter-)securitisation is contingent upon the capacity of the (counter-)securitising actor to establish itself as a legitimate speaker for its relevant audience and maintain this perception of legitimacy throughout the (counter-)securitisation process. Additionally, as demonstrated in the theoretical framework chapter, in order to account for how 'illegitimate' actors securitise, it is essential to broaden the scope of relevant audiences within securitisation theory. 'Illegitimate' actors retain influence within marginalised groups in society, and through communicating with them, may establish themselves as legitimate speakers. Lastly, given the evidence that demonstrates the British government's continued efforts to exclude IRA from the realms of decision-making (most notably seen in their amendment of the Representation of the People Act), it is not valuable for securitisation theory's analysis to describe securitising actors necessarily or overwhelmingly as 'state representatives'²⁰⁵, since this does not account for the reality that oppositional groups may be prevented from entering the polity, yet remain capable of (counter-)securitising.

²⁰³ Stritzel, Chang, p. 552.

²⁰⁴ Olesker, p. 314.

²⁰⁵ Buzan, Waever, de Wilde, p. 21.

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