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## The Irish Republican Army Through Film, (1935-2014)

Colleen B. Gottfried

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**THE IRISH REPUBLICAN ARMY THROUGH FILM,  
(1935-2014)**

**Colleen B. Gottfried**



THE IRISH REPUBLICAN ARMY THROUGH FILM, (1935-2014)

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

HONORS COLLEGE

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE HONORS IN THE DEGREE OF

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

COLLEGE OF LETTERS AND SCIENCES

BY

COLLEEN B. GOTTFRIED

Bathmore  
PURE COTTON

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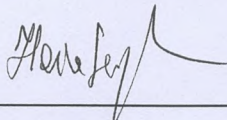
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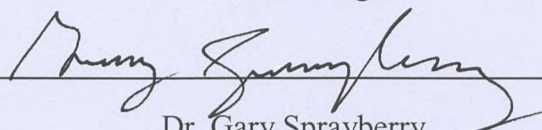
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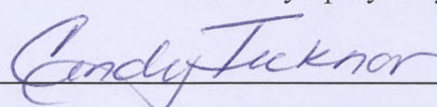
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## Abstract

This thesis will explore the evolving relationship between terrorism and its visual representations and what these representations say about the reception of terrorism by audiences all over the world. This study examines thirty movies produced in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ireland between 1935 and 2014. These films portray different versions of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), an association founded in 1917 with the intent to end British control in Ireland and establish the Republic of Ireland. This thesis examines how concurrent events may have shaped the way filmmakers chose to portray the organization. For instance, if earlier films showed members who were loyal to the organization and to the cause, later productions depicted a group that had developed into a cult and had no regard for the lives of its members. Merely tools for accomplishing their goals, people of the IRA were no longer heroic during the Irish Troubles in the late 1960s.



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## Introduction

Since the British first took possession of parts of Ireland in 1603, many Irish people have fought to remove them.<sup>1</sup> On multiple occasions, clashes among British and Irish people have been violent and both sides have suffered a high number of casualties. Although the situation at present is calm, tensions and animosity persist. This thesis looks at filmic representations of the so-called “Irish Troubles” throughout the twentieth century, exploring the process of appropriation and romanticization of this seminal series of events by audiences and filmmakers alike. It examines films from the 1930s to the present produced in Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. As a whole, this study uses these films as vehicles to understand the many ways in which the Irish conflict has been imagined and understood by people from various sides.

In particular, this study traces the repeated notion of loyalty among members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). By comparing and contrasting how this concept was treated in movies across time and space, this study will contribute to a growing literature on the way terrorism has changed popular culture.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, many scholars have studied the ways that film depictions have changed after traumatic events. One example of these studies was done on German cinema regarding the transformations in film since World War II.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, since the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York City, there has been an increase in the number of books written about

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<sup>1</sup> T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin, Dermot. Keogh, and Patrick Kiely, *The Course of Irish History*,. 5th ed., (Lanham, Md.: Roberts Rinehart Publishers), 153.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, *German Cinema-Terror and Trauma: Cultural Memory since 1945* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014); Stephen Prince, *Firestorm: American Film in the Age of Terrorism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009); Tony Shaw, *Cinematic Terror: A Global History of Terrorism on Film* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); David J. Slocum, *Terrorism, Media, Liberation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005); University of London, *Terrorism, Italian Style: Representations of Political Violence in Contemporary Italian Cinema* (London: Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies, 2012).

<sup>3</sup>Elsaesser, *German Cinema-Terror and Trauma*, 2014.



American film because of the impact they had on the minds of the people that lived through them. These works discuss how various representations of violence in film reflect the changes in the mindset of the people who lived through these devastating experiences. This thesis will contribute to this literature by exploring the ways in which the IRA was imagined and represented changed vis-à-vis its turbulent history.

In terms of methodology, this study examines thirty movies produced between 1935 and 2014(see Appendix I). Figure 1 shows the films produced in each decade. There were fewer films made from the 1940s to the 1980s than in the 1990s. There were a plethora of films made about the IRA in the 1990s. In the late 1990s the Irish and British discussed and eventually signed an agreement that brought an end to the violence and the Troubles. The fighting had been going on for over twenty years. The filmmakers had these years of violence to reflect on in their films which accounts for the large number of films from this decade. Figure 2 shows the countries where the films were made. More films were made in the United States than in Ireland and Great Britain, where an equal number of films were made. The United States had a fascination with the Irish Troubles because it was a similar issue to the American Civil Rights Movement. Americans could identify with the Republicans who felt alienated in their own country. Figure 3 shows that the majority of films were made about the Provisional IRA. The second largest amount of films was made about the Old IRA. Also, this chart shows the major theme that was discussed in each film. One of the most prevalent themes was loyalty, which was important for almost all of the films. These films portray different versions of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), an association founded in 1917 with the intent to end British control in Ireland and establish the Republic of Ireland. The IRA is considered a terrorist organization by people who wanted Ireland to remain under the British authority; however, Irishmen who stood



for a united and independent Ireland viewed members of the IRA as freedom fighters. Over time there have been a number of different incarnations of the original IRA, which was recognized by the Irish Parliament (*Dial Eireann*) as the true army of the Republic of Ireland in the 1920s. Since the "Old IRA" of the 1920s, there have been five other factions that broke away because of differences in ideologies and tactics. The Old IRA split into the Pro-Treaty IRA and Anti-Treaty IRA. The Anti-Treaty faction became the IRA which split into the Official IRA (OIRA) and the Provisional IRA (PIRA), which then split into the Continuity IRA (CIRA) and the Real IRA (RIRA). The CIRA and the RIRA remain active in Ireland today. The majority of the films examined in this thesis portrayed the Provisional IRA, which was created in 1969, ended in 1997, and experienced a rebirth in 2011. Many others represented the Old IRA, which existed from 1917-1922, and the IRA, which lasted from 1922-1969. The films have been grouped in three categories, in accordance with the three factions of the IRA that were portrayed in the movies. Each of the different sections illustrates films from the United States, Ireland and the United Kingdom, exploring the representations of the IRA within each division of the organization in chronological order of emergence. The films are also divided by country and discussed in chronological order.

Each film focused on one major event that was carried out by the IRA, exploring the actions and ideals of its members and displaying the attitudes of people both within and outside of the organization. The spectrum of opinions expressed by members range from the complete willingness to sacrifice themselves to the total condemnation of the acts. Some movies show people outside of the IRA who agreed with its plans without supporting the organization. Other movies also tried to depict the IRA's core rationalization of its own values and strategies, and how the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), a secret association in Ireland whose goal was to



free their country from the British, and the *Clan na Gael*, the American equivalent of the IRB, was to work for an independent Ireland through the use of force.<sup>4</sup> The IRA adopted the ideas of both the groups that worked to form it.

The films often emphasized that the IRA had started out as a secret organization which demanded anonymity and loyalty from its members. The characters were either working to carry out an attack which would further their cause, or they were trying to stay hidden after an attack had taken place. Violence was prevalent in all the films reflecting the belief that violence was the only way to achieve the IRA's goals.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, criticisms and reactions to violence were also important themes in the films, as were the difficulties of remaining loyal to the cause or maintaining control of the organization after such actions took place. This thesis will illuminate these complex and intersecting trajectories. Thus, it will shed light on the evolving relationship between terrorism and its visual representations and what these representations say about the reception of terrorism by audiences all over the world.

### Historiography

Stephen Prince, author of *Firestorm: American Film in the Age of Terrorism*, wrote about the way directors chose to depict terrorism. He argued that they portrayed terrorism as entertainment and presented the acts of violence in a "sensuous way."<sup>6</sup> Prince discussed how films either exploited the graphic nightmares of situations and left out the happy details, or they omitted the gruesome aspects to focus on positivity. Rarely, he pointed out, did they tell a complete story. Prince argued that documentaries about terrorism were far better than the studio

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<sup>4</sup> Ward, *The Easter Rising*, 52.

<sup>5</sup> Ward, *The Easter Rising*, 54.

<sup>6</sup> Prince, *Firestorm*, 33.



productions and television series created on the same subject. The same could be said about some of the films discussed in this thesis. While some resolved the conflict with a happy ending, others graphically depicted violence and death, leaving viewers with a much more nuanced message about these events.

A similar study was conducted about German movies that were made after World War II. Unlike the study by Prince, this literature refrained from discussing terrorism's impact on television. In his 2014 book *German Cinema- Terror and Trauma: Cultural Memory since 1945*, Thomas Elsaesser argued that it is "symptomatic for the penchant of this continent in geopolitical decline to cling to its past and to fetishize even horrific parts of its history."<sup>7</sup> He later said that remembering the history of the nation is necessary because "cultural memory is an ethical duty."<sup>8</sup> Similar to Prince, Elsaesser discussed how people were represented and the difficulty that came from trying to tell the story as it happened. Like Prince, Elsaesser argued that telling a complete or exact story is difficult. He used his study to explore the mentality of the generation that came right after the war. Bearing "the brunt of the knowledge of the Nazi period, of Hitler and the Holocaust, this generation saw how such knowledge evolved into guilt."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, filmmakers of this generation were influenced by the war as this changed the way they created films. In a similar fashion, filmmakers of the 70s and 80s were impacted by the Irish Troubles and they created films that reflected this experience.

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<sup>7</sup> Elsaesser, *German Cinema-Terror and Trauma*, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Elsaesser, *German Cinema-Terror and Trauma*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Elsaesser, *German Cinema-Terror and Trauma*, 22.



In *Cinematic Terror: A Global History of Terrorism on Film*, Tony Shaw examined the film industry all over the world.<sup>10</sup> The study was not narrowed down to a specific region nor did it focus on the way films were shaped by a specific event. Shaw discussed instead the importance of films and the significance of the events that inspired them. Shaw began each chapter by setting a scene and describing the emotions felt while watching the scene play out. Shaw emphasizes the emotional relationship between “violence, terrorism and entertainment.”<sup>11</sup> He argues that authors and directors wanted to elicit reactions from their audiences, and so they combined terrorism and entertainment in these films. The films discussed in this thesis were similar in that they connected the audience with characters in emotional terms and often showed the loss that the characters felt through the conflict.

In his book, *Terrorism, Media, Liberation*, John David Slocum debated the portrayal of terrorists and terrorism in the media. The focus of this study was the post-September 11 period. The book was a collection of essays written by different people, some written about a specific film and others structured around other forms of media. David Slocum’s essay reviewed how to interpret media in regards to terrorism. Slocum stated that three important assumptions were necessary for understanding the films and the studies. First, it was important to understand the history of the cultures that were being assessed because “recurrent concerns are identifiable in the mediation of violent events.”<sup>12</sup> Secondly, it was important to understand the reasons behind an event because the media had different ways of portraying it over different mediums.<sup>13</sup> Third,

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<sup>10</sup> Tony Shaw, *Cinematic Terror: A Global History of Terrorism on Film* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 3-5.

<sup>11</sup> Shaw, *Cinematic Terror*.

<sup>12</sup> Slocum, *The Recurrent Return to Algiers*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Slocum, *Terrorism, Media, Liberation*, 2.



the actions taken by terrorists and media portrayal were equal.<sup>14</sup> According to him, the films displayed the effects of previous violence on the characters and showed how their experiences affected their present decisions.

In the same way in which these studies reflected on the way tragedies influenced the minds of filmmakers, this thesis reflects on the changes that were made in the portrayal of loyalty within an organization. The limn of the organization evolved as the actions became more violent. Film depicted this change, effectively condemning it in the eyes of the public. This thesis examines how concurrent events may have shaped the way filmmakers chose to portray the organization. For instance, if earlier films showed members who were loyal to the organization and to the cause, later productions depicted a group that had developed into a cult and had no regard for the lives of its members. Merely tools for accomplishing their goals, people of the IRA were no longer heroic during the Irish Troubles in the late 1960s.

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<sup>14</sup> Slocum, *Terrorism, Media, Liberation*, 3.



## Films about the Old Irish Republican Army

The Old Irish Republican Army was established in 1917 and was concerned with forcing the British out of Ireland. This faction of the IRA fought the Irish War for Independence from 1919 to 1922 through a series of domestic acts of terrorism using guerrilla tactics. Given the violent nature of their actions, the leaders of the organization were concerned with the public image of the IRA. Men took careful measures to improve the reputation of the organization. For instance, when General Michael Brennan had his troops stay in the house of a prominent Unionist, he had them keeping track of all the food they ate and the damages they made, and later remitted payment for the food and damages to the owner.<sup>15</sup> The members were civil compared to their British opponents who would torture their prisoners. They “treated their prisoners with casual respect and did their best to keep him in the manner to which he was accustomed.”<sup>16</sup>

A ceasefire was called in 1921 so that a treaty could be negotiated. The Irish were willing to put their guns down, but they were unwilling to surrender them to the British because they wanted to be ready to start fighting again if a treaty could not be negotiated. They also used the cease-fire to continue training new as well as old members.<sup>17</sup> The guerrilla tactics that were used by the IRA eventually forced the British to agree to a treaty which led to the division of Ireland into the Irish Free-State, which would later become the Republic, and the northern counties, which would be called the Ulster counties and would later become Northern Ireland. While the Republic was a free-state, the Ulster counties remained under the control of England.

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<sup>15</sup> Younger, *Ireland's Civil War*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Younger, *Ireland's Civil War*, 96.

<sup>17</sup> Younger, *Ireland's Civil War*, 7.



The United States

These films were consistent in their depictions of loyalty in the IRA. With the exception of *The Informer* (1935) and *Angela's Ashes* (1999), which described an organization that lacked any loyalty among members, films about the IRA showed how the organization relied on the loyalty of its members because, without people, it could not carry out the plans which would further their cause. The films celebrated loyalty as the most important part of being a member of the organization. The bond kept the members together and united, strong, and devoted to their fellow members and the cause. The first film to document these events was *The Informer*, which was produced in the United States in 1935. The film was about a member of the IRA who traded information about his friend for money. It portrayed the IRA as a weak organization, one that was not united because members were willing to give up information on each other. The film also showed the desperation that people felt while the British were in Ireland, portraying the organization and its members as justified in their actions, no matter how weak they appeared institutionally because they did what they had to do to survive. The film focused on the importance of loyalty and how the organization was weakened when members turned against each other.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast to *The Informer* (1935), the film *Quiet Man* (1952) did not represent the organization as a victim of British oppression, but as a group in complete control of their surroundings. It argued that IRA members had good intentions, but nonetheless did bad things. The film was about an Irish-American, a former boxer who left America to escape his past after he killed a man during a fight. The film followed the immigrant as he acclimated himself to life in Ireland and fell in love with an Irish woman. The film portrayed the IRA as an organization

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<sup>18</sup> "The Informer," directed by John Ford (United States of America: RKO Radio Pictures, 1935).



that had a great deal of control over people and events in the cities they occupied. Their actions were justified because they were carried out to protect their supporters. One character told another that he had to go join his comrades to talk a little treason in a pub. The film also pointed at the fact that the people in the town knew who the members of the organization were, and the members were not ashamed of the endeavors in which they were involved. One character in the film asked if the IRA was involved in a disagreement and the IRA member said, "If it were not a stone of your fine house'd be standin,'" a statement which implied that the organization had power over individuals in the community. The IRA members in this film were people who were fully aware that their actions were illegal. The film illustrated the members as loyal to the cause and to the organization. And if the film portrayed the organization as doing bad things, it also characterized it as being made of good people.<sup>19</sup>

Forty years later, the film *Angela's Ashes* (1999) would have a different portrayal of the IRA. It portrayed the faults of the IRA and blamed them on its own members. This film was made long after the Old IRA became inactive, at a time when the Provisional IRA had become a prominent party in the conflict of Northern Ireland. The PIRA was a more violent group that participated in activities such as bombings and assassinations. Film depicted this change, effectively condemning it in the eyes of the public. The organization had undergone a change in ideology and tactics. These changes evoked a different view of the IRA in the minds of filmmakers and shifted the focus of the writers who began to represent the organization as more sinister in its activities. The film told the story of a family that moved to the United States and then moved back to Ireland because their father could not keep a job. The film followed their struggles as they made adjustments to their lives during World War II. The film portrayed the

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<sup>19</sup> "The Quiet Man," directed by John Ford (United States of America: Argosy Pictures, 1952).



IRA in a negative light. The organization appeared as an informal group of people who fought together rather than a legitimate entity. It was a heartless organization that would not give money to former members who fought in the conflict. It was also disorganized because they did not have complete documentation of all the members who fought for the cause. The organization was also mocked in this film. When the father would come home drunk, he would tell stories and sing songs about the IRA and tell his sons to join the fight, but he only did this when intoxicated. Also, the IRA did not seem to be at the center of these people's lives, a major shift in cinematic representation, clashing with earlier films which depicted the IRA as an organization based on loyalty. The film chose to focus on a family that was trying to survive in Ireland after numerous setbacks. It described the struggle of daily life for poor Irish people during this time with the IRA being simply a less-than-glorious element in the background. This film was made after the Irish Troubles, when the IRA was a violent, terrorist group. This film described the organization differently from previous American films. Devotion to the cause or organization was not the theme of the movie, rather, the film focused on the shortcomings of the organization.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "Angela's Ashes," directed by Alan Parker (United States of America: Universal Studios, 1999).



## The United Kingdom

In contrast with *Angela's Ashes* (1999), the British film, *Odd Man Out* (1947), portrayed IRA members as devoted to each individual rather than focused on themselves. The film, produced in the United Kingdom in 1947, glorified the organization and depicted its members romantically as heroes, although it did not deny that the members engaged in illegal activities to accomplish their goals. This film was about a man who escaped from prison. He was the local leader of the organization who attempted to evade the police after a robbery failed. The film opened with this local leader and other members discussing their plan to rob the mill for funds for the families of members in jail, therefore characterizing the IRA as an organization that was very loyal to its members and their families. The film also depicted the loyalty that family and friends had to members. Citizens throughout the city were willing to hide members in their houses or to hide evidence of their actions. At the end of the movie, a girl wanted to prevent the leader of the organization from being captured and tortured by the British so she fired a gun in the air so that they would be gunned down by British police, an act which showed the support the IRA enjoyed in the community. If the film at times portrayed the associates as criminals, it also demonstrated the dedication and loyalty that they felt to the organization. One of the protagonists said that as long as they live they'll belong to the organization. The film thus portrayed him – and the organization – as heroes, or as people who found it necessary to engage in illegal acts to accomplish their goal of Irish independence. In the end, their illegal activities were justified as they had committed them to assist people in need.<sup>21</sup>

Another British film, *Ryan's Daughter* (1970), took a different approach to display the relationship between members and the community. This film portrayed the freedom fighters as

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<sup>21</sup> "Odd Man Out," directed by Carol Reed (United Kingdom: Two Cities, 1947).



victims of an oppressive government with enough support from people within Ireland, as well as the Germans, to operate under a microscope. It showed how the IRA had loyal supporters in some towns. In this film, some members kept their identities secret. A woman in the town married a well-respected teacher but had an affair with a British soldier, an episode which led people to be suspicious and alienate her. Her father ran the local pub and was also an informant for the British. The whole town disliked the presence of the British soldiers and fully supported the IRA. The film discussed how the youth in Ireland were corrupt because British laws prevented them from having jobs. They did not have respect for authority which was displayed when they taunted soldiers in the streets or when they disobeyed the priest, but when the IRA came they did whatever they could to assist. The IRA was also shown as so hateful toward the British that they worked with Germany to get weapons. A number of scenes confirmed that they had a lot of popular support: at one point, when the IRA members were trying to get the German weapons out of the ocean the whole town came to help. They went down to the shore and started grabbing boxes and guns from the water and loaded them into a truck. They were loyal to the people who protected them. They all followed the truck and cheered the IRA members as they drove away. At another moment the whole town gathered to scalp the woman who had an affair with the British soldier because they believed her to be the informant. They punished people who they felt threatened the goals of the organization. The pub where everyone met to talk was owned by a member of the IRA who served as an informant to the British forces. The organization was praised in this film because they fought against the British. In the film the members - although wanted criminals due to their past actions - were ultimately viewed as heroes who fought for the people who supported them.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "Ryan's Daughter," directed by David Lean (United Kingdom: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1970).



## Ireland

While *Ryan's Daughter* loyalty to the IRA from the community, *Borstal Boy* (2000), which was based on a book from Brendan Behan, who was in the IRA depicted the loyalty of one member to the organization. This Irish film portrayed an IRA member unceasingly dedicated to the cause. He went to England with materials to build a bomb and was arrested. Because he was young, he was sent to a place called Borstal, a camp for young boys who committed serious crimes. The film followed his time there, emphasizing the dedication that the members had to the organization. The boy refused to renounce the IRA, even if doing so would allow him to go home. At the end of the film, he agreed to stop fighting the British while they were fighting the Germans, but he promised that he would take up the fight again at the end of the war. To be sure, the film at times depicted the IRA members as cunning. A group of boys came up with a plan to escape the camp and the IRA member was the leader of the plot. Yet, the boy also read during his time at the camp and he worked to put on a play. This depiction of the boy shows that the IRA members were not solely focused on violence but they were intelligent and creative. The boy represented the organization and the devotion that members had to the cause. In the end the message was that they were willing to be imprisoned for the sake of Irish Independence.<sup>23</sup>

Another Irish film, *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (2006), also portrayed the willingness of members to be imprisoned for the sake of the cause. Telling the story of the Irish fight during the war for independence against the British Black and Tans, who were British troops in Ireland, the film depicted the IRA as heroes who stood up against the British. The beginning of the film showed a member being killed by the Black and Tans because he refused

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<sup>23</sup> "Borstal Boy," directed by Peter Sheridan (Ireland: Strand Releasing, 2000).



to use his English name (at this time the use of the Gaelic language was illegal). The Irish were not allowed to meet in large groups, and Irish recreation games, such as hurling, were outlawed. The members were subjected to discipline within their organization because they took an oath and were reminded of their duty. The film characterized the guerrilla fighters as well-prepared, undergoing training exercises in secluded areas. They were also very smart and planned their raids on British barracks very carefully. They had the support of civilians in the town, who would feed them or give them a place to stay. There were also people in the organization who informed on them, and their devotion to the organization made them brutal as they promptly killed them, even if they were close to them and they had been raised together. Even in this characterization the IRA was portrayed as more heroic than the Black and Tans who killed people unnecessarily. Later in the film, the leaders of the IRA met to discuss the Free State Treaty. Afterwards, the Black and Tans were replaced by the Irish Green and Tans. Some of the Free-State Army soldiers were former IRA members who agreed with the Treaty because it meant that the British would leave Ireland. The other IRA members did not agree with the Treaty because they wanted a united Ireland and they refused to swear an oath of loyalty to the crown, from which they wanted to be separate, so they continued to fight and they found themselves fighting against their former comrades. The movie showed the loyalty within the organization while it depicted the members as heroes who died for the cause. When members were captured they were tortured for information and they were strong enough to stay quiet during the torture. They were willing to go to prison for their fight, but their devotion to the fight extended to the willingness to die before giving up their comrades.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "The Wind That Shakes the Barley," directed by Ken Loach (Ireland: Matador Pictures, 2006).



## Films about the Transitional Period

Some of these films depicted a transitional period within the organization where opinions began to differ among members regarding the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The result was the split of the Old Irish Republican Army into the Pro-Treaty and Anti-Treaty factions. In some instances the transition was violent and resulted in death. The transitional period was described in two films, *Shake Hands with the Devil* (1959) and *Michael Collins* (1996), both of which depicted operations of the Old IRA and ended with the conflict that resulted in the Anti-Treaty faction splitting from the Old. One of these films, *Shake Hands with the Devil* (1959), displayed the Pro-Treaty members as the rational individuals because they wanted to bring an end to violence. In both films the members who remained in the Old IRA were viewed as the rational members while the Anti-Treaty faction was depicted as irrational for wanting to continue the violence. Another, *Michael Collins* (1996), demonstrated a similar dynamic where the Pro-Treaty members wanted to preserve lives. *Michael Collins* showed the life of a real person, but the main characters in both films were depicted as being above the rest of the members. Loyalty was the main bond that members shared at the beginning of each film, but by the end this had been lost through internal disagreements and fighting which led to the death of leaders. These deaths are symbolic of the demise of the Old IRA and of the transition to the new faction, the Anti-Treaty Irish Republican Army

The Irish film *Shake Hands with the Devil* (1959) portrayed an American who traveled to Ireland to attend medical school. His professor happened to be the leader of the local IRA and his roommate was shot for being a suspected member, a fact which led to his involvement in the organization. The film depicted the IRA to be selective in admitting new members. The protagonist wanted to join the organization but his professor would not let him, showing that the



IRA was an organization that one had to earn his way into. The main character was an American who tried to hide a gun for one of the members. Caught, he was arrested and transported to the British barracks. One of the members said, "Better him than me. He isn't even one of us." After the protagonist was rescued from the barracks, the members found out that he did not betray them. Only after having proven himself was he allowed to join the organization. The man demonstrated an act of loyalty to the group, thus earning his acceptance into the organization. The film showed that the organization was composed of different types of people, from young men to older women whom one would not suspect to be members. In one scene, an elderly woman drove a car through the streets and the police spoke to her with respect until a dog sniffed the trunk. With much surprise, they found that she was smuggling a wanted member of the organization out of the city. The film celebrated how she was willing to risk her good name and reputation with the British in order to help the organization achieve its goals. The film also depicted the IRA as a secret organization, emphasizing how secrecy allowed them to go out in public to carry out their jobs. In the film, the organization was also very strict. An oath was taken, and members remained in the organization until their mission was accomplished or they died. The film also presented the organization as unstable because of internal differences. The local leader wanted to continue his campaign because he did not agree with the Free State Treaty, while other members were satisfied with the British leaving. Representing the IRA before it split into the Anti-Treaty IRA, the film alluded to what would happen in the future. In the words of the anti-Treaty leader: "It will be Irishman versus Irishman, a civil war."<sup>25</sup>

Another film, *Michael Collins* (1996), made in the United Kingdom, also portrayed the events that led up to the split of the organization. This film was based on the true story of

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<sup>25</sup> "Shake Hands with the Devil," directed by Michael Anderson (Ireland: Pennebaker Productions, 1959).



Michael Collins and his involvement with the IRA as well as the violence he commanded of his men. His actions led the British to agree to a Free State Treaty and Collins was sent to negotiate the treaty. In the film, the organization was unnecessarily violent. The members went out and killed a number of people on different occasions because they collaborated with the British. These same men were also victims because they were hunted down by British officials, but they were well supported by members of the community. For instance, at one point IRA men were hidden in a hotel by a desk boy who would give alerts and pass messages from member to member. The organization was also portrayed as being well organized. On several occasions there were meetings of the Board to discuss future movements, and the organization was shown as having a strict hierarchy. Michael Collins was in charge of a group of members when Eamon de Valera, a high ranking official in the organization, went to the United States. The result of the treaty was that the British would leave the Republic of Ireland but the Ulster counties would remain part of the British Empire. The treaty was opposed by many members, but Michael Collins was convinced that the terms were the best they could get. He was also convinced that de Valera knew that the British would not give anything more, so he sent Michael Collins to negotiate, knowing that members would be unhappy with the results. The leadership of the organization was given a negative representation because they were concerned with popularity rather than results. And even if the film was a hagiographic display of Michael Collins, it provided context to the events that caused the members of the organization to disagree. The beginning of the film depicted loyalty among members. The lower ranking members did what they were told to do and the higher ranking members gave commands that would further the cause. Everyone had a sense of purpose. Throughout the film, however, loyalty faded away and members started to turn on each other. They became power hungry and felt threatened by other



members who had more power or were more popular. In the end, Michael Collins was killed by a former comrade simply because they had differing opinions.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> "Michael Collins," directed by Neil Jordan (United Kingdom: The Geffen Film Company, 1996).



## Films about the Anti-Treaty Irish Republican Army

The Anti-Treaty faction of the Irish Republican Army broke away from the Old IRA in 1922 after the free-state treaty was signed. The Treaty made the south of Ireland free from the British, but it allowed the north of Ireland to remain under British control. Northern Ireland was predominantly Protestant and loyalists who considered themselves British opted out of the free-state. Michael Collins signed the Treaty because he believed that the terms were the best that the English would allow and Ireland would be rid of them. Collins said that even though "the Irish did not get the Republic they had fought for at least they had won freedom and the Republic would come one day."<sup>27</sup> However, the result of the treaty was a civil war between Free-State advocates and Republicans.

In his book *Ireland's Civil War*, Calton Younger wrote, "Revolutions overturn regimes; they do not immediately replace them. Moderates and extremists, realists and idealists unite in common purpose; once they have achieved it they diverge once more."<sup>28</sup> Members disagreed on whether to accept the terms of the Treaty or to continue fighting until the entirety of Ireland was united. The Anti-Treaty faction of the IRA was more radical than the Old IRA and their ideologies would carry on to the future Provisional IRA.

## Ireland

*I See a Dark Stranger* (1946) represented the organization as sinister and willing to use people for its own gain. It portrayed the organization as well-structured and the people as loyal to the goals of the organization. It was about a woman from a small town in Ireland who went to Dublin so that she could join the IRA. Her father had been a member during the early years of

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<sup>27</sup> Younger, *Ireland's Civil War*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Younger, *Ireland's Civil War*, 5.



the organization and she wanted to follow in his footsteps. Her hatred of the British led her to work alongside the Germans during World War II. The beginning of the film depicted how the IRA members were viewed as heroes in isolated towns. The IRA had changed into an organization that relied more on treaties and communication than it did on violence and fighting. The film also showed the split in the IRA and how a new group of people, under the name IRA, went about gathering intelligence and working against the British. The man who worked with the new IRA sat in a bar frequented by British soldiers so that he could hear their discussions and future plans. Some of the members wanted to join the IRA for what it used to be and serve as another enemy of the British in the war. The movie also depicts the IRA affiliates as people full of hate toward England. The associates wanted to keep their identities secret so they could continue to carry out their plans. The woman showed her loyalty to the cause when she flirted with British soldiers, despite her hatred for them, and made herself a distraction to them so that the other participants could carry out their plans.<sup>29</sup>

#### The United Kingdom

In both films the organizations involved Germans during World War II, a fact which showed the Irish loyalty to the cause because they were willing to work with the enemy of many countries in Europe at the time in order to achieve their goals. The organizations and members in *I See a Dark Stranger* and *The Eagle has Landed* helped the Germans fight the British by gathering information or creating a plan to outsmart the British. In these films the actions taken by the IRA members were done in order to increase their chance of defeating the British.

A British film, *Eagle has Landed* (1976), also described the IRA as an organization that was loyal to the cause and sought to help other countries in order to achieve their goals. The film

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<sup>29</sup> "I See a Dark Stranger," directed by Frank Launder (United Kingdom: General Film Distributors, 1946).



depicted the organization as one made strong by its members. This film followed a group of German soldiers who were on a mission to kidnap Winston Churchill. They enlisted the help of an Irishman who had connections to the IRA. The film characterized the members as creative. The Irishman helped the Germans get into England disguised as Polish troops. This film did not focus on the IRA, but rather on one man who had ties to the organization and used them to help the Germans. This man who had connections with the organization hated England, just like the woman in *I See a Dark Stranger* (1946). Moved by his hatred, he helped the Germans in their attempt to kidnap Winston Churchill. He was charming and able to convince people he was someone different so that he could carry out the plan. It showed that the IRA was composed of members who were strategic and manipulative. The protagonist was a person who worked with another country to fight England. *The Eagle has Landed* (1976), described the organization as opportunistic.<sup>30</sup> While the films that were made in the United Kingdom did not present the IRA as a violent organization and put the violence in the background of the plot, the film made in the United States focused on the level of violence that one member of the IRA was able to achieve.

#### The United States

A similar dynamic of collaborating with other countries was present in the American film *Duck, You Sucker* (1971). This film was made in the United States, characterized the IRA member as destructive, yet effective in his actions. The man was also depicted as victim of an oppressive government that turned members and friends against each other. The film depicted some members as loyal to the cause because they took the fight to another continent, while other members were portrayed as weak because could not stand up to the enemy and gave away information about their group. The film compared the struggle of revolutionaries in Mexico to

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<sup>30</sup> "The Eagle Has Landed," directed by John Sturges (United Kingdom: CIC, 1976).



those in Ireland. An IRA member fled to Mexico and joined their fight. The bomber took up the cause of the Mexicans because he saw similarities between their fight and his own struggle in Ireland. Throughout the film, the IRA bomber had flashbacks to his time in Ireland. The film showed the members of the IRA as heroes who were willing to join other people to fight for freedom. They were depicted as brave and willing to sacrifice their lives to save the lives of the people they did not even know because they were aware of the oppressive situation that they experienced. In one scene, the bomber met with other IRA members in Mexico and came up with a plan to release numerous prisoners. In another instance, he was willing to die for others: he set explosives to fight the enemy rather than run like the other revolutionaries. In a flashback, an Irish man was brought into a pub and started pointing out members of the IRA who were then taken and killed. The man was weak because he could not stand up to the questions of the British and told on their fellow members. In the present, members of the Mexican revolution were taken and had to identify people in a lineup: they too were then shot once identified. In a later scene, when the bomber was on the run, he still kept a flag with IRA written on it with him. The message was that IRA symbolized bravery, loyalty, and commitment to the cause.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "Duck, You Sucker," directed by Sergio Leone (United States of America: United Artists. 1971).



## Films about the Provisional Irish Republican Army

The Provisional Irish Republican Army operated in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s during the Irish Civil Rights Movement. After the Treaty was signed, the northern counties were separated from the Republic of Ireland and remained under British control. Many members of the PIRA wanted a united Ireland and were determined to force the British out of Ulster. The PIRA fought to protect the Catholic neighborhoods in Northern Ireland. The Provisionals also had an advantage because a number of them had military training from fighting for the British.<sup>32</sup> They also established training camps in the Republic of Ireland, just south of the Northern Ireland border and had supporters in the United States who helped them smuggle weapons and ammunition into Ireland. However the PIRA lacked the support that the previous factions of the IRA had, and so they had a difficult time training in secret.<sup>33</sup> They instead relied on the devotion of their members to the organization for their success.

## The United Kingdom

The first two films, both set in England, were made during the Troubles. Interestingly, they have contrasting depictions of the IRA. The first film, *The Long Good Friday* (1980), was made at the start of the conflict and described an organization that was conniving and violent. The British film *The Long Good Friday* (1980) portrayed the PIRA as a violent organization. The film followed an Englishman who had a criminal past and was starting a new career as a businessman. His associates were targeted and murdered and someone inside his circle was a mole for the people responsible for the murders. This film portrayed the IRA as indiscriminate assassins. They set bombs to destroy cars and buildings such as hotels and casinos. They also

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<sup>32</sup> Tommy McKearney, *The Provisional IRA from Insurrection to Parliament* (London: Palgrave Macmillian, 2011), 68.

<sup>33</sup> McKearney, *The Provisional IRA from Insurrection to Parliament*, 72.



resorted to other forms of violence, including stabbings, as a means to achieve their goals. This film portrayed them as villains whose aim was to kill and cause destruction. Their loyalty was not to the cause but to destruction. They did not target government officials or soldiers, rather they destroyed a businessman.<sup>34</sup>

The film made later *Hidden Agenda* (1990), presented an organization that was innocent and non-violent. It showed the members as victims of power abuse. The portrayal shifted from aggressors to victims. In contrast, the British film, *Hidden Agenda* (1990), portrayed the members of the Irish Republican Army as victims of British security organizations. The movie followed a woman who was investigating claims about torture of Irish prisoners. The security organization wanted to keep secret that they torture IRA members as well as blame them for their own actions. Here, the IRA is a victim of British courts and organizations, which would pick targets that threatened their agenda and then blame the IRA for the action. They also had an intelligence operation so they knew where people would be at certain times and could kill them without giving away their identity. IRA members were victims because they were being tortured and killed in the jails and in the streets. This film also depicted the IRA as a secretive association. They kept their pubs very exclusive and did not trust outsiders. They did not talk to them so that they could keep each other safe. The film displayed loyalty, but not within the organization. The ideal of devotion in this film came from a woman who wanted to prove that prisoners were being treated unfairly. Despite being denied information by British officials, she continued to look into the case. Resiliency in spite of difficulties characterized the IRA actions throughout the film.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> "The Long Good Friday," directed by John Mackenzie (United Kingdom: Paramount Pictures, 1980).

<sup>35</sup> "Hidden Agenda," directed by Ken Loach (United Kingdom: Hemdale Film Corporation, 1990).



Similarly, the film *Hunger* (2008) displayed individuals as victims of physical abuse. The violence in this film was also conducted by prison officers. The British film *Hunger* (2008) also portrayed members of the IRA as victims to the British. They took physical abuse everyday to further their cause. This film was about IRA members who were in prison and protesting. They were stubborn and steadfast in their devotion to the cause. They refused to wear prison clothes because they considered themselves to be political prisoners, and since they were not allowed to wear their own clothes because they had lost their status as political prisoners, they were naked. They showed their loyalty to each other by not giving in and continuing their protests on a united front. They rubbed feces on the walls and refused to maintain their hygiene. They also did not eat the food that was given to them. These men were depicted as determined because they were protesting for a united Ireland and social equality. They were described as victims of the British jailers who would beat them and forcefully wash them. Subjected to physical violence and threats, they received a lot of support from people outside of the prison. When somebody came, they would exchange items with their visitors. They would also use church time as a meeting and did not pay much attention to the priest or the service. Their religion, in a sense, was their cause.<sup>36</sup>

The British film *Shadow Dancer* (2012) also portrayed the IRA as a tight knit group, though it differed from *Hunger* in that it was very violent in retaliation to British acts. The film *Shadow Dancer* (2012) illustrated the affiliates as victims of British authority, though they also commit violent acts. The film was about a woman, Colette, who was arrested by a British intelligence organization after failing to plant a bomb in a train station in England. When Colette was caught, the intelligence officers had numerous files about her and her family. The

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<sup>36</sup> "Hunger," directed by Steve McQueen (United Kingdom: Broadcasting Commission of Ireland, 2008).



intelligence organization influenced her to be an informant on the IRA in order to remain with her son. This film described the IRA as a violent organization that did whatever it had to do to avoid leaks. One man had a location where he would torture his fellow members to find out what they told to the police before he killed them. Though he was killing his fellow members, his actions showed his devotion to the other members by getting rid of people who threatened their safety. While showing that people were violent, it also displayed how they were vulnerable to British intelligence organizations that were blackmailing them to be informants. Colette's mother was also an informant for the British because her sons and daughter were members of the IRA. When other members became suspicious of her daughter she told them that she was the only informant to save her daughter's life. Colette's brother also planted a bomb in the car of the intelligence officer so that Colette and her son could get away safely. Yet IRA members shared a close bond and were willing to kill for each other. The film depicted a family that was involved in the organization to illustrate the bond that members shared.<sup>37</sup>

In contrast, the British film *'71* (2014) showed IRA members having ties to organizations on both sides of the conflict. While the members in *Shadow Dancer* were loyal to a fault, *'71* showed members who could not choose one organization with which to remain loyal. A British soldier, Gary Hook, was left behind in a Catholic neighborhood in Belfast. The British troops were there to provide support to the Royal Ulster Constabulary that was looking for weapons. They assaulted the Catholics in the houses. Some of the Catholics outside lashed out and started shooting at the soldiers causing chaos in the street. One soldier was killed and Gary was ordered to retrieve his body and the gun that was used to kill him. Members of the Provisional IRA began chasing Gary through the neighborhood. This film described a complex relationship

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<sup>37</sup> "Shadow Dancer," directed by James Marsh (Ireland: Irish Film Board, 2012).



between the Official IRA and the Provisional IRA. The OIRA was a less violent faction than the PIRA, and the relationship between the two factions was strained. When loyalists were building a bomb in a pub that accidentally exploded, each faction of the IRA blamed the other for the accident. Gary Hook, once wounded, was found by some Catholics who took him into their home. They called the OIRA leader because they knew that he was less radical than the PIRA leader, and he made a deal with the British Captain of the Military Reaction Force saying that he could have his soldier back if he took out the leader of the PIRA. The PIRA was more appealing to the youth because it was newer and more active than the OIRA. By emphasizing these divisions, the film depicted the IRA as a ruthless organization that detonated bombs and killed innocent people. The film also illustrated the division of Protestants and Catholics in the city. There was a barricade between the two neighborhoods and it was guarded by Protestants. The organization was also depicted as an unstable group with members who worked with other militant organizations. Finally, the movie '71 returned to a villainous representation of the organization, one that was simply thirsty for violence.<sup>38</sup>

#### The United States

Most American films were produced during the Irish Troubles. While members in '71 were unable to remain loyal to one side, members in *A Prayer for the Dying* (1987) were able to choose, but they were disloyal to fellow members. It emphasized the importance of loyalty and devotion to the cause. The American film *A Prayer for the Dying* portrayed the organization as one that was hostile even to its own members. It was about an IRA bomber, Martin Fallon, who wanted to get out of the organization after a failed bombing attempt. In the opening of the film, two IRA members were waiting for a road bomb to go off and kill a truck full of British soldiers,

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<sup>38</sup> "'71," directed by Yann Demange (United Kingdom: Crab Apple Films, 2014).



but a school bus passed the truck and detonated the bomb instead. One of the members just ran away while Fallon watched the scene with regret. He wanted to get away from the violence and was given the opportunity to escape by killing one last person, an act that was witnessed by a priest whose life was then in danger because of what he saw. Fallon went to confession with the priest so the priest could not tell anyone what he saw because of the seal of confession which prevented the priest from revealing any information he heard during Penance. After confession the priest would be safe because he could not tell anyone that he witnessed Fallon kill someone. Fallon tried to keep the priest safe from other people while hiding from other members of his organization who were supposed to bring him back into the organization or kill him. This film represented the IRA as reckless murderers. The film depicted the IRA as an organization composed of members who were willing to kill each other to prevent them from leaving the organization. It showed the organization as an evil group but the members, individually, as brave people. The loyalty the members felt was not to the cause, but to the organization.<sup>39</sup> Negative characterizations of the IRA in these films emphasized the violent actions of the organization. These films also depicted an organization that overall lacked a higher cause. Members seemed to dedicate themselves to the organization itself, which required undivided dedication and an oath of loyalty that bound them until they died. American films vilified the organization.

In *A Prayer for the Dying* the members of the IRA were victims of their own organization, but in *Patriot Games* (1992) they were the villains who used the organization's resources to enact revenge. Four of the films produced by the United States explored broader connections to the United States in terms of people or location. *Patriot Games* (1992) is an

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<sup>39</sup> "A Prayer for the Dying," directed by Mike Hodges (United States of America: Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1987).



example of one of these films where the United States was involved in one way or another. It was an American film that vilified the organization and portrayed it as chaotic. It is about a former CIA operative, Jack Ryan, who, when he went to give a speech in England, saved a member of the royal family from an assassination attempt by the IRA. In the rescue he killed one of the members of the organization whose brother sought revenge for the remainder of the film. His journey for revenge took him to the United States where he hunted down an American citizen. The IRA was portrayed as an organization composed of vengeful and destructive members. The small groups of former IRA members spent their time searching for Ryan and honing their skills. They were devoted to the cause and willing to go to great extremes to achieve their goals. The members traveled to the Middle East to hide while improving their techniques. The film denounced the IRA as a divided organization whose members used the connections of the group to exact their own revenge. Ultimately, the leaders of the organization did not have control over their members, who freely engaged in violence and revenge separately from the organizations orders.<sup>40</sup>

In contrast, *Some Mother's Son* (1996) was an American film that portrayed the members of the IRA as heroes in the eyes of their families. This film was about members of the IRA who were arrested for their actions and decided to participate in a hunger strike while in prison. The film depicted the dark side of the IRA as people who bombed bridges, targeted British soldiers, and endangered other people's lives at the same time, but it also displayed the unity of members. The members were dedicated to their beliefs and the cause so they risked their lives by going on a hunger strike. This film also depicted the strong relationship between the IRA members and their families. The mothers supported their sons while they were in prison. The film also

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<sup>40</sup> "Patriot Games," directed by Phillip Noyce (United States of America: Paramount Pictures, 1992).



characterized the individuals as secretive because their mothers had no knowledge of their actions until they were arrested.<sup>41</sup>

This element of secrecy also appeared in the film *The Devil's Own* (1997), another American film that involved some aspect of America. In this case, an American unknowingly offered his home to a member of the IRA. This film described an individual member who participated in illegal activities for the cause. The beginning of the film showed a man being shot in front of his family for being a republican sympathizer. His son, Francis McGuire, joined the IRA, becoming a well-known member and a wanted man. McGuire traveled to New York to make a deal for weapons. While there, many of his comrades were killed. The film characterized the IRA as justice seekers. It also showed the organization as having popular support: when other organizations came around looking for the members, children playing in the streets gave them a warning. The IRA also had people in other countries that would find a place to house them while they were there. The members were depicted as being loyal. After hearing that many of his fellow members were being killed in Ireland, McGuire wanted to go back to help them. Also, when people broke into the house where McGuire was staying he fought the men to protect the people who were housing him. The members were ruthless in their quest for weapons and were willing to kill their own friends. The police officer who hosted McGuire found out what he was doing and wanted to stop him so they fought each other until McGuire was dead. McGuire tried to keep his identity and purpose secret in order to protect his mission. He refused to turn himself in and died while trying to support his fellow members in Ireland.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> "Some Mother's Son," directed by Terry George (United States: Castle Rock Entertainment, 1996).

<sup>42</sup> "The Devil's Own," directed by Alan J. Pakula (United States of America: Columbia Pictures, 1997).



Similar violence was presented in *The General* (1998), another film that showed the IRA as ruthless in achieving its goals. *The General* (1998) was an American film that portrayed the IRA as a controlling group. The film was about Martin Cahill, a man known as the General. He was a career robber who made an enemy of the IRA. Cahill was the leader of a group who made a living by breaking into places and stealing expensive items then hiding them where they could not be found. He often spent the night at the police station to give himself an alibi so the police could never connect him to any of the crimes. At the end of the film, Cahill was killed and the IRA was suspected of being responsible. The IRA was shown as being territorial within its neighborhood. They also did not want competition from a group that was more capable than they were. Cahill's group was able to break into a jewelry store that the IRA had failed to break into after careful preparation. They were also a criminal organization that attempted to rob stores. This portrayal contrasted with an earlier depiction of the IRA, *Odd Man Out* (1947), which showed the IRA as good people because they robbed a mill in order to provide funds for families with members in prison. The IRA was also afraid that other organizations would have more power than they did so they took them out. This film did not deal with loyalty within the IRA. It dealt with a separate organization, led by Cahill, which contrasted with the IRA in different aspects. The group of men lead by the General was a loyal group that carried out robberies more successfully than the IRA. This description led the audience to believe that the IRA lacked the loyalty that the General's men had therefore reflecting badly on the organization as a whole.<sup>43</sup>

The group led by Martin Cahill could have worked with the IRA to participate in some robberies, but they were unwilling to cooperate. The organization portrayed in *The Jackal* (1997) was given a more positive description because the member worked outside of his

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<sup>43</sup> "The General," directed by John Boorman (United States of America: Sony Pictures Classics, 1998).



organization to help the authorities. Together with violence and loyalty, the IRA's international scope was also an important theme in American movies. *The Jackal* (1997) portrayed the IRA as a global organization. This film was about an imprisoned member of the IRA working with the FBI to find an assassin who was targeting an American official. The film depicted the IRA as well connected because it used a member to locate an assassin based on acquaintances that he and the assassin shared. In the film, the IRA follower was willing to help another government and leave his own cause to get out of prison. This contradicted other films which characterized members as dedicated to their cause so greatly that they would not leave prison or, in some instances, even refuse to eat while there. This film, along with *Ticker* (2001), represented the IRA as an organization that had operations in different countries. In *Ticker*, an IRA bomber set a bomb in San Francisco. The film had contradicting portrayals of IRA members. They were loyal because they would not confess anything about their partners. But two affiliates left behind a third, who was captured by the police, so that they could get away. This also showed the devotion of participants because they were willing to sacrifice their freedom for the survival of the mission. The film characterized members as devoted to their fellow members, but also dedicated to the cause. The film also illustrated the individual's knowledge and use of bombs and advocated that violence was the way to achieve higher goals.<sup>44</sup> Both films presented the organization as one that had concerns outside of the Northern Ireland conflict, but also one with members who were not focused solely on the cause.<sup>45</sup>

Ireland

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<sup>44</sup> "Ticker," directed by Albert Pyun (United States of America: Artisan Entertainment, 2001).

<sup>45</sup> "The Jackal," directed by Michael Canton-Jones (United States of America: Mutual Film Company, 1997).



In contrast with the American movies, the Irish films did not incorporate other countries who not traditionally involved in the conflict. Some films *The Crying Game* (1992), *In the Name of the Father* (1993), and *The Boxer* (1997) were made during the last few years of the Irish Troubles, which had been taking place for approximately twenty years. They characterized the organization as one that was violent and unwilling to resolve issues to move forward. The filmmakers portrayed the attitude of people who were ready to move toward an agreement, but were unable because the organization was reluctant to compromise. In some of the films, the organizations had violent tactics that caused tremendous destruction, both in terms of property and loss of life. The members of the organization had devotion to the organization rather than to a cause. They lacked any real goals and instead sought to punish people through their violence. In the Irish film, *The Crying Game* (1992) the leaders of the organization had significant control of their subordinates. In the film, the IRA kidnapped a British soldier to use as leverage for the release of some of their own men. One of the members, Fergus, formed a bond with the soldier while he was being held. They found out that the British would not release any of the members so they killed him. Fergus was told to kill the soldier. Although he did not want to do it, he obeyed. His actions displayed his devotion to the cause. The soldier was killed by British soldiers when he tried to escape along with some of the other IRA members. Fergus went to the soldier's town and tried to get out of the duties of the organization. While he was there, he got a job at a construction site where the people in charge were skeptical of him and pushed him harder than the other men. The men of the IRA were harsh and insincere. They were also dedicated to the organization and were reminded by their oath that they could only escape their duty through death. Fergus was found by some of the members who safely got out of the hideout before the British destroyed it. The members forced Fergus to help them take out a British



official. The leaders had enough power to strike fear into other members to remind them of their duty to the organization, rather than the cause.<sup>46</sup>

In contrast *In the Name of the Father* (1993) depicted an organization that did not run from its obligations to the group, but the members hid from the fallout and failed to take responsibility. The Irish film portrayed the organization as one that conducted acts of violence that targeted innocent people. *In the Name of the Father* and *The Boxer* depicted the IRA as instigators and cowards. They also ruined peaceful gatherings by blowing up cars or setting fires to buildings. *In the Name of the Father* characterized the members as cowards who were not willing to take responsibility for their actions and let other people take the fall. It was about young Irish men who went to England to be with friends. While they were there the IRA placed a bomb in the Gilford Pub and killed numerous British people. The young men returned home and were arrested for the bombing. They were put on trial and convicted of the crime. They were wrongly imprisoned and treated badly while they were there. Later, another lawyer set out to prove their innocence. The film focused on the British courts and the lack of equality for Irish people within the system. The bias toward the Irish in court was displayed to demonstrate the fear that the IRA created in British people. The Irish people were seen as victims because the courts were against them and allowed key evidence to be left out of the trial and hidden from the defense. There was a witness who could prove that the four people were not at the pub the night the bomb was placed, but the prosecutors kept him hidden and the other members of the court went along with it. The dedication of one lawyer resulted in the release of the wrongly accused

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<sup>46</sup> "The Crying Game," directed by Neil Jordan (United States of America: Palace Pictures, 1992).



people. Although initially presented as villains who set bombs to kill random people who were not even involved in the conflict, ultimately the IRA was a victim.<sup>47</sup>

Another film that depicted the members as villains but then somewhat redeemed them was *The Boxer* (1997). In *The Boxer* (1997) the members were resistant to peace and they challenged anyone who threatened their campaign (this film was a former member who wanted to make peace). A former member of the IRA, Danny Flynn was released from prison on good behavior. He was a Catholic from Belfast who wanted peace between the Protestant and Catholic communities. He used boxing at the local community center to try to bring about peace between the Protestants and Catholics by training kids of both neighborhoods. The IRA was also depicted as a community because the wives of the prisoners remained faithful to their husbands while they were in prison and some women married their husbands while they were captive. The film also represented the IRA as senseless killers. They bombed several protestant areas including the car of the head law enforcement officer. Yet at the center is the divide in the organization between members who want peace and members who want to continue the violence. There was instability within the organization because lower ranking members made decisions that benefited their beliefs rather than the organization's goals. The younger associates wanted to kill Flynn because he was mocking the members who were in prison by trying to bring peace to the neighborhood. The film also characterized the affiliates of the organization as devoted because they did not want a treaty to be signed unless it guaranteed the release of their fellows from prison. Members who wanted out of the organization were seen as selling out and making a mockery of all the men who were in prison and the sacrifices they had made. This film displayed the members of the organization as devoted to their own, but ultimately prone to

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<sup>47</sup> "In the Name of the Father," directed by Jim Sheridan (Ireland: Hell's Kitchen Films, 1993).



violence. Rather than ending this violence and stopping future members from going to prison, they chose to carry out actions which resulted in death and the imprisonment of more men. The individuals were portrayed as violent because they set bombs and killed people who had differing opinions.<sup>48</sup>

Loyalty was a major theme in *The Boxer*, but only loyalty to members in prison. Those who wanted to move forward were seen as enemies who threatened the cause. In contrast, the film *Bloody Sunday* (2002) offered a portrayal of the IRA that showed an organization that tried to voice their distress in order to force change. The film commemorated the massacre that took place thirty years earlier. The film characterized the Irish Civil Rights marchers as victims because they were shot at by British soldiers. The organization was not innocent, but in *Bloody Sunday* the Irish were protesting peacefully until some protesters began throwing rocks, an act which led the British to respond with heavy force. The filmmakers chose to focus on the retaliation of the British forces, thus establishing them as the antagonists. The film was about the civil rights movement in Derry and the process that turned it violent. On 30 January 1972 the leader of a planned protest stressed that the march was to be nonviolent and sent home some people who he thought could get into trouble. Here, clearly, associates did not want to be involved in violence. Also, members of the community wanted to keep the members of the IRA out of trouble. The film followed the march that was supposed to be peaceful until a group of protesters walked toward British troops and started throwing rocks. Some of the protesters shot at the troops, and they started shooting back into the crowd. The IRA was portrayed as victims in this film because the British troops used disproportionate force against the protesters. Especially because British troops had different instructions on how to handle the protest, they

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<sup>48</sup> "The Boxer," directed by Jim Sheridan (Ireland: Universal Pictures, 1997).



appeared at fault. Also, the protesters were targeted while trying to retreat. They thus became heroes and died for a good cause. Their sacrifices would lead a large number of youth to join the IRA in memory of the fallen. This displayed the loyalty that new members had to fallen members because they were willing to pick up the fight where the dead had left it.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> "Bloody Sunday," directed by Paul Greengrass (Ireland: Granada Television, 2002).



## Conclusion

At any given place and time, the Irish Republican Army was portrayed differently by various people. In Ireland, earlier films portrayed the OIRA as freedom fighters and victims of British violence. The members were strong and devoted to the cause in all the films; yet, later movies characterized them as violent. The transition from the Old IRA to the Anti-Treaty faction depicted the organization as a heterogeneous group with strict authority. The films highlighted the internal fighting that led to divisions within the organization. Later films described the Provisional IRA with contrasting representations, showing them as either victims who engaged in peaceful protests or as instigators who were resistant to peace.

In the United States, too, representations of the IRA differed greatly. The Old IRA was described both positively and negatively by American filmmakers. While the films did not portray the violence of the organization, prior violent acts were often acknowledged. A later film which depicted the Anti-Treaty faction, focused on the violence of one member as a window into the entire organization. Yet, while the protagonist was violent, he was still characterized as a victim and a freedom fighter. After the Anti-Treaty films, the movies portrayed the organization as antagonistic. The filmmakers chose to illustrate the Provisional IRA as an organization that was destructive and hostile. They were able to persuade their audience that the organization was evil by setting their films in the United States. The films showed Americans who were being victimized by the IRA, which was now depicted as a destructive group. If the representation of the Old IRA was initially positive, and if it later transitioned to be violent but still valiant, the Provisional IRA was simply violent and corrupt.

The British films were oddly similar to those from the United States and Ireland. Though the British were on the opposite side of the IRA throughout the conflict, some of the filmmakers



sympathized with the organization and illustrated them as the victims, which led the viewer to believe that the filmmakers thought that the IRA was not the only party at fault. It humanized the members of the IRA. The Old IRA was portrayed as an organization that was not violent, but the members had good motives for carrying out their illegal activities. Later, British films were similar to their Irish counterparts, which described a transitional period of internal fighting with strict leadership. If the Anti-Treaty faction was depicted as sinister organization, they were also represented as heroes because they took a stand against the British. A common theme in the Anti-Treaty films is the German involvement. In one film the Germans were giving weapons to the organization, while in the other one individual was assisting the Germans in their plot to kill Winston Churchill. The films were made after World War II, but they were both set during wars where the British fought against the Germans. The intent was to vilify the organization for working with the enemies of the British during the war. The PIRA films offered two different characterizations of the organization. The first was violent and antagonistic. In some of the films the members were destructive and relentless. In other films they were helpless victims.

In sum, loyalty shifted from the cause to the organization. It was no longer dedication to achieve a goal, rather a cult-like devotion. The national origin of the films examined in this thesis did not determine whether the IRA was portrayed in a positive or negative light. The differences in representation depended on the time period being depicted. The films illustrated different aspects of the organization such as their support system, which included family and neighbors, as well as other countries such as the United States and Germany. They described their belief in loyalty, in addition to the faults in the organization. The amount of violence that the films sketched was not related to the country where the film was made. The violence depended on the faction of the IRA that was being represented.



The factions became more violent and filmmakers were inspired by the actions of the IRA. The earliest films were created when the IRA was not viewed as a terrorist organization, but rather as a rebel group that used guerrilla tactics to fight the Irish War for Independence. Some of the films glorified the journey that the members took to turn into a reality their dream of an independent Ireland. The violence in the earlier films was minor compared to the violence that was depicted in the later films regardless of the era they represented. The later films depicted the violence of the organization and memorialized the individuals in the struggle who sacrificed their lives while condemning the senseless violence of the organization as a whole. The Irish War for Independence inspired filmmakers to illuminate the hostilities of both sides of the conflict. It was depicted as being less violent on the part of the IRA and more violent on the side of the British. The Troubles were depicted as being increasingly violent on both sides of the conflict.

Similar to the film studies that were done about American films post September 11, this study finds that the violence that was portrayed in the films increased and became more severe as the years passed. Many people around world sympathized with the Irish, forming an audience for films with contradicting depictions of the IRA. Later, the Troubles brought new forms of violence which inspired the filmmakers to create more violent stories. The films of the 1970s were produced early in the decade toward the beginning of the Irish Troubles. They depicted the struggle of earlier Irishmen. In the 1980s the films portray the Irish Troubles which took place from 1968-1999. The early movies were made at least a decade after the Irish War for Independence, which was not seem to influence the filmmakers until much later. During World War II many films incorporated aspects of the war into the plots, such as the involvement of Germans. Many of the films were made during the Troubles because the events shaped the lives



of filmmakers. The large number of films made in the 1990s correlates with over two decades of violence from the Troubles on which to reflect, which inspired a number of filmmakers.

This thesis did not focus on the historical accuracy of the films, rather it discussed the ways each film portrayed the IRA based on the opinions of the writers and directors who imagined them. This thesis provides a window into the mentality of filmmakers and audiences. The filmmakers reflect on their ideas of the organization which influences the audiences when they watch the movies. This study can be used in future research about how events and people are remembered. Some films portrayed events shortly after they occurred while others were made later. Studies can be done in how the passage of time affects the depictions of the events. Throughout the violence of the various incarnations of the IRA in each film, loyalty was stressed as being an important characteristic of membership and a bond that kept the organization together through times of trouble. It was a significant part of the organization that shaped the way filmmakers, writers, and subsequently film audiences remembered the Irish Republican Army.



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Appendix

Appendix I: Distribution of Films by Decade

1930	1940	1950	#	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
<i>The Informer</i> - 1935	<i>I See a Dark Stranger</i> - 1946	<i>The Quiet Man</i> - 1952		<i>Ryan's Daughter</i> - 1970	<i>The Long Good Friday</i> - 1980	<i>Hidden Agenda</i> - 1990	<i>Borstal Boy</i> - 2000	<i>Shadow Dancer</i> - 2012
	<i>Odd Man Out</i> - 1947	<i>Shake Hands with the Devil</i> - 1959		<i>Duck, You Sucker</i> - 1971	<i>A Prayer for the Dying</i> - 1987	<i>Patriot Games</i> - 1992	<i>Ticker</i> - 2001	<i>71</i> - 2014
				<i>The Eagle Has Landed</i> - 1976		<i>The Crying Game</i> - 1992	<i>Bloody Sunday</i> - 2002	
						<i>In the Name of the Father</i> - 1993	<i>The Wind That Shakes the Barley</i> - 2007	
						<i>Michael Collins</i> - 1996	<i>Hunger</i> - 2008	
						<i>Some Mother's Son</i> - 1996		
						<i>The Boxer</i> - 1997		
						<i>The Devil's Own</i> - 1997		
						<i>The General</i> - 1998		
						<i>The Jackal</i> - 1997		
						<i>Angela's Ashes</i> - 1999		



Appendix II: Films Divided by Country

American	British	Irish
<i>The Informer</i> - 1935	<i>Odd Man Out</i> - 1947	<i>I See a Dark Stranger</i> - 1946
<i>The Quiet Man</i> - 1952	<i>Ryan's Daughter</i> - 1970	<i>Shake Hands With the Devil</i> - 1959
Duck, You Sucker!- 1971	<i>The Eagle has Landed</i> - 1976	<i>The Crying Game</i> - 1992
<i>A Prayer for the Dying</i> - 1987	<i>The Long Good Friday</i> - 1980	<i>In the Name of the Father</i> - 1993
<i>Patriot Games</i> - 1992	<i>Hidden Agenda</i> - 1990	<i>In the Name of the Father</i> - 1993
<i>Some Mother's Son</i> - 1996	<i>Michael Collins</i> - 1996	<i>The Boxer</i> - 1997
<i>The Devil's Own</i> - 1997	<i>Shadow Dancer</i> - 2012	<i>Borstal Boy</i> - 2000
<i>The Jackal</i> - 1997	71- 2014	<i>The Wind that Shakes the Barley</i> - 2006
<i>The General</i> - 1998		
<i>Ticker</i> - 2001		



Appendix III: Films Divided by Organization with Themes.

Old IRA	Transitional Period	Anti-Treaty IRA	Provisional IRA
<i>The Informer</i> - 1935: American, Loyalty, Victimization	<i>Shake Hands With the Devil</i> - 1959: Irish, Loyalty, Secrecy	<i>I See a Dark Stranger</i> - 1946: Irish, Loyalty, Secrecy	<i>The Long Good Friday</i> - 1980: British, Loyalty
<i>Odd Man Out</i> - 1947: British, Loyalty	<i>Michael Collins</i> - 1996: British, Loyalty, Victimization	<i>Duck, You Sucker!</i> - 1971: American, Loyalty, Secrecy	<i>A Prayer for the Dying</i> -1987: American, Loyalty
<i>The Quiet Man</i> - 1952: American, Justification, Loyalty		<i>The Eagle has Landed</i> - 1976: British	<i>Hidden Agenda</i> - 1990: British, Secrecy, Victimization
<i>Ryan's Daughter</i> - 1970: British, Loyalty, Secrecy			<i>The Crying Game</i> - 1992: American, Loyalty
<i>Angela's Ashes</i> - 1999: American, Struggle			<i>Patriot Games</i> - 1992: American, Loyalty, Victimization
<i>Borstal Boy</i> - 2000: Irish, Loyalty			<i>In the Name of the Father</i> - 1993: Irish, Loyalty, Victimization
<i>The Wind that Shakes the Barley</i> - 2006: Irish, Loyalty, Secrecy			<i>Some Mother's Son</i> - 1996: American, Loyalty, Secrecy
			<i>The Boxer</i> - 1997: Irish, Loyalty, Internal Conflict
			<i>The Devil's Own</i> - 1997: American, Loyalty, Victimization
			<i>The Jackal</i> - 1997: American, Loyalty, International Influence
			<i>The General</i> - 1998: American, Loyalty
			<i>Ticker</i> - 2001: American, Loyalty, International Influence
			<i>Bloody Sunday</i> - 2002: Irish, Victimization
			<i>Shadow Dancer</i> -2012: British, Loyalty, Victimization
			'71- 2014: British, Loyalty



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