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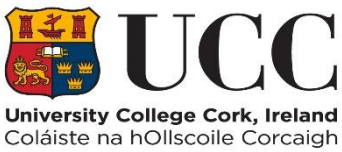
No Ordinary Death: The Disappeared of Northern Ireland's Conflict

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BSc (Hons) Professional Development in Nursing

MSc in Nursing

Submitted to University College Cork in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy



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31st August 2022

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Declaration of Academic Honesty

This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism and intellectual property.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the families of the Disappeared, especially those who are no longer with us. Their courage, determination, and quiet dignity in the face of the most unimaginable callousness and cruelty shines like a beacon in the darkness.

Prologue

I grew up in an idyllic rural area during Northern Ireland's recent conflict, often referred to colloquially as 'The Troubles'. Whilst I was aware of the violence, my exposure was limited. Smyth (1998) suggests that the Troubles did not affected us all – and while many were relatively untouched, in some areas the deaths were clotted thick.

At age 18 I moved to Belfast to train as a nurse at the Royal Victoria Hospital. There I saw the devastation of the Troubles first hand - the damage done to bodies and minds by bullets and bombs. The violence was evident in patients who lay on the operating table in theatre, in casualty, on the surgical wards, and in psychiatry; as those bereaved and injured struggled to cope and find meaning in what had happened. My sudden sensitisation to the Troubles wasn't just a feature of my day to day work; it was also ever present when I was off duty. The nurses' quarters were situated adjacent to the Falls Road, and the contrast between my rural upbringing and my new life, in a conflict zone in west Belfast, was stark. The darkness that was peaceful in the countryside only served to intensify the feeling of fear in the city. There was an edge to living in Belfast that brought a watchfulness and a sense of the unpredictability - anything could happen at any time. News of shootings and bombings travelled fast; the threat was ever present.

When I completed my training as a nurse I worked in the surgical and theatre directorates. Given the scale and intensity of the violence during the Troubles, The Royal Victoria Hospital became world renowned as the leading accident and emergency hospital specialising in blast and bullet injuries. Pioneering and ground-breaking surgical techniques were developed, and lives were saved, but whilst physical scars may heal, the mental scars and trauma largely went unrecognised. There was no mechanism, outside of the family, for people to share what had happened to them. The priority for everyone was surviving and keeping safe.

In June 1995, after completing a Masters in Nursing at Queen's University, and following a period of volunteering, I took on a development post in a local charity called WAVE Trauma Centre. WAVE was, and is, a cross community charity open to all people impacted by the Troubles regardless of their background. Working in WAVE I quickly became aware that the Troubles had left a deep and indelible legacy, but yet there was and is a blindness to the true devastation of the Troubles. Whilst medical and nursing intervention in hospitals or the

community had helped many people, psychological support was limited and there was an inherent reluctance at an individual, community, societal and Governmental level to talk about what had happened. There were no specialist or dedicated trauma services. While some bombing and shooting incidents came to prominence, a huge amount of violence was never publicised, particularly that inflicted by the paramilitaries, both loyalist and republican, on their own communities. The silence around these cases was deafening.

In 1995 a woman named Margaret McKinney came to visit WAVE. Her son Brian, who by today's standards would have been considered to be a vulnerable young adult, had been abducted by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA/IRA) in 1978; she believed that he was dead and had been secretly buried. When she approached the IRA they denied any involvement in his disappearance and in subsequent meetings she had with Sinn Fein, they issued a firm denial that enforced disappearances had ever taken place. I remember her clearly saying to me, after she had finished telling me for the first time what had happened to Brian,

'Love I don't know what you can do to help me'

And in truth, I didn't know either. However, I started on a journey with Margaret and then with other families who also suspected that their loved ones had been abducted by paramilitaries before being killed and secretly buried. I have journeyed with these families for over two decades, supporting them in an advocacy capacity.

From the start, a central element of the work involved developing trust. This was hard won as over the years, many of the families had been threatened into silence and they lived in communities where the mantra was, 'whatever you say, say nothing'. Family members were naturally suspicious, and the fear was palpable. In some cases, families felt that they could only talk about what had happened when they were out of their own area and in a place where they felt safe. Whilst during this time, there were periods when the IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) were on ceasefire, violence continued (albeit at a reduced level) and the fear remained. There are subtleties and nuances with all conflicts and Northern Ireland is no different. There were unspoken and unwritten community *rules* and in Northern Ireland not criticising the paramilitaries was one of them. This meant that it was almost impossible for the families of those who were missing to highlight their loved ones' cases.

Paramilitary control was ever present for the families and the threat of further violence was never far away. This was compounded by the fact that paramilitaries lived within the heart of the communities and the families were never sure who was actively involved in the violence, or sympathetic to it. In some cases, this even applied to individuals within their own families. The result was a blanket of silence.

Activism when it happened took many forms. At WAVE, activism involved setting up confidential phone-lines to gather information on the locations of the bodies of the Disappeared. It also involved memorialisation and commemoration - we held church services to remember the Disappeared; we hosted exhibitions and engaged in creative activities to humanise who they were, and to have their stories shared across the community. Professor Monica McWilliams (2012), commenting on this activism, remarked that the families of the Disappeared and WAVE did not sit and curse the darkness, but instead lit the proverbial candle that ensured the voices of the families did not disappear too.

The biggest breakthrough in my work with the families came in 1998 when I arranged for a group from WAVE to visit the United States of America. I wrote to the First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton, to ask if she would meet the group which was comprised of those bereaved and injured as a result of the Troubles. Margaret McKinney was one of the delegates. On May the 7th 1998, we met with President Clinton and the First Lady. President Clinton listened to Margaret's story. He pledged that he would do all that he could to get her son's body back. 10 months later she and other families received a visit from Sinn Fein and they were told that a statement regarding the Disappeared would be released to the Press the next day. In that statement, Oglaigh na hEireann (IRA) and the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) admitted their involvement in the disappearance of a number of individuals. We know now that the list they gave was not complete, and this brought huge disappointment to some families whose loved ones' names were not included.

In May 1999, after a flurry of activity, legislation was simultaneously enacted in the House of Commons in London and in Dail Eireann in Dublin. This enabled a joint British-Irish Government sponsored Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains (ICLVR) to be established. Enshrined within the legislation was the guarantee that all information received by the ICLVR could be used only to identify the burial site and the identity of the individual disappeared. No other forensic examination could be undertaken of

the site or the body; and information could not be passed to any other law enforcement unit or agency. This ensured that prosecutions and the identification of the perpetrators would be almost impossible.

To date, the process with the ICLVR has been successful, but recoveries have been sporadic and not all of the bodies of those disappeared have been returned to their families. I continue to work with the families to keep the issue to the fore. In 2005, following the visit of two family members of the Disappeared to the United States, a new process was adopted using specialist forensic techniques. This included the use of ground penetrating radar and other forensic approaches that had been used to locate the bodies of Irish railway workers who had been killed at Duffy's Creek in Philadelphia in 1830 (Glatsky 2017). This led the ICLVR to adopt a new proactive approach primarily to information gathering, alongside utilising these investigative techniques which has resulted in many more bodies being recovered. However, this process remains an information-led undertaking, and the ICLVR continue to rely on those individuals who were involved in the disappearances coming forward with information. It is a slow process, and there is an ongoing need for pressure and focus to remain on this issue in order to encourage individual to share what they know about the Disappeared.

It has been an honour and a humbling experience to work with the families of the disappeared over the last two decades. When considering engaging in a research study for a PhD on the issue, I spoke directly with the family members themselves. My overriding concern was to ensure that nothing in that process would be detrimental to the established recovery processes, or would negatively impact on the wellbeing of the families. The families were very supportive, but an important consideration now was where and how the study should be undertaken. I had met Dr Orla Lynch at a conference in St Andrews University. I was impressed by her non-political stance and respect for the experience of victims and survivors. I approached Dr Lynch and subsequently registered for a PhD in University College Cork. I was awarded a scholarship by the University under the "Strategic Research Fund" for this work.

Much has been written about engaging in activism and how it intersects with academic research (Frey et al 2020; Lagegaard and Phipps 2020 and Howard and Baker 2021). While my primary role was one of advocacy as opposed to activism, I did at times support the family members in an activist role. Advocacy was the background work facilitating the families to have their voiced heard. It was the step before activism. Whilst activism entailed becoming

more actively involved in the process through giving evidence/ engaging with politicians or being with the families on the frontline of annual events such as the Silent Walk held each year at Stormont in Belfast. Sanford (2006) termed a move from advocacy to activism in response to the needs being represented as '*positive responsibility*' (p3). As a result of all of this work, whether it be advocacy or activism, it was important to bear in mind how the inherent sensitivities might influence any research carried out. Activism does not automatically rule out the possibility of producing solid empirical data, nor sound analysis. However, as Jones (2020a) concedes, there may be concern about the existence of cognitive biases, and the perception of a lack of impartiality that could be seen to undermine the quality of any study. He argues however, that activism does not prevent research studies being undertaken, and suggests that the researcher, like all researchers, should be cognisant of the potential for bias to arise, and focus on evidenced based strategies and appropriate methodologies to reduce any potential risk. Such insider research has both strengths and weaknesses, but in the field of victimology, often itself called an activist field, the maxim of nothing about us without us is central, and this work embodies this research philosophy.

Sadly, since I started this study, seven of the interviewees have passed away. It is comforting to their families to know that they engaged in the study and that their voices will continue to be heard through the research findings. Indeed, through engaging in the study the families are no longer silent or silenced. Rather, their voices have been heard and will live on in the dissemination of the results. I am indebted to all those who contributed. As Maya Angelou (1984) writes,

> '*Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning'* (p106).



Figure 1 Delegation from WAVE in the White House. Photograph @ The White House

In this picture a delegation including Margaret McKinney (immediate left of the First Lady) meet President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton in the Oval Office, White House, Washington DC, May the 7th 1998.

ABSTRACT

This study is set within the context of the Northern Ireland Conflict, also known as the Troubles. The aim is to explore the impact of enforced disappearances on first and second generation family members. The study relates to the families of a group of people abducted, murdered and secretly buried by republican paramilitaries during the Troubles. The research considers the influence of disappearances on the interpersonal relationships in the families involved and in the communities in which they lived. The project also examines the historical significance of intra-community deaths and of interactions with other elements of society that make up our society such as the church, health professionals, members of the police and government bodies from the period following the abduction to the present day.

Disappearing individuals is a phenomenon that occurs and has occurred outside of NI's Conflict. The researcher draws on the experiences of families in other conflicts around the world, whose loved ones were also disappeared by paramilitaries, to examine how the context to the violence impact on the individual and family experiences.

The study was carried out using a Grounded Theory framework and involved interviewing 40 people (repeat measures) - parents, siblings, children and other family members of those abducted. The researcher is an *insider researcher* as she worked with and works as an advocate for the interviewees, both nationally and internationally, for a period in excess of twenty years.

Analysis of the data gathered produced eight theoretical higher order concepts, underpinned by a number of higher and lower order categories. These concepts have been developed into a new theoretical framework called 'Orchestrated Loss', which explains the impact of enforced disappearance within a conflict situation on individuals, families and communities.

This new theoretical framework offers an insight into the unique situation in which the families of those disappeared in politically motivated, conflict-related situations find themselves. It also offers a basis and future direction for additional research in an area that has been under researched, and which is complex and conceptually immature.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study would not have been possible without the courage of the families of the disappeared. They trusted me to share their stories through this thesis, and they are amongst the most inspirational individuals I have ever met. My heartfelt thanks to them for their engagement, support and ongoing encouragement to complete the work.

One of the most important decisions for any PhD student is the choice of supervisor. Dr Orla Lynch has been truly amazing. Orla's guidance and encouragement has seen this study through to the end. I have appreciated her calm demeanour even when deadlines went slightly adrift!

I also want to thank Dr James Windle for his advice and guidance, particularly in the final stages of the process. This has been invaluable.

It is important that I acknowledge the 2015 UCC Strategic Research Fund PhD Scholarship which supported my study.

There are a number of individuals who reminded me along the way of the importance of this study in recognising the journey of the families. Their support has been so gratefully received. From the outset, Professor Monica McWilliams highlighted why the study was needed. She has been truly inspiring. Baroness Nuala O'Loan has also worked with the families for some time. Again her guidance, help and continued support has been immeasurable.

Given my advocacy role with the families, I decided to form an advisory group to protect the study's integrity and impartiality. The late Professor Jean Orr, Geoff Knupfer and Dennis Godfrey provided direction and support throughout the work, highlighting, and assisting me in resolving, any issues that arose in relation to the families or the wider advocacy process.

Dr Tony Morgan was always available as a sounding board and offered immense encouragement to get the job done!

There are a number of photographs included in the thesis which document some of the milestones along the families' journey. My sincere thanks to Brendan Murphy, Hugh Russell, Kevin Cooper, Cathal McNaughton, Justin Kernaghan, the ICLVR and Pacemaker for so readily agreeing to share the moments they captured with their lenses.

The work of WAVE Trauma Centre (WAVE) is immensely varied, complex and challenging - therapeutically, politically and socially. But it is always deeply rewarding. The Management Board at WAVE have supported this study every step of the way, recognising my efforts to balance my working life with that as a PhD student. The WAVE staff team have also been extremely supportive and I would like to pay tribute to Tracey Shirlow, Alan McBride, Gordon Buchanan, Catherine Colohan, Denise McNaughton, Dr Paul Gallagher, Isabel Stewart and Marie-Therese O'Hagan for their help and encouragement.

I would also like to thank Helen Russell and Margaret Bateson for their support and guidance.

Mary Lemon has always been a dear friend and her advice and help has been truly invaluable. Ann Irvine provided the most amazing space in Donegal to write and to reflect. This was a special haven, particularly in the latter days of the study.

I want to thank my Mum and Dad and sister Jen who have always supported me in whatever way they could. Sadly, Dad died 11 years ago, before this study started, but I know he would be as proud as my Mum and Jen are to see this work complete.

Last, but not least, I want to thank my amazing family. Since we met, my husband Kealan has supported my academic journey 100%. He has facilitated the often antisocial nature of my work at WAVE and, in particular, my work with the families of the disappeared. He has sacrificed so much to enable me to do the work that I need to do. His love and support have been unending. I have three amazing children who have also made sacrifices to see this study through to its completion. Their teenage years will be forever associated with this work. There are, of course, positives as they have all learnt new skills! Enna has become an amazing cook, while Katie and Conor have developed lasting relationships with the dishwasher, the washing machine and the vacuum cleaner!!

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation)

BMH (British Military Archive)

CED (Convention for the Protection pf all Persons from Enforced Disappearance)

DSM V (Diagnostic and Statistical Management)

FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)

GARDA (Garda Siochana)

GHQ (Brigade Command in the General Headquarters)

GFA (Good Friday Agreement)

HMG (Historic Memory Group)

ICD (International Classification of Diseases)

ICIP (International Catalan Institute for Peace)

ICLVR (Independent Commission for the Location of Victims Remains)

ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross)

ICTJ (International Commission of Transitional Justice.

ICC (International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearances)

IRA (Irish Republican Army)

INLA (Irish Nationalist Liberation Army)

IRSP (Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP)

ISB (Irish Statute Book)

JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna)

LRA (Lord's Resistance Army)

LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam)

MP (Member of Parliament – United Kingdom)

MRTA (Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement)

PIRA (Provisional Irish Republican Army known under IRA)

PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)

RTE (Raidio Teilifis Eireann)

RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary)

SF (Sinn Fein)

UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force)

WAVE (WAVE Trauma Centre)

WGEID (United Nations Working Group on Enforced Disappearance)

WHO (World Health Organisation)

INTRODUCTION

> **'***Where's your mama gone?*
>
> *Little baby, Don?*
>
> *(Little baby, Don?)*
>
> *Where's your mama gone?*
>
> *(Where's your mama gone?)*
>
> *Far, far away'.*
>
> The lyrics of Chirpy, Chirpy, Cheep, Cheep sung by Middle of the Road, 1971.

When Middle of the Road released their song in 1971, Northern Ireland was already two years into a tumultuous period of political and sectarian tension, often involving violent confrontation between Catholic and Protestant communities, paramilitary groups, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) - the predominantly Protestant local police force - and the British Army. McKittrick and McVea (2012) provide us with a snapshot of the kind of violence that was commonplace at this time - commenting on how sectarian tensions and the associated violence had spread from Derry/Londonderry to areas of North and West Belfast in 1969; they describe a confrontation involving large numbers of Protestants and Catholics:

> *'Ancient guns came out of their attic hiding-places, sending rifle and pistol shots ringing down the backstreets. Hundreds of houses were set on fire. Thousands of stones and other missiles were thrown, and barricades were erected across streets. The RUC staged baton charges, crowds surging back and forward between Protestant and Catholic areas' (p63).*

1969 also saw the Provisional Irish Republican Army (hereafter referred to as the IRA) overtaking the Official IRA as the predominant Republican group in many Catholic working class communities (McKittrick 1999). The IRA, unlike the Officials, were willing to use widespread violence to achieve their political aims:

> *'Within months their approach was being described as 'combined defence and retaliation'* (McKittrick and McVea 2012, p69).

Many Nationalist communities became no-go areas for outsiders as, in response to attacks by Loyalist mobs, the police and the military, community members erected barricades preventing access in or out of these areas (Keefe 2018). The history of Northern Ireland's 'Troubles' (hereafter referred to as NI's Conflict), and the wretched catalogue of death, injury and human suffering that defines that period is already well-documented. This study does not aim to add to that existing body of work in a general sense - it does, rather, seek to shine a light on a specific insidious strategy employed mainly by republican paramilitaries and that is the strategy of enforced disappearance.

In the early 1970's, the current manifestation of the IRA embarked on the practice of abducting, murdering and secretly burying individuals (a practice hereafter known as disappearing).[1] Whilst disappearances had been long suspected to be going on, it was not until 1996 that the families of those disappeared began to come together at the WAVE Trauma Centre and discovered the extent to which the strategy was used. It was not until 1999 that first the IRA and then the Irish National Liberation Army (a republican splinter group hereafter called the INLA) released statements acknowledging their responsibility for some of those disappearances.

The first disappearance, that of Joe Lynskey, took place in August 1972. This was followed by the abductions of Kevin McKee and Seamus Wright in October 1972 (ICLVR 2021). In December 1972, a widowed mother of 10, Jean McConville, was abducted from Divis Flats in West Belfast. A further 12 disappearances were recorded over the following years, with 11 being attributed to the IRA and one to the INLA (ICLVR 2020). One further disappearance took place in 2003 and was attributed to the Real IRA, a new republican paramilitary group that rose to prominence after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (Hoey 2019). The 1973-74 disappearance of Seamus Maguire was confirmed in February 2022 as a new ICLVR case (ICLVR Statement Feb 3, 2022).

While many individuals simply vanished with no witnesses coming forward, in a small number of cases the victim's abduction was witnessed by their loved ones. The children of Jean McConville witnessed her kidnapping; they clung to their mother as the IRA attempted to take

[1] Throughout this thesis the Disappeared (with a capital D) refer to the people missing not the method.

her away, only letting her go when the captors promised they would bring her back (Keefe 2018). However, they never saw their mother again. In the days and weeks after the kidnapping, some of the neighbourhood women who resided in Divis Flats sang the Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep song to her children as they passed by. Unknown to the children they were glorifying the IRA's abduction of their widowed mother by singing the chorus, '*Where's your mama gone? Far, far away'*. Beyond this taunting, no one approached the McConville children to offer help – either at this time, or in the years following (Moriarty 2019), with the children ultimately being taken into state care. The same applied to the other families of those disappeared, they were ridiculed, and ignored and abandoned. The fear and isolation surrounding the abduction and disappearance of individuals created a wall of silence that lasted for decades, with the issue only becoming public shortly before the first IRA ceasefire was declared in 1994 (Taylor 1998; Bew and Gillespie 1999).

The objective of this thesis is to give voice to those whose loved ones were disappeared. In chronicling the families' journeys, and analysing their narratives using grounded theory, the researcher allows the reader to better understand the impact that disappearance has had on first and second generation family members, particularly when dealing with conflict related loss in a community that was, at best, indifferent and, more frequently, hostile, to their needs. Faced with the seemingly insurmountable challenge of pressurising republican paramilitaries to return their loved ones' bodies, this group of once disconnected individuals recognised their shared grievances, experience of loss and the legacy of threat, and worked together to re-humanise their loved ones, and to reclaim their identities and, in some cases, their bodies. Whilst there have been many remains recovered as a result of the families' determined and dignified perseverance, there are still other victims who languish in bogs or farmland across Ireland. The work of reclaiming the Disappeared of NI's Conflict is not, as yet, complete.

OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

There are seven chapters in this thesis. Chapter 1 contextualises the study. It looks at the historic and cultural origins of the contemporary IRA and how they came to be in the position of power within Catholic/Nationalist communities during the period that forms the backdrop to this thesis. It goes on to review the journey undertaken by the families, from the initial

disappearance of their loved one and the suffocating silence that followed, through their coming together as a self-help group. It follows their lobbying on a national and international basis to the return of the bodies of some of their loved ones and the solidarity which leads them to fight on as a group to recover the bodies that remain missing.

Disappearing individuals did not begin with the Troubles – it was a strategy long used by the IRA and their precursor organisations. During the War of Independence in Ireland from 1919-1921, and in the Civil War from 1922-1923 (referred to hereafter as the Independence Conflict Period), countless disappearances took place across the island (Hart 2009). The intracommunity nature of disappearance in Ireland during the Independence Conflict Period has particular relevance to this study and will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 examines the wider use of disappearance as a weapon of war. The practice was not just restricted to Ireland - state forces and/or paramilitary, guerrilla or insurgency groups around the world have also used the practice of disappearing individuals to further their agendas (Amnesty International 2020). The impact of disappearance is explored in this chapter, specifically in cases where the perpetrators live in close proximity to the families of those taken. The United Nations (UN) has recognised the different players involved in Enforced Disappearance, and includes, not only disappearances that result in death, but also extraordinary renditions and imprisonment in detention camps, when the fate of the person is unknown. Given that the disappearances in many of these countries took place relatively recently, as opposed to a century ago, as was the case in Ireland, the impact of contextualised loss is also relevant to this study and is, therefore, considered in detail in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 4, the available literature in which the study can be situated, is considered. The psycho-social impact on a family of the disappearance of a loved one is similar wherever in the world it takes place, and no matter who is responsible for it. The practice of disappearance has been studied to some degree in several disciplines including law, history, forensic anthropology and criminology. However, the disciplines of psychology, medicine and social science provide a more holistic understanding of the impact of loss associated with having a loved one who has disappeared. This chapter considers the context of the disappearance and its impact on how the family deals with loss.

Chapter 5 reviews the use of Grounded Theory as the methodology for the study. Unlike other methodological approaches, Grounded Theory begins with data collection. This allows the researcher to be open to the concepts emerging from the data, without being derailed or influenced by the literature (Glaser 1998). When this process is complete attention can be directed to the existing literature.

Chapter 6 analyses the results of the study; these proved to be extensive. Eight theoretical concepts emerged from the data, with each one being further divided into a series of higher and lower sub-categories. These reflect the path of the family's loss and the multiplicity of influencing factors that resonated internally and externally, including areas such as: Disappearance as a cataclysmic event; Enforcing Control-Protectors to Persecutors; Family Trauma; Affirming and Re-humanising; Transformative Action on the Disappeared; Journey of Pain; Religious and Cultural Death Rites and Notions of Justice.

Chapter 7 looks at how existing theoretical frameworks explored in Chapter 4 can be enhanced, or replaced given the findings that emerged from this study. The outcome of the review is the proposal of a new theoretical framework called Orchestrated Loss.

By its very nature, disappearance is one of the cruellest acts that can be inflicted on, not only the person disappeared, but also on the families and friends who yearn for their return. In considering the results in Chapter 6, the reader should be aware that they may find the often graphic accounts of family members, directly quoted in this study, both harrowing and traumatic. This reflects the enormous pain and trauma endured by the families, who shared these accounts because they wanted to provide a greater understanding of the impact of the disappearance of their loved ones. Their bravery is to be commended. Their journey to bring home their loved ones is a testament to their tenacity, dignity and sheer determination to break down the wall of silence and challenge those responsible to return their loved ones for Christian burial.

Whilst the paramilitaries spirited the bodies of the Disappeared away, they could not spirit away the truth, nor the families' rightful demands to have their loved ones returned; their deaths acknowledged and their lives remembered. Hopefully, this study will continue to give voice to the families in their unrelenting fight to have all of the Disappeared brought home.



Figure 2 The shoes of Brian McKinney whose body, along with that of John McClory, was recovered from a double grave in Inniskeen, County Monaghan by the Garda Siochana in June 1999. Photograph © Cathal McNaughton

CHAPTER 1: SETTING THE SCENE

This chapter is not intended to present a history of the Troubles - that would require a thesis in its own right and is, in any case, available in countless texts already published (O'Malley 1997; Coogan 1996; Bew and Gillespie 1999; Maloney 2011; English 2012 and McKittrick and McVea 2012). In order to fully appreciate the significance and impact of disappearances, however, there are important contextual factors that need to be understood, and which set the scene for this study.

THE CONTEXT TO DISAPPEARANCES DURING THE TROUBLES

While the origins of the British–Irish conflict date back centuries, it's most recent manifestation, known as the Troubles (hereafter referred to as the NI Conflict), is generally considered to have begun in 1969 with a marked rise in political and sectarian tensions. The conflict has long been spoken of as occurring between members of the Catholic (Nationalist) and Protestant (Unionist) communities; there were, however, many other players, including both the British and Irish states; international supporters and observers; and, of course, the various paramilitary groups that aligned themselves with the main identities in the region (Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist and Catholic/Republican/Nationalist) (McKittrick et al 1999).

Prior to 1969, tension had been simmering for some time, with the Catholic community claiming widespread discrimination in relation to housing and jobs, as well as in respect of both local and national elections (Coogan 1996). Violence against Catholics by loyalist paramilitaries was also a feature in the region, with sectarian attacks occurring as early as 1966, resulting in a number of deaths (McKittrick et al 1999). In addition, mistreatment of the Catholic community by some members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) heightened already hostile relationships and further stoked community tensions (O'Malley 1997). When the British Army was brought in to support the police in August 1969, it was thought that they might act as a buffer between the two communities. Initially, the troops were welcomed by the Catholic community, but the nationalist people very quickly realised that the soldiers were not going to be the protectors that they had been hoping for.

In July 1970 the Falls Road curfew, during which the army sealed off the Lower Falls and conducted rigorous house to house searches killing four people and causing considerable damage to hundreds of houses, was the final act in the poisoning of relations between the military and the nationalist community. By this stage both communities had adopted a siege mentality with vigilantes and nascent paramilitary groups assuming the roles of community protectors and being accepted as such by their communities (McKittrick and McVea 2012). It was during this period that the Provisional IRA (hereafter referred to as the IRA), a new republican paramilitary group, rose to prominence within working class Catholic communities (English 2012).

During 1969-70 a number of people were killed by paramilitary groups, the police and the army. The result was that attitudes on both sides hardened with cycles of revenge and hatred intensifying (English 2012). In August 1971, 11 civilians were killed in the nationalist Ballymurphy estate by members of the Parachute Regiment of the British Army. In January 1972, 14 civilians were shot dead at a Civil Rights march by members of the same Regiment (Bew and Gillespie 1999); this had a profound impact on the Catholic communities in the North as it confirmed the belief that they were under attack, that the state could not be trusted to protect them.

As the violence spread, death, injury and the widespread intimidation of families followed (Fay et al 1998). Nearly 2000 families fled their homes in 1972 as working class communities segregated along religious lines responded to the violence. Housing estates became defined as either unionist/ loyalist (Protestant) or nationalist/republican (Catholic) (Keefe 2018). Against this backdrop, paramilitary violence, mass riots and wide-spread civil disobedience occurred. As a result, some nationalist communities became 'no go' areas that the police and army could not, and would not, enter. In these communities, the police had lost what little credibility and respect they had (Dowler 2013); their exclusion left a vacuum so that social control fell to the community itself - ultimately this role was taken up by the paramilitaries. The Army attempted to break down these 'no go' areas through Operation Motorman which involve the creation of military bases (Smith and Neumann 2005), but this further isolated the communities and created the opportunity for paramilitary groups to take on a *protective function.* The paramilitaries widely adopted the role of a quasi-police force, announcing themselves to be defenders of their community from attack as well as from the unwanted

attention of the police force, or the occupying presence of the British Army (Smith and Neumann 2005).

Although the IRA were widely accepted by their communities as being their only means of defence and retaliation, this did not extend to indiscriminate and perceived unjustified killing (English 2012); the IRA did not have the unquestioning support of the Catholic community in all instances. For example incidents such as “Bloody Friday”, in July 21 1972, when the IRA planted more than 20 bombs around Belfast, killing nine people and injuring many more, were condemned by the nationalist community and were ultimately seriously damaging to their reputation (Keefe 2018).

However, the treatment of Catholics by various arms of the state served to justify the actions of republican paramilitaries during this time. Arbitrary detention and internment by either the police and/or the army, was a common experience for Catholic men living in some areas of Northern Ireland (Norman 2021). However, albeit to a lesser degree, the paramilitaries also used a strategy of detention to facilitate military action inflicting interrogations, punishment beatings, intimidation, and attacks, to administer, with political and legal impunity, the informal criminal justice system they operated in the areas under their control (Knox 2002). Silke (1999) contends that the republican movement expended considerable energy and resources policing their respective communities, as they wanted to keep the housing estates quiet enabling them to both control, and have the support of, the community.

It was this context that set the scene for the introduction of a form of social control that saw the IRA begin a strategy of abducting, killing and secretly burying members of their own community. The policy, which became known as “disappearing”, continued throughout the 1970’s and into the 1980’s, with one single known incident taking place in 2003. In the same period, loyalist paramilitaries also carried out a smaller number of disappearances: these included the abductions of Hugh McVeigh and David Douglas. They were kidnapped and murdered in 1976 by members of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), allegedly for being members of a rival loyalist paramilitary organisation. However, their bodies were recovered five months later, the information on the location of their remains being provided to the RUC by one of those involved in the burial (McKittrick et al 1999).

Not all the 'battalions' of the IRA used disappearance as a tactic (McIntyre 2014). It is suggested that, following the disappearance of Patrick Anthony Duffy, a father of seven from Derry in 1973, members of the republican movement in Derry City, some clergy and the local community created uproar by calling publicly for the return of his body (O'Donghaile 2003). Initially, the IRA refused to release the remains. Instead, a week later in an effort to justify their actions, they placed a notice in a local paper branding Patrick Duffy an informer (Clarke and Johnston 2001). O'Donghaile (2003) and McIntyre (2014) suggest that this led the Derry internees (being held in the republican wing of Long Kesh (The Maze) prison) to issue a directive that the body of Patrick Duffy was to be returned. Pressure continued to be applied to the IRA until his body was returned 15 days after his disappearance. The body showed signs of having been immersed in water or very moist earth, and of having been covered with a white substance thought to be lime, to try to encourage decomposition as quickly as possible (McKittrick et al 1999). O'Donghaile (2003) suggests that, by defying the IRA leadership and gaining the return of Patrick Duffy's body, the people of Derry and the broader republican movement in the city showed the paramilitaries that they could not operate with total impunity and that community support, tacit or otherwise, was not omnipresent. Elliott (2014) agrees, stating that the return of Patrick Duffy was only achieved due to public condemnation of the IRA by the Derry republican community. A veteran republican, Mickey Donnelly (Breen, 2011), outlines the strength of opposition to secret burial at the time by stating that Derry republicans were appalled at any attempt to secretly bury someone. He added that every family had the right to bury their loved one with dignity, even if they had been an *informer*.

Whilst there is no way of knowing whether further disappearances were undertaken by the Derry brigade of the IRA, or who ultimately enabled the recovery of Patrick Duffy's remains in August 1973, the practice of disappearing individuals nonetheless continued with the abduction of Peter Wilson from Belfast. This was followed by a further 13 disappearances which were undertaken by other IRA units and one by a splinter republican group the INLA. These abductions, and the four from 1972, did not generate the same adverse response from the republican community as the Duffy case. This had the effect of allowing the IRA and INLA to hide the bodies for decades through a process of silence and denial (WAVE 2012).

THE TURNING POINT FOR THE FAMILIES OF THE DISAPPEARED

A pivotal moment for the families of the Disappeared came in August 1994, just weeks before the IRA Ceasefire, when two mothers broke the silence surrounding the disappearance of their sons in May 1978. The mothers of Brian McKinney and John McClory spoke to a journalist from the Irish Times about the disappearance of their two young sons 16 years previously (Breen 1994). This was the first time that the story of those who had been disappeared came to public prominence. Margaret McKinney and Mary McClory's bravery served to break down the wall of silence that the IRA and INLA had erected and maintained around the issue of the Disappeared, in some cases for more than twenty years.

A number of months later, Helen McKendry gave a heartrending radio interview to the BBC NI Talkback programme about the abduction of her widowed mother, Jean McConville, 22 years previously (BBC NI Talkback Programme, Dec 7th 1994). She was calling for information regarding the whereabouts of her mother's remains. These two events dramatically increased the awareness of the plight of the Disappeared in a community broadly oblivious to the existence of the practice. The families had lived for years with no knowledge of their loved ones' fates, of where they were, or why they were taken. However, even in the mid 1990's, the families' claims were met with blanket denials of responsibility by republican leaders.

In 1995, Margaret McKinney wrote an open letter to the then President of Sinn Fein, Gerry Adams:

> *'I ask you Mr Adams, what do I and other heartbroken families have to do to have our loved ones returned? Beg? Yes, I will beg. I will get down on my knees or do anything at all that will enable me to put my son to rest. In the name of the Holy Lord and all humanity I beg and plead with you to bring our suffering to an end. Give me back Brian's remains'.* (Original in McKinney family archive).

It took a further three years before the IRA gave any indication that disappearances were carried out. In December 1998 they issued a statement calling for information on the Disappeared from anyone in the republican movement who had been involved in either the deaths and/or burials of those taken (Irish Republican Army Statement on the disappeared 10 December 1998). Then, on March 28th 1999, some of the families were approached by representatives of the Republican movement and told that the next day Oglaigh na hEireann would issue a list of the names of nine individuals whom the IRA had killed and secretly buried

during the Troubles. It also acknowledged 'the incalculable pain and distress' caused by the disappearances (Irish Republican Army Statement March 30, 1999). However, the IRA list was not complete, and the names of several individuals were omitted. Some of these cases have never been claimed as IRA disappearances, while a further two disappearances were added to the list in 2009. And a further case in 2022. Some families suggest that the list of those disappeared is not definitive, and that other cases still exist that have never been publicly highlighted (Oireachtas Committee Dec 2021).

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

The campaign undertaken by some of the families in the mid to late 1990's, whilst important in that it led to the recognition that republican paramilitaries had disappeared individuals, did not lead to the return of any of the victims' bodies. It took international involvement by the United States of America administration to move the issue forward.

As outlined in the prologue, on May the 7th 1998, Margaret McKinney travelled to the White House with a delegation of families from WAVE to meet with President Bill Clinton and the First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton. Margaret was in the United States with the group as part of a study visit. She was armed with newspaper cuttings and the only photographs she had of her son, Brian. At that meeting, President Clinton personally promised her he would get her son returned to her (WAVE 2012). Transcripts of the calls between President Clinton and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (UK), Tony Blair, the following day (May 8th 1998) reveal the impact of the visit (Staunton 2016). President Clinton asked Tony Blair to work alongside the Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister), Bertie Ahern, to establish the framework for a process that would enable the IRA to provide information on the location of the bodies of the Disappeared that would be treated as privileged and could only be used for the purposes of enabling the bodies to be recovered (Staunton 2016). This would, in President Clinton's words, '*enable sanctified burials'* (Staunton 2016).

The involvement of the United States of America at that time was significant for Irish Republicans. Up until then, Sinn Fein officials had not been permitted to travel to the USA, but the recent granting of a visa to Gerry Adams was an extremely important public

acknowledgement of the priority the ongoing Peace Process had for the American administration (Dixon 2010). There was, and is, a long standing tradition amongst the Irish diaspora in the USA of using their influence on issues related to Northern Ireland. Gerry Adams, in his own book, referred to the process of harnessing support for Sinn Fein's objectives in Ireland from various political and policy groups, such as the Congressional Committee on Ireland; the Irish American Unity Conference; the McBride Campaign Committees (focused on ending discrimination of jobs in NI); and the Ancient Order of Hibernians- Adams 2003). However, the Clinton administration offered the most significant engagement for Sinn Fein, not only providing access at Presidential level, but at a political level within the Irish American community (Spencer 2019). In relation to the granting of a visa to travel to the USA at that time, Gerry Adams (2003) stated:

> *'The door into the United States had been opened. Irish American opinion was invigorated and informed. That potentially powerful community had a real sense of what was possible and there were new participants within corporate America, who were prepared to play a new role'* (p156).

For Sinn Fein, the granting of entry visas by President Clinton's administration was critical. It provided access to fundraising potential that would help Sinn Fein achieve its political ambitions (Smyth 2020); but it also provided visibility and legitimacy, much to the chagrin of the British establishment. It was estimated that between 1994-2001, at the very time the families were highlighting the issue of the Disappeared and seeking access to President Clinton, 'Friends of Sinn Fein' collected over five million dollars, making the USA the largest source of funding for Sinn Fein at that time (Maillot 2005). The families understood that Sinn Fein were encouraged via political pressure to *engage* in the process of recovery or there may have been financial or other limitations imposed upon their fundraising efforts in the USA, if they were not seen to address the issue.

THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION FOR THE LOCATION OF VICTIMS' REMAINS (ICLVR)

The timing of the campaign by the families of the Disappeared was *fortuitous.* The ongoing international dimension to the Peace process negotiations allowed the families some leverage thanks to the personal involvement of President Clinton. This leverage was pivotal in encouraging the British and Irish Governments to establish an independent mechanism to

facilitate the provision of information on the whereabouts of the bodies of the Disappeared. A month after PIRA / INLA released the list of those individuals they were admitting to having disappeared, the British and Irish Governments moved to introduce legislation in their respective Parliaments to enable those with information on the location of the bodies of the disappeared to provide it without fear of prosecution.

On 27th April 1999, the two governments introduced legislation to move the process forward. In Westminster, Tony Blair's government passed '*The Northern Ireland (Location of Victims' Remains) Act 1999'*. This Act made provision for locating the remains of those killed by acts of unlawful violence, before the 10 April 1998, committed by or on behalf of proscribed organisations. At the same time, the Irish Government introduced *'The Criminal Justice (Location of Victims' Remains) Act 1999'* (Irish Statue Book 1999). This combined legislation led to the creation, on 24th May 1999, of an Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains (ICLVR). This legislation allowed the Commission to receive information that was to be treated as privileged - it could, therefore, be used only to locate the bodies of those disappeared, and not for any other investigative purpose.

Four days after the legislation passed into law in both Parliaments, An Garda Siochana (the Irish Police Force sometimes referred to as "The Guards") and a local priest received calls telling them that the body of Eamon Molloy could be found in a coffin, in a graveyard in Faughart, County Louth. It was thought that the body had been exhumed from a clandestine burial site located somewhere else, and placed in a new coffin, before being brought to Faughart Cemetery (BBC News 1999a). It was a case that had previously been unknown. As Eamon's brother Michael states,

> *'It wasn't until 1999 that we finally found out what happened to him. A woman my mother knew from Sinn Fein got in touch to say there had been a development with regard to The Disappeared. This was the first time we had ever heard of The Disappeared so we were somewhat surprised to hear this news. The woman said that Eamon's name was on a list of people taken away by the IRA and executed and that we would shortly be getting his remains back. It came as quite a shock to us all but especially my mother as she never thought that he was dead' (WAVE 2012).*

Other burial sites were identified across Ireland and the Guards undertook a series of searches. Initially, these searches failed to recover any of the victims. Media interviews with the families at the time indicate that, buoyed by the early recovery of Eamon Molloy's body, they all expected recovery of their loved ones within days (BBC NI News May 28th 1999b). In June 1999, on the eve of searches being adjourned, the Guards located the shoes of Brian McKinney and John McClory leading to their recovery from a grave in Inniskeen, County Louth. Following a further, unsuccessful, period of searching, the searches then ended.

In August 2003 a man out walking with his grandchildren on Shelling Hill beach in County Louth came across clothing and bone embedded within the sand. A subsequent search by the Guards identified the remains as those of Jean McConville (Keefe 2018). An extensive search for Jean had been undertaken in the neighbouring beach at Templeton, County Louth in 1999/2000 to no avail. The *accidental* manner in which Jean's body was recovered meant that the protections afforded by the ICLVR legislation against prosecution did not apply. Thus all the usual criminal justice options (e.g. regarding forensic analysis that could be of use in a prosecution) were available to the authorities.

Emboldened by the recovery of these remains, the families continued to highlight their loved ones' cases. A further two visits were undertaken to the United States. Following one of the visits (in May 2004) and a meeting with the US Envoy to Northern Ireland, Mitchell Reiss, Anna McShane (the daughter of Charlie Armstrong, disappeared in August 1980) and Anne Morgan (the sister of Seamus Ruddy, disappeared in May 1985) returned and lobbied for a forensic approach to be adopted in the search process (WAVE 2012). The family members were encouraged by the use of ground penetrating radar and other forensic techniques that had been used to locate the bodies of Irish railway workers who had been killed at Duffy's Creek in Philadelphia in 1830 (Glatsky 2017). The families lobbied the ICLVR and other Government ministers leading to the appointment of Geoff Knupfer, a forensic scientist and former Detective Chief Inspector with the Greater Manchester Police who had worked to recover the bodies of the children killed and secretly buried by the "Moors Murderers", Ian Brady and Myra Hindley (Brophy 2017). The adoption of a forensic approach, in terms of how information was gathered and analysed and the deployment of specialist contractors and a

dedicated team of forensic archaeologists, was a significant step forward in the quest to recover the bodies of those disappeared.

To date, eight bodies have been recovered using these forensic approaches: Danny McIlhone in 2008; Charlie Armstrong, Gerry Evans and Peter Wilson in 2010; Brendan Megraw in 2014; Kevin McKee and Seamus Wright in 2015 and Seamus Ruddy in 2017. Two of those disappeared were recovered in separate processes, not involving the ICLVR. The body of Eugene Simons had been located in 1984 following the draining of a bog in County Louth. He had been disappeared on New Year's Day 1981. Gareth O'Connor was abducted in 2003 by the Real IRA, a splinter group that emerged from the IRA (WAVE 2012); his body was recovered in his submerged car in Victoria Quay, in Omeath, County Louth in 2005. This case falls outside the remit of the ICLVR which covers disappearances perpetrated *prior to* the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (ICLVR 2020).

THE STRATEGY OF DISAPPEARANCE

While disappearance has been a tactic used predominantly by republican paramilitaries, across Ireland there are many examples of other individuals going missing. Cummins (2019) contends that the use of disappearance is significant by, inter alia, criminal gangs and perpetrators of domestic or sexual violence. In some of these disappearances, information may emerge that suggests paramilitary involvement in covering up, rather than committing, the crime. Lisa Dorrian disappeared in February 2015 from a caravan park in Ballyhalbert, County Down. Attention has increasingly focused on the involvement of loyalist paramilitaries, not in the murder itself, but in protecting the person responsible for Lisa's murder and the disappearance of her body (Lee 2021). Cases such as this highlight the complexity that exists with respect to disappearances in Northern Ireland given the social context to the Troubles, the ongoing role of paramilitaries and the post-conflict environment.

For years there has been speculation amongst the families as to whether or not the disappearances were sanctioned by the leaders of the republican paramilitary groups. It would appear from recent documentaries, such as 'I Dolours' (IMDbPro 2018) (which focused on the life of Dolours Price, an IRA volunteer) that the abductions carried out by the IRA were

sanctioned by a specific *group* within the IRA, and undertaken by a faction referred to as the 'Unknowns' (Maloney 2011), although this has always been denied by republican leadership (McDonald 2018). Based on accounts that detail the activities of the 'Unknowns', disappearances did not happen randomly. Rather, it is suggested that they were a specific strategy adopted by certain republican paramilitary units. It is primarily because multiple disappearances were carried out by one organisation as part of a deliberate strategy, that the researcher decided to focus this study on the experiences of the families of those who were abducted, murdered and secretly buried by republican paramilitaries. This is not to single out or differentiate between those victimised by republican groups as opposed to those harmed by the state or other parties, but it is to examine how a specific strategy, a tool of war used around the world, impacted on those families left behind in the aftermath of a disappearance. Furthermore it is to highlight how the context to a loss via disappearance has personal, family and political implications for communities in conflict but also options for reconciliation and post traumatic growth. As mentioned, disappearances in NI's Conflict were not the first time in recent Irish history that the practice had been adopted by military groups. In an effort to explore the cultural, political and social connections between the early manifestations of disappearances and the disappearances arising in NI's Conflict, historic Irish examples will be discussed in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL DISAPPEARANCES IN IRELAND

In Ireland, the practice of abducting, murdering and secretly burying individuals did not begin with NI's Conflict. Throughout the Independence Conflict period (from 1919-1921 in the War of Independence, from 1922-1923 in the Civil War), the abduction, murder and disappearance of individuals was a common occurrence. Only recently, however, have the disappearances which took place during this period of history garnered greater prominence in academic study and historical accounts (Borgonova 2007; Hart 2009; Murphy 2011; Fitzpatrick 2013; O'Halpin 2013; Bielenberg and Donnelly 2016; O'Ruairc 2016 and Bielenberg and O'Ruairc 2020a). An examination of the nature of, and rationale for, these historical disappearances in this chapter provides an important context for the time period under study in this thesis.

This chapter will explore the use of disappearance as a tool and tactic of war by republican paramilitaries during the Independence Conflict period. Whilst it has been suggested that British State forces also engaged in disappearances during this period, there is little evidence to back up the assertion. A variety of reasons have been suggested in the literature for these disappearances (Borgonova 2007; Hart 2009; Fitzpatrick 2013; O'Halpin 2013; Howe 2014; O'Ruairc 2016; Bielenberg and O'Ruairc 2020a), however for the IRA, a likely principal motive was that it sustained a climate of fear enabling them to maintain a degree of control over the local community.

The disappearances of the Independence Conflict period, and the outcomes for the families, and communities involved is relevant to the study of the disappearances which took place during NI's Conflict for a number of reasons. Not least of these is the direct impact the practice had on the families of those who were disappeared. Using a range of strategies, the paramilitaries enforced a silence around the disappearances that ensured that the families were marginalised and that the community and wider society were similarly quieted. In both time periods, this silence lasted decades.

In assessing the relevance of the Independence Conflict practice of disappearing individuals to that of NI's Conflict, it is important to first consider the context in which they occurred. The Irish War of Independence (1919 to 1921) was fought by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) against the British security forces. It ended with a ceasefire on the 11th July 1921, and the subsequent Anglo-Irish Treaty on the 6th December 1921. In contrast, the Civil War that

followed (1922-1923) was a conflict waged over the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty by Irish Republicans (opposed to the Treaty) and Irish Nationalists (the forces of the Provisional Government who supported the Treaty). The outcome of this war, that involved splits in the IRA and saw former comrades fighting one another, was the establishment of the Irish Free State (Dwyer 1998). This made Ireland an independent country governed by its own parliament, but included only 26 of the 32 counties on the island of Ireland. The six excluded counties in the North remained a part of the United Kingdom.

Throughout both wars, a central concern for the IRA was ensuring that the opposing side did not recruit spies or informers into their ranks (Murphy 2011). To deter individuals from informing, the IRA proactively investigated suspected spies or informers often executing those found *guilty*; in some cases they would be summarily executed and left at the roadside as a 'message' to other would-be informers (Keane 2017). In other cases, individuals were simply disappeared and never seen again. This campaign to identify and punish any such 'traitors' was pursued by the IRA within and across communities (Keane 2017). Hart (2009) posits that the IRA was waging a war on two fronts – one against the British security forces, and a second, unacknowledged civil war, against those in their own community they deemed to be working against them. The significance of this will be considered later in this chapter.

LEVELS OF DISAPPEARANCE

Much debate exists in academic articles regarding the extent of the disappearances undertaken in the Independence Conflict period (Hart 2009; Murphy 2011; O'Halpin 2013; O'Ruairc 2016; Bielenberg and O'Ruairc 2020b). A central difficulty is the need to re-analyse the limited data some 90 years after the events took place. Most of the relevant records are housed in Public Records within the Colonial and Foreign Offices, the Imperial War Museum in London and in the Bureau of Military History in Dublin (BMH). There is a dearth of family records relating to those disappeared, or any sort of official records from the IRA. The exceptions are the witness statements of IRA members, available from BMH, and the personal testimonies of key IRA activists reproduced in books. The sensitivities that still exist around the Independence Conflict disappearances, the need to control the narrative around the behaviour of the parties involved, and the relevance of the issue for the families of those disappeared, means that there was and is a ferocious debate (with accusations of political

bias) regarding how the disappearances have been documented and accounted for (Howe 2014). Howe (2014) argues that there has been a proliferation of accusations of agendas, or of nationalist or anti nationalist bias around this issue. To compound this problem, the hidden nature of the issue of the Disappeared and the corresponding (forced) silence of the families and communities has added greatly to the information vacuum regarding the levels and nature of the deaths. Hart (2009) and Fitzpatrick (2013) reflect that the climate of fear the families lived within rendered them silent, as the consequence of speaking publicly about the disappearance of their loved one could have been the inflicting of further violence and even death. Murphy (2011) contends that,

> '*In many cases families themselves colluded in the silence out of fear because to do otherwise would bring the ultimate sanction on other family members, as indeed sometimes happened….* (Those disappeared) *Perished as though they have never been ..' (*p xii).

In addition to the challenges outlined above, it is difficult to accurately account for the numbers of individuals who were disappeared during this period. This is largely due to the lack of comprehensive, contemporaneous records; the context and hidden nature of the disappearances; and the myriad ways in which disappearances were portrayed within the community or reported publicly, and in the media.

O'Halpin (2013) highlights another problem in quantifying the number of disappeared. He concludes that, in County Cork, there remained a triumphalism regarding the killing of spies. He argues that this has had an impact on the quantification of how many people were killed and secretly buried across the county, which may, in turn, have led to an exaggeration of the numbers affected. For the IRA members involved, exaggerating the numbers suggested greater involvement in combat action which had a positive impact on the pension awarded to them by the Government (Bielenberg and O'Ruairc 2020a).

O'Halpin (2013) suggests that approximately two hundred of the IRA's opponents were abducted, executed and secretly buried. Howe (2014) contradicts this, suggesting that more than 747 people were killed during the Independence Conflict period, with many of them being disappeared. He also questions whether a significant number of disappearances have not been captured in any contemporary or official record. Both Howe (2014) and O'Halpin (2013) agree that the context and circumstances of the Independence Conflict period and the

subsequent drive to promote stability, has led to the issue being deliberately played down at a community, societal and Governmental level. Borgonova (2012) and O'Ruairc (2017) reject both O'Halpin and Howe's estimates, contending that the numbers of those disappeared has been grossly exaggerated to portray it as a more significant practice than it was in reality. O'Ruairc (2017) suggests that the practice of disappearing was not widespread and posits that just 25 of those executed as spies were disappeared.

These differing interpretations of the data highlight the inherent difficulty in classifying the numbers and backgrounds of those who were disappeared during the Independence Conflict. O'Halpin (2013) contends that the numbers of individuals abducted varied considerably by county. He highlights that, in eight of the nine Ulster counties, there were just four killings of alleged spies. In at least three counties this targeting seems to have been for reasons other than giving information to the authorities, including the settlement of old scores, agrarian envy and community rumour and myth. This is echoed by other researchers (Murphy 2011; Fitzpatrick 2013 and O'Ruairc 2016). The 'Dead of the Irish Revolution Project' (O'Halpin 2013) highlights the variation, from county to county, in the numbers of individuals killed having been labelled as informers or spies. In Cork, 14% of the total killed during the Independence Conflict period were deemed to be spies or informers; this was considerably higher than any of the next most violent counties such as Dublin (5%), Antrim (0%) and Tipperary (7%). The figures also show that most of those who were killed and labelled as spies died in the last few months before the ceasefire of 11th July 1921. O'Halpin (2013) argues that this illustrates that most of those killed and disappeared were killed, not because they posed a threat to the campaign for independence, but rather because they were viewed as convenient or soft targets, or because there was a settling of old scores, as discussed later in this chapter. Hiding their bodies to prevent public scrutiny of the death is an interesting parallel to the practice adopted later by the IRA during NI's Conflict.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR REPUBLICANS OF THE INFORMER OR SPY

It is clear that, whilst a complex range of issues may have led to disappearances, the prevailing reason given by republican paramilitaries was the allegation of spying or informing (O'Halpin 2013). The archetypal folk devil of the Irish revolution was the informer, and their abduction, execution and secret burial would appear to have been a tactic long practiced (Fitzpatrick 2013). As Fitzpatrick (2013) suggests, the punishment for informing was often death, with the community (by their silence) acquiescing to the inflicting of this extreme violence against those who were so-branded. Hart (2009) suggests that, in successive Irish Revolutions, the rebel was deemed as the hero, while the informer was viewed with disdain, '*a symbol of evil since the days of penal law and priest hunters'* (p293).

The actions of spies and informers has long been used to explain the failure of various Irish uprisings against British rule including the 1798 rebellion, a revolt by the United Irishmen led by Theobald Wolfe Tone (Elliott 1989), and the 1867 Fenian Rebellion (Bowman 2019). McMahon (2008) contends that the use of spies and informers was one of the key strategic gambits that allowed the British forces to conquer the insurgents during both rebellions.

The informer or spy, therefore, has huge strategic but also emotive significance for republicans. Throughout the literature, the term spy and informer are used interchangeably (McMahon 2008; O'Halpin 2013 and O'Ruairc 2016). However Tom Barry (2013), a leading contemporary IRA commander in West Cork, offers a distinction between unpaid informers and paid spies. He suggests that the former *insiders* were more dangerous to the republican cause because they often came from, and blended in with, the community, which made them far more difficult to identify. By comparison, the paid spy was often from an impoverished background and not local to an area. They could be ex-servicemen or army officers who employed clandestine methods, including disguises and false identities, to gather information. Regardless of this differentiation, Barry (2013) indicates the disdain with which both groups were viewed, labelling them '*vicious*' and dishonourable members of the community (p177).

Due to the strategic impact of informers on prior rebellions, during the Independence Conflict period the IRA were very intolerant of any perceived betrayal and proactive in dealing with

the issue (Dwyer 1998). O'Ruairc (2016) suggests that the IRA were acutely aware of the need to stop the flow of information to the British by identifying and eliminating their agents. He contends that, as a guerrilla army relying on secrecy and mobility, the IRA could not hold suspected spies or informers as prisoners (in comparison to the British security forces). Instead, they would inflict a variety of punishments, including abducting and killing those they deemed guilty and, in some cases, disappearing their bodies.

O'Halpin (2013) posits that the IRA's treatment of spies must be considered in light of the fact that the British Crown forces were engaging in a campaign of systematic terror, murder and despoliation with large numbers of civilians dying in very dubious circumstances. They suspected that the killing of certain individuals by state forces pointed to local knowledge, i.e. that those involved in the IRA were being identified to British forces by members of the community. It would appear, however, that disappearing people was not a tactic used exclusively by the IRA. O'Ruairc (2016) contends that the British forces, through their Auxiliary and "Black & Tan" divisions, also engaged in the process of disappearing individuals from 1920-21. He claims, however, that they attempted to conceal responsibility by leaving signs such as 'Spy beware' purporting to come from the IRA (O'Halpin 2013). The implication is, therefore, that even British forces sought to distance themselves from disappearance as a tactic by blaming the IRA. Whoever was responsible, the practice of disappearing individuals went unchallenged (given the fear of the consequences of speaking out) and ensured that community control by the IRA was maintained. There is little information in the official British Government archives to confirm these disappearances beyond O'Halpin (2013) and O' Ruairc's (2016) assertions.

DISAPPEARANCES IN THE INDEPENDENCE CONFLICT PERIOD- AIRBRUSHED FROM HISTORY

Growing academic scrutiny over the past two decades has shown that the raison d'etre for disappearances during this period of history is multi-faceted (Hart 2009; Borgonovo 2012; Fitzpatrick 2013; O'Halpin 2013; O'Ruairc 2016 and Beilenberg and O'Ruairc 2020a). Up until this point, there had been little academic interrogation of the issue. This was mirrored by a lack of acknowledgement of the issue at community, political, policing, justice and

Government levels (Hart 2009; Fitzpatrick 2013 and Murphy 2011). Murphy (2011) contends that, even now, there is a reluctance at Government level to address the matter. He claims that any enquiries he has made to the Irish State seeking information about disappearances and exhumations have been met with resistance. He suggests that this is representative of a wider reluctance to address the issues at either a micro (community) level or macro (national) level.

Part of this reluctance may be due to how the Independence Conflict period is perceived across Ireland. It would appear that this varies from County to County, in the same way that levels of disappearance were shaped by the actions of the individual IRA brigades (Bielenberg and O'Ruairc 2020b). Howe (2014) reports that in Cork it was looked on with immense pride and that the high proportion of memoirs, commemorative sites, ceremonies and local historical accounts has intensified that feeling. However, beneath this veneer there is, in Howe's words, a community '*shrouded in a stressed silence'* p162. This stressed silence relates to the violence that was inflicted on the Cork community by members of the IRA. While there was an intense sense of community pride in all that was achieved at a military and political level to bring about Irish independence, the issue of unresolved disappearances within the community did not receive any attention. Neither has there been any concerted effort, at any stage, at either local or national level, to return those disappeared to their families for burial.

While the activities of the IRA were captured in the memoirs of combatants' such as Tom Barry and Ernie O'Malley (Howe 2014), the ramifications of issues such as the disappearance of members of the community do not feature in these accounts to any meaningful degree. It could be concluded that, had the issue of disappearance during the Independence Conflict period been brought to due prominence, the reputation of the IRA would have been sullied and the legitimacy of their campaign undermined. This resonates with how the issue of disappearances was approached and perceived when the tactic was later adopted during NI's Conflict.

Notwithstanding this sense of pride regarding the activities of the IRA and the justification and legitimisation of their actions (O'Malley 1978 and O'Suilleabhain 2013), there was also a sense of recognition and regret in the memoirs of some key IRA activists regarding the Disappeared. Tom Barry (2013) contends that,

> '*We were now hard, cold and ruthless, as our enemy had been since hostilities began…. The step was not an easy one, for one's mind was darkened and one's outlook bleak by the decisions which had to be taken'* (p187).

These testimonies quietly challenge the perceived view that all combatants believed that they were fully justified taking the actions that they did (O'Halpin 2013). They also demonstrate that, whilst the IRA sought to take the high moral ground as defenders of the community, there was an awareness that the reality of the war, in which individuals within the community were murdered and secretly buried, could have challenged this proposition. It could, therefore, be suggested that, in an effort to maintain their image as community defenders, and to bolster community relations and stability in the aftermath of the tumultuous Independence Conflict period, the IRA sought to ensure that the issue of the Disappeared remained unaddressed. Again, this presages what would later emerge as the stance of the IRA during the NI Conflict.

The IRA were unintentionally assisted by families and communities that were silent and fearful of retribution. There was also a failure to address the issue at a policing level. For example, the need to maintain the status quo within the community affected any attempt by the Garda Siochana (which replaced the Royal Irish Constabulary as Ireland's police force in 1926) to conduct any investigations (Murphy 2011). O'Halpin (2013) contends that there was local obfuscation, with sensitivities given those reportedly involved in such disappearances. He cites the Garda's unwillingness to search the farm of a prominent IRA member who had spoken in favour of disappearing individuals as they did not want to stir up unrest within the community, or generate a backlash from republican paramilitary supporters. O'Halpin (2013) suggests that this reluctance explains why so few of the bodies of those disappeared during that period have been recovered.

It was not just the police who did not address the issue. It would also appear that the church at that time did not involve themselves in actively pursuing the disappearance of individuals. Murphy (2011) highlights that, in certain areas, members of the clergy were suspected by the IRA of giving information to the British, and that this resulted in intimidation. He contends that they were caught in an invidious position with, on one hand, their faith and, on the other, the turmoil that was happening around them in the community. He suggests that there was only one winner – those with the guns who created such a climate of fear that clergy were reluctant to address what had taken place. Whilst some suffered intimidation because of

being seen to be supportive of the British forces, as outlined by Fitzpatrick (2013), Murphy (2011) concludes that, in many cases, they were blameless and not guilty of the charges levied against them. It is likely that fear and intimidation may have rendered many silent; whatever the cause, it is clear that neither the Protestant nor Catholic Churches sought to actively pursue this issue for families impacted by the disappearance of their loved ones during that period of time.

SILENCE

Silence is a common theme reflected throughout the literature regarding how families and communities coped with an individual's disappearance (Hart 2009; Fitzpatrick 2013; O'Halpin 2013 and Howe 2014). Murphy (2011) describes how, following a disappearance, a process of 'Omerta' quickly descended onto an area, at a family, community and societal level. This even extended to the press. He cites the case of family advertisements being placed in newspapers asking for information regarding the abduction of a loved one, even though the abduction didn't appear as a story anywhere in the newspaper. Hart (2009) similarly suggests that the lack of media reporting compounded the silence concerning the Disappeared. He cites the example of two men, Hornibrook and Woods, whose disappearance wasn't mentioned in any Irish newspaper despite their families having placed adverts seeking information on their whereabouts, in the same newspapers. The control exerted by the IRA, therefore, he suggests, extended right across the media leading, effectively, to a blanket of silence.

The process of maintaining silence may also have been assisted by the exodus of families from Ireland following the abductions of their loved ones (Hart 2009; Murphy 2011 and Fitzpatrick 2013). If families were not highlighting their loved ones' cases on an ongoing basis, then the cases would soon be forgotten. Murphy (2011) suggests that families colluded with the silence, fearful of inviting further IRA violence against them. He posits that, effectively, they buried the past in order to survive. Even when families did contact the authorities, they too were silent, unhelpful and unresponsive (Hart 2009). Murphy (2011) refers to the nascent state which, he says, stayed silent in an effort to maintain respectability around the IRA as some of its members were now senior figures in the Irish Government or in local authorities.

The literature shows that an intense climate of fear existed within communities at that time (Murphy 2011; Fitzpatrick 2013; Howe 2014 and Keane 2014). The IRA actively silenced families and communities, labelling them spies to justify their behaviour. They threatened dire consequences should the victims' families inform anyone about their loved one's abduction and/ or disappearance (Keane 2014). O'Halpin (2013) reports that the Cork IRA responded very strongly to any enquiries regarding the whereabouts of civilians or members of the state forces abducted and killed, stating '*Those shot during the war, (are) not to be inquired about as they are all spies in this area' (*p318). This rendered not only the families, but whole communities, silent as they were unsure who they could turn to for help given the covert nature of the IRA's operations.

Michael O'Donaghue (1921), an IRA volunteer, reflected on the secret nature of the IRA in a witness statement archived in the BMH. He contended that,

> '*The effectiveness of the IRA lay in its elusiveness, its unpredictable military tactics, its secret and mysterious character*' (p183).

This capriciousness and secretiveness rendered any redress for families impossible as they simply could not know for certain who was a member of, or affiliated to, the IRA. Given that the British authorities at no stage claimed any cases of disappearing individuals and, indeed, feigned a campaign to obscure their involvement, this, too, rendered families silent. The military strategy of the IRA to maintain and control a pervasive climate of silence had, therefore, succeeded, ensuring that the issue of the Disappeared was kept hidden for decades. The silence was particularly pervasive when gender-based violence was inflicted as discussed below.

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Disappearances were not the only conflict violence the IRA and the British forces sought to cover up. Gender based violence was carried out extensively by both the IRA and British forces (Connolly, 2019). Whilst the IRA had a directive not to kill women, as highlighted later in this chapter, there are a number of examples of how local brigades ignored this rule; this included disappearing women (Lane 2021). Violence against women was employed as a tactic by the IRA in an attempt to control them and especially to discourage any engagement between the women and members of the British forces (Howe 2014).

In a similar way the British forces sought to terrorise the community to dissuade women from engaging with the IRA. Women were caught in an invidious position. Some of the violence inflicted on women by the IRA included cutting their hair to the scalp (Howe 2014). Sexual violence was also rife (Connolly 2019). McAuliffe (2020) comments on the under-reporting of gang rapes. Foster (2017) concurs that these were under-reported given the taboo of talking about sexual violence at the time. While this deeply traumatic violence was hidden, the visual impact of a woman with short cropped hair, or scarred from having had oil or tar poured over her body, was intended to bring about public humiliation and vilification (O'Halpin 2013). O'Halpin (2013) suggests that the aim of this was to effectively neutralise the women and send a message to the community.

For decades it would appear Irish historians and academics omitted details of gender-based violence (Connolly 2020). This is in stark contrast to the attention given to this issue in other countries that also experienced civil war, such as Spain and Greece. Connolly (2020) suggests that, whilst stories of gender-based violence live on in the intergenerational memory of the family, the issue remained submerged and hidden within State archives. As with the disappearances, the deliberate lack of attention given to gender-based violence was in keeping with the ultimate strategy of both the IRA and British forces, to enforce the silence of families on these matters. Furthermore, by demonising the women as collaborators with the British, or as pro or anti Treaty supporters; or by portraying those women as spies or informers, the IRA and the British forces thwarted and suppressed any potential for community support, and ensured that a blanket of silence remained in place. Demonisation was a common strategy to prevent the issue from being addressed.

DEMONISING THE DISAPPEARED

As highlighted earlier in this chapter, during the Independence Conflict period, being accused of being a spy or informer was one of the worst allegations that could be levelled against an individual (Barry 2013; O'Halpin 2013 and O'Ruairc 2016). Its legacy remains today (Dudai 2012). By labelling the victim of disappearance a spy or informer, the perpetrators could invoke community revulsion against the individual. This ensured that no one would challenge

or question the perpetrators, or demand evidence, and there was therefore never any pressure to recover the remains, or reveal where they were buried.

Michael O'Donaghue (1921), in his witness statement to BMH, described the IRA hatred of those branded as spies. This even extended the treatment of the remains in death. O'Donaghue suggests that, so intense was the contempt that IRA members felt for spies, that they would try to go to the morgue to disfigure the corpse. By disfiguring the remains, they prevented the family from having the normal custom of a public wake where the body would have been on view to those who called at the family home. A wake had, and still has, huge significance in Ireland as it is tied to paying respect, not only to the deceased, but also to their family (McCoy 2012). By forcing the family to have a closed coffin, the IRA prevented the normal rituals associated with a wake from being undertaken.

The impact on families of having a loved one labelled a spy or informer was immense. Often, a label was physically attached to the body, bearing the text *'Convicted spy. Spies and informers beware'* (O'Halpin 2013). The impact of this on families was cataclysmic. As O'Ruairc (2016) suggests, it often rendered them outcasts, even within their own wider families. This also contributed to families feeling that, in order to survive, they had to also effectively 'bury' the past, and what happened to their loved one (Hart 2009). This was not peculiar to Ireland. As will be discussed in Chapter 3 the same process of 'enforced forgetting' occurred in Sri Lanka for the families of those disappeared during their conflict (Sivayokan 2014). There, the families removed photographs and any trace of their loved one's life as a form of protection from further violence. For those whose remains were recovered in the years following the Independence Conflict period, the shame often continued as their graves may then have been left unmarked (Fitzpatrick 2013). Murphy (2011) contends that, in order to live in the new Free State, many families felt they had to remain silent, and that this extended to not having a memorial for their loved one.

It could be suggested that demonisation was used by both the British Government and the IRA for their own ends. O'Ruairc (2016) contends that, given that there is no historical documentation publicly available which can conclusively confirm that those killed by the IRA were, in fact, British intelligence agents, it is likely that the killings will remain controversial whether the victims were disappeared or not. An important consideration regarding disappearance (as opposed to when the body is recovered and buried) is that accusations

remain alive for the families and, as a result, the demonisation does not abate (Hart 2009). Howe (2014) suggests that, given the controversy, discussions around disappearances by the IRA can lead to researchers being accused of political bias or of having a hidden agenda, years after the disappearances took place.

USING "SPYING" TO DISGUISE ULTERIOR MOTIVES

As highlighted above, in some cases the spy or informer label was used to obscure the real reasons for the violence. Hart (2009) suggests that individuals could be condemned by suspicion alone, particularly if they were ex-soldiers, or had shared particular political views in the past. Fitzpatrick (2013) posits that the label of being a spy or informer may have been a convenient way to hide the covetous motive of those responsible – for example, where political prejudice was used for private ends to obtain, say, a prosperous farm or shop. Similarly, prior disputes with IRA members (O'Halpin 2013); the reporting or initiating of court action over intimidation (O'Halpin 2013); or failing to contribute to the arms levy imposed by the IRA on landowners and businesses (Hart 2009) have all suggested as reasons for individuals being disappeared. Barry (2013), too, concedes that such cases were not about religion, land, or the status of those attacked, but rather an unwillingness to comply with republican authority. This demonstrates the extent to which the IRA would go to maintain community control. Equally, the British forces needed to maintain control and undermine the strategic support structures of the IRA (O'Halpin 2013). Howe (2014) suggests that a key strategy of security forces is often to create an atmosphere of paranoia that leads paramilitary groups to suspect and kill innocent people. This, in turn, delegitimises the group in the eyes of the community. Disappearing individuals and blaming the IRA could, therefore, have formed part of this strategy.

CONTROLLING PERCEIVED DEVIANCE IN THE COMMUNITY

Fitzpatrick (1998) suggests that killing individuals and secretly burying them was not restricted to those deemed to be spies or informers. He suggests that there were several other groups that bore the brunt of the violence and were disappeared. This included those who were accused of deviant behaviour.

> *'Several hundred supposed informers were murdered, sometimes in gruesome fashion, their bodies being buried or dumped in the sea. Though many of the dead had indeed tipped off the police or the Castle, others were the victims of numerous paranoiac assumptions. Adulterers, homosexuals, tinkers, beggars, ex-servicemen, Protestants: there were many dangerous and potentially lethal labels for Ireland's inhabitants in the revolutionary period'* (Fitzpatrick 1998, p95).

Those viewed as being tinkers (a pejorative term for a member of the travelling community) or beggars, or who were strangers into an area, were automatically suspected of being spies (O'Halpin, 2013). However, as Fitzpatrick (1998) contends, disappearances went beyond these groups, with those viewed as engaging in deviant behaviour also falling foul of the IRA. Those associated with brothels, or who were engaged in behaviour that was considered unorthodox, also came to the attention of the IRA (Howe 2014). It is suggested, therefore, that maintaining control was a greater motivation than any possible religious dimension or service-related past, and, if Fitzpatrick's assertions are correct, the IRA sought to control deviant behaviour across all sections of the community. O'Ruairc (2016), however, refutes Fitzpatrick's findings suggesting that,

> *'It is an astonishing suggestion that a historian would discern with any degree of certainty the private life, sexual orientation and activities of the IRA's victims'.*

He concludes that these are, *'bizarre and unreliable motives'* for IRA killings' (p324). Allegations, such as those considered by Fitzpatrick (1998) are often viewed as part of a propaganda campaign undertaken by British forces to discredit and undermine the military conduct of the IRA, as discussed below. However given the role of the IRA in policing its communities, the socially conservative nature of Irish society, and the powerful role of the Catholic Church, it is not inconceivable that the desire to control involved a moral component.

STIGMA

The stigma attached to having a loved one labelled an informer or spy and killed as a result is mentioned in testimonies such as Barry's (2013) and Hart's (2009). Barry writes;

> *'At first I listed the names and addresses of those sixteen British agents who were shot by the West Cork Brigade of the IRA. Then the thought came of the pain such a listing would bring to these traitors' descendants and relatives who are still living. Innocent men and women should not suffer for the sins of their fathers…… they must have suffered much, and indeed in truth, one felt for the wives of the informers then, though no pity for the spies themselves' (*p176).

It is difficult to equate those who perpetrated violence on the one hand, with the protector of reputations on the other. Hart (2009) suggests that, once the label of informer is given it never goes away, proving so poisonous that it passes to the next generation - often without any justification or evidence. This offers an important insight into the transgenerational impact of disappearance that has relevance to the experience of families during NI's Conflict. Hart (2009) recounts the toxicity and longevity associated with an allegation of informing on the next generation.

> *'Oh yes, I was told afterwards it was his father who had been the informer. They were not sure what he had done to warrant the charge, but 'the informer' was what he was called behind his back ever after, and 'the informer' his son remained. If rumour and reputation proved so virulent after seventy years, what must it have been like in the midst of a guerrilla war?' (*p294).

This attitude even, as Hart contends, seventy years later, may be one of the main reasons why little progress has been made in fully recovering the remains of those disappeared during the Independence Conflict period. Bielenberg and Donnelly (2016), who have collated the names and details of those abducted and secretly buried maintain that their intention is not to cause pain or embarrassment to the relatives of those disappeared by listing them, given the capacity in the community to pass the '*ill repute'* of those perceived to be spies across the generations, right up to the present day (p3). The transgenerational stigma associated with disappearance is so virulent, as Bielenberg and Donnelly (2016) suggest, that it can pass over, not one, but several generations. Part of the difficulty for families is the ongoing influence of the external context in keeping this issue alive across the generations - for example, family members who continue to be identified as the 'informer's son' regarding an incident that happened nearly a century ago. Families are, therefore, left in a state of prolonged uncertainty which does not abate due to both the external environment, and the fact that, in many cases, their loved one's body has not been recovered.

In conclusion, the literature reflects that, throughout the Independence Conflict period, the abduction, murder, and in some cases, the disappearance of individuals was a relatively common occurrence. It would appear that for many decades the issue of the Disappeared received little or no attention at a community, academic, historical or political level (Bielenberg and O'Ruiarc 2020b). In Cork, there were particular challenges as the levels of abduction, killing and disappearances were significantly higher than in other counties (Hart

2009; O'Halpin 2014 and Bielenberg and O'Ruairc 2020a). Silence around this issue was compounded by the wider community and political context which venerated the success of the military campaign undertaken by the IRA in Ireland (Howe 2014). The Disappeared, therefore, were an unpleasant reminder of the trauma endured by many within the County, and the lack of redress for their families.

The impact on the second and third generations of those affected was first mooted by Tom Barry, the IRA leader in Cork, who withheld the names of those who were killed labelled as spies or informers. As described earlier, Barry (2013) contended that this would only bring pain to the '*traitors descendants'*; Hart (2009) also comments on how the legacy of being an informer's son or daughter remained, leading him to pose the question, *'if rumour and reputation proved so virulent after seventy years' what must it have been like at the time*? (p294). It is, therefore, evident why families and communities remained silent; and why there was no lobbying for the return of those disappeared. Whilst there were some attempts at recovering the remains of British soldiers, the majority of those disappeared lie in unmarked graves in bog land and in farmland across Ireland (Bielenberg and O'Ruairc 2020a). Murphy (2011) suggests that, as well as burying those disappeared, the IRA buried their names too. Documentation projects such as that undertaken by Bielenberg and O'Ruairc (2020b) therefore offer an important baseline from which, hopefully, further work can take place to address the issue of the Disappeared from the War of Independence and Civil War period in a meaningful way in the future.

Throughout this chapter it has been shown that political and social issues hindered families from dealing with the issue of disappearance. In the absence of any strategy from the families, the community, police, the churches or the Government the issue has, in the main, remained hidden until recent times. While the data reflects the situation nearly a century ago, it is highly relevant when we consider the intracommunity practice of disappearance throughout the Conflict in Northern Ireland, from 1969 onwards. Paramilitary disappearances have not been solely restricted to Ireland, there have also featured at an international level in particular in Peru, Sri Lanka and Colombia. It is important to therefore consider the social, political and cultural significance of the practice of disappearance beyond Ireland both to explore how the context is similar or different, and how the act itself is used as a tool of war. Both these considerations can inform how we understand the use of disappearance by paramilitaries in

Northern Ireland as a manifestation of the community dynamics underpinning NI's Conflict but also as a more universal process for inflicting physical and psychosocial harm. International disappearances are discussed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: THE USE OF DISAPPEARANCE IN INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS

Whilst understanding the disappearances that occurred during the Independence Conflict period in Ireland is vital to appreciating the cultural, political and community impact of the tactic both at the time and in more recent years, disappearance as a tool of war has long been used in conflict zones around the world. The nuance of the Irish incidences of disappearance tell part of the story, but disappearance cannot be fully understood without considering it in the context of its wider international use. Disappearance creates tiers of victims, whereby the individual, families and communities involved are all impacted by the act. In a sense it is a public victimisation, an act of control and an act, not of repeat-victimisation, but on-going victimisation. As a result, the *harm*, particularly the psychological harm that reverberates from a disappearance, is highly relevant to understanding the impact of the act, regardless of the context. In an effort to understand them, independent of the Irish context, both historic and current, this chapter explores how disappearances were perpetrated, understood, denied and resolved in a number of locations internationally. In particular, the social, political and cultural context of intracommunity disappearance will be considered in this chapter by exploring its prolific use in Colombia, Sri Lanka and Peru.

Up until the end of World War II, the use of enforced disappearance as a weapon of war, although well known, was sparsely documented (Dulitizky 2019b). However, as the hostilities came to an end and the world sought to come to terms with the scale of the atrocities committed by the Nazis, it emerged that among the litany of crimes perpetrated by Hitler and his acolytes, was the enforced disappearance of thousands of people purported to be members of resistance movements across Europe (Giorgou 2013). This resulted in the systematic disappearance of individuals into the gas chambers or concentration camps, and, ultimately, to mass genocide, referred to since as the Holocaust (Mentan 2021).

Since then, hundreds of thousands of individuals have been disappeared in conflicts around the world. It is estimated that, in more than 85 countries, enforced disappearance has been used as a means of control and of eliminating political opponents, members of opposing ethnic communities or individuals who may hold information damaging to a state, political or military regime (Dewhirst and Kapur 2015).

The highest profile cases of individuals being disappeared are those involving the military dictatorships that governed many of the countries of Latin America from the 1950's to the 1980's. In Guatemala the military government disappeared between 40-50,000 people during the country's 36-year civil war (Peccerrelli and Henderson 2021). In Argentina, an estimated 30,000 individuals disappeared between 1976 and 1983, while in Chile approximately 3000 people vanished at the hands of General Augusto Pinochet's soldiers between 1973 and 1990 (Aguilar and Kovras 2018). However, disappearing people has not been the preserve of Latin American dictators alone. In a number of the cases the Disappeared were abducted and killed by either guerrilla/insurgent groups opposed to the regimes in power in the country in question, or by paramilitary groups sponsored by, or acting with the acquiescence of, the regime (Dulitizky 2019b).

Some states, such as the United States of America (USA), have also adopted the practice of 'extraordinary rendition', whereby individuals are taken to holding centres and their fate is unknown. Bargu (2014) contends that, if this is considered to be enforced disappearance, then the USA and its allies will be viewed as complicit in this practice which is a dereliction of human rights.

The United Nations (UN) (2006) has recognised the different players and methods involved in enforced disappearance. Article 2 of the 2006 International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED) - one of the 18 Human Rights Conventions that member states are expected to ratify and abide by - defines enforced disappearance as:

> *'The arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by person or groups of persons acting with the authorisation, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law'.*

Article 3 adds that:

> *'Each State Party shall take appropriate measures to investigate acts defined in article 2 committed by persons or groups of persons acting without the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State and to bring those responsible to justice'.*

Whilst the UN has recognised the involvement of groups other than corrupt regimes in enforced disappearances around the world, it is only recently that the literature on the practice of disappearance by insurgent or paramilitary groups has grown. Among the most

well documented are the cases of Peru, Sri Lanka and Colombia, but recent examples from Syria, including the actions of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), have been noted (Sarkin 2021).

In Colombia, it is estimated that over 100,000 people were victims of enforced disappearance between 1958 and 2013 (with over 62 % carried out by paramilitaries), many in the final phase of the war (Cronin- Furman and Krystalli 2020). In Peru, the figure is estimated to be in the region of 20,000 people disappeared between 1970 and 2000 (the majority by insurgent and paramilitary groups), with a further 70,000 killed "openly' (Subramanian et al 2014; Garcia Godos 2013). While in Sri Lanka, there have been an estimated 140,000 killed between 1970 and 2015, with over 70,000 enforced disappearances from the 1980's until relatively recently (with State forces predominantly carrying out disappearances in the 1970's and 1980's and insurgent and paramilitary groups intensifying the practice of enforced disappearance from the 1980's onwards) (Harrison 2013; Somasundaram 2014).

In all of these cases there was substantial involvement by insurgents or guerrillas (fighting the regime), and paramilitary groups (De Alwis 2009; Haugaard and Nicholls 2010; Subramaniam et al 2014; Garcia Godos 2018; Dulitizky 2019a and Berman- Arevalo 2021). The common feature across all of these groups, is that they operate on an intracommunity basis, submerged and intertwined across all aspects of community life. In considering the use of disappearance by these sub-state groups it is important to consider how they are defined. Young and Gray (2011) define 'insurgents' as an opponent or outgroup that may use violence or political resources as a form of opposition or resistance to a Government or other political regime. 'Guerrilla warfare' focuses on urban, small force fighting, where guerrilla fighters move among the community (Young and Gray 2011). The term 'paramilitary' is defined as a member of a group that is organised like an army, in relation to structure, tactics, training and sub-culture; a paramilitary group might cooperate with the Government, depending on its era, context and location (Holmes et al 2021). This is significant for this study given the context in which republican paramilitaries grew and thrived as a powerful entity across many working class nationalist communities in Northern Ireland where control by the state had been ceded to communities.

The context created by the abduction of civilians (as opposed to military or political officials) adds an additional level of difficulty and complexity to a country's efforts to return to relative

normality following a period of conflict or authoritarian rule. In all cases, a central problem, reflected throughout the literature, is the fact that the number of individuals to have suffered enforced disappearance can often only be estimated (De Alwis 2009; Andreu-Guzman 2012; Garcia- Godos 2018; Bassel 2019 and Berman- Arevalo 2021). A key issue is how disappearances are recorded by the State authorities. In some countries, such as Colombia, no official lists of those missing have been retained despite families repeatedly reporting their loved ones missing (Cronin-Furham and Krystalli 2020). In part, a reluctance was noted amongst medical and legal entities to investigate, report or record enforced disappearances in case it evoked violence by paramilitaries against them (Haugaard and Nicholls 2010). In others, such as Sri Lanka (Subramaniam et al 2014) there is no legal requirement to record deaths or any associated medical or legal investigations. In Peru, Humphreys (2018) suggests that not all of the Disappeared were officially registered as disappeared due to the law around who could be registered as a political victim (the Consolidated Registry of Victims 2005–RUV Registro Unico de Victimas Law 28592). Those whose relatives were deemed to be members of subversive organisations in Peru, even if they had been forcibly recruited and subsequently disappeared, or inappropriately labelled, were not recognised officially as being disappeared. This law was eventually changed in 2012 to recognise all of those disappeared as victims (Humphreys 2018). Bargu (2014) suggests that the lack of record-keeping (together with the absence of accountability, funerals and memorials) aims to ensure that there is no account of the social or political identity of an individual, and that this is all part of a deliberate strategy to erase the violence and, thereby, erase and eliminate the individual's standing and presence within their family and community. Alvarez (2007) suggests that the practice of disappearing is designed to limit and hinder any protection (of the victim) by the law or State institutions, thus rendering the Disappeared person defenceless.

Any family whose loved one is disappeared will have faced some or all of the difficulties outlined above in their pursuit of justice. However, when paramilitary, insurgent or guerrilla groups are responsible for an enforced disappearance, there is an added burden for families. In many cases, the perpetrators are known to the families affected, and may live and work within the same community. This intracommunity aspect of disappearance and the relevance of the social, cultural and political context is of significance in this study. The themes emerging

across the literature in respect of intracommunity disappearances in Colombia, Sri Lanka and Peru are now considered in this chapter.

PERPETUATING FEAR

A review of the international literature on disappearances highlights that enforced disappearance has a multitude of consequences, but there are two particularly conspicuous effects (Andres and Pabon 2018; Garcia-Godos 2018; Dulitizky 2019a; Isuru et al 2019 and Cronin Furham- Krystali 2020). The most obvious is the impact of removal of an individual from their family and community due to somehow being perceived by the perpetrator to be a threat. The second is the fear that is instilled in the remaining population.

Fear, by its very nature, is pervasive and all consuming, particularly when the violence is intra-community and those perpetrating live close by. Verdwijning (1979) suggests that the goal of instilling fear among the population is to enable the perpetrators to control the agenda and eradicate any aspiration of social justice. Similarly, Heeke et al (2015) contend that the wider strategy of those perpetrating enforced disappearance is to use it as an instrument of political repression - to weaken opponents and to create an atmosphere of fear and silence. Weliamuna (2012) posits that the fear of further violence being visited on those who speak out frustrates protest and dissent, thus giving the perpetrators control of both the community and wider society.

Dewhirst and Kapur (2015) highlight that,

> *'One of the chief objectives of an enforced disappearance is to remove political opponents. The violation seldom leaves survivors, witnesses or physical evidence, enabling perpetrators to hide behind a veil of secrecy and avoid the legal challenges, protests, and international pressure that can result from more 'visible violations.' The systematic practice of enforced disappearance is also a devastating tool of fear, repression and intimidation. It creates a climate of terror in which family members, friends, and other activists are afraid to speak out'* (p1).

There is also a ripple effect associated with this fear - enforced disappearance is used to erode a sense of community, ensuring that individuals lived in a perpetual state of fear and risk (Walker 2015). Such was the dread of retribution from paramilitaries or insurgents that it also led the community to withdraw any potential support from the family, effectively isolating them. Somasundaram et al (2011) postulate that, if the political-military situation is too

intense, people feel unsafe identifying themselves with the disappeared person or their families. Sivayokan (2014) echoes this process of 'enforced forgetting',

> *'In time, the family had to adopt measures to 'forget' the disappeared, as if he never existed or develop more acceptable narratives of the person to continue to live in the community'* (p208).

Sivayokan describes how individuals suppressed memories - removing photographs and belongings, and avoided talking to family members, including children, about the person disappeared. She refers to this as an adaptive response in a closed community to aid survival, concluding that,

> *'the perpetrators had even succeeded in disappearing the person from the memories of their beloved relations'* (p209).

This need to remove all reminders of the disappeared is a stark indication of the climate of fear that was prevalent in the communities affected given the internecine nature of the violence there. At a wider political level, this enforced forgetting is also a tactic (Balasundaram 2016) as it forces families to adapt to survive. As Connerton (2011) posits, however, while those who perpetrate the disappearance require enforced forgetting, and attempt to erase the existence of those abducted, the requirement to forget paradoxically reinforces the memory of the individual abducted for the family members left behind (p41).

This enforcement of forgetting, and the wider consequences of having to endure the terror of living in close proximity to the perpetrator, is widely explored in the literature (Dudai 2012; Theidon 2013; Bargu 2014; Hollander 2016; Robins 2016; Seoighe 2016; Selim 2017 and Nieman 2020). Family members were, for example, often warned not to search for their loved ones, or to highlight their case (under threat of further violence) (Medina 2013). Hollander (2016), who focused on the experience of parents whose children were abducted in northern Uganda, observed that they were actively marginalised, with the community fearful of the consequences of engaging with the family.

The use of terror as a psychological tool was not only prevalent at family and community level, but also at a general societal level in Sri Lanka, Colombia and Peru. Haugaard and Nicholls (2010) outline the practice in Colombia, that saw local doctors, undertakers, judicial and other Government officials, for example, failing to report the recovery of bodies found in many areas, because the country was still facing an uncontrolled and violent conflict, with attacks

likely from all quarters. The only way to survive was to remain silent. In Peru, too, if bodies were recovered they were often buried in secret for fear of reprisals by the Shining Path (insurgent group) or the army (Willems 2021).

A sad consequence of this climate of fear and oppression is that, even in death, dignity for the Disappeared (who are often stigmatised and defamed) and accountability for the family are denied. It also allows the practice of disappearance to continue unabated. The obfuscation of blame contributed to this process, as few moved forward to highlight or halt this practice as discussed below.

OBFUSCATION OF BLAME

As well as this profound fear, the families of those disappeared faced many challenges, not least stigmatisation - where paramilitaries and state forces actively engaged in a process designed to create confusion and obscure who was to blame. This obfuscation adds to a sense of powerlessness for the families and the community as they seek to address their loved one's death. Haugaard and Nicholls (2010), give examples of stigmatisation in Colombia, where those killed and secretly buried were often portrayed as guerrillas. This aimed to ensure that, in the eyes of the community their deaths and disappearances were seen to be justified; the result was that families were marginalised and displaced given their suspected association with a guerrilla organisation known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

This practice of obfuscation was not a new tactic, and it was practiced extensively. The lengths paramilitaries, and particularly state forces, would go to, to perpetuate the justification of such deaths is widely reflected in the literature (Haugaard and Nicholls 2010; Woods and Gibney 2010; Medina 2013 and Caicedo and Cardenas 2018). HMG (2016) highlights the cases of thousands of young people from rural and low income communities in Colombia who were allegedly detained and disappeared, and later found dead dressed in guerrilla clothing. In the recent hearings of the Colombian Truth Commission contrition for this practice has been heard from those involved (ICIP 2021). This practice was not restricted to Colombia. There is also evidence that it occurred in Peru and Sri Lanka (Nicholls 2010; Weliamuna 2012; Garcia-Godos 2018 and Jayasundara-Smits 2018).

This branding of victims as traitors has a profound impact in communities. It serves as a further injustice to victims' families who may also be viewed as guilty by association – the stigma associated with this can leave an indelible imprint that, in some cases, passes from generation to generation. There is clear evidence of this from the Independence Conflict period in Ireland, as outlined earlier. Medina (2013) contends that this stigmatisation erases the name and dignity of the person disappeared; it underlines how, in the case of a disappearance, it is not only the person who is taken, but also their reputation and standing. Vereda el Faro, cited in Medina (2013), recounts his experience of listening to a paramilitary member's account of their involvement in disappearances.

> '*I went with the mothers …… to the free accounts of 2007 and 2009. Once they finished, we felt very bad, very mistreated. This was a re-victimised truth, a half-truth. They (paramilitaries) only justified their acts'* (p56).

Medina argues that experiences such as this re-traumatised the families concerned as the paramilitary account was taken as the judicial truth, and there was no mechanism or counter-balance from the family or State authorities to take account of, or pay respect to, the victim's memory. The long-term outcome is ongoing stigmatisation and isolation for the family within the community, as neighbours and community members withdraw (Shultz et al 2014; Garcia-Godos 2018 and Jayasundara-Smits 2018). This can, in turn, lead to community expulsion, leading to multiple levels of loss, from the profound and long term impact of displacement and unresolved trauma (Shultz et al 2014; Curcio et al 2019 and Hyndman et al 2020).

Ultimately, however, the effect of stigmatisation does not just exist in the past. In Peru, for example, the effect of enforced disappearance continues to have ramifications for subsequent generations. Martinez (2013) highlights how members of younger generations, asking questions to try to uncover the truth, have reportedly found themselves labelled as terrorists. He concludes, therefore, that,

> '*Memory is still a battleground in Peru'* (p8).

CONTROLLING COMMUNITIES

Across the literature the use of disappearance as a means of controlling communities is a central theme (De Alwis 2009; Haugaard and Nicholls 2010; Sivayokan 2014; Subramaniam et al 2014; Robins 2016; Hollander 2016; Isuru, et al 2021 and Wellims 2021). Haugaard and

Nicholls (2010) suggest that disappearance has been strategically used by both state and non-state forces to control communities by removing those in leadership roles or in political opposition, or those who are community activists. As referenced earlier in this chapter, the effect is to instil enormous fear in those left behind. The implications of this are immense for family members. As well as silencing them, the social infrastructure which surrounds them, and which would ordinarily lobby and fight for them, is eroded.

A critical objective for paramilitaries and insurgents in retaining control within communities is to bolster their reputation as enforcers. Haugaard and Nicholls (2010) refer to the unrelenting nature of such control in Colombia, where individuals not readily giving support to FARC were automatically deemed to be working against them, with dire consequences,

> *'Whoever is not with us, is against us and is considered by the organisation to be an informant. Your days are numbered and we will be waiting to carry out our death sentence'* (Haugaard and Nicholls 2010, p10).

This concept of total control also resonates with the IRA's practice in some counties in Ireland in the 1920's, and with members of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka (Hyndman et al 2020), as well as with the indigenous and rural populations in Peru (Garcia-Godos 2013).

The diverse range of individuals disappeared in Colombia demonstrated both territorial and political control (Meger and Sachseder 2020). There was also, however, an element of social control - Amnesty International (2004) highlighted a process of social cleansing operated by the paramilitaries in Colombia which saw the forced disappearance of sex workers, members of the LGBT population, the homeless, and those perceived to be drug addicts. In the same way as the IRA, in the 1920's, who sought to disappear individuals because of their perceived 'deviant' behaviour, the paramilitaries in Colombia sought to maintain a type of moral order that would help them to maintain social control.

A powerful example of the impact and omnipresence of community control has been documented in relation to Sri Lanka, where one of the most terrifying images was that of the 'white van'. These vans were used to abduct people, and often parked outside the houses of those the State wanted to intimidate. Soon, the visual image of the white van gave rise to a constant state of hyper-vigilance, with the underlying threat that someone could be abducted at any time of day or night Sivayokan (2014). Weliamuna (2012) suggests that the Government in power opted to ignore this situation as it allowed them to continue to

eliminate militants, political dissenters, criminals and others, thus maintaining political and social control over the community.

THE ROLE OF THE STATE

There are other examples of Governments being complicit in maintaining control within communities, either by staying silent on the issue of disappearance, tacitly supporting the paramilitaries or issuing denials that served to protect their image. Meger and Sachseder (2020) highlight that the escalation in human rights abuses from the 2016 peace agreement in Colombia arose because of the intertwined nature of paramilitaries with State forces. They argue that, in this situation, it is difficult for those impacted by disappearances to have a voice, or to have access to truth and justice.

The degree to which violence is supported or sanctioned by the State is important for families and those affected by conflict-related disappearances. State complicity can lead to the issue being ignored or minimised, leading to a perception of State neglect. The approach of the Irish Government to the Disappeared in the 1920's, as reflected in Chapter 2, demonstrates how State neglect can be manifest in a number of ways – for example, through an absence of measures to progressively address the disappearances (including a proactive and dedicated process to return all the bodies); and through an absence of support for, or recognition of, the families concerned. The failure of the RUC to investigate or even acknowledge the disappearances during NI's Conflict had a similar impact.

It is the case, too, that, while the State may engage in a process of minimising or disregarding disappearances, it may be assisted by the laws enacted within the country involved. In Colombia, for example, the law does not recognise the families as victims. Haugaard and Nicholls (2010) contend that, often, the families' unfamiliarity with the legal processes means that their rights are disregarded. This is compounded in Colombia, where Government officials do not include the family members in processes they consider to be technical, thus excluding them from processes pertaining to their loved one's disappearance.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ANGUISH

The psychological anguish experienced by the families of those disappeared is reflected extensively throughout the literature (Blaauw and Lahteenmaki 2002; Boss 2003; Rauchfuss and Schmolze 2008; Hollander 2016; Robins 2016; Garcia-Godos 2018; Bassel 2019; Dulitizky 2019a; Dahl and Boss 2020; Isuru et al 2021 and Willems 2021). Monin (2007) and Robins (2009) contend that this ongoing state of psychological anguish and uncertainty following the disappearance, not only affects the wellbeing of family members, but also dominates the dynamics of family life.

Lenferink et al (2017) suggest that the disappearance of a loved one is the most stressful type of loss, with Barakovic et al (2014) arguing that the stress and anxiety associated with disappearance contributes to the development of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a trauma related medical disorder that may arise following exposure to a traumatic life event (Rumball et al 2020). It is one of the most prominent medical disorders linked to trauma exposure as outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (5th Ed- DSM -5) discussed in Chapter 4. Rumball et al (2020) outline five core symptoms of PTSD that include: re-experiencing the trauma through nightmares and flashbacks; an avoidance of traumatic reminders; feeling hyper arousal; changes in mood and cognition; and, finally, a change in social and occupational functioning. Many of these symptoms are listed across the studies outlined above.

Heeke et al (2015) also suggest that the ongoing stress and anxiety associated with the disappearance of a loved one in conflict may leave individuals susceptible to PTSD. However, a number of studies on violent bereavements were unable to determine whether those whose loved ones were disappeared experienced higher levels of PTSD in comparison to others whose relatives had suffered a violent death (Powell et al (2010); Lenferink et al (2017a) and Isuru et al (2019)). Dahl and Boss (2020) suggest that, whilst PTSD can arise for some individuals, it is the ambiguity around the disappearance on top of the loss, rather than a psychological weakness resulting in a disorder, that presents the biggest issue for family members whose loved ones have disappeared. Becker (2008) contends, however, that PTSD is not appropriate in the context of disappearance; he suggests that it converts a social and political problem into psychopathology, deeming individuals to have suffered a disorder that

is over and in the past. As a concept it does not, he believes, account for the longevity of the traumatic experience, or for the particular social, political or cultural context in which the disappearance occurred.

While enforced disappearance has been a phenomenon evident in violent conflicts around the globe for many years, research attention has moved from focusing solely on medical disorders, such as PTSD, to concepts such as unresolved and prolonged grief. Heeke et al (2015), for example, contend that little is known about unresolved grief processes as an outcome of the disappearance of a loved one. They conclude that the psychological anguish of enforced disappearance can result in prolonged grief reactions, leading, in turn, to a prolonged grief disorder, particularly when those left behind maintain hope that the disappeared person is still living. Heeke et al (2015) go on to define prolonged grief as a maladaptive grief reaction following loss, in which individuals may try to maintain their relationship with the disappeared person, but, at the same time, suffer from their absence. They believe that it is this state - in which the person is neither confirmed as alive or dead - that leads to a prolonged grief disorder.

In a similar vein, Prigerson et al (2009a) refer to an elongated period of grieving, suggesting that prolonged grief is characterised by intense longing and yearning for the lost person as well as feelings of hopelessness and emptiness. While grief theories, such as Prigerson et al's (2009a) prolonged grief, or Heeke et al's (2015) unresolved grief, have relevance in relation to many aspects of mourning for the disappeared, a key question remains as to the appropriateness of extrapolating these theories to focus on disappearances, given the unique contextual issues that apply.

In relation to the relatives of those disappeared, the intense longing and yearning does not, in itself, fade with time (Dahl and Boss 2020) given the social and political context of the loss. Yearning and longing are normal responses to an abnormal situation. For many of the families there is inevitable psychological anguish,

> *'Forced disappearances represents a type of psychological torture for these families and usually causes prolonged suffering because in circumstances that are inconclusive true mourning is difficult, if not impossible' (HMG 2016, p296).*

Medina (2013) echoes this view, highlighting that the family members of those disappeared are deprived of the opportunity to mourn. There is a social and public context to grief in

normal circumstances; however, disappearances, particularly in conflict situations, interrupt all those norms. For example, family members may engage over decades in a continued search for their loved ones; they may focus and fixate on justice; this has the effect of prolonging the psychological anguish experienced and prevents grieving. Medina (2013) argues that this may lead to complicated grief, or ambiguous loss.

Whilst grief and dealing with this ambiguous loss will vary from person to person, and even within families, a critical factor reflected within the literature is the impact of the external environment on grieving. In reference to Sri Lanka, Sivayokan (2014) suggests that, with enforced disappearance comes politicised promises. These promises represent hope that the person is still alive and, thus, keep the grieving process going, preventing closure.

The context in which disappearances take place is also an important influencing factor in relation to grieving. It is not just the disappearance itself that impacts on grieving, but the attendant uncertainty, and the fear of the extent of the human rights abuses a loved may have faced in captivity (Blaauw and Lahteenmaki 2002). Heeke et al (2015) suggest that families are often preoccupied with, and tortured by, the uncertainty around their loved one's whereabouts, and the question of whether or not they are being tortured.

This fear of torture is often well founded. For example, as evidence of some of the brutal practices in Colombia have emerged over the years (with reports that they operated crematory ovens to burn bodies in Catatumbo and Medellin) it has intensified the grieving process for families. In essence, the social, cultural and political context in which disappearances take place has an ongoing psychological hold on families, and means that they replay the experience of the disappearance time and time again,

> *'I know that when a relative comes to …tell us her case, we have all lived the same experience. It means going back over and reliving it again. It is like a piece of the past which keeps turning over and over and we cannot forget' (Conte 2002, p4).*

THE SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT TO DISAPPEARANCES

The impact on the families of those disappeared does not, therefore, rest solely in the psychological paradigm, but also in this complexity of social, cultural and political issues which can have a direct influence on their wellbeing (Becker 2008; Hollander 2016; Robins 2016;

Isuru et al 2019 and Testoni et al 2020). Blaauw and Lahteenmaki (2002) and Dharmadasa (2002) highlight that family members may suffer from physical, familial, social, economic and legal problems; the ramifications and significance of each of these areas is interwoven throughout this chapter.

When disappearances take place as a result of war and conflict these contextual issues take on added significance. Rauchfuss and Schmolze (2008) argue, however, that often psychological research on the traumatic impact of disappearance does not take cognisance of these broader issues.

A case from Sri Lanka demonstrates how the socio-political context impacts upon how the Disappeared are perceived, and the issue addressed. Sivayokan (2014) shows how, in the case of a natural disaster, the possible fate of those disappeared becomes part of the community's history, even though there is intense psychological pain and grief. With enforced disappearance, however, uncertainty and fear are stoked by stories, rumours and threats, both psychological and physical. While this renders relatives silent and isolated, it also renders the community and wider society mute, with a code of 'omerta' ensuring that an enforced disappearance is excluded from the community's history. This demonstrates how community and societal perceptions around a disappearance can compound the family's sorrow and intensify the ambiguity and silence around the issue.

Another important contextual factor is around the rituals associated with death. Ultimately, a fundamental need of families is to recover their loved one's body and perform the essential rituals associated with death (De Alwis 2009; Haugaard and Nicholls 2010; Garcia et al 2018; Jayasundara-Smits 2018; Bassel 2019; Dulitizky 2019 and Willems 2021). Recovering and burying the body according to family and community traditions is a significant part of the mourning process (Beristain 2010; Robins 2011 and Aronson 2011). The deeply held need for the remains to be returned to the family cannot be under-estimated - as Dharmadasa (2002) shows in relation to this case in Sri Lanka.

> '*The paramilitaries in Colombo threatened to take Ana away many times. She was searching for her brother a taxi driver who had been abducted. "I felt like I was on the brink of insanity. I went to where they (the paramilitaries) had taken him. I took boots and a spade with me, ready to dig up his body if I had to. I was crazy, I just wanted to have his body at least so we could bury him" '* (p23).

Time and again, families are prepared to go to great and daring lengths to recover the bodies of their loved ones, often searching themselves and defying paramilitaries. In Peru, for example, the forensic specialists only visited identified and confirmed burial sites. The families, therefore, often had to commence the search themselves in order to get the specialists to attend to the graves. Willems (2021) contends that these were deeply traumatic searches for the families given the cultural significance.

This prolonged or unresolved grief, in the absence of a body, can also be significantly exacerbated by the political context in which an individual's remains are recovered. For example, in countries such as Colombia that have established legislation to recover the Disappeared under a clause of immunity, the full circumstances of a disappearance case (including where the body is buried) may never be resolved; nor may anyone ever be held to account (Haugaard and Nicholls 2010), much like the ICLVR cases in NI; this is a key factor in impeding grieving (Rauchfuss and Schmolze 2008). Currently, just under 8,000 bodies out of over 100,000, secretly buried in Colombia, have been recovered (United Nations 2021a).

Blaauw and Lahteenmaki (2002) suggest that an ongoing state of disbelief prevents the normal grieving process from starting, thus presenting a high risk of pathological or complicated grief. The importance of having a body returned to enable mourning is evident across the literature (De Alwis 2009; Hollander 2016; Robins 2016; Humphrey 2018 and Willems 2021). This is a common theme across all cultures, and is part of the wider context around customs, laws and traditions that have a strong determining factor in relation to the impact of disappearance on the families involved.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, enforced disappearance has become a familiar part of civil conflict around the world in the late twentieth century. To the uninitiated, it is clear that the individual who is 'disappeared' has suffered a horrific violation of their human rights. Less obvious are the experiences endured by the families of those 'disappeared'. A review of the literature on the recent conflicts in Peru, Colombia and Sri Lanka from the disciplines of social sciences, history, law, and medicine; in addition to policy papers from key humanitarian and aid agencies, such

as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), illustrates that, although each conflict is unique in its origins and circumstances, the suffering experienced by the relatives of the disappeared in each conflict is not (De Alwis 2009; Hristov 2009; Seoighe 2016; Lenferink et al 2017a; Garcia-Godos 2018; Humphrey 2018; Bassel 2019; Isuru et al 2021 and Willems 2021).

The literature reveals a series of broad themes, as outlined in this chapter, that run through the post disappearance experiences of the victims' relatives; they are also felt by members of the wider society in which the victims lived (Hollander 2016; Robins 2016; Jayasundara-Smits 2018 and Garcia-Godos 2018). However, one of the most startling aspects of this experience, evident in Colombia, Sri Lanka and Peru, is the potential violence that faces families from all sides - both from State forces, and from paramilitaries, insurgents or guerrillas who live or engage within the social infrastructure of the community. As Obeyesekere (2011) contends, once insurrectional violence commences, state violence and repression follow, thereby, producing a vortex of spiralling violence. Individuals are still at risk of being disappeared today in Peru (Goi 2017), Sri Lanka (Human Rights Watch 2020) and Colombia (Giraldo and Toban 2020).

The perpetrators of the disappearances in each of these countries have sought to both eliminate a problem and control the agenda. The relatives have been left in fear for their own safety, both as a relative of the victim, and also if they try to investigate the disappearance. They have also suffered stigmatisation, with the perpetrators of their loved one's disappearance often seeking to blame the victims for their own fate, and encouraging their communities to ostracise them (Haugaard and Nicholls 2010; Sivayokan 2014 and Willems 2021). Laws, such as those in Peru (Malca 2015) which exclude individuals (or their relatives) who are 'alleged' to have any association with 'subversive organisations' from the register of those disappeared, compound the injustice experienced by many families. The law often stigmatises these deaths further, enabling those responsible to evade any accountability for their actions, thus further marginalising the families within Peruvian society.

Most, though by no means all, of the victims of enforced disappearance have been men. The United Nations Working Group on Enforced Disappearance in 2021 (WGEID) suggests that between 70% to 94% of those who have disappeared in conflicts across the world are male (United Nations 2021b). However, across all conflicts, women, too, are disappeared; there is,

though, a dearth of published research focusing solely on women who have suffered enforced disappearance, and the nature of their disappearances. Recent evidence shows an increased pattern of women being disappeared (in Zimbabwe and Libya in 2019 and 2020) who are political leaders or human rights defenders (Nudd and Vicente 2021). Amnesty International (2021) suggests that, while the vast majority of the Disappeared are men, it is the women who are the campaigners fighting for their loved ones' return. Much of the research attention around women has focused on this role, as opposed to cases of their disappearance. It is evident, however, that a lot of women have been left to suffer further abuses, including violence (sexual, physical and psychological), intimidation and persecution, as well as financial hardship (De Alwis 2009; Dewhirst and Kapur 2015; Hollander 2016 and Robins 2016).

At the same time, families have had to deal with the impact of the uncertainty as to whether their loved one is alive or dead and, as a result, have been caught in limbo between hope and acceptance. The absence of a body for whom to perform the rituals associated with death, impacts greatly on the grieving process, so that many families endure a prolonged or perpetual process of grief, with all the psychological implications that entails (De Alwis 2009; Lenferink et al 2017b and Willems 2021). Added to this, families also suffer the consequences of the many idiosyncrasies inherent in the local customs and laws of the countries in which they live.

De Alwis (2009) suggests that disappearance is one of the most insidious forms of violence – whilst the socio-political context is an important factor that may be different in each region where disappearances occur, the impact on families is universally catastrophic. This is clearly evidenced in the data available from the Independence Conflict period in Ireland, and in the themes emerging from the data in relation to Peru, Sri Lanka and Colombia. In considering the Disappeared of NI's Conflict, it is important to now look at the available literature in which to situate this study that takes account of the psycho-social literature of relevance for the study of disappearance. Having attended to the historic precedence of disappearance in Ireland, the context to NI's Conflict, the international incidence of disappearance and how the political and community context to these events have relevance for this study, it is now necessary to focus on the psychological consequences of loss, grief and mourning when a loved one is lost to disappearance. By attending to the macro (social/political), the meso

(community, group, local context) and now the micro (individual and family), this study will build a picture of the existing literature that can scaffold the findings that will emerge from this study.

CHAPTER 4: SITUATING THE STUDY

This study is focused on representing the voices of family members whose loved ones have been disappeared by republican paramilitaries during NI's Conflict. It deals particularly with contextualised conflict-related loss. It also considers the influence of integral social relationships within the community and wider civic society from the period following the abduction to the present day. Chapter 2 explored the historical and cultural significance of disappearances during the Independence Conflict period in Ireland. However as discussed disappearances are not restricted to Ireland, and Chapter 3 considers the use of disappearance as a tool of war at an international level, particularly intracommunity violence, as witnessed in Peru, Sri Lanka and Colombia. The aim of this chapter is to gain an understanding of existing research focused on individual psycho-social experiences which may be of relevance to this study.

Whilst the issue of disappearance has been studied and analysed to some degree from a legal, forensic, political and justice perspective, it is in the disciplines of psychology, medicine and social sciences that a greater understanding of the impact of enforced disappearances on family members is gained (Dulitizky 2019a; Blasi 2020; Naser 2020; Tamayo 2020 and Giraldo and Tobon 2021). As outlined in earlier chapters, the psychological burden for family members of enforced disappearance is evident in data shared from the archives of the Independence Conflict period in Ireland over a Century ago and, more recently, in the conflicts that took place in Sri Lanka, Colombia and Peru (Pabon 2018; Cronin-Furman and Krystalli 2020 and Willems 2021). Indeed, this psychological burden is common to the experience of the families of those disappeared across the world, regardless of where the disappearances took place – examples can be found in Nepal in South Asia (Robins 2016); Northern Uganda in Africa (Hollander (2016); Mexico in North America (Smid et al 2020); and Argentina in South America (Crenzel 2020).

A central issue that is peculiar to the families of those disappeared, in comparison to other conflict related deaths, is the impact of the absence of information regarding the fate of a loved one. This lack of information, and the psychological implications of living with this particular type of loss within a conflict situation, creates an environment in which family members live in a continued state of uncertainty or, as Tribe and Silva (1999) call it, a state of

'suspended animation' (p185). Brody and Gonzalez (1997) contend that those abducted are deprived of any legal protection or social support, and their fate is determined by their captor. In the majority of cases, disappearance ends in death and with the body being secretly hidden, sometimes after being tortured (Brody and Gonzalez 1997; Sarkin 2012 and Abhyankar and Tulsyan 2020); knowing this, and coping with the psychological ramifications of this knowledge, has a profound effect on families.

Boss (2010) contends that it is this uncertainty and lack of closure, coupled with being unable to perform the rituals associated with death that results in disappearance being the most stressful type of loss. Betz and Thorngren (2006) describe disappearance as cruel – they refer to how the longevity associated with the ongoing torment of disappearance leads to unending grief. Heeke et al (2017), who focus on the experience of families of those disappeared in Colombia, suggest that, when disappearance is as a result of political conflict, the context is substantially different; they argue that this leads to an increased risk of exposure to trauma, with persistent distressing and complicated grief often the norm.

It is evident from Boss's (2010) summation that disappearance could be described as one of the most complex types of loss, as it not only brings immediate separation from a loved one, but also a continued state of uncertainty and disruption that is unresolved. Zhai and Du (2020) suggest that loss involves, not only the separation from those we love - which they describe as primary loss - but also affects many other aspects of the interwoven lives of individuals and families; they suggest that these losses - which they term secondary losses - will emerge with time. As the period of separation grows and the loss intensifies, grief may emerge leading to an unending grief, as outlined by Betz and Thorngren (2006), or a complicated grief, as described by Heeke et al (2017), and discussed later in this chapter. The detrimental impact on the family unit is articulated throughout the literature on disappearance (Haugaard and Nicholls 2010; Hollander 2016; Robins 2016 and Crenzel 2020), and reflected in Chapters 2 and 3.

The societal context in which disappearances take place, as outlined by Heeke et al (2017), can also have a profound impact on the lives of individuals and families, not only because of the ongoing risk of repeated exposure to conflict related trauma, but also because of the rules and customs associated with dealing with what are often considered to be stigmatised losses (Salih and Samarasinghe 2017). This was illustrated by the treatment of the families of those

disappeared during the Independence Conflict period in Ireland and, more recently, in the isolation, marginalisation and exclusion which typified the experiences of families in Sri Lanka, Colombia and Peru (Witting et al 2019, Isuru et al 2021 and Willems 2021).

Given that this study is focused on the family members of those disappeared during a period of political violence, a useful place to start when situating this work is to consider the literature that exists on the concept of loss and grief within an individual, family and societal context following the trajectory outlined above.

LOSS

There is a universality to loss. Furnes and Dysvik (2010) define loss as,

> *'A life experience which concerns something irrevocable and feelings connected to what is lost' p135*.

Parkes (1986) contends that, at an individual psychological level, significant loss regardless of the context, can have a similar impact and pathway as grief. Grief has been defined as the emotional response to the loss (Stroebe et al 2017a), and loss and grief are often intertwined in different life situations. As Boss (2004) contends, disappearance brings with it an immediate sense of loss, given that a loved one has been abducted and is missing and their fate is unknown. The sense of fear and threat generated by disappearance (Abhyankar and Tulsyan 2020) gives rise to multiple levels of loss which emerge and cannot be altered. These affect, not only individuals, but also the family unit and the wider community. This was reflected in the experience of families in Ireland in the 1920's, as depicted earlier, who, not only lost a loved one, but also often their family, home, business, and engagement in community life. Similarly, Chapter 3 reflects the multiple levels of loss experienced in Peru (Perez 2020), Sri Lanka (Isuru et al 2021) and Colombia (Heeke et al 2015) where disappearances not only induced immense personal trauma, but also affected identity, livelihoods, domesticity, family cohesion and societal framing. According to Smid et al (2020), traumatic losses (as opposed to death as a normal part of life's course) brings about a break in the continuity of life.

When loss is caused by death, and grief emerges, the particular events and circumstances of the loss can have a profound effect on how individuals, families and communities function (Smid et al 2020). Good and Hinton (2016) refer to trauma survivors having an ontology to

explain how they may perceive the loss associated with a traumatic death. This ontology, which focuses on the family members' beliefs and interpretation of the facts, will depend on the circumstances of the loss; the nature of the relationship with the loved one; the social circumstances and the cultural background of the individual and their family (Good and Hinton 2016). The political context of the disappearance also impacts directly on how the loss is perceived. A central issue regarding disappearance is that the loss is surrounded by ambiguity and is often unresolved. One of the most prominent theoretical frameworks emerging in relation to the impact of disappearance is that of Ambiguous Loss, which was proposed by Boss (2004). Given the focus of this study on family members who have experienced disappearance linked to NI's Conflict, the Ambiguous Loss framework is, therefore, an important place to start.

AMBIGUOUS LOSS

While the concept of Ambiguous Loss was not developed specifically in relation to death and grief, it has specific relevance to this study. Ambiguous Loss has evolved from a family systems framework used in family therapy in response to the stress that emerges from having an absent father. Ambiguous Loss is defined by Boss (2004) as unclear loss that is caused by:

> '*Not knowing if a loved one is dead, alive, absent or present'* (p554).

Boss (2004) noted the patterns that emerged from children and young people in response to an absent parent, and this led to the development of a theoretical framework that has gone on to influence clinical practice (Dahl and Boss 2020; Huang and Habermas 2021) and academic research (Robins 2016; Hollander 2016). Huang and Habermas (2021) contend, however, that whilst there has been significant development of the theoretical framework, the relationship between Ambiguous Loss and coping across different kinds of loss has not been studied systematically.

For the families of those disappeared, the uncertainty regarding their loved one's fate over many decades can leave them in a situation of ambiguity - is their loved one alive or dead and, if they are dead, where are they buried? This sense of ambiguity is a common reaction to disappearance regardless of the context; it has been termed *'the ambiguity of presence and absence'* (Fuchs 2018, p56). Rahmanovic (2008), focusing on the families of those

disappeared in Bosnia Herzegovina, suggests that the person disappeared is held in their loved one's conscience – they remain with them always – preventing them from saying goodbye. It is this state – in which the family members remain uncertain of whether their loved one is alive or dead and, in turn, fluctuate between fearing the worst and hoping that they are alive - which intensifies the emotional turmoil (Riley 2012).

Under Boss's (2004) theoretical framework there are two types of Ambiguous Loss. In the first, the family member may be physically absent but psychologically present. She refers to this as *'leaving without goodbye'* (Boss 2020, p5). The family do not know whether their loved one is alive or dead. This uncertainty leads to ongoing ambiguity, and the families continue to live oscillating between hope and despair, fantasy and fear – as outlined by Riley (2012). This has a direct impact on family members, causing family functioning to freeze (Boss 1999). Fuchs (2018) contends that this timeless frozen state can have a profound effect on family life - given the absence of their loved one, families can feel unable to plan, or to make decisions. They may, for example, preserve belongings and retain the same furniture, clothing and structures within the home, where they '*presentify' the* deceased rather than acknowledging that they may have died (p8).

In the second type of Ambiguous Loss the family member may be physically present but psychologically absent. This can arise due to dementia, brain injury or severe and complex mental illness. To those around them the person is emotionally and cognitively impaired. Boss (2020) refers to this as *'goodbye without leaving' (p5).*

Some families may experience both types of Ambiguous Loss. In the case of a disappearance, dealing with the ongoing ambiguity associated with a loved one being physically absent but psychologically present may lead to the relatives suffering severe and chronic mental ill health, leaving them, in turn, psychologically absent but physically present. There may, therefore, be a clear connection between the two types of Ambiguous Loss, so that they can occur simultaneously for family members. However, it is also important to note the interlinking of the individual, the family and the social environment which may contribute directly to the ambiguity. In the Ambiguous Loss framework, in comparison to other bereavement frameworks as discussed later in this chapter, it is the ambiguity that is the predominant reason for an individual's distress, as opposed to issues resting with the

psychological ability of the individual to cope with the disappearance or broader psychosocial issues.

Holland and Neimeyer (2010) suggest that ambiguity has a direct impact at a psychological level, leading to feelings of despair, hopelessness and uncertainty that may then compound feelings of both anxiety and grief; this can lead to individuals feeling stuck in a situation that appears to have no end. This frozen grief may be so strong that family members are immobilised and can cease to function cognitively or emotionally within the family unit (Boss and Yeats 2014). Huang and Habermas (2021) concur suggesting that ambiguity freezes grief and blocks coping, thus compounding ill health. This concept of frozen grief is mirrored by the work of Neimeyer (2019) on complicated grief; and in Prigerson et al's (2009a) work on prolonged grief – as considered later in this chapter.

The central premise of Ambiguous Loss in relation to the Disappeared is that it arises because of the context and nature of the uncertainty and doubt caused by the disappearance. It is, therefore, relational, but not because of any pathological weakness within the individual or the family unit. This is important for individuals and their families given the situation they find themselves in, where the context and ongoing political environment surrounding disappearances is pervasive, and renders many powerless and marginalised. Fuchs (2018) states,

> *'The ambiguity intended as part of terror, left the relatives desperate but unable to mourn their loved ones and thus to gain a new future. They were retained in the no man's land between life and death'* (p56).

For this reason, therefore, any suggestion that a family's reaction is due to a pathological weakness, as opposed to the context and implications of the disappearance itself, could be considered a further grave injustice to those who search for answers regarding their loved one's case. Adopting a medicalised approach strips the disappearance of the social consequences, instead it situates the impact squarely with the individual and the nature of their psychological functioning, as discussed later in this chapter.

Recognition that it is the abnormality of the external environment, as opposed to a weakness in the individual, is therefore important in preventing a further wrong being perpetrated on the individual and their family. As Fuchs (2018) posits the family are caught in a no man's land in which the ambiguity intensifies their terror. There is growing evidence that

complications in grief arise due to the shrouding of the external environment in this ambiguity (Thornton 2000; Betz and Thorngren 2006; Boss and Carnes 2012; Boss and Dhal 2014; Powell et al 2010; Robins 2016 and Hollander 2016). As reflected in the studies above, this external ambiguity impacts on family members' ability to understand their loss; makes it difficult for them to find meaning; and leaves them yearning for the return of their loved one, whilst experiencing anger, blame, stigma and social isolation, and feeling emotionally numb.

Hollander (2016) also highlights the prevalence of feelings of helplessness, sorrow, emotional pain, anger and increased anxiety. Boss (2016) contends that a significant problem can be the change that comes in roles and responsibilities following the disappearance; this can challenge family structures and impact negatively on how a family functions (for many, losing the family breadwinner, for example, can cause untold financial consequences). She refers to this as '*boundary ambiguity'* (p556). From a family systems perspective - which focuses on the interaction between individuals in a family, and the context(s) in which the family is embedded (Milberg et al 2020) - the impact on family relationships, communication and functioning is often severely challenged by the immediate and long term implications of disappearance. If a loved one is dead there can, for example, be no family ritual to mark their life and this can also have a role in preventing any transitioning in family roles and responsibilities. The importance of rituals in deaths that are stigmatised, such as in the case of the Disappeared, is hugely important, and is discussed later in this chapter.

A *normal* grieving process may also be prevented when the usual practices associated with the ending of life are interrupted or frustrated (Fuchs 2018, p56). Feelings of guilt over whether the disappearance could have been prevented or dealt with sooner is common across families, as is evident in Rahmanovic's (2008) work in Bosnia Herzegovina. Zhang et al (2006) also point out that the psychological anguish of disappearance is intensified by individuals fighting back against the reality of their loss. They refer to this psychological process as inhibiting individuals from making any life changes - the impact being that individuals are trapped in a process of chronic mourning.

Over the last two decades the Ambiguous Loss theory has gained greater traction and has been applied across many situations in which grief is open ended. It is structured around six separate strands which essentially offer a family systems model as depicted in Figure 3 below.



Figure 3: Diagram adapted from Boss's Ambiguous Loss Framework (Boss 2020).

Boss's (2020) framework has been used extensively in research studies relating to a diverse range of issues, including immigration; the experience for refugees disappeared; military deployment; mild and severe cognitive impairments; the impact of life limiting illnesses; and family issues and processes. Most of these studies have taken place within the USA, such as Luster et al's (2008) study of the Ambiguous Loss experienced by young Sudanese boys who were refugees in the USA; Mitchell's (2016) study on Ambiguous Loss arising in foster care; and Betz's and Thorngren's (2006) study on family grieving processes. While the circumstances leading to Ambiguous Loss vary across these studies, the inherent underlying social, cultural and political customs can be said to be subject to many of the same influences given that the majority of the studies were undertaken in the USA (Robins 2016). Expanding on the inherent individual focus of the Ambiguous Loss framework, Boss (2006) recognised the impact of culture in her work with diverse ethnic groups following the loss of their loved ones in 9/11. She looked at how culture impacted on how individuals and families rationalised and coped with their loss, which was strongly influenced by their customs and belief systems. This is an important area that needs to be considered as it, in turn, influences how Ambiguous Loss is perceived and dealt with within the family unit.

Whilst the Ambiguous Loss framework has significant contemporary application in the literature, the impact of political violence coupled with Ambiguous Loss has not been fully explored. Only two researchers have focused on Ambiguous Loss as a result of conflict related disappearance. Robins (2016), for example, studied the experiences of the families of the Disappeared arising from the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. He applied the theory of Ambiguous Loss to community and humanitarian-based support programmes developed to support the families. Hollander (2016) also undertook a study, in northern Uganda, of disappearances perpetrated by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group fighting against the Ugandan Government. His work focused on the relevance of complicated grief, in comparison to Ambiguous Loss, for the parents of those disappeared. These studies offer a really useful insight into the impact of disappearance arising from political violence.

As a result of this work in conflict zones, Boss (2018) used Robins (2016) and Hollander's (2016) research findings to adapt the Ambiguous Loss framework further to take account of cultural issues regarding mastery – i.e. the ability to control one's life. This issue of control is culturally and societally defined, particularly for women affected by the disappearance of their spouse. Robins (2016) contends that it is vital that the social and political context of disappearances is fully considered as this, alongside the psychological impact of Ambiguous Loss, can aid or hinder how individuals cope with the experience.

However, notwithstanding the inclusion of the criteria of mastery, the approach taken by Boss and her contemporaries' remains focused on the individual; their symptoms and their characteristics. Lenferink et al (2017), in a review of research studies into psychological symptoms in relatives of the missing, conclude that Boss's (2004) contention that the disappearance of a loved one is one of the most stressful types of loss, is not borne out across their research, or that of a number of other research studies (Powell et al 2010; and Heeke et al 2017). Whilst there are different methodological issues noted, Lenferink et al (2017b) conclude that the available data shows that those who experience Ambiguous Loss do not report greater psychological symptoms. Whilst it is important to note that all of the comparative studies involved bereavement due to violence, the context, cause, ramifications and longevity of the violence also needs to be taken into account.

It is also worth noting that the timing of the various research studies may have influenced the findings. In Bosnia Herzegovina, for example, Rahmanovic (2008) contends that many

individuals are reluctant to speak about the impact of disappearances, particularly about the impact of death, as this is viewed as being disloyal to their loved ones because it removes any sense of hope that they will return. Similarly, Hollander (2016) reports that the parents of children abducted in northern Uganda perceive any discussion regarding the fate of their loved one as bringing bad luck, and auguring a negative outcome in respect of their return. In Nepal, too, Robins (2016) suggests that when he attempted to broaden the focus with families to look at living with the ambivalence of disappearance, he was met with angry rejection from family members who perceived this as dishonouring their loved ones and acquiescing to the goals of the perpetrators. The studies reviewed by Powell et al (2010), Heeke et al (2017) and Lenferink et al (2017) focus on the symptomology, as opposed to the broader psychosocial aspect of disappearance. However, it is clear that an understanding of the culture, context and wider ramifications of disappearances is essential in any study – the issue of willingness to report psychological symptoms is also highly relevant in the case of the families of the Disappeared.

The Ambiguous Loss model clearly views external factors as contributing to how grief is perceived. At one level this is important as it focuses on the abnormality of the situation, rather than focusing on and pathologising the response (Becker 2008). However, the focus on the individual and psychological sequela remains dominant as there are many researchers who argue that there are inherent circumstances, traits and coping styles that make individuals more susceptible to Ambiguous Loss and the development of grief complications (Betz and Thorngren 2006; Luster et al 2008 and Smid 2020). Boss (2018) similarly argues that, because Ambiguous Loss is a relational loss, the treatment must also be interpersonal and individually focused. Despite the refocus to include mastery as an element of the framework the dominant approach is, therefore, individualised.

A further weakness or incompleteness in Ambiguous Loss as a comprehensive psycho-social framework is the fact that in many cases there may be no end point. The need for a conclusion to end the ambiguity is often cited in the literature: this might be the return of a body, the confirmation of death, or a change in circumstances that allows the state of ambiguity to end (Hollander 2016; Robins 2016). It is acknowledged, however, that, in many contexts, this conclusion does not take place; Robins (2016) suggests that, even when it does, the

psychological implications continue - even in the case of a body being recovered; and Boss and Carnes (2012) contend that closure is, sadly, a myth.

It is also the case that, once the ambiguity ends, when a loved one's death is confirmed or their body recovered, a different process may start that is best described as grieving. In considering the case of the Disappeared, it is important to examine the concept of grief that emerges from loss, followed by the anticipation of grief and the disenfranchised grief frameworks which focus on stigmatised deaths.

GRIEF

Grief is an individualised response to the death of a loved one. Goldstein et al (2020) posit that grief is a normal and unavoidable reaction to loss. Throughout the literature, the terms grief, bereavement, coping and mourning are often used interchangeably (Valentine 2008; Nickerson et al 2014; Guillard 2017; Milman et al 2017 and Isuru et al 2019). There are, however, some distinctions proposed. According to Stroebe et al (2017b) grief refers to,

> *'The emotional experiencing of a number of psychological, cognitive/ behavioural, social and physical reactions that a bereaved person may experience as a result of the death of a loved one. It is considered to be a complex emotional syndrome'* (p584).

And Jakoby (2012) suggests that bereavement is the experience of having lost something or someone significant. Bereavement frameworks, as with loss, are relevant, not only for death - they emerge from having lost something that is valued by a person, or someone to whom the person feels connected. The concept of bereavement has, in turn, a direct link to coping (which relates to the process and strategies adopted in managing the impact of this loss). Jakoby (2012) goes on to contend that mourning and grief are not homogeneous, and she provides a useful distinction between the two concepts. She suggests that grief is the emotional reaction to the loss, while mourning encompasses, both the practice, ritualization and expression of grief shaped by the society and culture in which the loss has taken place.

While the constructs of grief and mourning are viewed as interlinked with one dependent on the other (Valentine 2008; Guillard 2017), Stroebe et al (2017b) agree with Jakoby (2012), and suggest that, whilst grief is an internal process, mourning can influence grief as it is externally determined. Stroebe et al (2017b) submit that mourning,

> *'Encompasses the actions and manners expressive of grief which are shaped by social and cultural practices, and by societal expectations which serve as guidelines for how bereaved people are expected to behave'* (p584).

Given that mourning is shaped by internal and external factors, such as societal expectations based on social and cultural practices, its interrelationship with grief and how it impacts at an individual, family and societal level will be considered later in this chapter. It is important to first situate grief in the literature as it is relevant for this study.

GRIEF - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

There has been extensive research into the subject of grief (Averill and Nunley 2006; Charmaz and Milligan 2006; Nickerson et al 2014; Boelen et al 2015; Milman et al 2017; Isuru et al 2019; Huang and Habermas 2021 and Komischke-Konnerup et al 2021). These studies, in addition to counselling and psychoeducation literature, provide significant analysis of the impact of grief on the lives of individuals and the family unit. It is evident from the trajectory of the therapeutic understanding of grief, that the concept of grief, as detailed below, has witnessed a shift from a generalist approach to a more specialised focus on issues such as complex or complicated grief which have distinct theoretical frameworks.

Early work on grief focused on disengagement from the deceased. One of the patriarchs of psychoanalysis, Freud (1917), suggests that a crucial stage in grief work is to relinquish the tie to the deceased in order for adaptation to the bereavement to take place. According to Boerner and Heckhausen (2003) Freud argues that,

> *'The psychological function of grief is to withdraw emotional energy (cathexis) and become detached from the loved one (decathexis)'* (p201).

Freud's early contention was that those grieving go through a type of linear process, reviewing thoughts and memories of the deceased in order to come to a place of emotional detachment and acceptance. Progressing this work further, Kubler Ross (1969); Bowlby (1980); Worden (1982); Rando (1993) and Murray Parkes (1996) suggest that grief is about reframing the relationship to the deceased person, not ending it. This interpretation shaped early counselling practice which was focused on working through the impact of grief and giving up (or reframing) the attachment to the loved one who had died (Boerner and Heckhausen 2003). This fits with the concept of coming to a place of closure.

These grief models focused on a series of stages that it was expected individuals would work through – they share common core components of grief, including yearning and searching, or trying to maintain a connection to the lost person; in addition to numbness, disorganisation and despair (Guillard 2017, p481). The concept of a series of stages of grief has, however, increasingly drawn criticism across academia (Stroebe et al 2017a; Lofland 1985). Lofland (1985) contends that grief is influenced by the social environment and by the time and place in which the loss occurs (p173), while Stroebe et al (2017a) argue that there is no empirical evidence that bereaved individuals go through *stages* of grief. They suggest that, rather than helping individuals manage their grief, it may actually harm them as they mistakenly believe that they have to go through these stages in order to deal with their bereavement. While these grief frameworks have core components, such as yearning and searching, that have some relevance to the turmoil experienced by the families of those disappeared, they do not reflect the complex nature of disappearance or the context in which the deaths occur.

Over the last century, as is evidenced across the literature, there has been a move away from the more generalist grief theoretical frameworks (Bowlby 1969; Worden 1982 and Kubler Ross 1969) to processes that focus specifically on the adjustment to loss (Neimeyer 2019; Stroebe et al 2017b and Prigerson et al 2009b). Equally, therapeutic modalities have moved from being generalist to specialist in response to specific needs. This reflects a broader understanding that the focus should be on ways of coping with a death - finding meaning and engaging in a process of adaptation to the loss. Guillard (2017) proposes that, rather than ending the link to the deceased, grief is focused on transforming the link (p480). However, regardless of the model, Fuchs (2018) contends that grief work cannot proceed, and a process of finding meaning commenced, until the death is acknowledged. This represents a major issue for those families whose loved ones disappeared during conflict, given that they are often left in a state of ongoing and distressing ambiguity - conflicted between feelings of hope and despair, with the death not only unacknowledged, but actively denied by those involved (Fuchs 2018, p51). External forces can, therefore, have a strong influence on the grief process, and may even, as Fuchs (2018) suggests, impede it entirely if the death is unacknowledged.

The impact of grief on psychological and physical health is well documented (Aoyama et al 2018; Fagundes and Wu 2020; Mason et al 2020; McCoyd et al 2021; Thim et al 2020 and Komischke-Konnerup et al 2021). Grief can impact at an individual and family level and can

also have a transgenerational impact. Whilst the impact will vary for individuals, there is commonality across the psychological, health, therapeutic and social science literature regarding the cost of unresolved grief, in which feelings of loss do not abate with time, but do, instead, intensify. A range of symptoms and health challenges are noted including: increased use of medication (Stroebe et al 2017a); addiction issues (Weichelt and Straussner 2016); ill health (Kapiro et al 1987; Milman et al 2017); higher mortality (Jakoby 2012); post-traumatic stress disorder (Kristensen et al 2012; van Denderen et al 2015); impaired functioning (Boelen and Prigerson 2007; Fuchs 2018); depression (Lobb et al 2010; Barakovic et al 2014; Maercker et al 2016); and, when grief becomes intolerable, suicide (Morina et al 2010). However, many of these symptoms or methods of coping with the loss may be exacerbated by the context in which the death occurred. Gentry et al (1995) contend that anger and feelings of revenge feature more prominently for those bereaved through violence, given that a loved one's death might have been prevented and was caused by another human being. Similarly, Heeke et al (2017) contend that the existence of ongoing conflict leads to poorer mental health. The type of loss can also bring changes to one's sense of individual and social identity that may cause mental anguish. Those individuals widowed or orphaned, for example, suffer from the loss of being identified as a spouse or a child (Richardson 2014); whilst those victimised by members of their own community experience isolation and rejection (Guillard 2017).

It is difficult for generalist grief frameworks to fully capture the experience of the families of those disappeared. Hollander (2016) posits that the context impacts directly on how the death is perceived and shapes the pathway the families adopt in coping with the loss. It is, therefore, important to look at what happens when grief is complicated due to the impact of disappearance.

There is some work that is important in this space, as recent studies of the theoretical construct of grief have focused on what happens when grief becomes prolonged and stuck (Stroebe et al 2017b); complicated (Neimeyer 2019); absent (Bonanno 2004; Bowlby 1980) or chronic (Jakoby 2012). These terms are often used interchangeably and, in essence, they attempt to explain the difficulties that can arise for individuals when what are considered normal grief reactions linger and become complex; or when they cause avoidance, or the impact becomes debilitating (Piers 2014; Heeke et al 2017 and Prigerson et al 2009b).

The prevailing theoretical perspectives of complicated grief are found within the literature in respect of psychiatry and psychology in which grief is treated as a clinical disorder (Averill and Nunley 2006; Charmaz and Milligan 2006; Nickerson et al 2014; Boelen et al 2015; Milman et al 2017 and Isuru et al 2019). Neimeyer (2019) suggests that approximately 10% of those bereaved will experience grief which is prolonged, painful or unresolved. In the case of those grieving a violent death, it is estimated that this increases to between 30-70% (McDevitt-Murphy et al 2012; and Milman et al 2017 and Komischke-Konnerup et al 2021). However, a central difficulty in reviewing these studies is that the context in which the deaths occurred is often not referred to and, therefore, a range of factors that may have contributed to a prolonging of the grief are not considered; these factors include issues such as whether the death is stigmatised and, therefore, compounded by societal withdrawal.

PROLONGED GRIEF AS A MEDICAL DISORDER

Increased research into, and scrutiny of, the issue of abnormal grief has led to complicated grief being recognised with a formal diagnosis labelled Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD). Komischke-Konnerup et al 2021 defines prolonged grief disorder as,

> *'a persistent and pervasive grief reaction in which the bereaved individual intensely longs for or is persistently preoccupied with the deceased and experiences intense emotional pain such as sadness, guilt, anger and has difficulty accepting the death'* (p1).

The inclusion of prolonged grief as a recognised clinical condition, under the category of Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder, in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM V) has led to increased attention on, and research into, the issue (Prigerson et al 2009a; Stroebe et al 2017b and Neimeyer 2019). PGD has also been recognised by the International Classification of Diseases (ICD 11) as a clinical disorder (Maercker et al 2016).

Under these diagnostic frameworks, individuals can experience a variety of symptoms. These include a sense of yearning for the deceased and suffering at least five of the following nine symptoms on a daily basis: a feeling of disablement; feeling emotionally numb; feeling stunned or that life is meaningless; experiencing mistrust; feeling bitterness over the loss; having difficulty accepting the loss; identity confusion; avoidance of the reality of the loss; or difficulty moving on with life (Prigerson et al 2009a). Symptoms should be prevalent six months from the death leading to a degree of maladaptation to the loss and disablement

(Heeke et al 2017). Importantly, there is the acknowledgement that the grief should also exceed social, cultural or religious norms (Lacour et al 2020).

Stroebe et al (2017b), however, distinguish between complicated and prolonged grief. They suggest that complicated grief is expected to last between 6- 12 months. If, however, the symptoms persist beyond 12 months, then this will lead to a diagnosis of PGD. Prolonged grief has been placed at the most severe end of the grief continuum (Holland et al 2009). Milman et al (2017) contend that, whilst PGD can be viewed as a distinct and severe disorder, grief should be viewed as a continuum with PGD at one end - denoting the most severe grief response; while at the other end are the common reactions associated with grieving.

The diagnostic frameworks around prolonged grief treat all grief as the same, regardless of the context. The focus is solely on symptomology. There are, however, very clear challenges in trying to apply this model to disappearances, given that the context or circumstances in which disappearances take place within a conflict zone cannot be accounted for within a symptomology framework. And equally, a symptomology framework places the impact of the disappearance down to individual factors, with no recognition of the social or political context of this type of loss. The symptoms listed by Prigerson et al (2009a) do clearly resonate with the testimonies of the families during the Independence Conflict period in Ireland, and in the data from Peru, Colombia and Sri Lanka discussed earlier. A key consideration, however, is the degree to which these symptoms are exacerbated by the conflict itself, rather than the trajectory of the grief reaction.

While the prolonged grief framework has gained greater prominence from a therapeutic perspective (Prigerson et al 2009a), it has not been prominently applied in relation to grief arising out of conflict and, more specifically, the unique circumstances surrounding disappearance, with the exception of the study by Hollander (2016). Hollander (2016) undertook a comparative analysis of PGD and Ambiguous Loss in a study with parents whose children had disappeared in northern Uganda. He concluded that, given that grief is an individual experience that also has a family and societal impact, variations can arise with respect to the severity, longevity and degree of impairment arising out of the loss. Whilst these circumstances may well prolong grief and, therefore, a number of the symptoms of PGD can be evident, he argues that the Ambiguous Loss framework has greater applicability, given the protracted ambiguity and uncertainty for the parents in relation to the fate of their

disappeared children. He also argues that the social and cultural implications associated with this type of loss contribute to the experience of grief.

In exploring the relevance of the PGD framework further in relation to this study, it is clear that a series of factors may determine its applicability given their influence on the grief experience. A key influencing variable is the nature of the relationship with the deceased. Parents who have lost children are, for example, 30% more likely to experience complicated grief; those whose loved ones have died by suicide (Neimeyer 2019) are also at increased risk. This is an example of how the nature of the relationship (in this case the existence of parental responsibility) and the cause of death, and the expectations of death can inform and complicate the nature of the grief - here a sense of familial guilt can arise from the questioning of whether or not the death could have been prevented (Keesee et al 2008; Hibberd et al 2010; Richardson 2014; Lenferink et al 2017 and Denhup 2017).

Gender can also be a factor when thinking about grief and grieving, with women reporting greater difficulties in dealing with grief than men (Hibberd et al 2010; Barakovic et al 2014; Basharat et al 2014 and Heeke et al 2017). Several studies (Neimeyer and Burke 2017; Milman et al 2017) have identified risk factors that may lead to post death difficulties. Neimeyer (2019) suggests that the circumstances and context of the death; the nature of the relationship to the deceased; the background to prior family life; the coping strategies adopted and the social and institutional setting in which the bereavement takes place are all potential risk factors (p5). Stroebe et al (2017b) suggest that other factors, such as personality traits or prior mental health difficulties, need to be taken into account as they compound the grieving process. It is clear that, while there are innate issues for individuals that can contribute to prolonged grief, external factors such as the circumstances and context of the death, as suggested by Neimeyer (2019), are extremely relevant. This is significant for any study focused on the experiences of the families of those disappeared.

One external factor that contributes greatly to PGD is the type of death. Christ et al (2003) suggest that individuals will experience grief differently, in intensity and duration, and that this influences how it is expressed. Violent death increases the risk of PGD as the grieving is elongated, and those mourning are unable to make meaning of the death, or of life post death (Bonanno 2004; Boelen and Prigerson 2012; Heeke et al 2017 and Milman et al 2017). Whilst this is challenging in cases where grief is *expected,* in grief that is caused due to conflict, the

ability to make either sense of the loss or to find meaning in existential, spiritual or practical terms, increases the potential for both chronic grief and unrelenting distress (Neimeyer 2006 p3). Lenferink et al (2017a) concur with this premise, presenting empirical evidence based on 15 studies focused on the prevalence of psychological symptoms and psychopathology in the families of those disappeared. They suggest that the level of exposure to traumatic events and kinship to the Disappeared person increases the psychopathology associated with the loss. However, they conclude that at the level of symptomology, grief symptoms are no greater in families whose loved ones have been disappeared, than in those whose loved ones have been killed in conflict. This finding echoes Heeke et al's work (2017).

In respect of Heeke et al's (2017) and Lenferink et al's (2017a) studies, the researchers do not clarify if the deaths in the case of those disappeared have been confirmed to their families. In this case Boss's (2002b) state of unrelenting ambiguity may be applicable, where families oscillate between hope and despair. This process of oscillation may have affected the data generated in these studies, as some of those who engaged may still have been holding on to the concept of hope of a safe return. Equally, as highlighted earlier, cultural factors may come into play, with families fearing that they may seem disloyal to those disappeared if they confirm death without clear proof. Whilst the commonality in the research studies undertaken by Heeke et al (2017) and Lenferink et al (2017a) is the *cause* of the death (conflict related violence), it could be contended that the PGD model does not enable the nuances around the social, political, economic and cultural aspects of the death to be captured; or the factors that can impact on how the disappearance is perceived at a familial or community level. In assessing the applicability of a PGD framework, a central question emerges in relation to whether or not it pathologises loss while having insufficient regard for the context of the disappearances. This issue of essentially medicalising grief is explored later in this chapter.

While the PGD theoretical framework is not appropriate for this study, it is important to consider if other grief theoretical models may be applicable to aspects of the grieving process in respect of disappearance (in the absence of a dedicated theoretical framework focused on conflict related disappearance). As mentioned above, Boss (2018) suggests that the ambiguity around disappearance is fed by the uncertainty as to whether or not a loved one is dead. She suggests that individuals are held in this state of uncertainty - holding on to hope, whilst anticipating confirmation of death. It is important, therefore, to consider the concept of

anticipatory grief in light of this dichotomy in which families of the Disappeared find themselves.

ANTICIPATORY GRIEF

The concept of anticipatory grief Overton and Cottone (2016) who refer to this concept as preparing for death) has been prominent in gerontology and psychology, but has not been referenced in relation to disappearance with the exception of Testoni et al (2020). However, in Testoni et al's study, disappearances were not politically linked and, in some cases, individuals had chosen to go missing removing themselves from their families and communities. The contextual issues were not, therefore, comparable to cases involving political violence; however, the concept has some utility.

The focus of this framework is on the grieving that may emerge when the death of a loved one is anticipated or, as in the case of the Disappeared, when the death is confirmed. For many families whose loved ones have disappeared the uncertainty regarding their fate evokes anxiety and fear. As highlighted above, the state of ambiguity renders families into a state of powerlessness and often leaves them feeling terrorised. In the context of conflict, Bernard (2018) states that there is often an assumption that when loved ones do not return home, and when paramilitary, insurgent or state organisations are silent, then a loved one is dead. Overton and Cottone (2016) posit that the grief may be as intense in the pre-death period as it would be following the death, or confirmation of the death, of a loved one (p430).

Across the literature there are a variety of terms used interchangeably to denote anticipatory grief. Some researchers, such as Sanders et al (2003) and Shuter et al (2013) refer to grief and pre-death without distinction. Others, such as Ziemba and Lynch Saucer (2005), refer to living grief; while Mayer (2001) suggests chronic sorrow, and Johnasson et al (2012) preparatory grief. Whilst the anticipatory grief framework is similar to Boss's (2002b) Ambiguous Loss framework, a core distinction is that Boss's (2002b) model focuses on physical absence but psychological presence, whilst the anticipatory grief framework focuses solely on grief, with the omission of any aspiration of hope that a loved one will return. Boss (2002b) refers to individuals living with a 'both/and' attitude, given that the deaths of those disappeared have not been confirmed. In anticipatory grief, the focus is on the expectation of

pending loss in which the grieving process may be as acute pre-death as that experienced post death.

Anticipating the death of a loved one can lead to a variety of difficulties including depression, a sense of being burdened, and intensity in relation to coping with a loved one's demise (Blandin and Pepin 2017). In addition, the literature highlights pre-death grief as causing emotional distress (Chan et al 2013); conflicting emotions (Jones and Martinson 1992); a change in relationships (Adams et al 2008); depression (Adams and Sanders 2004); an intense sense of hopelessness (Duggleby et al 2009) and a feeling of being abandoned and isolated within the community (Aoun et al 2018).

Whilst many of the studies of anticipatory grief are focused on the expected death of those with terminal or life-limiting illnesses, there are none focusing on the concept in relation to disappearance arising from political violence. Hemer (2018) suggests that anticipatory grief can signal an important time in which family members can prepare for death and make the necessary arrangements. Forensic processes regarding the Disappeared are being conducted in areas of conflict across the world; for families this creates an expectation that recovery might signal the start of the rituals associated with death within the community (Bernard 2018). It is suggested that grief starts from the point of the official confirmation that death is to be expected, with the psychological, cognitive and physical losses occurring before the actual death (Lindaucer and Harvath 2014). As outlined earlier, Fuchs (2018), however, contends that grieving only starts when death is confirmed. If that is the case, then it would suggest that the expectedness of death may be a greater determiner of post loss grief than the type of death (Boelen 2012). However, this is in direct conflict with the work of Milman et al (2017), as outlined earlier in this chapter, who contend that the nature of the death strongly determines the grief response, such as in the case of violent death. Neimeyer (2019) argues that, regardless of the cause of death, there can be greater anguish associated with anticipatory grief in the absence of finding meaning about a loved one's death. This is challenging, particularly when loved ones are missing and their fate is unknown.

One of the most striking aspects of anticipatory grief, in the context of the Disappeared, is the concept of a social death. Auon et al (2018) - albeit in respect of dealing with families whose loved ones have dementia - argue that anticipatory grief may lead to social withdrawal from a loved one and, thereby, to a social death. Evidence of a social death might be silence around

memories of a loved one; or a failure to fulfil rituals (Hemer 2018). A social death is defined as Mulkay and Ernst (1991) *as,*

'The cessation of the individual person as an active agent in others' lives' (p178).

In the case of disappearance, the loved one ceases to be an active agent in others' lives as they are no longer present. In Colombia, this concept of a social death can be seen in the example given earlier of families being forced to remove all pictures of their loved ones (Medina 2013); and, in the period following the Independence Conflict in Ireland, it is seen in the silence of families about their loved one's disappearance. Robins (2016) also gives the example of the Junta in Argentina who sought to erase any memory of individuals by denying their existence.

In the case of the Independence Conflict period in Ireland, a social death was also evidenced by the failure of the media to report the disappearances. Interestingly, this also applied to Sri Lanka, Peru and Colombia, as outlined earlier. Such was the power of the paramilitary groups in these countries, that they were able to demand the obliteration of all traces of a loved one. It could be contended that part of the strategy of disappearance is to bring about a social death which then renders families silent. At one level, Mulkay and Ernst's definition is useful, however, while the Disappeared may not be physically present, they may still form a strong presence psychologically; and this can prevail long after the disappearance has occurred.

A central point at issue for the applicability of anticipatory grief in respect of disappearances is that of confirmation of death. As discussed earlier, Hemer (2018) contends that grief is a continuum of loss, which may emerge in relation to losses incurred pre-death. However, the anticipatory grief pre and post death cannot be assumed to be theoretically different. For any anticipatory grief to occur, there must be some indication that the person is dying - be that physically or socially (Hemer 2018). Fulton (2003), however, questions anticipatory grief and suggests that it may not be viewed as a positive and adaptive response, as grief cannot occur until there is a finality in which the death occurs (in the case of the Disappeared, this is likely to be confirmation of the death). This is a central limitation in relation to any study on the Disappeared as there may be no firm indication of death and, even if it is provided, it may not be believed by family members, in the absence of a body, given the historic manipulation by those who perpetrated the loss. Distrust of those who perpetrate disappearances is common,

and the wider use of the Disappeared for political ends, not only violates a loved one's reputation, but also compounds this distrust (Dulitizky 2019a; Isuru et al 2019 and Willems 2021). This political manipulation is further evidence of the direct impact of outside influences on the grieving process in relation to the Disappeared.

It is apparent that, whilst the concept of anticipatory grief has some merit in relation to conflict related disappearances, it does not fully capture the impact for families in dealing with the ambiguity and uncertainty regarding what has happened to their loved ones. Unlike an illness, which is visually impactful, the Disappeared are hidden, as is the omnipresence of the threat. It is, therefore, difficult for families to fully accept that their loved one is dead until they receive confirmation that this is the case. When there is official confirmation that death has occurred, this may lead families into a process of waiting and, therefore, anticipating the recovery of a loved one's body. Whilst, for some, this may lead to anticipatory grief, for many of the families of the Disappeared, it is the influence of external factors that impacts directly on their grieving process. The anticipatory grief frameworks, like Ambiguous Loss, are largely internal processes, although they also operate within a family systems model. However, as outlined throughout this chapter, it is important to consider the role of the external environment on grieving, as external issues often play a significant role in either exacerbating or ameliorating the grieving process. When grief is not acknowledged externally or, for example, mourning is prevented by the absence of a body, this may lead to what is referred to as disenfranchised grief, as discussed below.

DISENFRANCHISED GRIEF

One of the principal considerations in relation to the Disappeared is the unrelenting ambiguity around the fate of their missing loved one. Boss (2018) contends that this Ambiguous Loss can lead to disenfranchised grief. She contends that,

> *'Grief is often disenfranchised- that is in eyes of the law, religious institutions and the larger community, the family loss is often not considered 'real' as it would be with a verifiable death'* (p522).

Doka (1999) defines disenfranchised grief as grief that cannot be publicly acknowledged or mourned rendering individuals socially unsupported; as such, it has much in common with

the concepts of Ambiguous Loss and anticipatory grief as already discussed. Attig (2004) describes disenfranchised bereavement as a failure to empathise with those bereaved, or to acknowledge or understand their suffering, the seriousness of their loss, or the impact for those left behind – those grieving are, effectively, rendered outsiders, excluded by their own community. Hollander (2016) contends that, in northern Uganda, while there was initial support for relatives of the Disappeared, public mourning was not permissible as there was no confirmation of death. He suggests that there is a culturally defined expiry date on permissible grief, after which it is not spoken about and mourning is frowned upon (p12).

In respect of the disenfranchised theoretical framework, Doka's focus is on relationships - the cause and context of the loss and the attachment to the person who has died. Corr (2002) developed Doka's theory further, suggesting that it is broader than just the psychological aspects - mental, physical, social and spiritual functioning are as important in relation to grieving. Corr goes on to argue that the focus on symptoms further pathologises grief (p18) as discussed later in this chapter.

Doka's (1999) model of disenfranchisement highlights key elements of bereavement that would be impacted by disappearance, with a clear emphasis on both internal and external factors that could impede the grieving process. He suggests that factors that could contribute to disenfranchised grief include: a lack of societal recognition of relationships, or of the significance of the loss (such as in the case of a breadwinner); or diminishing the impact that the death may have had, for example, on children. Equally, the circumstances of the loss can impact on culturally defined grieving rules and rituals, and render individuals and their family unit isolated; often support is either not available, or is conditional (as in the case of political violence). In many cases of the Disappeared, as reflected in Chapters 2 and 3, these issues are prevalent and, it could be argued, lead to disenfranchised grief.

So much of the literature on grief, as outlined earlier in this chapter, focuses on the internal processes regarding how individuals react and process grief. The concept of disenfranchised grief is interesting because it focuses on external factors and community perceptions - as Boss (2018) outlines, a death may not be viewed as verifiable from a legal, religious or community perspective. This lack of acknowledgement fundamentally inhibits the grieving process. The failure or inability to afford a loved one the rites of burial or the normal processes associated with death has a direct impact on the grieving process. In respect of the Disappeared,

disenfranchised grief is tied strongly to the lack of acknowledgement of a death, whether at an individual, family, community, statutory or societal level.

When grief is complex or severe, and individuals are seen to grieve for longer than the expected cultural norms, then it may be considered abnormal or maladaptive. Kalich and Brabant (2006) suggest that this process of blaming individuals for abnormal or maladaptive grief causes undue stress and prevents essential grief work from being undertaken. Both Ambiguous Loss and disenfranchised grief recognise that it is the circumstances of the loss that lead to a specific emotional process; this impacts on both the individual and the family. Doka (1999) contends that, by its very nature, disenfranchised grief '*intensifies grieving'* (p39).

The concept of disenfranchised grief outlines the rules that exist within cultures and societies referring to these as the '*grieving rules'*: how long is it acceptable to grieve, who is entitled to grieve, when can they grieve, and how will this be recognised publicly? (Doka 2002). When grief is not recognised, or when families are not accorded the necessary rituals and processes associated with death, they are cast into the role of silent mourners (Doka 2002). Guillard (2017) contends that grief is ritualised socially and psychologically, as discussed at the start of this chapter. Grieving rules and rituals also symbolise life's passage, providing stability at times of personal and social difficulties (Hunter 2006, p163). However, when the grieving rules do not correspond to the feelings of those left behind or their sense of loss, the grief may become disenfranchised.

Hollander (2016) refers to the impact on grieving caused by the 'social disenfranchisement' that arises for families of the Disappeared, given the social stigma involved p13. This social disenfranchisement ripples out into the community, so that even family members, neighbours, friends or colleagues may actively avoid the grieving family, impeding any support or acknowledgement of the loss (Thornton 2000, p285). Social disenfranchisement is also impacted by the political context, including government strategy in respect of the Disappeared – when, for example, the issue of the Disappeared is not acknowledged, this can cause further exclusion and marginalisation. Attig (2004) argues that disenfranchised grieving is not just a social and ethical failure, it is also a political failure if the circumstances of the death are not addressed, or are politically maligned. If the loss is not viewed as significant at a community, societal or political level, then the family members are not afforded a *'right to grieve'* (Doka 2002, p5).

Attig (2004) argues that disenfranchising is not simply a matter of indifference to the experiences of those bereaved, but involves a much more active process.

> *'The denial of entitlement, interference and even imposition of sanction. Disenfranchising messages actively discount, dismiss, disapprove, discourage, invalidate and delegitimise the experiences and efforts of grieving. And disenfranchising behaviours interfere with the exercise of the right to grieve by withholding permission, disallowing, constraining, hindering and even prohibiting it' (p198).*

This has direct relevance in relation to how political violence can directly cause or, indeed, exacerbate disenfranchised grief. The fact that it is an active process in which, not only is the grief not recognised, but also individuals are actively denied the right to grieve, demonstrates the power of the political process over individuals' lives. Fowlkes (1990) refers to this lack of acknowledgement and right to grieve publicly as demoralised loss – which leads to hurt and reinforced loss, leaving families marginalised within the community with their grief unaddressed.

There are a number of limitations of the disenfranchised framework. The degree to which disenfranchised grief rests solely with outside forces has been challenged (Valentine et al 2016). They contend that individuals may often disenfranchise their own grief through the specific cultural and societal norms, and this can leave the family feeling their grief is unrecognised and their experience invalidated. Hollander's (2016) study highlights how the cultural and social parameters can prohibit grieving and public mourning. In the case of the Disappeared, the trauma and grief associated with the circumstances of their death usually falls outside the permitted grieving period and, therefore, remains unaddressed. The disenfranchisement may also be driven primarily from an individual, rather than a societal, point of view. Robson and Walter (2013) contend that disenfranchised grief may arise if a bereaved individual perceives that their grief is not socially legitimised. They argue that it is not solely about external determinants, there are also internal determinants that impact on the grieving process too.

A further central weakness of the theoretical framework is that there are a lack of comparative studies on disenfranchised grief. Cultural variations and societal norms are very diverse - what may be considered the norm in one community may be frowned upon in

another. This reduces the opportunity for fully comparative studies of disenfranchised grief. This applies equally to comparative studies on the impact of disappearance.

Attig (2004) argues that many studies which focus on disenfranchised grief do not consider the wholeness of the person, or the widespread ramifications that arise externally which can lead to a variety of reactions from helplessness, to shame and stigmatisation. To date, whilst disenfranchised grief has been referred to in respect of its links to Ambiguous Loss, no specific studies have been undertaken in relation to the impact arising out of deaths in a political context. The contextual issues arising out of political violence are clearly nuanced by the unique situation that pertains in any given conflict; it could be suggested that this context is influential in any review of the disenfranchised grief framework.

THE MEDICAL MODEL/PATHOLOGISED LOSS

Human grief is said to be a '*ubiquitous condition'*, in so far as death and loss are considered to be part of human life, then the emotional reaction to this loss is viewed as understandable and normal and should not be medicalised (Bryant 2012, p9). As outlined previously, pathologising loss takes insufficient account of the context of that loss. While many have welcomed the recognition of specific diagnoses such as Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD) as discussed earlier, there is a tension in the literature between those who pathologise complex grief regardless of the context (Morina et al 2010; Lichtenthal et al 2019 and Nickerson et al 2014), and those who recognise context as being a determining factor in relation to how individuals cope with their loss (Betz and Thorngren 2006; Boss and Yeats 2014; Hollander 2016 and Robins 2016). It is evident that, at one level, the focus on prolonged grief as a medical disorder offers validation of suffering (Komischke-Konnerup et al 2021) and the opportunity for comparative studies using the same symptomology framework to be undertaken (Tribe and Silva 1999). However, at another level, in the absence of cognisance regarding the context of the loss, it may lead to the grief reactions being labelled inaccurately. A focus solely on symptomology fails to acknowledge the multi layered context that often surrounds the death of a loved one (Becker 2008).

This diametrical opposition between the pros and cons of a diagnostic approach or medical model have parallels with one of the most commonly referenced stress and trauma disorders - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD features prevalently across studies on trauma

and loss (Heeke et al 2017; Smid et al 2020 and Isuru et al 2021). Like PGD, PTSD is a clinical disorder attributed to the stress and trauma arising out of a traumatic incident. PTSD has three core components: re-experiencing the traumatic incident; avoiding reminders of, and stimuli in relation to the incident; and continually preparing for further traumatic exposure through a hyperaroused state (Stradtmann et al 2017, p461). A number of studies have focused on PTSD and the impact of disappearances (Lenferink et al 2017b; Smid et al 2020; Tufan and Bayraktar 2020; Hamid et al 2021 and Isuru et al 2021).

Essentially, while there are measurement indicators for both PTSD and PGD that can determine whether the disorders exist for family members of the disappeared, the frameworks fail to account for the ambiguity arising out of the context and the cause of the abduction; or the societal and political factors associated with the disappearance (Robins 2016). For example, as highlighted previously, when deaths are repeatedly denied and unclaimed by those who have perpetrated the loss, this prolongs the ambiguity, leaving individuals in a perpetual state of uncertainty. Boss (2002b) argues that, neither traditional grief approaches, nor specific grief or trauma frameworks such as PGD or PTSD, can address the ambiguity that arises in relation to disappearance. It is this ambiguity that she argues perpetuates the loss.

> *'Being confused, unable to grieve, feeling ambivalent, defying the idea of "closure"- all are natural reactions to ambiguous loss. They are not evidence of resistance or psychic weakness but the result of ambiguity piled on top of loss' (Boss 2002b, p16).*

It is very clear from Boss's summation that the issues rest with the context of the loss rather than any predisposition to mental distress on the part of the family member left behind. Given the reality of war, Becker (2008) suggests that there is nothing 'post' about the situation in respect of PTSD. He uses the example of the experience of families in Bosnia Herzegovina, contending that conflict trauma is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation – in other words, the situation causes the severe psychological distress and, therefore, the 'abnormality' lies within the external environment. This chimes with the work of Boss (2002b) who suggests that the reactions are normal in the face of the ambiguity being endured. Summerfield (2001) also echoes this, and highlights the difficulties of relying on standardised measurement tools,

> *'Human pain is a slippery thing; if it is a thing at all; how it is registered and measured depends on philosophical and socio moral considerations that evolve over time and cannot simply be reduced to a technical matter'* (Summerfield 2001, p98).

One of the central issues that Boss (2002a), Becker (2008) and Summerfield (2001) highlight is the overriding need for consideration to be given to the context in which the loss took place. In conflict, the complexity of issues facing individuals such as the economic, social, spiritual, and physical ramifications, in addition to the psychological impact are often immense. In Colombia and Peru, for example, the reality was often displacement from the family home following a disappearance; this had dire economic and social consequences for family members, compounded by the community response to their loss (Haugaard and Nicholls 2010; Curcio et al 2019 and Dulitizky 2019b).

Hollander's (2016) account of the complex and interrelated stressors affecting the families of those disappeared in Northern Uganda illustrates the significance of external factors. His work shows that, not only were the deaths violent following the disappearance, but there were also numerous losses and changes within the family unit, with poverty being a prominent influencing factor in relation to grief. Across the literature a strong link is drawn between violent conflict, internal displacement and poverty, all of which have a significant impact on grief (Currier et al 2006; Boelen et al 2007b and Robins 2016). It is crucial, therefore, to consider further these external factors that impact on individuals and families in conflict situations.

A medical framework such as that associated with PGD or PTSD or others, whilst offering a symptomology framework, is too restrictive as a premise for this study, as it focuses on the impact of grief or trauma without reference to the cultural, historical, social, economic or political context in which the death occurs (Charmaz and Milligan 2006; Jakoby 2012). It also cannot do justice to the multifaceted and complex nature of disappearance. As discussed earlier, grieving can be blocked by a lack of acknowledgement of the death (Fuchs 2018) and by the state of perpetual ambiguity that is faced by the family (Boss 2002b), but which is outside their control. In essence, the complexity of disappearances, and the powerful influence of the external forces involved in relation to grief, go beyond individual psychological and medical diagnosis. As Becker (2008) suggests, a focus on a symptomology framework, to explain the impact of the disappearance converts a social and political problem into a disorder, failing to capture the destruction of family systems or the abnormality of the situation in which the disappearance has taken place.

From an examination of the available literature on the Disappeared, it is clear that it is the political and social environment, as well as the context and longevity of ambiguity which is abnormal, and which must be taken into account in any study focused on exploring loss arising out of disappearances (De Alwis 2009; Robins 2016; Hollander 2016; Dulitizky 2019; Pabon 2018 and Dahl and Boss 2020). There is, however, a dichotomy in relation to the Disappeared of NI's Conflict in that the abnormal context was largely viewed as 'normal' by those living within communities exposed to daily violence (Keefe 2018). In conflict related disappearances across the world families are often constrained by the perceived dominant force, and follow the social norms and rules that exist within the community (Hollander 2016; Robins 2016 and Isuru et al 2019). This internal normality which, from the outside, is perceived as inherently abnormal contributes to how grief emerges and whether it is considered as frozen, complicated, anticipatory or as disenfranchised given the societal context of the loss. The societal context and the circumstances and implications of the disappearance of a loved one are, therefore, important influencing variables that have a powerful influence on how this type of loss is perceived by family members. These factors need to be fully considered in this study.

EXPLORING A FRAMEWORK

As outlined earlier in this chapter, Ambiguous Loss and anticipatory grief are internal processes which will be individually determined. They offer useful, but limited, frameworks through which to consider the impact of disappearance. In comparison, disenfranchised grief focuses on how the external environment can compound the grief process. The grief felt by the families of the Disappeared might be described as disenfranchised – these disappearances, effected during periods of political violence, are seen as stigmatised losses which, as suggested by Charmaz and Milligan (2006) are not acknowledged, validated, recognised or publicly mourned because the survivors do not have the right to grieve (p529). This disenfranchisement is seen in conflicts across the world, where families of the Disappeared are often marginalised and the subject of the disappearance is considered taboo (Haugaard and Nicholls 2010; Medina 2013; Sivayokan 2014 and Isuru et al 2019). Family members are, for example, often labelled as in some way complicit in their loss (Hollander,

2016), with the associated rebuke in the community impacting negatively on the grieving process (p16).

Whilst these frameworks of loss and grief are important in the context of this study, and capture the emotional impact of disappearance, it is also important to consider the circumstances of the disappearance and the social, religious, political, cultural and international context which surrounds the families involved. The impact of each of these layers intensifies the emotional impact of the disappearances. In order to capture the complex and multi-faceted context that exists around disappearance, including the wider experiences and trajectory of the families' engagement in a social movement, fighting for the return of their loved ones' bodies, a broader theoretical view needs to be considered.

This study, therefore, seeks to expand on how we consider the psycho-social experience for the families of the Disappeared, to take account of the wider context and to explore how this interacts with the existing theories of loss and grief. The notions of loss and grief outlined in this chapter are but one small element of the experience of the families of the Disappeared; this experience cannot be simplified solely into individual or family reactions to loss.

The methodology process that underpins this study will now be considered.

CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

This study seeks to consider the impact of disappearance on first and second generation family members; it deals, particularly, with contextualised conflict-related loss over a prolonged period of time with a significant degree of uncertainty as to the fate of the individual harmed. It also considers the influence of integral social relationships within the community and wider civic society from the period following the abduction to the present day. In this chapter the ontological and epistemological basis for grounded theory is discussed first followed by a methods section which details the step by step operationalisation of the research process undertaken in this study.

WHY GROUNDED THEORY?

There is a dearth of systematic academic scrutiny of the experiences and loss endured by the families of those whose loved ones were disappeared during NI's Conflict. There exists a number of historic analysis of disappearance as detailed earlier, and significant literature on the psycho-social impact of international disappearances, but no research on the intersection of the personal and the political nor the community and the international. Recent disappearances in Ireland have received little academic attention, and like many of the victims of the Troubles, the voices of those harmed and left behind have been silenced or side-lined in a post-conflict Northern Ireland. A central tenet of this research study is to ensure that the voices of those impacted are heard, respected, and acknowledged but importantly analysed in a meaningful empirically sound manner that grounds the findings and emerging theory directly in the testimony of the participants.

The origins of the study lie in the advocacy work undertaken by the researcher with the families of the Disappeared for over two decades. This has provided invaluable knowledge and experience, as well as trusted access to family members. Taking account of the need to give voice to those affected, and to explore in depth their experiences, this study applies 'Grounded Theory' (see below) – an approach which facilitates the process of going beyond any conjecture, linking the theoretical with the experiential (the reality for the families) and allows the researcher to explore neglected topics avoiding as much as possible existing assumptions and bias.

The data collection for this project consists of semi-structured interviews with the family members of individuals (n=40) who were disappeared between 1969 and 2003. The study also takes an intergenerational approach, with members from two generations of families included in the sample. A Grounded Theory approach is applied because the issue of disappearance is complex, understudied and conceptually immature; and because it helps to overcome the fact that there is no published research conducted with this, or a similar, populations in the academic literature; nor is there any substantive holistic theoretical material available on the topic.

The specific methodological approach used is Charmaz's (2008) modified Grounded Theory approach for data collection and analysis. This approach ensures that themes and concepts emerge from the data; that the conclusions are intimately linked to this data; and that the rich data available ultimately informs theory building on the topic of the disappeared in Northern Ireland (Morse et al 2021). It is particularly advantageous that Grounded Theory facilitates the exploration of copious and detailed data within the situational and social context in which an issue has taken place. This is vital as disappearances do not take place within a silo, rather the context and circumstances around the events, known or unknown to the family, continue to have an impact long after the abduction has taken place. This chapter provides the rationale underlying the adoption of this approach, the implications of its use and the ethical issues arising from it.

CHOOSING A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

The method chosen for a research study must be the most suitable to elicit and analyse the data generated, and to answer the research questions posed. In this study, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate given the aim of accessing rich data and developing theory that was grounded in the content. First and foremost, the focus of the study was on the experiences of a group of individuals whose loved ones were disappeared during NI's Conflict – disappeared in this context refers specifically to being abducted, murdered and secretly buried by republican paramilitaries. In order to understand the process and potentially theorise about it, it was important to gain an understanding of the impact, context and longer-term issues arising out of the experience of having a loved one disappeared. The

chosen methodology needed to facilitate an analytic process of induction so that the theory emerged from the analysis of the voices of the participants.

Another issue related to the choice of methodology is that, for the subject of study, the research approach taken can be a determining factor in ascertaining whether or not participants wish to engage in the study. At one level, surveys and other quantitative methods allow participant's greater anonymity as everyone follows a set of standardised questions. This can increase reliability with everyone being asked the same questions in the same way. However, these approaches do not facilitate the unique aspects of each individual's experience to be teased out, with the result that valuable data may be missed. Qualitative methods, by contrast, involve greater exposure for participants, providing an opportunity for interviewees to fully share their experiences with the researcher. As a result, a greater understanding of the context in which issues arose is gained. In addition, as Lundy and McGovern (2006) suggest, qualitative studies can often enable the voices of those who have had to challenge oppression to be heard, thereby, breaking their silence. In this way, the personal impact for the participants of giving their testimonies was outweighed by the benefit of having their stories recorded, and raising awareness of their experiences (Lundy and McGovern 2006, p59).

There are, however, drawbacks to qualitative processes, for example, painful memories may be recounted (Keyel 2020), and this may lead to emotional, psychological or physical anxiety arising from the issues being presented (Dickson Swift et al 2007; Gregory et al 2020). In addition, there may be a corresponding negative impact for researchers with research distress and powerlessness among the issues that may arise (Jafari et al 2013; Keyel 2020). All of these factors were carefully considered and it was concluded that, given the specifics of the issue under study, the experience of the researcher, the relationship of the researcher with the participants and the support available to the participants, a qualitative process offered the best approach.

CHOOSING GROUNDED THEORY?

There are many different methodological approaches across the spectrum of qualitative research. Grounded Theory is defined by Charmaz and Bryant (2011) as providing a series of flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing data, enabling researchers to systematically

construct a theory. According to Charmaz (2006), the benefit of adopting a Grounded Theory approach is that you can direct, manage and streamline your data collection and develop an original analysis of that, thereby constructing a theory that is grounded in the data collected. In contrast to many other qualitative approaches, in Grounded Theory, the theoretical analysis starts from the beginning of the research process. Sarantakos (2005) suggests that Grounded Theory is not only a method, it is also a technique, research design and the outcome of the research. He argues that it is not just an analysis process as it involves all aspects of the research process, starting with the questions asked and concluding with an answer. The strength of Grounded Theory is that the emerging theory is grounded in empirical data, situated in the words and actions of those individuals under study (Markey et al 2020). This makes it an invaluable tool to hear and acknowledge the voices of the families of those disappeared.

Grounded Theory has evolved significantly since its emergence in the 1960s. The approach first emerged in the field of sociology in the 1960's as a means of progressing research in the qualitative paradigm from descriptive to theoretical. It was a direct challenge to positivist conceptions in the scientific arena, in which it was contended by Carson et al (2001) that statistical and mathematical approaches undertaken with objectivity were seen as the only rational and logical approach to scientific research. The vision of the founding fathers of Grounded Theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967), was to develop a more systematic and defined procedure for the collection and analysis of qualitative data, changing qualitative research from being descriptive to generating theories.

Since its inception, Grounded Theory has changed somewhat, with even the creators taking different views of its application. Glaser (1978) has maintained his earlier stance that defined Grounded Theory as a method of discovery, treating categories as emergent from the data and relying on direct and often narrow empiricism. His emphasis was on the researcher as neutral, akin to quantitative processes, with the data generated and coded line by line. Strauss (1987) on the other hand, views human beings as active agents in their lives rather than passive recipients. He argued for a more ordered version of the methodology in which the researcher could choose several investigative tools to create and construct theory grounded in the data. Glaser (1992) criticised this approach contending that it forced data into preconceived categories.

Whilst various researchers have continued to work according to the earlier aspirations of the founders, Grounded Theory has gained significant recognition across a range of disciplines - including health, education, justice and communication and marketing - because of its rigour, usefulness and positivist assumptions (Goulding 2005). Oliver (2012), however, argues that, while Grounded Theory has evolved under different disciplines, there are common components across all disciplines in which theory is developed inductively through a continual process of data collection, data enquiry and analysis. The core characteristics in all Grounded Theory studies, regardless of the researcher or the area of study or the discipline, is that data analysis starts from the beginning of the research study, rather than having a preconceived conceptual framework or hypothesis. The developing theory, therefore, directs the researcher to the relevant literature or theories that are significant in respect of the concepts emerging from the data (Gill 2020).

As Grounded Theory evolved Charmaz (2006) gained significant prominence in the discussion, application, and modification of the approach. She advocated that we construct our Grounded Theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives and research practices. It is, therefore, not an exact picture of the area of study, but rather an interpretation of it (Charmaz 2006). Importantly, Charmaz's (2006) approach leaves room for analysis of data in a systematic way that accounts for the realities of interpersonal interactions. Gill (2020), in reviewing the rigour of Grounded Theory, suggests that Charmaz's approach necessitates that the researcher go beyond the superficial, looking for concepts that may offer an explanation for the phenomenon under study and demonstrating these concepts through explication and data supported evidence. It is important, therefore, that the defining components of Grounded Theory are followed rigorously by researchers. According to Charmaz (2006), Grounded Theory provides tools to use rather than 'recipes to follow' and allows the researcher to gather rich and detailed data, placed within situational and social contexts. This was an imperative in this study given that disappearances had taken place as a result of a political conflict in Northern Ireland, in which social and situational issues were interwoven in relation to how the violence had played out across many communities that had experienced high levels of violence.

Despite the flexibility offered by Grounded Theory processes, Charmaz (2006) has outlined a series of defining steps for analysing and extracting the information. The researcher adhered

to the key principles of the approach as shown in Figure 4. In the *doing* of Grounded Theory many of the steps ran concurrently, for example, the ongoing re-examination of the earlier data, with each step guided by the emerging themes. Data collection and analysis was, therefore, undertaken simultaneously in an iterative process. Age (2011) describes a continuous process of data collection which is influenced by the preceding sessions in which data is closely examined. This has been referred to as the constant comparative method of data analysis, in which following line by line analysis there may be the repeated presence of specific content areas or categories that need further refinement or development (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Equally, the process of memo writing to elaborate, define relationships or identify further areas for exploration is interwoven throughout all stages of the process. The ultimate aim collectively is to enhance the development of theory during each step of data collection and data analysis.

Glaser (2003) argued that accuracy in Grounded Theory is not the first priority, and he contends that the theory will be continuously modified as new data emerges. As a result, Grounded Theory is a continual process that it could be argued may never be finalised (Age 2011, p1608). However, Charmaz (2008) postulates that the process is both interactive and iterative and does lead to an end point of theory construction. She suggests that Grounded Theory starts with inductive analysis that progresses with the creation of new theoretical concepts that are continually considered and reviewed against new data generated during the course of the study. The process of using Charmaz's (2006) modified Grounded Theory is outlined in the Figure 4 below.

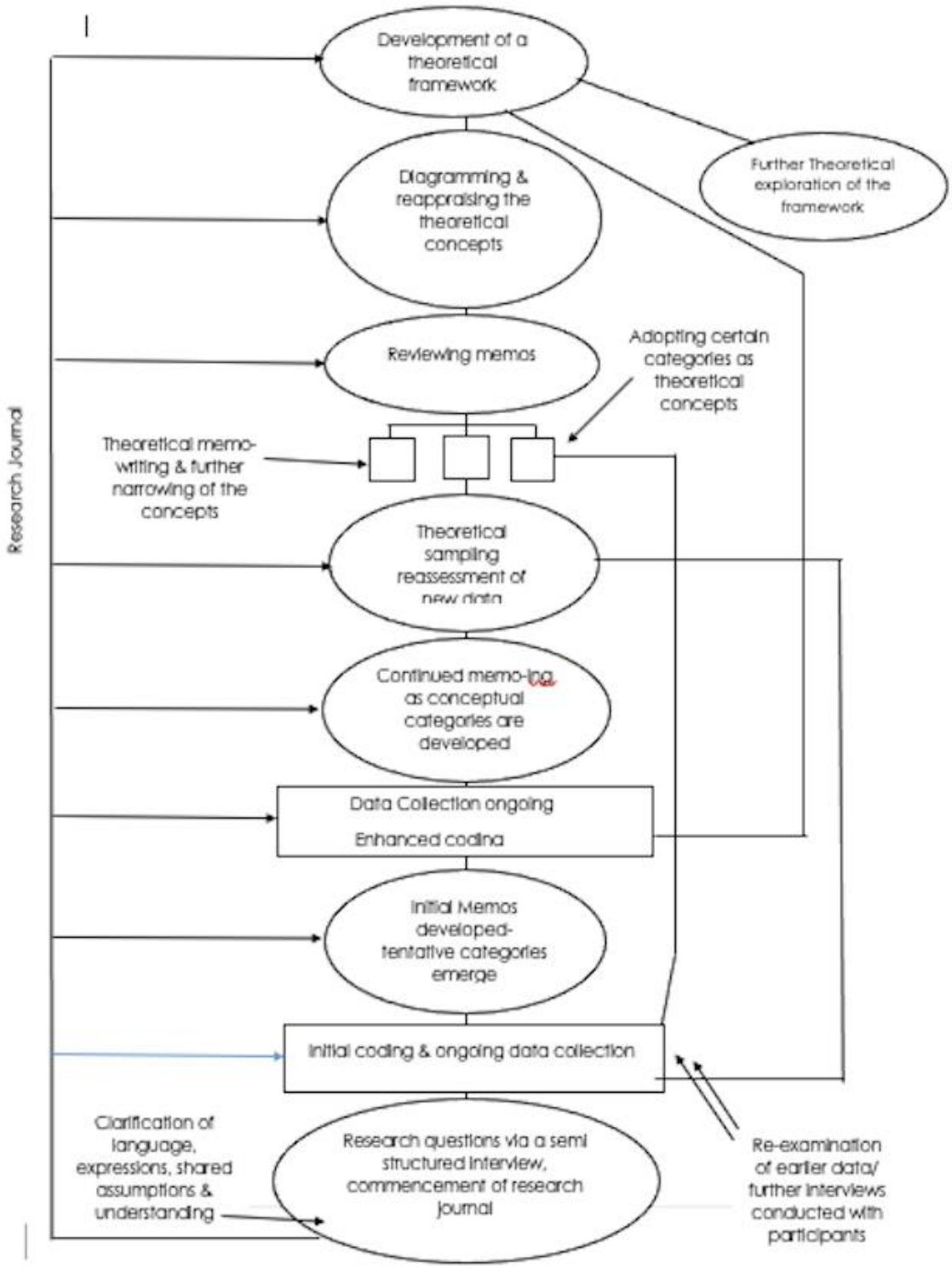


Figure 4 Adapted from Charmaz's 2006 (p11) Grounded Theory Process

Consistent with Charmaz's (2006) Grounded Theory processes the methodology was advantageous for this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, because there is an absence of supporting academic literature on the issue of the Disappeared in the context of the conflict

in NI the study is exploratory rather than theory-testing. Grounded Theory is invaluable in areas in which no studies have been undertaken, or in cases where theories are not available. Chiovitti and Piran (2003) suggest that at no time does the investigator attempt to impose a theory from another study on to the data. This means that data from the participants determines what is explored in the research, the research questions developed, the number of participants in the study, and the literature searched after developing an independent analysis.

Second, the issue of the Disappeared, the experiences of their families and the complexity of issues surrounding the use of disappearance by paramilitaries throughout the conflict requires a process that can produce rich and in-depth data. It is important that the researcher can explore, clarify and go back to the data source to follow themes or gaps in the data. Pfeifer (2000) cited in Sarantakos (2005) referred to the research design for Grounded Theory as not following a direct path, but a circular one which allows moving back and forth between data collection and analysis. Given that data analysis starts at the beginning of the process and evolves as the study progresses, with data analysed line by line through open coding, until saturation has been achieved, Grounded Theory provides the necessary inductive qualitative approach needed for this sensitive area of study.

Third, the families of the Disappeared are a hard-to-reach group. Having gone through the experience of having a loved one abducted and secretly buried, many family members have withdrawn from community life and developed a mistrust of those outside the family. Trust in the researcher was essential. Gill (2020) contends that strong emphasis is placed on the researcher as an element of the research process undertaking rigorous engagement that generates rich data from the personal experiences of people. A process that involved face to face engagement and allowed interviewees to provide data through semi structured interview was viewed as advantageous.

THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF GROUNDED THEORY

It is important to acknowledge both the strengths and weaknesses of a Grounded Theory approach. There are many strengths of Grounded Theory some of which have been highlighted above. Its use across a wide range of disciplines and by researchers with diverse epistemological backgrounds demonstrates its value in both rigorous qualitative and

quantitative studies. Oliver (2012), for example, contends that Grounded Theory has an impressive track record in the applied disciplines, characterised by accessible and highly developed methodological guidelines. The structure and mechanisms of coding provide a clear pathway that enables researchers to avoid feeling they have been swamped by the data generated. The capacity to generate theories is, therefore, particularly important (Schaffar 2020).

Whilst Grounded Theory has many strengths, several points of weakness are also reflected in the literature. These include the subjectivity of the researcher (Chiovitti and Piran 2003); the validity of the data generated (Whittemore et al 2001); the difficulty of predicting when theoretical saturation of the data and theory has been reached (Goulding 2005); the over emphasis on coding which negates the interpretative aspects of the process (Schaffar 2020); and the method of theory building and the notion of the theory being 'grounded in data' (Age 2011). Equally, each Grounded Theory process is unique, dependent on the questions and the evolution of the process. This can be viewed as a strength as well as a weakness, as the methodology needs time and effort (Schaffar 2020). It is suggested that often lack of researcher time and investment in the process limits the conceptualisation of the data at a deeper level, and results in superficial or familial codes which do not fully reflect the richness of the data presented (Morse 2020). It was important that time and effort were invested by the researcher into the study.

The subjectivity of the researcher will always be open to debate. Much has been written about the importance of the researcher entering the field of study as neutral (Levitt et al 2020, Donnelly et al 2020; Plakoyiannaki and Budhwar 2021). However, life and personal experiences, education and employment shape who we are and, as Kellehear (2020) concludes, the researcher is part of the world that is under study and is consequently affected by it. Timmermans and Tavory (2012) argue that inductive Grounded Theory devoid of outside influences is untenable. They suggest that, without exception, qualitative research studies that are reviewed as the best are often steeped in extensive literature with a clear goal of adding to this literature. However, Goulding (2005) argues that the main drawbacks of Grounded Theory do not lie in the approach itself, but in how it is implemented by researchers. For example, studies may be labelled Grounded Theory but not follow the principles of coding, constant comparison or advancing theory development as outlined by

Charmaz (2006) in Figure 4. It is, therefore, not a limitation of the approach, rather it is in the application of the process. The Grounded Theory process was carefully implemented in this study.

KEY CONCEPTS IN QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

VALIDITY

While validity in quantitative studies may be deemed to be straight forward (questionably so), in qualitative studies it is more complex given the overall aims of qualitative inquiry. Souza et al (2017) contend that validity is the properties of a research instrument that measures exactly what it proposes in respect of its relevance, precision and accuracy. In contrast, Hammersley (1990) focuses on the role of the researcher rather than the research instrument and contends that validity is the extent to which the truth is interpreted to represent the social phenomenon (p57). It could be argued that establishing validity in qualitative research renders the research free from interference, contamination, control or variable manipulation whatever the source (LeCompte and Goetz 1982). Given that the process of Grounded Theory starts from the beginning of the research process, not from preconceived hypotheses, research or theories, research undertaken using these guidelines is unlikely to be exposed to the risks of invalidation identified by Le Compte and Goetz (1982).

With all qualitative processes, including Grounded Theory, the role of the researcher and the data collection processes adopted mean that the researcher cannot be viewed as a neutral party or observer. For example, Hallberg (2006) argues that the notion of entering the research scene without preconceptions is questionable. Charmaz (2006) suggests that, given the intense involvement of the researcher throughout the process and the subjectivity that is inevitable in such research, the process must be continuously examined to ensure its continuous validity. She contends that how researchers use the Grounded Theory process, the assumptions they bring to the research or their engagement through the process cannot be considered as neutral. Holmes (2020) echoes this, contending that a researcher's values and beliefs are strongly influenced by a multiplicity of factors that can influence, not only how the research is conducted, but also its outcomes and results. Importantly, however, Grounded Theory, with its use of constant comparison and memo-ing makes space for the subjectivities

that are an inherent element in any research, qualitative and quantitative. This is particularly advantageous for this study.

In Grounded Theory, the issue of researcher bias is made explicit and is kept continuously under review throughout the research process. The work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Wollcott (1990) was invaluable regarding the issue of validity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocate for prolonged engagement with the research subjects; persistent observation; triangulation; member checks; peer debriefing; negative case analysis; and referential adequacy. While Wollcott (1990) postulates that the researcher should listen rather than talk, record detailed notes, record the data as early as possible, facilitate the participants to have access to the recording of their interview, and finally seek feedback from peers.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Wollcott's (1990) central principles regarding validity were applied in relation to this research study. At the outset when the researcher completed the pilot interviews, the results were presented to the interviewees and to peers for review. An academic article was drafted and feedback was received via peer review. This was an invaluable process as it helped the researcher reflect on the Grounded Theory process, the themes emerging from the data and the validity of the interpretation of the data. Charmaz and Thornberg (2020) posit it is important that the codes, categories and theoretical outlines are continually questioned and reviewed, leaving them open to further interrogation and even rejection.

In relation to the main study, the use of semi-structured interviews enabled participants to engage fully; often the questions were not needed as participants spoke freely about their experience of having a loved one disappeared. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The participants were given their interviews to review post transcription which was a useful process as often participants reflected on their interviews and contacted the researcher post interview with other comments, information or documents they felt were important to the issues discussed. Where necessary, further interviews were arranged to clarify particular points, gather further information or question or review the codes, categories and theoretical assumptions emerging from the data. As part of this process, the researcher kept a research journal to document the experience and process of data collection and to reflect on the progress of the interviews. These processes

served as a form of triangulation, which was essential in ensuring the validity of this study. Alongside validity a central question is the issue of reliability.

RELIABILITY

Jiraporncharoen et al (2021) contend that reliability is the capacity for the research to produce consistent results if it is reproduced with the same precision and accuracy regardless of the researcher, the respondents or the research conditions. While reliability is a strong component on which to assess quantitative studies, it poses challenges in relation to qualitative studies. Qualitative researchers have often argued that, in its true sense, reliability has limited relevance to qualitative methods (Le Compte and Goetz 1982; Madill et al 2000; Charmaz and Bryant 2011 and Charmaz and Thornberg 2020).

Studies which involve the engagement of interviewees will always be open to a variety of factors that would influence their contribution if the same process was repeated a number of times. Sandelowski (1993) contends that change can occur because, in the very act of retelling, participants may view and reflect on the circumstances and connection of the events which happened in their lives differently. Le Compte and Goetz (1982) argue that unique situations cannot be reconstructed precisely, therefore, even the most exact replication of a research method may fail to generate identical results. Given social research is the interaction between the interviewee and interviewer, it can be argued that it can never be fully controlled. According to Shipman (1982), if it were controlled, it would no longer reflect reality. Jiraporncharoen et al (2021) posits that one of the central tenets of qualitative research is the idiosyncrasies and uniqueness of the situations in which studies are undertaken which often prevents them from being replicated. They contend that this is not a weakness, but rather a strength, given the benefit of such specialist areas of study generating rich data across many diverse areas.

Challenges can, however, arise regarding reliability in relation to the analysis and interpretation of data by different researchers. Madill et al (2000) contend that the interpretation and analysis of all qualitative data is subjective and, therefore, differences regarding the coding of this data by researchers is not invalid but gives an alternative

perspective. According to Madill et al (2000) reliability in Grounded Theory processes can best be assessed through consistency of meaning. Gosling et al (2004) argue, however, that it is unrealistic to expect researchers to have the same interpretation, or indeed consistency of meaning, as all summations can be viewed as valid.

It would appear that, whilst qualitative researchers do consider reliability an important parameter of research, there may be variations in the approaches they use to ensure studies have dependability, credibility, applicability, transferability or auditability (Sarantakos 2005). The researcher in this study, aware of the criticisms regarding reliability in qualitative studies, utilised Flick's (2007) series of steps to deal with the internal and external aspects of reliability in respect of qualitative studies:

- prolonged engagement and persistent observation;
- peer review and debriefing;
- analysis of negative cases;
- checking the appropriateness of the terms of reference of interpretations and their assessment;
- participant checks (communicative validation); and
- external auditing.

Flick (2007, p11).

These action steps were invaluable in the context of this research study.

Throughout the study the research process was reviewed, debriefed and analysed on an ongoing basis by the researcher in collaboration with the research supervisor. Issues such as ensuring an accurate audit trail as a form of internal validity; audio recording as a process to provide an accurate account of the interviews; checking the transcription of the interviews with interviewees; and analysis of data were all addressed to ensure greater accuracy. An audit trail was retained in the research journal. The use of audio recording prevented the filtering of data that could have arisen due to issues regarding recall or interpretation. It was beneficial for the participants to review their interviews and to provide clarification of themes emerging in the analysis.

The researcher recognises that, given the approach of Grounded Theory, questions regarding the reliability of the study will always present a challenge. The principles of reliability or

dependability have, however, been fully considered. Sandelowski (1993) postulates that rigor in qualitative studies is less about following all procedures rigidly, and more about being focused on maintaining the spirit and ethos of qualitative studies.

In considering validity and reliability, a central question that is pertinent to Grounded Theory is that of saturation as discussed below.

SATURATION IN GROUNDED THEORY

As Grounded Theory was the chosen methodology, a central principle was ensuring saturation. Strauss and Corbin (1998) define saturation as the stage in the research process in which no new or relevant data emerges, with the connections between the categories established and validated. Saunders et al (2018) posit that saturation is reached when no further data collection or analysis is necessary because new concepts are not emerging in the additional data. They do, however, urge caution, suggesting that saturation should be consistent with the theoretical framework, the research question(s) and the process of analysis. Some researchers have argued against discounting Grounded Theory studies that involve a small sample, as the method focuses on the presence of conceptual categories and the relationship between them (Corbin and Schuff-Werner 2011). Charmaz (2006) contends that the amount of data is not a central concern, it is the suitability and sufficiency of the data for depicting empirical events. She suggests a number of useful questions (that were adopted in relation to this study) regarding the data set in establishing whether saturation has been achieved:

- Which comparisons do you make between data within and between categories?
- What sense do you make of these comparisons?
- Where do they lead you?
- How do your comparisons illuminate your theoretical categories?
- In what other directions, if any, do they take you?
- What new conceptual relationships, if any, might you see?

(Charmaz 2006, p114).

The concept of achieving a point of saturation is open to debate. Saunders et al (2018) argue that the point at which saturation is reached has been disputed by various researchers,

differentiating between saturation achieved by hearing it all, in comparison to understanding it all. Morse (1995) contends that many researchers claim they have reached saturation without proving that they have achieved it. However, Charmaz (2006) concludes that saturation, sampling, and sorting creates robust categories and sound analysis, with saturation reached when the data no longer provides any new theoretical insights, revision or development of the core categories. The principles outlined by Charmaz (2006) were fully applicable to this study.

With any qualitative research study the involvement of the researcher is a key area of consideration as discussed below.

RESEARCHER INVOLVEMENT

The importance of objectivity in relation to the role of the researcher was a significant consideration throughout the study. Sarantakos (2005) posits that objectivity is a key research principle which must be actively enacted without any interference, prejudice or bias to ensure that the social reality in the research process is presented as it is, and not as the researcher wants or imagines it to be.

In relation to this study, the researcher had engaged for more than 20 years in a support and advocacy capacity with families whose loved ones were disappeared in NI's Conflict. Through her work with victims and survivors, the researcher was very aware that a key impact of the conflict on those affected by the violence was a reduced or even shattered trust in those outside the family unit. The researcher had already established a relationship of trust with the families which enabled engagement by those who would never have participated in a research study with someone unknown to them. It was important that the families' voices were heard during the course of this research process. Tungohan (2020) posits that studies that are borne out of advocacy have the potential to improve the situation of under-represented groups. Given that the families of the Disappeared of NI's Conflict had not previously engaged in any academic study and their voices had been unheard within academia, it was extremely important to have their engagement in this study; their participation enabled the researcher to access the untold story of the impact of their loved ones' disappearances. Jones (2020a) contends that, whilst there may be concern about

objectivity in research studies that have arisen out of advocacy, advocacy does not undermine the principle of objectivity; rather, the researcher needs to ensure that there is academic rigor through stronger evidence based strategies. The researcher in this study actively worked to promote this principle.

In exploring the principle of objectivity, Bird (2020) contends that it is wrongly assumed that objectivity means that research should be detached, judgement free or impersonal, and that researchers should not be influenced by those whom they are studying. He suggests that, instead, objectivity is met by ensuring that all accounts offered by participants reflect their reality. It was, therefore, imperative that the researcher listened actively and was engaged in the accounts shared by the research participants. Bird (2020) adds that these accounts must be represented honestly, using measures and terms of reference that enable both open comparison and verification outside the area of study. The researcher recognised that her prior work with the families could introduce bias or the adoption of a particular position, however, by having cognisance of this (and by actively following through the Ground Theory process with strong evidenced based strategies such as active engagement with the supervisor and peers) she was able to reduce any potential risk regarding blurred objectivity.

In establishing the study, it was also important to consider whether the participants might have had preconceived ideas about the researcher. Because of this, she sought, in presenting the research, to make sure that they were aware that they had a choice whether to participate or not, and that she was approaching the study with an open mind. Whilst there were shared assumptions and understandings, participants were made aware that the researcher would ask them about their use of terminology and their reference to events; and they were also informed that non engagement in the study would in no way affect any aspect of service provision. It was important to keep the principle of objectivity continually under review throughout the study, although the literature does also recognise the strengths in having the researcher actively engaged in the research process. For example, Becker (2008); Timmermans and Tavory (2012) and Zawacki (2017), reject the notion of objectivity, contending that research encourages inter-subjectivity, i.e. a closeness between the elements of the research process and the active engagement of the researcher in the whole process. It is through active engagement with hard to reach participants, in which their experiences are explored within the broader socio political context, that a deeper understanding of the issues

under study is possible (Zawacki 2017). The researcher's prior position and work was, therefore, not detrimental to the study.

Throughout the research study care was taken to ensure that there was no blurring of boundaries between the role of researcher and the role of advocate. The researcher formed a small Advisory Panel that she could consult with in relation to this study see (Appendix IV). This was separate to, and did not impact upon, the direction and guidance provided by her supervisor. The Advisory Panel was in place solely for counsel, given that searches for some of the disappeared were ongoing during the course of the data collection phase, and other work relevant to the cases of the disappeared was being discussed. It was, therefore, imperative to have a clear separation, from an ethical perspective, between the role of researcher and the responsibilities associated with being an advocate.

In many cases, getting access through gate keepers is one of the most challenging tasks facing researchers. The difficulties are often compounded when the subject area is sensitive. It can be argued that when research relates to NI's Conflict, there is an added layer of sensitivity. Smyth (1998) referred to the correlation between the conflict and silence, contending that, in Northern Ireland, a culture of silence that often arises in situations of war and violent conflict also developed around the dangerous and traumatic elements of the conflict. It is this perceived danger that has resulted in the dearth of academic study into issues regarding the impact of the conflict prior to the Good Friday Peace Agreement in 1998 (Smyth & Robinson 2001). Whilst there may have been a perceived lack of engagement by researchers, equally, there was a reluctance on the part of those bereaved or injured to contribute to any study. In the case of those disappeared, this reluctance was exacerbated by the proximity of those responsible for the disappearances within their communities. There were, therefore, direct benefits for the researcher in being known to the family members for in excess of two decades. Jain (2017) suggests that a researcher's positionality and the relationships formed through personal, social and emotional exchange, governs data collection, leading to increased engagement from participants and increased knowledge of the subject area. Whilst many Grounded Theorists call for emotional detachment and distance in conducting and analysing data generated (Glaser and Strauss 2006), Jain argues that this is often unattainable as researchers are not isolated from the social world. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) posit that, social research involves participating in the social world and reflecting on the outcomes

from this participation. The researcher in this study was not isolated from the world in which the participants operated, so the key issue was managing this appropriately from an ethical perspective.

There were many advantages for the researcher in having an awareness of the sensitivities relating to potential participants, including knowledge of significant anniversaries or other related family dates; as well as an awareness of family dynamics and the specifics of the individual cases. Additionally, familiarity with the researcher enabled the participants to feel that they could be open regarding the issues discussed. This trust was essential because, as McCosker et al (2001) point out, there is an inherent danger in doing research which tends to generate an emotional response in areas that are perceived to be private, traumatic, sacred or closed to others outside the family. The researcher was deeply aware that questions could generate an emotional response and, therefore, issues regarding safety, ensuring support and the adherence to full ethical considerations were proactively addressed. The challenge is in uncovering the complexity surrounding the emotional experiences of the interviewee, and affording the individual time and space whilst maintaining the focus of the research (Stewart 2016).

The pros and cons of insider knowledge have received much academic scrutiny (Dickson- Swift et al 2007; Jain 2017; and Costley et al 2010). Costley et al (2010) suggest that, as an insider, you have an advanced level of knowledge through your expertise and experience in your area of practice. While Dickson- Swift et al (2007) contend that there are many advantages to being an 'insider researcher' given the challenges of building rapport; dealing with participant attachment; managing vulnerability; and listening to untold stories. Jain (2017), however, argues that in insider researcher situations, relationships and positionality are important determinants in research, particularly in sensitive areas with those who have been oppressed and marginalised. Far from insider engagement invalidating research, Jain (2017) posits that it often produces a direct impact for the client group through the availability of new knowledge and thinking about the subject area, and that this validates the researcher's primary motivation for conducting the research study. Ultimately, this research contributes to the advancement of academic study in the area of practice in question which was important in the context, and in respect of the implications of disappearance for the families concerned.

While there were many positives noted from the establishment of prior relationships, particularly in sensitive areas such as dealing with the aftermath of conflict, there were also disadvantages that had to be considered in this study. Costley et al (2010) posit that many insider researchers can suffer from subjectivity; impartiality; having a vested interest in certain results being achieved; or a lack of an objective view on the data. Murray and Lawrence (2000) suggest that criticism regarding insider bias and validity is an important consideration and should receive due attention. They propose several steps that the researcher should take to guard against this bias, including attention to participant feedback; evaluation of data triangulation; and an awareness of the issues being presented by participants. Triangulation involved using several overlapping approaches to gather data; the continual examination and reexamination of the data; extensive engagement that involved repeat interviews with the participants and discussion with the supervisor (Denzin 2021). This continued for the duration of the project. These principles were strictly adhered to in this study. Dickson-Swift et al (2007) also urge caution regarding the management of mental and physical exhaustion for researchers associated with the process of undertaking in depth interviews in sensitive areas of practice. Given that the participants felt at ease with the researcher in this case, there was a significant degree of openness from them regarding the issues discussed. The researcher was aware that this could happen, not only at the time of the interviews, but also throughout the intensity of the data analysis; every effort was made to have support available for both the participants and the researcher should the need arise.

It is clear that in research processes where the researchers are known to the participants, the challenge of conflicting roles needs to be carefully managed, particularly in studies involving in depth interviews (Johnson and Clarke 2003). On one level, there can be the feeling of being fortunate, or of having an advantage, when individuals engage in an open way in interviews. The feeling of privilege - being allowed to hear personal accounts of individuals' lives - is reflected in the literature (Rosenblatt and Fisher 1993, Sullivan 1998 and Dickson- Swift et al 2007). However, this feeling of privilege may also lead to additional feelings of responsibility for the researcher. Dickson- Swift et al (2007) posit that researchers are often left feeling guilty or obliged to help interviewees faced with life changing events. In this study, the researcher did, indeed, feel privileged in relation to the participants' willingness to engage; this brought with it, however, an additional sense of responsibility to ensure that the study

would be completed to the highest standards; that it would be ethically sound, both for the participants and for the researcher's home institute; and, critically, that it would in no way be detrimental to any active search process being undertaken for those still disappeared.

The perceived power relationships between researchers and participants do not always privilege the researcher as the identity of the researcher can be as open to question, critique or, indeed, threat as the marginalised groups engaged with in the research study (Yassour and Borochowitz 2012). This is crucially important in relation to NI's Conflict as the perceived identity or background of the researcher may be openly questioned, and it may, for example, be implied that the researcher has an agenda if his/her research findings are unpalatable to sections of the community, or to those with vested interests within the community or across wider society. Breen-Smyth (2018) referred to this as the *'toxic politics of victimhood'* in Northern Ireland (p230). Honeycutt & Jussim (2020) argue that there is no reason to suppose that researchers may not display errors, biases or distortions based on tribal loyalties. However, Lawless and Bowden (2014) contend that, whilst studies may generate findings that are not socially or politically palatable, if these are not reported fully then this displays, not only a 'wilful blindness', but also distortions and biases which are unethical given the responsibility of the researcher to disseminate the findings. The challenge for researcher scrutiny is not restricted to NI's Conflict. Campbell (2017) suggests that conflict presents unique challenges, not only around researcher scrutiny, but also around key issues such as confidentiality, informed consent, risk benefit analysis and beneficence. These require careful thought and, in some cases, more nuanced guidelines and training to ensure that they do not present a malign influence in the study.

One final area to be considered was the challenge of maintaining emotional detachment without this detachment leading to a process of desensitisation. Jain (2017) suggests that emotional detachment and distance are viewed as prerequisites to achieving unbiased data and also to ensuring the correct equilibrium between insider and outsider engagement. However, Jain (2017) acknowledges that emotional detachment and distance do not recognise that researchers are participating in a social world, operating in a variety of roles, receiving information from a wide variety of sources, including family, friends, colleagues or the public and through social media and mainstream media outlets. It is debatable, therefore,

whether anyone can come to a research study with emotional detachment and distance, particularly in sensitive areas of study.

Alongside detachment, the issue of desensitisation is equally important. Given that the researcher had worked in the field of victim and survivor support for some time, it was important to acknowledge that she could have been desensitised to the impact of the experience of loss or disappearance. Concerns over desensitisation have been reflected throughout the literature (Morgan and Krone 2001; Melrose 2002). Dickson Swift et al (2007) contend that there is always a danger that the abnormal may become the normal. This was an important factor to bear in mind in addressing any insider bias. As the researcher had worked on the issue of the disappeared for over two decades it was impossible for her to have either emotional detachment or distance, and so the charge of desensitisation was always a possibility. This risk was, however, mitigated by ensuring that Charmaz's process of Grounded Theory was followed; by taking the steps recommended by Murray and Lawrence (2000), as outlined above; and by being subject to robust supervision. Being fully aware of the ethical challenges that could arise was also of prime importance, as discussed below.

ETHICAL ISSUES

The foundation of any research study is ensuring that it is ethically grounded. Dickson-Swift et al (2007) posit that researchers need to work from a clear moral and ethical basis in which the participants' contribution is acknowledged, respected and treated with discretion – it is more than words, or signing a form to gather information - the researcher is gaining access to participants' lives and their experiences, and throughout this process they are imparting deeply personal information. When the research deals with what are perceived to be vulnerable groups there are additional considerations that need to be taken into account.

Connolly (2003) proposed three ethical principles for researchers in relation to their conduct and behaviour. These are that they should:

1. *conduct their professional work with integrity and in such a way not to jeopardise future research, the public standing of researchers or the ability of others to publish and promote the findings of their research;*
2. *respect the rights and dignity of all those involved in or affected by their research; and*
3. *ensure as far as possible the physical, social and psychological well- being of all those who take part in their research or are subsequently affected by it* (p5).

When the subject of the research is perceived to be 'vulnerable', additional considerations will apply. Alexander et al (2018) define vulnerability as a multifaceted concept that is continually being advanced in response to societal values and beliefs. It generally includes individuals of all ages who are at risk of exploitation. Ford et al (2009) contend that individuals within populations exposed to conflict have heightened vulnerability resulting from physical and mental distress, the collapse of normal coping mechanisms, and deliberate targeting. This highlights why, in all research studies on sensitive topics, ethical processes and stringent safeguards need to be firmly in place. Vulnerability should not be automatically viewed as stopping all research, rather it should be viewed as a signal to have proper safeguards in place for all participants (Kipnis 2001).

Despite the fact that conflicts are widespread across the world, impacting directly on the lives of many individuals, families and communities, Summerfield (1995) contends that there is a relative dearth of published information on the plight, health status and challenges facing thousands of people affected on a daily basis. In part, he argues, this may be due to a reluctance to research vulnerable people affected by conflict. However, the literature reflects other factors which may impede research activity, including accessibility and security (Vlassenroot 2006); instability of conflict areas (Reilly et al 1994); limited infrastructure; lack of resources (Lundy and McGovern 2008); and perceived danger that may arise for participants and researchers (Smyth & Robinson 2001).

The scarcity of published research findings extends further, with only limited literature available on the ethics of research in conflict and post conflict environments (Campbell 2010). Ford et al (2009) call for greater care and consideration for research participants living in conflict torn areas in relation to the research methods utilised; the depth and level of information required; the harm-benefit ratio for potential participants; the justification and necessity of undertaking such research; and the established ethical requirements of undertaking such studies. One of the central questions in any study is whether the benefit of undertaking the research outweighs any potential harm? This question requires careful consideration when considering any research with vulnerable groups. Alexander et al (2018) argue that well-meaning and unfounded assumptions about vulnerability may limit research

activity and may only serve to further stigmatise, devalue and marginalise groups and individuals.

The focus of the area of study determines the research methods chosen as the most appropriate to elicit the information required. Connolly (2003) suggests that ethical issues should not be confused with methodological issues. He states that a study that uses good techniques of data collection with the production of important findings might pay scant regard to ethical considerations. Conversely, a study may conform to the highest ethical standards but be methodologically flawed and produce little by way of academic rigour. This highlights why the methodology and validity of the research tool, underpinned by very clear ethical principles and processes, needs to be of the highest standard and adapted to the particular situation/ conflict. In addition, adapting the methodology to ensure that the research processes are culturally sensitive is essential (Robins 2010).

The research methodology chosen for this study was felt to be appropriate and sensitive to the needs of the participant group involved, with careful consideration being given to a harm/ benefit ratio; the potential for re-traumatisation, harassment, and retaliation; as well as a sense of further traumatic loss, given the subject area (Bell 2001, Connolly 2003, Lundy and McGovern 2006). The protection of research participants throughout the study was a central concern. The principle of informed consent and what this meant in practice was of fundamental importance, particularly as the participants had engaged with the researcher previously. The researcher was aware that there would have been an inherent assumption on the part of the participants that she would ensure that any risks would be fully addressed. Mindful of the responsibilities to ensure safe and ethical practice, the researcher took a number of steps to ensure that informed consent was given as outlined below.

When all of the issues regarding the appropriateness of the methodology were fully reviewed, an application for ethical approval was submitted to University College Cork (UCC) adhering to their research code of practice. This included a detailed application, informed consent contract, information sheet and support organisations, as included in Appendices I-III. Permission for the study was granted by SREC the Social Research Ethics Committee of UCC in 2016.

Given that the study group was a small and often well-known group of families the protection of the participants' identities was of paramount concern to the researcher. Certain details could immediately identify families or even individuals. This included, for example, the gender of the person disappeared; the location of where they went missing; or small details about the circumstances that would be immediately identifiable given the publicity surrounding the cases. The other challenge was that participants might talk about aspects of their story that they had not revealed to other members of their family in order to protect them. Dickson-Swift et al (2007) contend that sharing intimate or unknown details of their lives, can change participants' expectations. They argued that the researcher can then become a type of '*secret keeper*' (p338). The researcher was very mindful of the need for individual and family protection. Participants were informed that they would have full access to the transcript of their interview and that any quotes attributable to them would be shared before publication. The issues around protection of identity and ensuring anonymity were essential (Stewart 2016).

A concern discussed throughout the literature is the issue of the dynamics of power in relationships between those being researched and the researcher. Given that the researcher had worked with some of the families, there was a concern that they may have felt duty bound to participate. Daly (1992) refers to the principle of reciprocity in research. The researcher was conscious that she had worked with the families for a number of years and that they might, therefore, have felt that they wanted to reciprocate by engaging in the study. This highlighted the need for clear information and guidelines, particularly regarding the principles of non-obligation to participate – it was stressed at the outset that participation was entirely voluntary, and would in no way impact upon any services or engagement with the researcher.

Prior relationships and knowledge pose challenges for any researcher. Dickson-Swift et al (2007) contend that - whilst there are many benefits to having prior engagement - boundary blurring, leaving the relationship, and self-care all pose challenges for any researcher. However, Sikweyiya and Jewkes (2013) argue that it cannot be assumed that participants, even in studies which are deemed sensitive, cannot protect themselves from harm. They termed this the *'agency of participants'* (p 1000). Alexander et al (2018) suggest that, whilst it would be dangerous to assume that each participant had the same level of agency (or even

where there is a standard power ratio in the researcher/ participant relationship), over-looking an individual's ability to protect themselves from harm may be seen as entering into the territory of paternalism. The impact, they argue, is that the voices of those often marginalised are not heard and they remain hidden within our society.

Within all areas of research, particularly that concerning victims and survivors of NI's Conflict, there are ethically challenging nuances that need to be taken into account. In relation to interviews with those impacted by violence in the context of the conflict, further clarification regarding the parameters of confidentiality was also raised. Throughout the study the researcher was aware of the need for strict confidentiality, however this confidentiality was not absolute. As per the ethics statement to SREC and as discussed with each participant, the researcher would at all times seek to ensure anonymity by removing identifiers, but there were instances where confidentiality could not be guaranteed. The most concerning issue that had the potential to emerge was participants identifying who they *knew* to be involved in a disappearance, and the responsibility on the researcher to share this information with state authorities. Participants were reminded of this obligation on the researcher pre interview and so the issue did not arise. Regarding anonymity, given the difficulty in ensuring every statement did not identify the participant, each quote included in this thesis was shared with the participants prior to submission of the work for examination. This was to ensure that every individual was happy with 1) the inclusion of the quote and 2) aware of any potentially identifying features no matter how obscure. All participants specifically approved the use of anonymised quotes for this thesis.

As per the ethics permission sought for this study, all participants had the right to withdraw from this study, and the option remained available to the participants for up to six months after the data collection. This extended withdrawal period was to allow individuals the assurance that they were central to this process and their needs were considered at all times. At no point did any participants seek to withdraw their data.

Protecting participants was of paramount concern to the researcher. Throughout the study the researcher was aware of the need for the study to be ethically sound and at all times a safe, non-traumatising and conducive place for those participants engaged in the study.

CHOOSING DATA COLLECTION METHODS

SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Intensive semi-structured interviewing lends itself to the process of Grounded Theory as it allows for flexibility and facilitates probing for further clarification. It also enables the researcher to go back to the participants to gather more focused data in order to follow through on themes or issues that emerge during the course of the data collection. In addition, it provides the opportunity for participants to give a spontaneous answer, which was important in this study given the layers of protection the families of those disappeared have adopted over the years. As Charmaz (2006) postulates,

> *'Intensive qualitative interviewing fits grounded theory methods particularly well. Both grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open ended, yet directed, shaped yet emergent and paced yet unrestricted'* (p28).

There are many benefits of using an interview process with Grounded Theory. The interview can, for example, elicit the experience and insight of participants through an in depth exploration of an aspect of life. Even when issues are perceived as sensitive, participants may report that they have benefitted therapeutically from research interviews. Often, they find it cathartic, or report that they have gained new knowledge or perspectives, or have experienced feelings of altruism (Rivlin et al 2012; Rossetto 2014; Alexander et al 2018 and Pascoe Leahy 2021). Halek et al (2005) contend that the process of talking about a previously undisclosed event contributes to a feeling of release and relief. Similarly, Scott et al (2002) conclude that studies examining traumatic experiences should not be discounted as often bereaved people are keen to contribute, and may find the experience beneficial. They suggest that it is often the 'gate keepers' or those on ethics boards that need convincing given the sensitivities around such studies.

The value of conducting interviews with people who have been rendered silent was considered by Reinharz and Chase (2001) in a study on the sensitivities of interviewing vulnerable women. They highlighted that the quality of women's responses varied due to their experience of being silenced about the topic. They suggested that, whilst feeling silenced about a topic was a determining factor in how participants perceived their engagement with researchers, equally, the circumstances of participants' lives and the skills

of the interviewer were important factors for consideration. Pascoe Leahy (2021) referred to the ethics of reciprocity, in which participants may feel that they are contributing to a greater purpose, such as breaking the silence around issues that have personal significance through their involvement in the study. Contributing to increased knowledge and greater public awareness of the use of disappearance in NI's Conflict may have been a motivating factor for some participants in this study.

The drawbacks of interviews also had to be considered. Some of the challenges of using interviews cited within the literature concern the lack of anonymity; bias on the part of the researcher; or the misinterpretation of facts or statements (Mercer 2007). A smaller sample size that inhibits the study and its time consuming nature, were also viewed as drawbacks (Rahman 2017); while Silverman (2010) suggests that focusing on meanings and experiences may result in cultural sensitivities being overlooked. Ensuring that these issues were actively considered and addressed was essential. The issue that was harder to mitigate against was causing distress, as participants were recounting traumatic experiences (Carlson et al 2008). Carlson et al (2008) postulate that there is an interesting paradox – often, recounting the past, which may prove distressing, leads to new insight and feeling validated which many report as beneficial. They suggest that what may cause upset in interviews about trauma may be interwoven with what is useful about participating. Alexander et al (2018) concur with this view. In a comprehensive systematic review of the experiences of vulnerable people participating in research studies they concluded that any risks were significantly outweighed by the benefits, provided the correct parameters around strong research principles were applied.

Taking all of these factors into consideration, and the inherent sensitivities around the area of study, the interview process was deemed to provide the most suitable approach to elicit the experiences and insights of the family members of those disappeared. Given that the researcher was known to the participants it was, however, important to actively review the process to ensure that issues identified as drawbacks (such as anonymity; bias on the part of the researcher; or misinterpretation of data based on prior engagement) were fully considered. Charmaz (2006) contends that professional status, the dynamics of power, race, age, gender and context of the research area may affect the content and direction of an

interview. These factors were minimised by ensuring that careful consideration and regular and ongoing discussion was held with the researcher's supervisor, and that a clear audit trail was retained.

RESEARCH JOURNAL

The completion of a research journal was considered an invaluable data collection process to sit alongside the completion of semi structured interviews. Newbury (2001) contends that a research journal facilitates reflective thinking and is central to the research process in that observations, thoughts and questions are recorded as they happen.

Schatzman and Strauss (1973) refer to the function of a research journal as being a mechanism for *'ordered creativity'* (p105). While Breheny et al (2020) suggests that the benefit of a journal is the immediacy of recording experiences which would be otherwise lost, or the significance altered in the research process if the recording was made at a later time. In this study the researcher found that recording a journal was a useful process, particularly when analysing the interviews, as it enabled her to review the interviews in the context of what else was happening at that time, as well as issues identified by the participants and key areas of discussion. Burgess (1981) suggests three main elements that should be included in a journal: substantive account; methodological account; and analytic account. The substantive account represents a chronological account of those who have been interviewed and any observations. The methodological account includes an outline of the researcher's engagement and any observations arising out of the interviews. Finally, the analytical account encompasses the questions that were asked and participants' responses to them; the themes and issues emerging from the interviews or from participants' post interview; and any areas where the researcher felt further clarification was required.

A personal journal in Grounded Theory studies facilitates the researcher to record his or her views of the phenomenon (Bulawa 2014; Busetto et al 2020). Whilst the researcher retains a record and description of what took place in the interviews, the more tangible benefit is that it allows for theoretical themes and concepts to be documented, and for other areas requiring exploration to be identified as the data collection and analysis evolved. This is a fundamental component of the Grounded Theory approach.

Jain (2017) argues that it is not just emerging data that should be recorded, but also feelings of frustration with interviews as this often serves as crucial data at a later stage in the research process.

METHODS

Outline This project involved conducting semi structured interviews with multiple generations of the surviving family members of individuals who were disappeared by republican paramilitaries in Northern Ireland between 1972 and 2003. The data for this project also included a research journal populated by the researcher during the data collection and analysis process.

Ethical permission was sought from the Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) of UCC – permission was granted prior to the commencement of data collection.

Advertising the study and forwarding information: A comprehensive information leaflet was developed outlining the aims and objectives of the study, why it was being undertaken and what was involved in it. This included ethical permission details, details of supervision, details of support structures etc. This was circulated to all those on a 'Families of the Disappeared' contact database developed by the WAVE Trauma Centre. The database contains individuals who are active in an advocacy and campaigning capacity in respect of the Disappeared, and those who are not. Information was forwarded to 80 potential participants, 40 individuals agreed to participant in response to the information forwarded. All of the participants were known to the researcher. None of the participants withdrew from the study. It was important to have as representative a sample as possible. The individuals in this database have previously consented to their details being held and have agreed to receive information on services, research or monitoring and evaluation processes.

From the outset, the researcher provided information on the study and its rationale. As is the case with many campaign or support initiatives, family members often elect a spokesperson as a type of gate keeper, through whom any external requests are routed. It would have been easy for each family to nominate a spokesperson for this research study, and it was noticeable during interviews that those family members who have lobbied and engaged in media interviews were much more comfortable, and less hesitant, conducting interviews. However,

whilst it was important to include these individuals, it was vital to also move beyond these voices, to engage with those who had not spoken before - often other members of the family have an important contribution to make but remain silent. The researcher ensured, therefore, that those less public within each of the families were also contacted about the study; this helped to guarantee as representative a sample as possible. This was important as it prevented what Sandelowski (1993) refers to as an *'elite bias'* in which those who often come forward to participate in studies are the most accessible; the most articulate and reflective; are viewed as the most knowledgeable around the event and its ramifications; or, are elevated within the group (p6).

Follow up phone contact: When the information was forwarded, the opportunity for further clarification was provided by phone. Time was given to allow family members to decide if they would like to engage in the study. If they were interested they contacted the researcher and face to face meetings were arranged.

Engaging with the participants & discussion of process: All participants directed where they wanted the interviews to be held. Most opted for their home, with a smaller group opting for one of WAVE Trauma Centre's premises or in one case a hotel conference room. Each interview was scheduled and time was spent at the start of each interview going through the information sheet and reviewing each section.

Discussion regarding informed consent: When discussion on the research process was complete a consent form was reviewed which outlined the following: that participation was voluntary; that the interviews would be audio recorded, or not, if requested; that participants could withdraw at any stage during the interview process; that permission to use the data could be withdrawn up to six months from the date of interview; that all information given would be stored securely and destroyed after a period of seven years; and that anonymity would be ensured in the write up. Participants were asked to indicate if the researcher could quote extracts of the interview in both the thesis and any subsequent publications. In relation to audio recording, whilst this was preferable, the option not to record, and for the researcher to take notes, was given (no one objected to the use of an audio recorder). The process regarding the transcription of the recordings and the storage of the information was outlined fully.

Within all areas of research, particularly that concerning victims and survivors of conflict, there are ethically challenging nuances that need to be taken into account. In relation to interviews with those impacted by violence in the context of NI's Conflict, further clarification regarding the parameters of confidentiality was also raised. For example, there was a risk that family members might speak openly about who they suspected might have been involved in their loved one's disappearance, or who might have had knowledge about the circumstances of the disappearance. A key issue raised within the consent forms was the fact that any information provided in the study, that could relate to current or future criminal investigations, could not be kept confidential and could be accessed by police or the security services. This was an important part of the pre-discussion with participants regarding protecting themselves in the course of the interviews - ensuring their protection was of paramount concern. Kvale (1996) highlights the challenges of dealing with disclosure, stating that individuals may leave themselves open to repercussions if they self-disclose information that they later regret, given the openness and intimacy of the interview process. According to Alexander et al (2018), however, protection must be balanced and not progress to making decisions for the participants. As a researcher there was an obligation to ensure safe parameters were clearly set and adhered to throughout the study, however, ultimately the decision regarding appropriate disclosure and engagement rested with the participants. All participants were made aware that during the course of the interview they could withdraw at any stage, or not answer any questions or topics that they felt uncomfortable talking about.

Participant Breakdown in the study: 40 participants engaged in the study. The following table below details the participants: relationship to the individual disappeared; gender; age bracket; status of recovery; age at the time of the disappearance; and, the duration of the disappearance of their loved one. Figure 5, also below, shows the total number of participants broken down by the nature of the relationship to the individual disappeared and the number of interviews undertaken.

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Peake, S. 2022. No ordinary death: the Disappeared of Northern Ireland's conflict. PhD Thesis, University College Cork.

Please note that Figure 5 (pp. 133-134) is unavailable due to a request by the author.

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Participants	Number of Participants
Parent	3
Child	7
Sibling	23
Family member	7
Total number of participants	40
Total number of interviews transcribed	45
Total number of interviews analysed	45

Figure 6 Total number of interviews conducted, transcribed and analysed.

The individual interviews conducted with direct family members of the disappeared were the central element of the Grounded Theory analysis. In a small number of cases further repeat interviews were conducted to explore further themes that had arisen in the analysis, or to clarify data given. A research journal was recorded in tandem. This journal was for the purpose of memo-ing, but also for recoding the reflections of the researcher.

The overall sample produced a number of variations across a range of categories, as denoted in Figures 7 to 11.

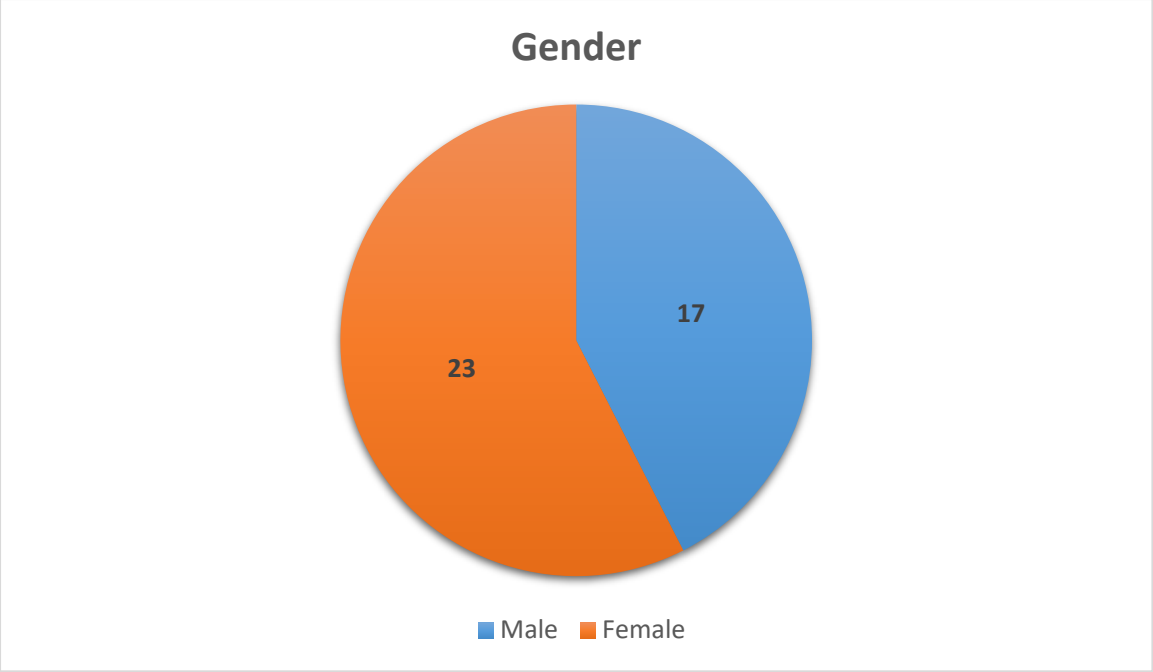


Figure 7 Gender of participants

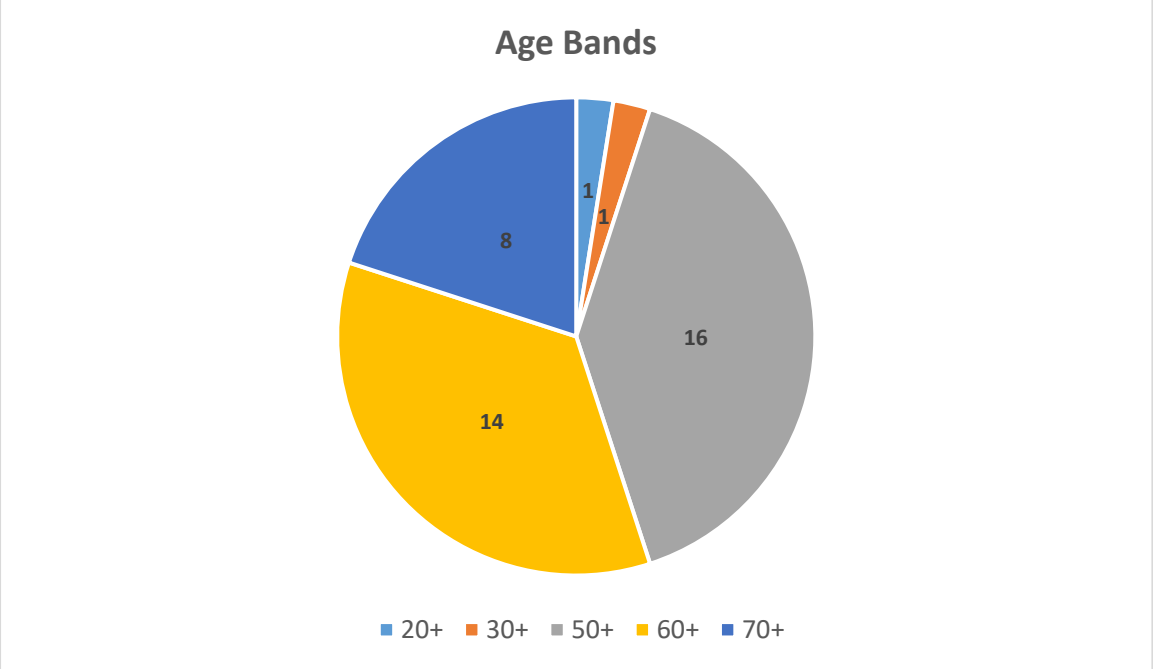


Figure 8 Age of participants

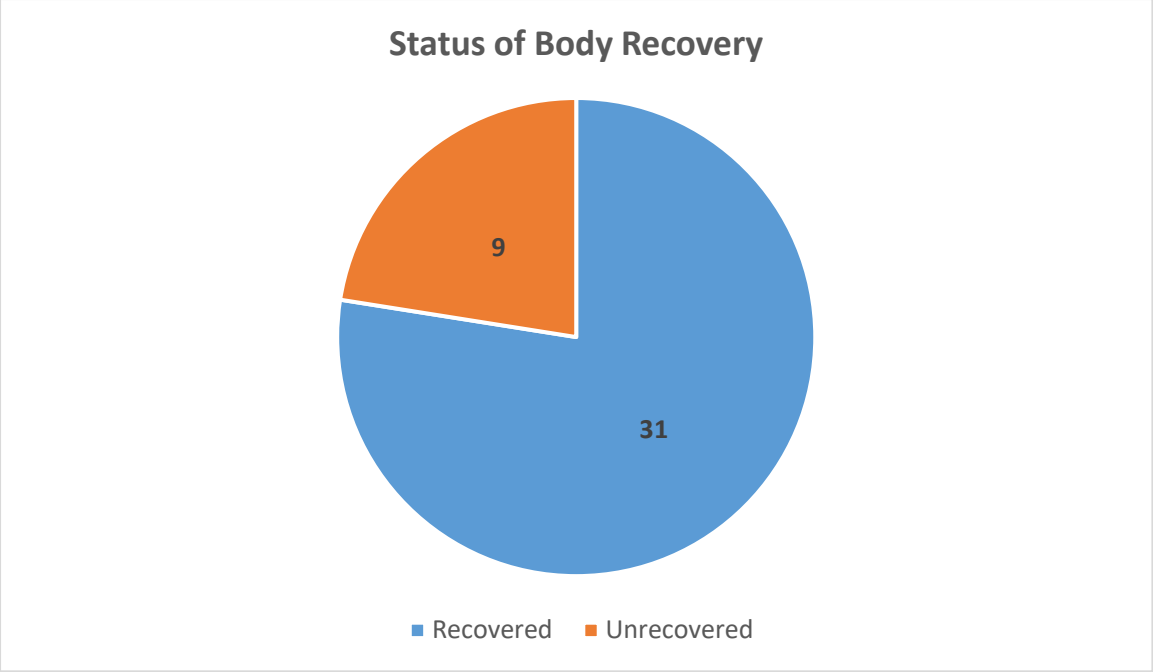


Figure 9 Status of body recovery

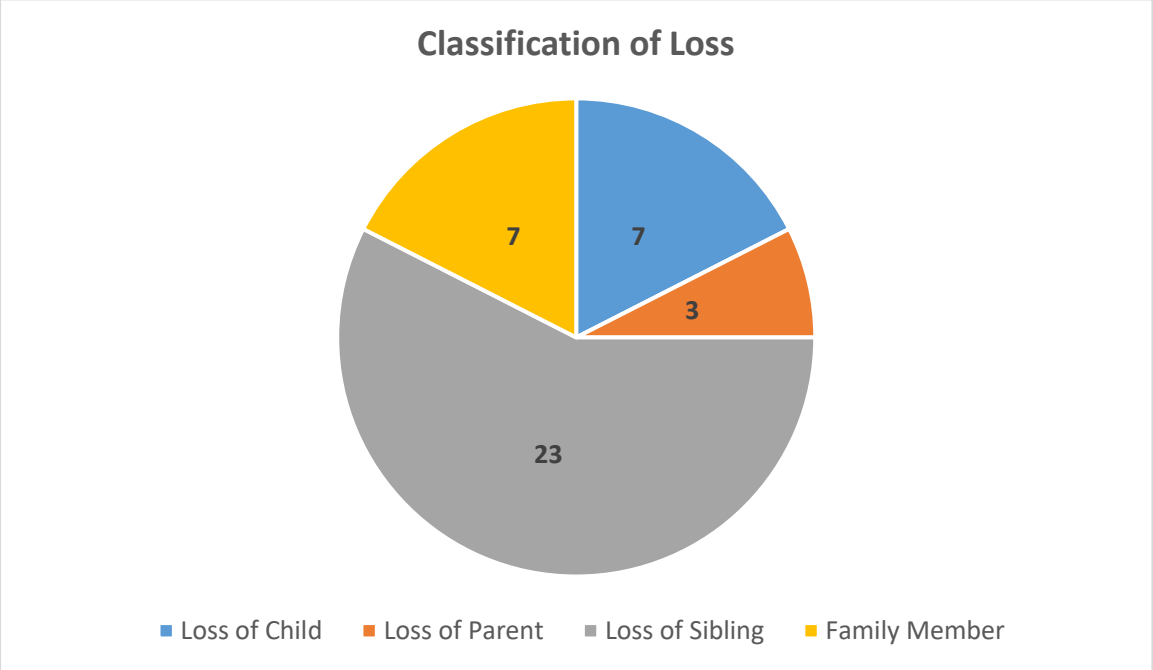


Figure 10 Classification of loss

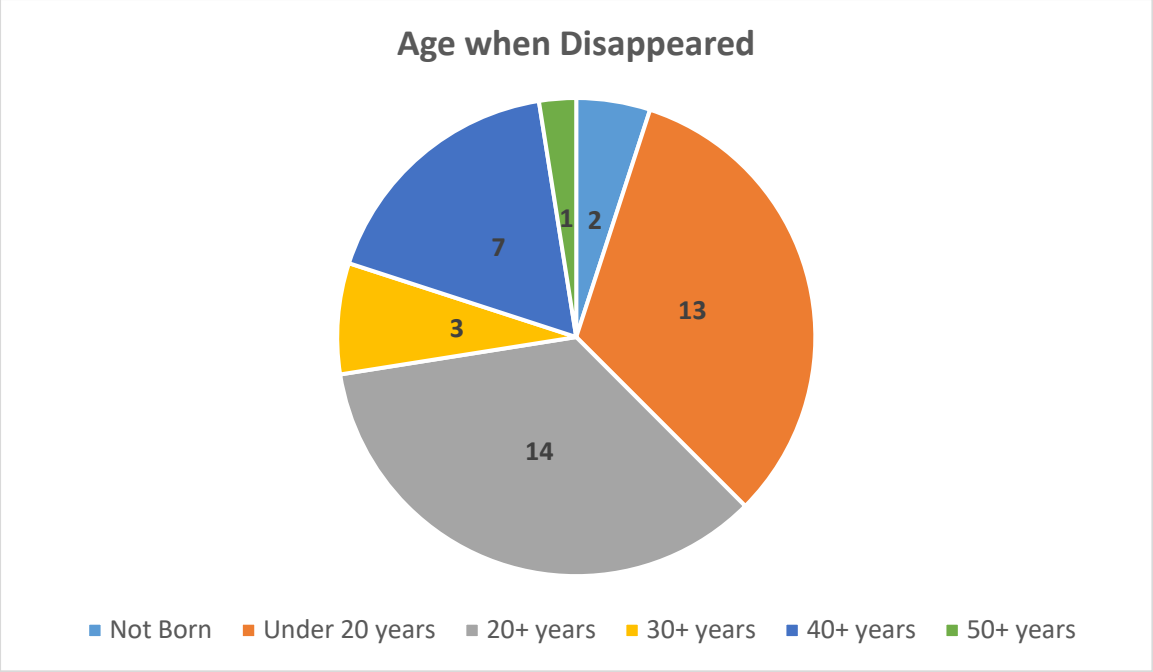


Figure 11 Age when disappeared

Participants' Characteristics: In this study, all of the participants, with the exception of two, had direct experience of having a parent, sibling, child, or direct family member disappeared. For the purposes of the research, the family member group was deemed to include maternal aunt, niece/nephew and brother/sister in law, who were involved in the search for their respective family members at the time of the disappearance. The two participants born after the disappearance took place have assumed prominent roles in their respective families, and active roles in a support group for those families of the Disappeared still campaigning for the return of their loved ones.

All participants were over 18 years of age. The profile of the participant group was diverse. The disappearances of individuals took place between 1972 and the mid 2000's, with all having been perpetrated by republican paramilitaries.

The participant characteristics reflect that 30 participants were under the age of 30 when the disappearance took place. All of the participants interviewed, with the exception of two, were over 50 years of age at the time of interview. This was not a deliberate aspect of sampling; it reflects the fact that the majority of disappearances took place over four decades ago.

Data collection began in 2016 and was completed by 2018. There was further engagement with the participants for the purposes of clarification up until the submission of the thesis

Undertaking semi-structured interviews: A semi-structured interview schedule was utilised for this study, as detailed in Appendix V. The researcher approached each interview with open ended questions. This was used as a guide only, and often topics arose organically during the discussion. The interview schedule allowed for flexibility and facilitated the researcher to gain further clarification. It also enables the researcher to go back to the participants to gather more focused data in order to follow through on themes or issues that emerged during the course of the data collection.

For the participants, there was also the potential for their answers to be shaped by what they felt the researcher might be interested in. The researcher sought to reduce any potential bias by providing the same introduction before each interview; she also encouraged participants to assume that she was new to the issue of the disappeared or their story in relation to the questions she would ask in the interview schedule.

The length of interviews varied from 45 minutes to over two hours. In some cases further interviews had to be scheduled to enable the interview to be completed to enable clarification and further information to be sought. All interviews were recorded, with the participant's permission; this facilitated verbatim transcriptions. They were also conducted in a venue chosen by the participant which included their home; a WAVE Centre; or a conference room in a hotel.

Achieving Saturation: saturation in this study was achieved by interviewing until no new theoretical insights were forthcoming from the data and repeat analysis and comparison of the data indicated there were no new directions to take (Charmaz 2006). If clarification or further exploration was required further interviews with new participants were scheduled or repeat interviews were conducted with previous participants. When no new significant themes emerged, it was concluded that saturation had been achieved after 30 interviews. A further 10 interviews however were undertaken, and this confirmed no further data collection was required.

Equipment Used: The equipment used in the study was:

- Sanyo digital recorder and an Apple iPad voice memo facility
- Interview Schedule (Appendix V)
- Information sheet including contact details and supervisor details if required by participants
- Support leaflet identifying a variety of support groups
- Lenovo Think Pad Computer
- NVIVO 11 (License from University College Cork)

Recording a Research Journal: A journal was retained throughout the data collection phase of the study. The journal recorded the researcher's reflections on the process of data collection – when, for example, did the role of insider researcher matter or not matter; what issues and themes came to the fore? It also included observations and reflections from the interview process. As an insider, the researcher was also aware of the obligations she felt around the operational delivery of the study given the personal working relationships that were in place.

Any issues which emerged in the interviews, or difficulties noted with the wording or any adaptations of questions, were also recorded. The journal was invaluable post interview as participants often reflected on their input and contacted the researcher to provide additional information or documents.

Discussion and establishing mechanisms of follow up support: After each interview the researcher spent time with the interviewee to offer support; a further phone call was made to each individual later in the day, or the next day, to check how they were feeling. Often, this resulted in further information or points being raised by the interviewee that they felt needed to be shared with the interviewer.

The need for support mechanisms in research is of paramount importance, particularly when the research involves the vulnerable or a sensitive subject area (Lundy and McGovern 2006; Kinsella and Blau 2013). Throughout this study careful attention was paid to having access to appropriate support in place. The researcher had, for example, drafted a comprehensive

support leaflet providing information and contact details for external organisations that the families could engage with for support (Appendix III). A key issue highlighted in the leaflet of invitation to participate in the study was the option of not engaging, or being able to withdraw at any stage without explanation. Participants were made aware that this would not impact on their access to the services or initiatives provided for them by the organisation the researcher worked for; nor would it interfere with their ability to seek support from any other member of the team. Support and updates were offered by the researcher throughout the process.

Maintaining strict confidentiality: Throughout the study the researcher was aware of the need for strict confidentiality; this extended even to those within the participant group. Individuals were not made aware of who else had been interviewed unless they chose to disclose this to each other. From the outset, all interviews were coded - this was essential as most participants continue to live within the same community as those who perpetrated their loss. Safety, security, appropriate reporting; and clear guidance regarding the use, storage and long term availability of data were key ethical considerations throughout the study.

The interviews were fully analysed, through line by line analysis, and the data entered on to the NVIVO package from which comprehensive coding took place, as detailed below.

Data Analysis: Data analysis and data collection were carried out in tandem, utilising the constant comparative method of the Grounded Theory approach based on the work of Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Charmaz (2006). As a result, the interview schedule evolved based on emergent themes. The process involved collecting and analysing data which stimulated the researcher's thinking about incidents; sensitising concepts and identifying categories and their properties; and identifying a point at which saturation was reached (Bulawa 2014). The data generated during this process was extensive. Over 300,000 words were transcribed verbatim, based on over 3500 minutes of recorded interviews. In addition, the research journal generated over 8000 words.

The first step of data analysis was the transcription of the audio recordings of each interview. It was equally important to consider what was not said in the recorded interviews, but might

have been raised after the interview finished. These discussions were recorded and considered in the research journal. By including in the journal features of delivery, and also the stance adopted by the participants during the interviews, an enriched representation of findings was provided (Flick 2018).

The individual interview transcripts were transferred into the NVIVO 11-12 (Qualitative Research Computer Analysis Package) package for line by line coding. Each file was coded to ensure anonymity. Consistent with Grounded Theory analysis, open coding was undertaken first. New codes were continuously added into the NVIVO package as they appeared in the data. Given the volume of data generated, the initial coding was painstakingly slow. The NVIVO package was an important tool in dealing with the vast amount of raw data generated, enabling complex and detailed coding to take place, and providing an organised and structured approach to the analysis.

As data analysis was ongoing, and as it evolved as further interviews were undertaken, greater theoretical sensitivity was required - the researcher responded to nuances and implied meaning, exploring what the person was saying and the reasons why (Corbin and Schuff-Werner 2011). While verbatim transcription is useful, at times the transcripts do not fully reflect the context or the emotions shown by the participants. The researcher found that, while undertaking line by line coding, she often returned to listen to the audio recordings in tandem with reviewing the transcripts in order to ensure that the coding was appropriate to the sentiment expressed by the participant. Memos were invaluable and were recorded as the process was undertaken

As the data analysis progressed, relationships and connections were clustered to develop Tree Nodes. This ensured that the data was linked back to the original interview. Conceptual categories started to emerge as the codes were being continually reviewed and compared following line by line coding. The relationships between the codes emerged as the data process advanced.. An initial 11,500 codes were reduced down to just over 2000, thus increasing their complexity. With further simultaneous comparison, the next level of coding reduced these still further, clustering them down to just over 700, whilst also capturing the relationships between the codes. This iterative review process took over nine months. This involved re listening to interviews, re rereviewing issues identified and categorising and

recategorising these issues into a manageable number of themes. The final level of analysis resulted in 55 codes; this is referred to as theoretical coding. Charmaz (2006) posits that this level of analysis acts as an integrative process that enables codes to move in a theoretical direction. This final stage in the coding process incorporated the analysis of memos.

Memos were an important part of the analysis process, linking the analysis and abstraction that emerged at each level of coding. Bulawa (2014) suggests that memo-ing is an integral part of the process of generating theory as it continually sensitises researchers to their inherent biases. It was, therefore, important that memos were recorded in an orderly way to enable sorting and cross referencing, and connection with other categories and sub categories. Memos assisted in linking the emerging theory to the data, and, through utilising mind mapping and diagrams, the complexity of categories continually evolved, leading to eight theoretical concepts with associated higher and lower order categories. As a final step, the researcher shared the theoretical concepts, as well as the higher and lower order categories that had emerged throughout the interviews, with the participants who were attending a group residential. This facilitated discussion around the commonality of the issues and provided a strong basis for theoretical development. Finally, the data generated an inexhaustible supply of relevant quotes. The researcher selected those that most appropriately illustrated the theoretical concepts under discussion.

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined the justification for the methodological process adopted. All research studies need to be ethically sound and have the necessary academic rigour. When the subject area is sensitive, particularly in the context of political conflict, participants need to have trust and confidence in the process and in the researcher. Both these needs were met. Throughout this study, a wealth of rich data was generated through semi-structured interviews and the collation of a research journal. The eight theoretical concepts are now reflected in the results and discussion chapter which follows.

CHAPTER 6: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

"The Disappeared" is a label used to refer to 18 individuals who were kidnapped, murdered and secretly buried over a period of four decades by republican paramilitaries. The first disappearance was recorded in the early 1970s and the last in 2003. In all, one woman and 17 men were abducted and never seen again. Their stories are harrowing: the disappearance of sole parents leaving children orphaned; babies never having the chance to meet their fathers; and families left broken. To compound the agony, several of the young men abducted had educational or learning difficulties. From the moment of the abduction, the families carried this loss, often alone as it was too dangerous to talk about what had happened. The families' feelings of loss were intensified by the proximity of the paramilitaries within their community and the ravaging impact of the conflict which was going on around them. The families have waited, in some cases up to four decades, for the return of their loved one's body or for information about their murder and secret burial. They are still fighting for information and justice today.

In speaking with the families of the Disappeared, the overwhelming feeling associated with the disappearance was that something cataclysmic had occurred. The event was all consuming for them and took over every aspect of their lives. They report that the disappearance of their loved one was not an acute, one-off event. In many cases it evolved over days, months and years. The families do not focus on a moment of trauma, but on a lifetime spent dealing with it. They speak of the ongoing horror of not knowing what happened to their loved one, the re-victimisation and repeat victimisation by the paramilitaries, their community, the state and the church. This (re) victimisation happened through neglect, marginalisation, labelling, silence, isolation and violence and encompassed every aspect of their lives.

This chapter will review the results of the analysis of the researcher's interviews with the families. Using the Grounded Theory approach the researcher was able to establish eight theoretical concepts to explain and give voice to the experiences of the participants. Each of these theoretical concepts is made up of a series of higher and lower order categories.

The eight theoretical concepts will be considered within this chapter as illustrated in Figure 12 below:

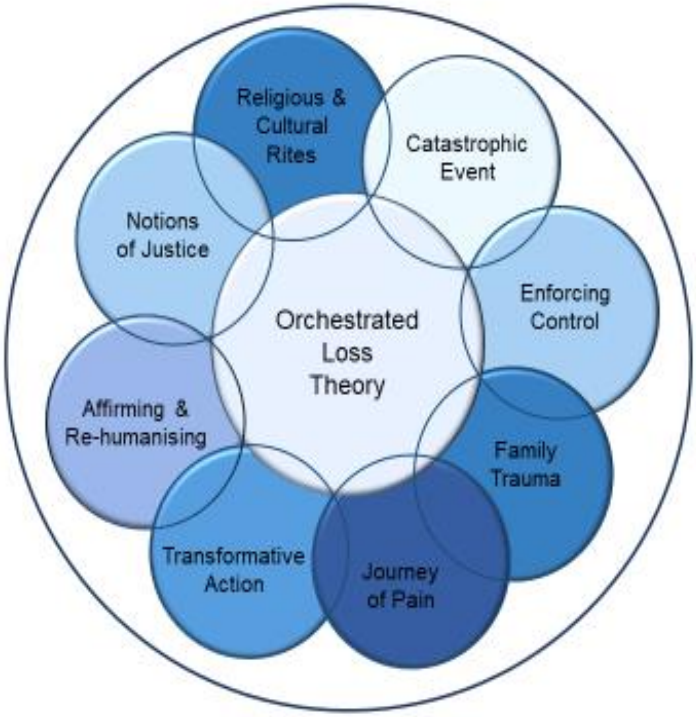


Figure 12 Eight theoretical concepts emerged using Grounded Theory.

SECTION 1: DISAPPEARANCE AS A CATASTROPHIC EVENT

THEORETICAL CONCEPT	HIGHER ORDER CATEGORIES	LOWER ORDER CATEGORIES
DISAPPEARANCE AS A CATASTROPHIC EVENT	Trauma across the lifespan	Abandonment by the Community Community Dynamics
	Labels of shame	Blackened reputation
	Victimisation, re-victimisation and repeat victimisation	Wanting to remain anonymous

THEORETICAL CONCEPT: DISAPPEARANCE AS A CATASTROPHIC EVENT

Like everyone else who lived in Northern Ireland during NI's Conflict, the participants in this study never expected to be victims of the violence. While they witnessed violence on the streets and knew people who had been touched directly, they never thought it would come to their door.

'I never dreamt he would die' P13.

This attitude was compounded by the fact that very few of the families witnessed the disappearance of their loved one and so didn't realise that they had become victims. That they were, only emerged years and decades later as the details of the abduction and murder of their loved one became known. When the families talk about the disappearance, they are not talking about the moment of the event. Rather they are talking about the lifetime since their loved one went missing, the sense of bewilderment and loss that has followed their family across generations and their silent abandonment by friends, family, community, colleagues, and the state.

> '*Nobody would have taken your side and stood beside you and said 'yes the IRA took this young man, he didn't do anything to deserve an execution' P4.*

Disappearances were not the only trauma to affect the immediate family. As it became apparent what had happened, the silent withdrawal of extended family members or friends was commonplace, oftentimes due to the complexities of existing loyalties within the republican movement in their community.

> '*Daddy's cousins and people like that were very republican people and again they didn't come forward or help or be sympathetic because they too had this attitude, well you know he must have got his "just desserts" if he had committed a crime against them' P4.*

The generous explanation for these family dynamics was the omnipresent fear of retribution by paramilitary groups if there was any question of loyalty faltering or any form of challenge issued. However, in many cases, issues of social and conflict identity, community loyalty and disbelief in the capacity of the paramilitary groups to engage in any form of *unjust* violence was the reality.

As a result, the disappearance was not just a very personal or family trauma. It was a public trauma, a trauma that involved victimisation and re-victimisation by family, neighbours and broader society. It entailed the labelling of the family as traitors, informers, criminals, and fantasists. In addition, it served to isolate and exclude them from support networks, stripped them of their sense of belonging and identity and dehumanised their loved one.

Stigmatisation, withdrawal and victimisation didn't just present externally. In some cases it emerged within family units, causing resentment and huge division. It split families along ideological lines, increasing dual realities for them. This led to complicated dynamics and relationships. The loss became about so much more than the (suspected) death of a loved one. It became about the death of a family and a way of life.

The silence was a very significant element of the trauma reported by the family members interviewed in the study. Not only could they not speak out against the violence, there was also the issue of some family members condoning it. The participants perceived that the political cause of republicanism was prioritised over any belief that their family member had been unjustly killed. Regardless of the ongoing conflict and the dynamics of NI's Conflict, this reaction among the close and extended family group compounded the hurt of the loss, and led the families to feel betrayed and abandoned by the wider family unit.

As the participants in this study reflected on their experience of the trauma they had suffered, both as individuals and as a family unit across the lifespan, three higher order themes emerged. These themes capture the range of experiences expressed by the victims' families and reflect the impact of the disappearance across all life domains. They are: Trauma across the lifespan; Labels of shame; and Victimisation, Re-Victimisation and Repeat Victimisation. These higher order categories will be examined in detail below.

HIGHER ORDER CATEGORY: TRAUMA ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

In the main, there were no witnesses to the disappearances - individuals simply vanished. The participants reflect that when their loved one went missing, the family assumed that they would return within hours or days when they were released by whoever had taken them. During the conflict, arbitrary detention and internment by either the police and/or the army, was an occupational hazard for those living in many areas of Northern Ireland (Norman 2021).

The paramilitaries also used detention to facilitate military action. They also used it, along with interrogations, punishment beatings, intimidation and attacks, to administer with political and legal impunity the informal criminal justice system they operated in the areas under their control (Knox 2002).

Only when it was confirmed that neither the police nor the army were holding their loved one, did the families conclude that republican paramilitaries had to be holding them. There was always hope that they would return. However, given the reputation and practices of local paramilitaries who operated as a quasi-police force, the families feared that their loved ones could return with injuries (Deglow 2016). This summary justice by the paramilitaries was often undertaken as a form of policing and was used as punishment or deterrence for perceived anti-social behaviour, or for engaging in actions seen to undermine paramilitaries' authority or control (Napier et al 2017).

Cavanagh (1997) suggests that social control by the paramilitaries was tolerated and, in many cases, welcomed within the community. However, for the paramilitaries to maintain this authority, their justice system had to be perceived as being "fair", with punishments being seen to fit the crimes. Cavanagh contends that excessive punishments or "rough justice",

risked alienating the community. Killing individuals without a very good reason would have been perceived as excessive by the community and risked undermining the authority of the paramilitaries, so in cases where there might not have been perceived community tolerance for violence, the victims had to literally disappear. This was illustrated quite starkly in the account from a legal case in 2019 involving the disappearance of Jean McConville, a widowed mother of 10 children, who was killed and secretly buried in 1972. Gerry Moriarty, reporting on the case in the Irish Times, wrote that the accused was recorded as saying that Jean McConville was disappeared because '*they couldn't take the heat from throwing her on the streets'* (Moriarty 2019). The implication was that this form of rough justice would not have been tolerated by the community which led the perpetrators to secretly bury Mrs McConville.

While their loved one was missing, the families were left in a state of limbo and uncertainty. They were afraid to speak, but certain that republican paramilitaries were responsible for the disappearance. P29 contends that, not only were the family afraid to attribute blame, the community were afraid too.

> *'And they were afraid to say. 'Yes the IRA done it, no they didn't do it'. No one knew, but then at the same time everyone knew. I knew after the first couple of days when he wasn't back and he wasn't released that he had to be dead cause he never would have been away, you could set your watch on him' P29.*

The suddenness of the disappearance, the lack of preparation and the uncertainty it brought, had an immediate impact on the families. There was a dawning realisation that their loved one had gone, followed by a realisation that support from within the community had gone too. A blanket of silence fell over the community. There was nothing that the family could do to rescue their loved one or to change the situation. To compound the anxiety and feelings of helplessness, they were unable to seek outside help as the paramilitary rules forbade families from contacting the police service. The community around them remained steadfastly silent. Such was the influence and control exerted by the paramilitaries on the community, that the families feared that if they spoke out they could be inviting more violence against themselves (Napier et al 2017). The fear was compounded by the tight knit nature of the republican communities in which many of the families lived (Dudai 2011). Family members reflected on the danger associated with speaking out and the reluctance of their

parents to do so when they had other children to look after. As a result, families were left in a state of helplessness and fear:

> *'It was surreal, you don't expect that to happen' P21.*
>
> *'It was nonsensical you know, he was just lifted off the face of the earth and gone for no reason' P29.*

The importance of the statement that their loved one had been taken for no reason reflects the families' belief that the abduction was unjustified and unjustifiable. The concept of innocence legitimatises the individual disappeared as a victim, but points to the fact that summary justice was so tolerated that there could well have been a *justification* for a discretion that violated community expectations during NI's Conflict (McEvoy and McConachie 2013). Given the context of the disappearances, in which the injustice of the murder and secret burial was hidden for years, the concept of innocence was tied to validation and recognition of their loss.

The feelings of uncertainty, disbelief and abandonment, following disappearance, are reflected across the literature (De Alwis 2009; Hollander 2016; Robins 2016; Lenferink et al 2017b; Lambert et al 2018; Garcia Godos 2018; Isuru et al 2019; Testoni et al 2020 and Hamid et al 2021). Strasser et al (2011) note that the constant state of uncertainty regarding their loved one's fate places individuals and families in an intimidating position, making it very difficult for them to talk openly about what has happened. This was evident for the families in this study as reflected by P29 above. Although people suspected her father had been abducted by the IRA, they didn't verbalise their belief because of the context of the violence, fear and the circumstances of the loss.

> *'You knew they knew, but nobody actually said what they knew' P13.*

In addition to the complex social dynamics that exist in conflict ridden societies, Dewhirst and Kapur (2015) point out that given that there are seldom witnesses to or evidence, or indeed survivors, of enforced disappearance, there is often very little to talk about and no one to talk to. This chimes with the data analysis which highlights that there were few witnesses to the abductions and those that did see something were reluctant to talk openly about it:

> *'Other people were just too scared to get involved, they didn't want to, they knew rightly they would have got a knock on the door if they said too much' P2.*

This allowed the perpetrators to remain hidden and to deny involvement which ensured the fate of the victims remained in doubt. As P2 suggests, the paramilitaries closed ranks, intimidating any witnesses to stop information being shared. Ironically, in the small number of cases in this study in which the family witnessed the kidnapping, it is reflected that knowing that their loved one had been taken by the IRA, whilst deeply traumatic, helped the family fight against the repeat denials of involvement by the perpetrators and their efforts at obfuscation and misinformation.

> *'We were there to see our Z being taken away - I don't know whether you would call it lucky or not that we were there when it happened. …. Because if we hadn't seen our Z being taken away, we would have believed ……..all the stories people were telling us; that's what would have happened. You would have believed that Z had run away so you would have' P32 No 2.*

The reference to running away here is an important one, because it was an excuse that was routinely invoked by the paramilitary groups to explain the victims' disappearances. Often the perpetrators would spread rumours in the community that a victim had *run off,* usually with someone of ill repute, or with an individual from the *other community,* leaving the families to fight, not only for information about their loved one, but also against the misinformation and the derision of the community regarding the supposed activities of the victim.

> *'People would have said very negative things like "He deserved it," or "Hell roast him". There was like a message that he deserved it and it was to control us definitely' P13.*

The effort at misinformation served to muddy the water enough to further isolate the family and ensure deniability by the paramilitary group, preventing the community and even police from taking the issue seriously. It was also a form of control orchestrated by the paramilitaries against the family. So not only did the families have to deal with the disappearance, they had to deal with gaslighting by their extended family and friends, their community, and even agents of the state (Somasundaram et al 2011). Gaslighting is a form of psychological abuse aimed at creating a surreal environment for victims, in which they are seen to be crazy, or regarded as fantasists or responsible for their own problems (Sweet 2019). For some of the family members this lasted decades and added to the injustice of the brutal loss of their loved one. It also rendered the families into the role of outsiders. Thus, they were doubly victimised, firstly by the disappearance of their loved one, and then by the enforced change of status

from belonging to the community to becoming an effective outcast from it. This was significant for the participants as membership of the community offered an element of safety from the violence going on in the wider community, with the republican paramilitaries viewed as protectors rather than perpetrators of violence. After the disappearance this 'safety blanket' was removed. Even if the family had lived for generations in the area, exclusion within the community could be actively engineered by the paramilitaries. Morrison (2012) contends that family members could often be viewed as being contaminated by association and that this led to them being marginalised and isolated. This process of exclusion was not exclusive to the NI Conflict, it was evident in other conflict related disappearances across the globe (Walker 2015; Hollander 2016; Robins 2016; Hussain 2019; Isuru et al 2019; Mir 2020 and Testoni et al 2020). For the families in this study the disappearance brought an immediate change for them as the paramilitaries orchestrated the distortion of facts around the disappearance thereby manipulating the families' reality for their own ends. By extension, they also manipulated the community which led to some of the families being singled out and excluded. Throughout this chapter there is evidence of the distortion and manipulation of the reality for the families, which often lasted decades.

The experience retold by participants in this study is echoed by Somasundaram et al (2011). They point out similarities to other situations internationally. In Sri Lanka for example disappearances often happened so suddenly that it became overwhelming, with the family left in limbo, unsure what they should do next, or to whom they could turn for help. Across this study and the international literature, the common first reaction of families was to search and to try to ascertain what had happened to the victim (De Alwis 2009; Salih and Samarasinghe 2017; Isuru et al 2019; Curcio et al 2019; Elghossain 2020; Fazi 2020; Testoni et al 2020; Badshah et al 2021 and Hamid et al 2021). The participants in this study all vividly recount a frantic process of physical searching that at times was overwhelming.

> *'I used to go away up the fields in the early hours of the morning on my own and dig through the soil looking for his body because I knew he was dead' P1.*

The turmoil and sense of despair as family members took on physical searches themselves, was painfully recounted. They had been effectively abandoned by those around them and faced a hostile response when they attempted to address their loved one's disappearance with paramilitary leaders within the community. The harrowing account by P1 mirrors the

testimonies of the other participants who were desperate to locate their loved one's body but were faced with an effective blank wall when trying to get information on where, or if, their remains had been secretly buried.

The participants speak of how that they were faced with many obstacles, inevitably driven by the paramilitaries in orchestrating secrecy. As discussed below, one of these was the abandonment by the community.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: ABANDONMENT BY THE COMMUNITY

A central category that emerged through a process of marginalisation and isolation was the issue of abandonment by the community. This contributed to poor knowledge about, and communication around, the issue of the disappearances. As a result, until the mid-1990s, families believed that they were the only victims of disappearance, only discovering two decades later there were other disappeared cases.

> *'I mean we thought we were the only ones that had a brother that was disappeared until we went to WAVE'* P8.
>
> *'I couldn't believe after reading the newspaper that all them people were disappeared, I couldn't believe it. I thought it was only our Z, I suppose they all thought the same' P38.*

The majority of disappearances took place during the 1970s at a time of chaos and serious civil unrest, particularly in the areas in which the Disappeared resided.

> *'Times were really terrible at that time NI's Conflict were rife, and people were trying to survive, everybody was trying to get on with their own lives' P4.*

Given the high levels of violence, families struggled to survive and keep individual family members from harm. Engaging with families of the Disappeared could have brought sanction and, therefore, members of the community shied away from the issue. The impact on the families was one of isolation and being actively marginalised. The families stayed within their own area in what has been described by one of the participants as a 'closed' community. This prevented information coming from neighbouring communities. The lack of reporting by the media at the time compounded this.

'I mean it was a closed community….everything was just kept closed; we weren't allowed to talk about it' P28.

Not only was it a closed community, it was also a closed society where the conflict prevented closer scrutiny of intracommunity violence when there was widespread violence between opposing sides on a daily basis. Many of the families perceived that they were on their own, separated from their community with no outside assistance. Throughout the data analysis this isolation is strongly reflected, with no discussion outside the family and individuals describing being shunned and being met with a wall of silence.

'They would have shied away or couldn't hold eye contact with you' P13.

'I remember (named- family member) telling me about ones not being able to look Granny in the eye, and all that there. It was mostly women, it wasn't men, not being able to look her in the eye, and things like' P20.

From the time of disappearance, participants reported a change in how they were perceived and treated within their communities.

'It was a very silent issue; it comes back to the fear factor and the control that organisations had on communities. Nobody wanted to 'talk' P10.

The processes adopted by members of the community went beyond simply ignoring the family. It was an active process in which support and 'neighbourliness' were withdrawn. As P20 indicates above, neighbours, particularly women, couldn't look family members in the eye. Family members perceived that they were treated as undesirable and a wall of silence was erected around them. Isolation and feeling that they were on their own from the day of the abduction until the recovery of the remains, was an experience common to all of the interviewees. The fact that the disappearances took place within a community that was unsupportive of their needs and actively turned a blind eye, compounded the isolation they were already experiencing. Moving away or not living in the same area as those who were believed to have abducted a loved one ameliorated the situation to a degree. It is important to note, however, that, regardless of the context, all families reported being left isolated and shunned, being left to deal with their loved one's disappearance alone.

The isolation was pervasive and unending. The starkness of the situation the families found themselves in was reflected through their recollection of their lives from the point their loved ones went missing.

'There was no one you could really go to at that time' P1.

'It was just, it was just that you were on your own and that was it' P8.

While some private support was offered by a few individuals within the community this did not translate into public support across the community. Even private support was not provided in any public arena as individuals were concerned that they were being watched by those in, or supportive of, the paramilitaries.

The isolation and abandonment was unique to victims of the PIRA. Violence by the *other side* was treated completely differently. Troubles related incidents involving 'the other side', were treated as a violation of the community, and there was a sense of vicarious victimhood that was publicly acknowledged (Manktelow 2007). Across Nationalist communities, help and support would have been actively and visibly provided to individuals or families who had experienced loss at the hands of the police, the military or loyalist paramilitaries. A similar process was noted in a study comparing the perception of victims of the tsunami in Sri Lanka with those of enforced disappearance in the civil war. The study concluded that, in the tsunami, there was shared grief (Isuru et al 2019); but in comparison enforced disappearance in Sri Lanka was seen as much more personal, hidden and isolating, with a victim often made to seem guilty with a consequent lack support for the family.

While the families of the Disappeared were placed in a position of being outsiders given the underlying climate of fear and threat if they spoke out, the local paramilitaries maintained an ongoing stance of non-involvement which enabled them to maintain respect within the community. However, the impact for the families was that support within the community was non-existent and they were actively marginalised within the neighbourhood.

'My poor mother. Not one rapped the door to say 'Mrs (surname) are you all right?' P27.

'There was always loads of visitors in me mother's, my mother's front door had the key in it, people, the neighbours were always coming in. You know after that, that stopped. People stopped coming in' P11.

The isolation faced by parents in particular was noted. Given that many had been brought up and lived within the area their whole lives this generated hurt, a sense of betrayal and feelings of abandonment. They were isolated and, therefore, they had no one to advocate for them

or to highlight their loved one's case. The feeling of isolation was compounded by the paramilitaries' strategy of sharing a false narrative that their loved ones were still alive, as discussed in Section 2.

> *'Definitely, they didn't really have anyone, did they, when it happened, they were led to believe that he wasn't actually dead like a lot of the other families' P34.*

However, conversely, while the isolation was perceived across the data as a negative, Callejo and Moraledo (2011) argue that isolation may provide a form of self-protection for families who are still living in the same oppressive social, political and economic context that led to their loss. Whilst this may have been the case for the families of NI's Conflict, the longevity associated with being actively marginalised and thereby silenced through the underlying climate of fear is central to the perpetuation of the isolation. Somasundaram et al (2011) point out that, in the case of disappearances, everything is low profile; while Callejo and Moraleda (2011) contend that the loss of trust and not feeling safe with anyone outside the close family circle is one of the most devastating and debilitating ramifications of the disappearance.

The negative connotations associated with having a loved one disappeared were very strongly represented throughout the data analysis. There was a ripple effect of the disappearance on the lives of the families. Not only were the families isolated they were also actively perceived in a negative light, resulting in even greater marginalisation and feelings of worthlessness.

> *'It was just one of those things that you didn't talk about. Because the way the community treated you - the community treated you like dirt' P32 No 1.*
>
> '*We were treated like scum' P33.*

This demonisation of the family members was not short lived. For many individuals it lasted up to the point in 1999 when the IRA/INLA lists confirmed a number of the missing were in fact disappeared. For others it lasted right up to the time of the recovery of their loved one's body. A central issue was community dynamics as discussed below.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: COMMUNITY DYNAMICS

The participants in this study experienced abandonment, isolation, neglect, denial and silencing for the duration of their search for knowledge as to what had happened to their family member. They felt, whether through fear of, or support for, the paramilitaries, that

their communities behaved in such a way as to deny both the violence inflicted upon, and the memory, of their loved one.

> *'The isolation thing is the worst part…..Someone has been plucked out of your family and nobody seems to know why, how and there is nobody to help you' P31.*

The interviewees noticed a perceptible shift in attitude amongst the other members of the community once the truth started emerging about what had actually happened to their loved ones. The trigger in some cases was the recovery of the body while, for others, it was the acknowledgement by the IRA or INLA that the person had in fact been disappeared. For the participants in this study this points to two explanations for the behaviour of extended families and communities in the aftermath of the initial disappearance. Either they believed the narrative propagated by the paramilitary groups and their supporters regarding the fate of those disappeared or, for whatever reason, they actively dehumanised the victim, psychologically traumatising the families left behind.

> *'I think a lot of them, in the beginning they would have seen the people who disappeared as problem people. Who needed to, let's say, who needed to be disappeared. So therefore they found justification in their thinking for that' P39.*

The families also concluded that the behaviour and body language of members of the community who approached them, served to blame them for the disappearance.

> *'You knew how people were approaching you, their body language, you felt as if you were doing something wrong, that it was you that was wrong you know, and they made you feel that way' P29.*

There was a perceptible shift once the fate of the victims became known; the community responded with displays of grief, shame and guilt. Many practical examples were reflected throughout the data analysis as members of the community attended the wakes held within the family homes, or stopped family members to apologise.

> *'Before the funeral finally arrived, you were able to open up and talk to people you weren't able to talk to before and people were apologising and saying 'I would have loved to have said something to you, but I was afraid' P29.*

Whilst there was a direct impact for the family, it also caused family members to reappraise what they had been led to believe all over the years.

> *'I think it finally showed the people like, you know the IRA have done something here that they shouldn't have done, or some of their members have done it, and in all the*

lies and everything that was told about him, and places he was supposed to be and seen and that, it was all nonsense. It was all hearsay' P29.

However, the recovery of bodies, or the admission of guilt by the paramilitaries represented a challenge to both the communities and the groups themselves. Apart from the initial violence associated with the abduction and killing, the sustained effort to hide the disappearance for so many years exposed both the duplicity of the paramilitary group and the extent to which they had orchestrated both the process and the families' suffering. As a result of this admission and the recovery of the bodies, a shift to what the families called a "process of community shame", took place.

'People were disgusted when they realised really what they [paramilitaries] did, people were shocked, it was hard to believe how shocked the whole community could be, that was so republican minded and listened to everything they were told and agreed with everything they were told [by the paramilitaries], and then for this to come up' P29.

'There's a lot of people around here disgusted at what they've done. People came to me when they found out that Z was one of the Disappeared: "That should never have happened"'P22.

The emergence of community shame was an inversion of the experiences of the families to that point. During the period of searching and truth seeking, there was a sense that the shame rested with the family. Shame had, up until this point, permeated all aspects of their lives rendering them marginalised.

'In a lot of ways, you sort of held your head down, you sort of couldn't hold your head up. You were conscious all the time of what people were saying behind your back, what people were thinking but what they weren't saying. That's how I felt , you know going up the town afterwards and going to meet people afterwards, I felt that….I was sort of keeping me head down with shame' P29.

The families' shame stemmed from the repeat denials of the abductions. Prominence was given to the misinformation engineered by paramilitaries across the community to attribute blame to those disappeared and, by extension, to their families. This enabled the issue to remain hidden and prevented any lobbying from members of the community on the respective cases as discussed below.

HIGHER ORDER CATEGORY: LABELS OF SHAME

Those who perpetrated the disappearances of the NI Conflict initially denied any involvement. In 1999, when the IRA/INLA revealed a partial list of the Disappeared, they propagated the narrative that those disappeared were in some way responsible for their abduction and death. In doing so they labelled and pilloried their families.

While the label of being a guerrilla or insurgent was heavily stigmatised in Peru, Sri Lanka and Colombia, in Ireland over the last one hundred years, the label of 'informer' or 'tout' is the most derogatory and value laden label that can be levelled in the context of paramilitary violence (Dudai 2011). Hart (2009) postulates that, once an individual is labelled as an informer, the connotations are so noxious and malign, the allegation is held within the community and is passed to the next generation. Goffman (1963) termed this a type of '*courtesy stigma'* in which those around the individual labelled are also viewed as guilty by association p30. This results in the victim's family being spurned and stigmatised *(*Dudai 2011). Dudai contends that informing on paramilitaries is perceived as the greatest crime of all.

Throughout the data analysis Goffman's (1963) courtesy stigma was evident. The families expressed a deep sadness that it remains even today.

> *'The stigma is still there …. it is there still big time and I know it will never go away' P27.*

For the relatives, there was a strong sense that the stigma was intensified because individuals had been killed and secretly buried by paramilitaries that operated within their own community. As McEvoy and McConachie (2013) contend, there is a hierarchy of victimhood and those labelled as informers or who were killed by paramilitaries in their own community, are perceived to be the lowest of the low. Their deaths are often not recognised or remembered by anyone associated with, or affiliated or sympathetic to, the respective paramilitary groups.

> '*Obviously there is a stigma attached with a Catholic being killed by the Provisionals, you know what I mean' P32 No 1.*

The impact of this was stark as it rendered support non-existent.

'You still have that stigma. It still goes back to that stigmatisation, of I don't want to get involved in this because this involves paramilitaries and we don't want to bring trouble' P14.

The use, by perpetrators, of labels to justify disappearances and murders is prominent across the literature on the conflicts in Sri Lanka, Peru and Colombia (Haugaard and Nicholls 2010; Nicholls 2010 and Weliamuna 2012). This labelling, and its impact on the families of the victim, chimes with the experiences of the participants in this study. By branding their loved ones as informers, known by the colloquial term "touts", the republican paramilitaries characterised the victims, as not only having betrayed the republican movement, but also the community in which they lived (Dudai 2011). The result was that their loved ones became persona non grata.

'Because you say oh the IRA killed him, so they say well he must have been in the IRA. They judge so it's easier just to say nothing, and not mention it' P11.

Christie (1986) referred to society having a fantasy of an ideal victim with whom they could publicly empathise, validating their status as a victim and recognising their suffering. He suggests that there are five central attributes associated with being an ideal victim: weakness, age or infirmity; not being engaged in any untoward behaviour; being innocent of the violence used against them and unable to protect themselves; the perpetrator was bad and responsible; and finally the perpetrators were unknown and not related to the victim (Christie 1986 p19). The Disappeared in the study did not fit into this concept of an ideal victim in the eyes of the community. They were construed as having engaged in untoward behaviour that was used to justify the violence used against them. Duggan (2018) suggests that the most significant reasons for viewing an individual as legitimate and blameless lie in the attributes of the victim and the relationship between the victim and the offender. The active process of misinformation perpetrated by the paramilitaries led to both the victims and their families being dismissed as non-victims by their communities.

As well as feeling belittled in the eyes of the community, the families were equally challenged by the belief that their loved ones' own actions had caused them to be disappeared.

'So the neighbours didn't really openly offer any sympathy, you know they just kind of shrugged their shoulders and nodded their heads as if to say well 'maybe he got you know what he deserved' P11.

Support further diminished if those disappeared were perceived to have been actively

involved in the paramilitaries.

> *'I think that is really why a lot of people think, I think, they would say "och sure he was mixed up and he deserved all he got', you know all that, horrible people' P27.*

A variety of feelings were relayed around additional judgments made if a loved one was politically involved in paramilitaries, regardless of whether they were actively engaged as a volunteer, or were supportive to the republican cause. There was a perception that there was less assistance from paramilitaries in locating the bodies of a loved one, if they had been a members of, or associated with, that organisation. There was an inherent assumption within communities that, when the paramilitaries killed members of their own community, they were justified in doing so (Knox 2002). This arose because of a belief within the community that the paramilitaries were acting in their interests; their denials or later statements on the Disappeared were, therefore, believed.

> '*They kind of kept looking out of the sides of their eyes, because anyone who went missing, well not so much went missing in those days but who were punished because of crimes against the IRA you know, nobody would sympathise with you' P4.*

The data analysis indicates that the families perceived that, because of the courtesy stigma and shame, they, too, were perceived to be outcasts. The result was the continuation of the exclusion and marginalisation that they had experienced for years:

> *'You were put in one corner and that was where you were to stay. And anyone that helped you was in that corner too…..do you know, and that was a very small corner round here' P35.*

> *'You know you were an outcast with them' P6.*

As reflected above, the isolation of the families extended to anyone who was seen to associate with them or attempt to help them. This was a key component of the orchestration process which included blackening the reputations of those abducted. Whilst stigma is all encompassing and speaks to how the families were treated and perceived by their communities, blackening loved one's reputations was the means by which the victims were stigmatised and was specific to each individual (Hamid 2021, p102). For the participants in this study, it went to the core of who their loved ones were as people and was a key part of the orchestration strategy as discussed below.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: BLACKENED REPUTATION

The families submit that stories circulated in the community suggested that some of the Disappeared had left of their own free will or were involved in a variety of illegal activities. This placed clear blame on the victim and was perceived as an explanation for why they had chosen to stay away. Family members involved in this study described the reasons given as hurtful and designed to inflict maximum damage.

Negative comments and innuendo about their loved ones were fairly common across the interviews. Participants recounted the pain and distress these comments evoked within their family, both at the time, and still today. It represented a second injustice compounding the harrowing, long term impact of the disappearance:

> *'All this old negativity and slurring their names, you know all that. That was all part of it. That was part of the cover up. Blacken them' P29.*

It was disempowering for the families as they had no way to rebuke these stories and the allegations levelled at their loved ones. By extension their reputations were blackened too and no one, within either the local or wider community, offered a counter attack to this process.

> *"Well you were sort of blackened. If somebody had disappeared well they had to have been an informer, they had to be this or that, or they were found at the side of the road or they didn't get it for nothing, you know. So you had that to live with it, and you know nobody was going to say 'no they didn't"' P3*5.

The impact for the families was that, regardless of the lack of truth around the allegations, they remained in the public arena. This is evident often in media coverage which continues to give the paramilitary justification for the disappearance, such as informing, even when this is discounted in other legal or policing processes (Moriarty 2019).

> *'Oh you know the republicans would all believe 'oh he has run away with another woman' and it's the same old adage 'if you throw enough mud it will, some of it will stick' P25.*

The practice of blackening reputations to ensure that individuals are not viewed as an ideal victim (Christie 1986) has also been adopted as a core strategy by paramilitary groups in other parts of the world to deflect blame and to discourage others from helping the families (Wasti et al 2009; Isuru et al 2019 and Lenferink et al 2019a). By extension, there is an inherent risk

that anyone seen to be actively supporting the families would be identified and subjected to the same treatment (Somasundaram et al 2011). Medina (2013) postulates that blackening reputations through labelling removes the name and dignity of the person disappeared. In reinforcing perceived guilt, reputations were repeatedly impugned. This active strategy of orchestrating the impugning of an individual's reputation compounds further the sense of injustice and prolongs and intensifies the traumatic impact in the years following the disappearance.

Labelling, as a practice undertaken by the paramilitaries to impugn the reputations of the victims and make them less worthy of sympathy, emerges from the data analysis as a significant development that started as the cases of the Disappeared began to generate publicity in the late 1990s. Up until this point there had been a protracted period of silence from those responsible. The most common charge levelled against the Disappeared was that of providing information, of working with the security forces against republican paramilitaries.

> *'Well they were all branded as touts weren't they and being a tout was like the worst thing you could be' P28.*
>
> *'When the IRA kill somebody they brand them with a label such as an informer, which is one of the worst things ever'* P23.

Being labelled an informer was viewed as the ultimate betrayal of the republican movement. It has deep historical significance all the way back to the Irish Independence period given Michael Collins' vilification of informers and assertion that they needed to be eliminated (Dwyer 1998). This vilification is publicly stated; it is, for example, often painted on walls and referenced in newspaper articles depicting the message 'Touts beware' (Sarma 2007). It is clearly evident in the picture below of Divis Flats in Belfast in 1979.



Figure 13 Graffiti on the Divis Flats in West Belfast in 1979. Photograph ©Brendan Murphy

Given this clear message within the community for the families, an allegation of informing perpetuated the isolation and marginalisation and rendered them even more powerless, compounding the feelings of injustice.

> *'They still keep saying Z was an informer, and stuff like this here. That's what pisses me off the most when you know that Z wasn't'* P33.

The sense that this could bring further harm to the family was felt strongly by P14 and others,

> *'I thought that maybe that he had informed. And if that was the case, well then you did keep your mouth shut because you would have been afraid to get yourself involved in that' P14.*
>
> *'You're afraid… if Z has done something, that's going to make us guilty as well, so you are a bit nervous about going places'* P21.

Labelling was termed *'organised deception'* by Lauritsch (2011, p74). She highlighted its widespread use in Kashmir to cover the death and disappearance of individuals. They were routinely labelled as 'violent', 'dangerous' or 'terrorist' and they were 'reportedly' involved in violent attacks against the police, army or paramilitary groups. In many cases they were taken to different geographical areas across the country, murdered and secretly buried. Whilst their graves were unmarked their location was known but not spoken about, with their unmarked graves becoming a visual reminder perpetuating fear across the community. Lauritsch (2011)

contends that these mass graves situated near schools and homes produced social deaths and prohibited any recognition of the loss or processes of remembrance. Instead they are a constant reminder of the potential consequences of challenging the rules and practices of the oppressors.

The use of labelling to produce a social death has significance in relation to the families engaged in this study. Mulkay and Ernst (1991) defined a social death as the ending of an individual person as an active presence in the lives of others p178. Following the abduction there was the immediate absence of the individual within the family unit. Given the context and protracted nature of the disappearance, this later led families to question had their loved ones ever existed, as discussed in Section 4. The devastation of this social death is reflected by the participants.

> *'It ruined us as a family. It ruined our lives in the way that you didn't want to trust anybody'* P32 No 2.
>
> *'It had a terrible effect on us all; it put us all in a terrible position'* P21.

The ramifications of this social death intensified over the years as a result of the longevity and ambiguity associated with the absence. Given the context of the disappearance and the orchestrated deception achieved by labelling those disappeared, the concept of a social death went beyond the family. By labelling the victim, the paramilitaries ensured that the Disappeared were deemed pariahs within their own community. This rendered not only the family, but also friends and associates of the Disappeared silent and unable to share memories or stories about the individual or to mark their life in any way.

> *'The republicans who disappeared people just wanted to wipe you out - your whole memory - they didn't want you to be remembered' P21.*

The participants reflected on how, when their loved ones were recovered, and their remains were returned, they were inundated with friends and members of the community coming to the wake and telling them stories about their loved one.

> *'It was like respect you got in people's eyes instead of looking at you and sort of edging away, you know you'd see sort of respect coming back, respect for the family, respect for the way we handled things, and pity too for both families that had been through so much and had to go through that much' P29.*

This represented a type of awakening, with respect restored. As members of the community came to pay their respects, the families were told stories about the victim some of which were familiar, whilst others they had never heard previously. The recovery of the bodies therefore shattered the hold that labelling had on the community and reversed the victim's social death:

> *'Eventually people stopped looking on the Disappeared as what they were being called – "informers" etc, and started looking at them as human beings'* P10.

HIGHER ORDER CATEGORY: VICTIMISATION, REVICTIMISATION AND REPEAT VICTIMISATION

The families, throughout the data analysis, speak of the ongoing horror of not knowing what happened to their loved one; they related the victimisation, re-victimisation and repeat victimisation inflicted on them by the paramilitaries, their community, the state and the church. This (re) victimisation happened through neglect, marginalisation, labelling, silence, isolation and violence and it encompassed every element of their lives.

> *'To me we got the raw end of the stick from the word go in this and we are still getting it'* P32 No 2.

The participants spoke of how that the legacy of disappearance resulted in victimisation at the time and re-victimisation and repeat victimisation after the fact. From the moment their loved ones were taken they were effectively isolated, neglected and rendered outsiders within their community. In the months and years following the disappearance, as well as feeling marginalised and excluded, they were taunted and sometimes physically attacked as a form of re-victimisation.

> *'I remember the phone used to ring at around 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, and there'd be people laughing at the end of the line; I'm sure that was part of the intimidation'* P21.

Participants reflected on how the taunting was often to try to provoke a reaction. Taunting went beyond physical. It also arose when the families were smirked at or when those responsible smiled at them in the street as a form of provocation and belittlement. In one example, family members were also exposed to neighbours singing a song with lyrics about a mother having gone away, as shared in the introduction. Some of the participants mentioned the perceived wickedness of those who engaged in these acts of provocation.

> '*Some of them old dolls in them flats were wicked*' P30.

This was all a form of gaslighting in which the family were psychologically provoked and repeatedly victimised.

> *'I mean, when people heard that they were disappeared and they were shot and how horrible death they got and that. I mean people would have smiled at us in the street and you didn't know what they were smiling for……I mean you thought to yourself, and then I used to think and I thought no wonder my mother went mental because when I was older I understood what were they smiling for'* P8.

This ongoing re-victimisation, years after the disappearance, showed what a potent and toxic environment the families were often living in up to four decades after their loved one disappeared. There was a sense throughout the interviews that families were caught, unable to leave the area. Initially they stayed in the areas as a number were concerned that their loved ones might return and not know where they were. Others remained in the area to support family members. The ongoing risk to family members if they spoke out about their loved one or retaliated in any way was clear and rendered them silent. Despite this, provocation continued. In some cases physical violence ensued.

> *'His brother P turned and said 'he was in his pigswill' that's when it all kicked off'* P5.
>
> *'Oh, you better want to watch yourself or you will get the same as what your brother got'* P25 No 1.

Age was no barrier to taunting or violence. Even as children the participants were singled out because of their loved one.

> *'I remember one girl spat at us walking past her years ago, and you think what's that about? Spitting at us?' P13.*
>
> *'We were treated like scum, we were, we were treated like scum, we got spat in our faces, told that Z ran off…., told us that Z didn't want us no longer' P33.*

These were deeply painful recollections and family members continue to see some of these people who attacked them within their neighbourhood. The participants conclude that the victimisation has been compounded by the perpetrators showing no remorse for their actions, even today.

Ongoing victimisation is reflected across the literature as a means of ensuring the silence of families whose loved ones have been disappeared (Hollander 2016; Salih and Samarasinghe 2017; Aguilar and Kovras 2018 and Adams 2019). Also, as reflected in Peru, Sri Lanka and Colombia as female members of the family were at risk of sexual violence when they went to

enquire about their loved one (Falcon 2003; De Alwis 2009 and Moloney 2018). The intention was to cause humiliation, punish and engender greater fear thereby bringing about silence (Haugaard and Nicholls 2010; Lauritsch 2011). Whilst sexual violence was not reported in relation to the participants in this study, the fear, and a perceived sense that you or family members would be punished if you stepped out of line, was very clear.

On a wider level the intention of paramilitaries was also to keep family members isolated and prevent support or lobby groups from forming (Somasundaram et al 2011; HMG 2016). It is suggested that the silence of medical and legal fraternities, and also the church, enabled victimisation to continue unabated. This also applied to the NI Conflict as these were the services that families had contact with within their community. Each of the participants would have an allocated General Practitioner (Dr) and access to local clergy. Throughout the data analysis, there was a general reflection that none of these practitioners or agencies gave any credence to the issue of the disappearance and the impact it had on the family members left behind. In some countries, such as Thailand, these key professional groups colluded in the silence by encouraging families not to bring cases to court or seek the truth about their loved one's disappearance at the hands of the police (Neelapaijit 2011). While violence was ongoing and the socio-political environment was fraught with danger, those around them deemed it unsafe to engage with the families of the Disappeared, and therefore, remained silent (Somasundaram et al 2011). In the same way, a lack of action regarding paramilitary violence in NI, as reflected in this study, allowed victimisation to continue unchecked, compounding the traumatic impact of the disappearance.

'We didn't know anything about social services. Nobody helped us, not a sinner' P9.

The fact that these agencies did not help or give public voice to the experience of the families inadvertently allowed the families to be victimised and then re-victimised over the years. Part of this repeat cycle of victimisation was because the family members were demonised as being toxic; as a result they were viewed as untouchable and were ostracised, not only within their own community, but also in their workplace.

It was striking that the victimisation did not abate with time. Rather, in some cases, it continues to impact upon the families to this day.

'Even when we got to the age of working…. if you were working on a building site and the IRA found out you were working on the building site, and knew you, they used to say to the foreman, "I don't want him working there". Then he would have to tell you there was no work there for you. This was happening all the time' P32 No 2.

'At times you couldn't get a job, because of who you are' P30.

This demonstrates the level of control republican paramilitaries had within the community, in that they could order employers to remove employees or in some cases refuse them work. Across the data analysis a picture emerged of the repeat victimisation of family members in which they were identified and labelled negatively because of who their loved one was. Others report being singled out in work because of the disappearance of their loved one, years after they were abducted and recovered despite their efforts to retain anonymity.

'Another boss was in her car and she said it to me, and I remember me winding down the window and I thought this is going to follow me forever' P13.

For one of the participants, being a relative of one of the Disappeared led to their professional integrity being challenged.

'Somebody wrote a letter to (the employer) saying: "She's got issues or whatever, what are you doing employing people like that?"' P13.

The letter referred to was addressed to the most senior person in the organisation. It was also included in correspondence in external legal proceedings with the result that a private family matter became a public work related matter. Although it had no relevance to the work of the participant, the disappearance of her brother was being used to undermine her professional credibility and standing within the organisation in which she worked, for purely political ends.

The impact of disappearance affected all aspects of the family members' lives. It is evident that power and control did not dissipate with the abduction. Rather, there was an orchestrated process by which paramilitaries continued to exert a type of hold over the families and inflict punishment on them in the years afterwards. A series of examples were interwoven throughout the data analysis, including being blanked or ignored, being discriminated against in work, being asked to leave their job, or feeling unable to continue in a position given the negative and derogatory undertones. This has continued over decades affecting the ability of some family members to obtain employment or stay in employment. While there are examples across the world of victimisation, re-victimisation and repeat victimisation against families at the time of an abduction and in the months afterwards, which

in some cases caused individuals to flee or to seek asylum, in NI, this victimisation continued for a much longer time. In the context of the conflict in NI, periodic victimisation of the families of the Disappeared has continued for decades, with a detrimental impact on the relatives. This led some family members to want to maintain anonymity within the community, as discussed below.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: WANTING TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS

One of the ways family members sought to deal with the victimisation and marginalisation within the community was to try to retain a degree of anonymity. This served as a type of protection from the condemnation associated with having a loved one disappeared.

> *'The families had to develop a shield around them to protect themselves from that outer ring of condemnation' P6.*

Across the data analysis it is evident that the families adopted strategies around maintaining a low profile in work and within the community, not speaking about the loved one who had disappeared and, re-emphasising the respectability of the family.

Negotiating a working life was difficult and to avoid the victimisation highlighted above there was a repeated sense that family members had to maintain a low profile, particularly pre the 1999 statement from republican paramilitaries. The 1999 statement brought a number of the cases out into the public arena. However, despite this, some family members were still reluctant to lobby publicly for the return of their loved one.

> *'To be honest, I didn't want to become known in work as one of the families of the Disappeared' P21.*

> *'I worked in a factory and I travelled around customers all over the North of Ireland and the South, aye, you just had to be anonymous, everywhere and as quiet as could be, there was no references to anything whatsoever*' P39.

As well as dealing with negative reinforcement from their own community the families had to protect themselves from the reaction of the Protestant community. The political connotations surrounding their loved one's disappearance meant they could also be perceived negatively if there was any suggestion that their loved one had been involved as a volunteer or associate within republican paramilitaries. It also caused the families to modify

what they would discuss and also how they engaged with members of SF or the IRSP that they may have met in a work capacity.

> *'All sorts of customers, all places that I had to keep a low profile' P39.*
>
> *'I had to be careful in biting their (SF members) heads off cause I was still working and I didn't want them complaining' P25.*

It was only on retirement and in a changing political environment and with the passage of time that one of the families felt they could eventually express themselves.

> *'That shackle, you know you could express yourself then'* P39.

Those interviewed were caught in an invidious position in which the constant negativity associated with the Disappeared and the sense of underlying threat and shame led them to have a sense of embarrassment around the issue.

> '*I didn't talk about Z probably because I felt embarrassed about it' P3*.
>
> *'It's a dirty… it's a dark secret' P28.*

There was a legacy associated with the family members' need to hide a loved ones' disappearance as a form of protection. Even when individuals did try to reach out to help family members, for example a teacher within the school environment, such was the fear and sense of shame it led participants to feel more vulnerable.

> *'He was one person who went out of his way and actually said "I can explain that you have extenuating circumstances if you don't pass this." And I was going "No please don't do that. Don't tell anybody this. You've worked it out, but you are not to tell anybody!"'* P13.

To reduce the possibility of labelling and guilt by association and to prevent any victimisation, the participants sought to manage any negative reactions to their loved one's disappearance. In some cases this involved giving alternative reasons for their loved one's death

> *'I used to say something did happen to Z and Z died, Z died in a car crash…and then people left you alone' P33.*

The need to maintain anonymity was reinforced by the behaviour of others towards the family.

> *'People just didn't, they didn't talk to you, or else they spoke quickly and walked on. They never stood to talk to you, to be seen talking to you in case they were brought into something' P29.*

Even today some individuals will cross the road to actively avoid family members

> *'You would still see some of them now, walking about and they won't walk past you, they won't walk past me'* P5.

The need to state that there was no justification for the disappearance was reflected strongly throughout the interviews. This process of having to justify the family position is tied to the legacy of being marginalised, excluded and treated as an outsider within their own community. This was part of the orchestrated nature of the campaign by republican paramilitaries, not only against the Disappeared, but also against their families in the years afterwards. This chimes with the experience of families in Sri Lanka, Colombia and Peru (Dulitizky 2019b; Cronin Furham and Krystali 2020 and Mir 2020). In dealing with the stigmatised and labelling nature of the death, families sought to protect themselves by living as quietly as possible and developing a shield to protect themselves from condemnation.

> *'We were basically a fairly quiet family, we weren't a republican family or sympathisers or were never involved in anything like that at all' P4.*

The sense of keeping yourself protected was an inherent part of how individuals were conditioned throughout NI's Conflict as discussed in Section 2.

> *'They knew it wasn't normal for him. They knew he wasn't involved in anything, he had never been, cause we were reared that way. You kept your mouth shut. You seen nothing, you heard nothing, you know nothing, look after your own four walls' P29.*

As highlighted earlier, Callejo and Moraledo (2011) argue that self-protection through silence and anonymity is critical when individuals are living within the same oppressive social, political and economic context that led to their loss. However, silence and anonymity may conversely complicate grief by undermining support, meaning-making and continuing bonds to a loved one, leading to disenfranchised grief, as discussed in Chapter 3 (Cassidy 2021). For the participants, even the ceasefires of the republican groups, the peace process and a new era of political representation did not fully allow them to be free of the negative connotations of the disappearance. In addition, they are relying on those involved in the disappearances to come forward to the ICLVR to provide information. This has been a slow and protracted process and not all of the Disappeared have been recovered as yet. As indicated above, through an orchestrated process, re-victimisation and repeat victimisation can still emerge for the families fed by the stigmatisation and labelling that is still practised by some within the communities in which the families live. That has not abated with time.

This orchestrated process forms part of the control exerted by republican paramilitaries which will now be considered in the next section, Enforcing Control: Protectors to Persecutors.

SECTION 2: ENFORCING CONTROL: PROTECTORS TO PERSECUTORS

THEORETICAL CONCEPT	HIGHER ORDER CATEGORIES	LOWER ORDER CATEGORIES
ENFORCING CONTROL: PROTECTORS TO PERSECUTORS	Omnipresence of paramilitaries	Power & Status of Paramilitaries
	Enforced Silence (Paralysis)	Rules of Engagement: Growing up in NI Omerta within the republican movement Controlling Narratives and obstructing truth

THEORECTICAL CONCEPT: ENFORCING CONTROL: PROTECTORS TO PERSECUTORS

A major theme coming out of the data was the level of community control exercised by republican paramilitary organisations both pre and post the abduction and disappearance of individuals. The paramilitaries were viewed by the participants as enforcing control across the community throughout the conflict. Through an orchestrated strategy the participants contend that this control intensified following the disappearances, as the paramilitaries sought to: maintain silence around the issue; curb any discussion; deny any involvement; issue threats when the families spoke out about their loved one's case; and, control the narrative around the fate of their loved one. Ultimately this ensured that the paramilitary group maintained a position of power and dominance as the controller of the community. The relationship, role, function and conduct of paramilitaries within respective communities was therefore described by participants as being complex and multi-faceted. The families contend that there were visual reminders of the control that was in place across all aspects of community life. These include community advice centres, ex combatant groups and republican commemorations, festivals and murals which were clearly evident within the communities (Mulholland 2007).

While exerting considerable control, republican paramilitaries were viewed by participants as having three central functions in which they ascribe them to be the protectors, enforcers and perpetrators. The significance of each of these roles can be traced back to the trajectory of the historical development of respective paramilitary organisations within communities.

As protectors, the participants spoke of how that the paramilitaries were the rulers of the community adopting the role of a quasi-police force. From early in the conflict the IRA had established itself as protectors of the community from the violence of loyalist paramilitaries and the State forces: the local police, the RUC and British Army (Feenan 2002).

> *'They were supposed to be the army in the streets… if you heard anybody, something going wrong, something, you went to them ones.. you sort of looked to them cause they were the rulers of the land, you know'* P8.

This role of paramilitaries as protectors was not just in relation to the actions of loyalists or State forces. It was also to ensure intra community control in which behaviour that was perceived as antisocial, or that challenged the paramilitary's authority, was proactively addressed. For the participants, the IRA were viewed as adopting a local policing role in addressing community issues. In dealing with community issues, there was implicit trust that they would sort out situations that were causing individual and community strife. As P8 indicates, they were viewed as the '*rulers*' of the land in that they were perceived to be the governors, the people in charge of the community. P4 suggests that this role as a ruler had grown because of a policing vacuum, given that the RUC were not visible or welcome in the community. As a result, if you needed a problem sorted out, the only option was to go to 'the boys', to get it resolved.

To ensure that they were able to maintain the role of community police, the IRA warned families not to engage with the RUC (Dudai 2012). They then undertook a campaign against any perceived anti-social activity within their community. Perceived transgressors were subjected to a variety of punishments including: violent assaults (known as punishment beatings); abduction and interrogation; shooting through the knees (known as kneecapping) or expulsion from of the community into exile (Napier et al 2017; Kennedy 2020). It also allowed them to punish anyone who challenged their control. While the ultimate aim of this violence was to exert and maintain control and ensure discipline within the community, it was also intended to achieve the same result within the paramilitary organisation itself (Morrison

2016). However, as McEvoy (2003) argues, intra community discipline often satisfies community members' demands for retribution when they had been harmed, which conversely endorses the paramilitaries' role as community protectors. Given that the day to day issues were being addressed by paramilitaries with antisocial behaviour being tackled, this strengthened the paramilitaries' power base and emboldened their rule as community enforcers. As P28 contends, the implicit threat of violence ensured that community members modified their behaviour and didn't step out of line.

> *''That's part of the thing they did, they (paramilitaries) kept you under control and you didn't go mad' P28.*

For the participants, the role of paramilitaries as protectors was a dichotomy, as the IRA were also viewed by those on the receiving end of violence as persecutors and perpetrators. The participants reflected on how their power was often misused, as they inflicted violence with little respect for the sanctity of, or right to, life. Whilst they attempted to justify deaths as a type of rudimentary justice with allegations such as, the deceased had been working with, or assisting, British State forces, at times these claims were hollow and often unfounded (Feenan 2002). As Morrison (2016) contends, whilst the IRA professed to protecting the vulnerable, the true motivation was to gain power and control. Greater power and control, in turn, enabled the IRA to practice a more persistent and violent strategy. As reflected in the data there was no mechanism for the family or friends of those killed or severely maimed by the IRA to refute these allegations. As P3 indicates, the perceived crime did not have to be so great as to merit the violence inflicted against the person. He posits that the IRA were 'bullies' and operated with impunity.

> *'I think they (the IRA) owned the place, they were the bullies and I think if they didn't like something.. they were quick to bump somebody off. You know it hadn't to be that bad' P3.*

The brutality of the actions of the paramilitary groups was seen as being unjust. They are described by participants as adopting the role of judge, jury and executioner, killing individuals at will. As P25 states:

> *'Z was shot in the back of the head, you know it was judge and jury, bang bang and buried in a bog in the back arse hole of nowhere, with no one' P25.*

The public persona of the IRA as protectors, revolutionaries and defenders of the republican ideal for a reunification of Ireland, often resulted in intra community violence being overlooked (Alonso 2006). As reflected in the previous section the participants contend that the intensity of the violence between opposing sides often resulted in intra community violence going unreported. Certainly, as P25 indicates, there was no accountability or sanction against the IRA, as he perceives they killed at will. As P21 indicates,

> *'You see these things on television – out in Syria and that - somebody murdered in the middle of the desert. There's no difference in this case, in Z's case he was murdered in a bog, just as grim' P21.*

The challenge for the participants, as reflected in the data, was the minimisation and, in some cases, the denial of the deaths of their loved ones by those perceived to be their protectors from State forces and loyalist paramilitaries (Dawson 2006). As Morrison (2016) indicates, the trust that the community had in the IRA resulted in their actions often going unchallenged. This also applied to the INLA. However the paramilitaries knew that there was a balance to be struck as indicated earlier; they understood that they risked alienating the community if their violence was considered unjustified, or perceived as rough justice (Cavanagh 1997). This is why some deaths were hidden or the narratives around them were altered as a form of justification. Indeed, both the IRA and INLA sought to keep control of the issue of the Disappeared, maintaining their power through an omnipresence and a process of enforced silence in which the issues were managed by controlling the narrative and obstructing the truth. This is discussed below.

HIGHER ORDER CATEGORY: OMNIPRESENCE OF PARAMILITARIES

The powerful influence of the paramilitaries as the rulers of all aspects of life across the community was reflected throughout the interviews. One participant noted that, in the eyes of the community,

> *'The IRA were, they were God you know' P4.*

The sense of their presence and power is reflected by P29 who indicates there were only two entities within their community, either the IRA or British soldiers, concluding that the IRA were the ultimate rulers of the community

> *'Who are you talking about, the IRA? There was nothing else in our area. It was either them, you knew it was either soldiers or them.* They really stood out, they were the boss, and you behaved or else, and that was just the feeling there was' *P29.*

According to the participants this enabled republican paramilitaries to hold ultimate power and to sanction any action that took place within the community. Dudai (2012) postulates that the modalities with which the IRA exercised their power, such as inflicting harm, court martialling individuals or offering sporadic amnesties that allowed individuals to be exiled rather than killed, affirmed them, in the eyes of some within the community, as a quasi-state force. The extent of the power that this quasi-state force held was reflected by participants as being so far reaching, both at the time of the disappearances, and in the years since, that no actions could be undertaken in the community without the IRA knowing. This led participants to be fearful as they never knew who they could trust. As P1 concludes,

> '*You never knew who you were talking to or what and I was afraid' P1.*

A central tenet of how the paramilitaries operated in the eyes of the participants was that members of the IRA, or people sympathetic to their cause, were seen to infiltrate the community at all levels collating evidence and feeding information out as a means of maintaining control. These fears were not without foundation. Clarke (2011) suggests that this was the case with individuals strategically placed in social security offices, housing or in the local council that looked after household utilities; these people were able to access and collate data on individuals who were of interest to republican paramilitaries. Participants noted how they believed that the tentacles of these groups were everywhere, including key individuals within their local community such as in medicine or in the clergy, as discussed in the results.

The sense of not being able to trust was reflected across all the participant interviews. There was also a sense from the families that they were being watched and monitored and that, other than with close family and friends, they had to be guarded in relation to what they said and did. The participants contend that there was strategic surveillance through individuals trying to come alongside the family to gain information. P13 contends that,

> *'They were all part of that conspiracy to keep an eye on what's going on and stay close to different ones to see what's going on' P13.*

In one of the areas, participants said how they could not be seen at the house of another

family whose loved one had disappeared too. They perceived that this active monitoring was intended as a means of creating a climate of fear and, thereby, facilitating control. As a result, participants noted that instead of republican paramilitaries fighting solely against the oppression of the British State forces, they also became the oppressors of those within their own community.

> *'Fear, fear seemed to be the biggest thing because it wasn't Catholic, Protestant, it was just them [IRA] and us. We were repressed, and they ruled you, you were repressed like, you were kept down, and things would happen and you couldn't say 'God, that was wrong, that was terrible', cause you could have been taken away anywhere. It was just the way people lived at the time; it's hard to explain that to someone who didn't live through it'* P29.

A sense of being repressed and living in perpetual fear is reflected throughout the literature in relation to enforced disappearances globally(Haugaard and Nicholls 2010; Weliamuna 2012; Decker 2013; Medina 2013; Adams 2019 and Isuru et al 2019). Dewhirst and Kapur (2015) contend that enforced disappearance as a tool of repression and continual intimidation renders families immobile, fearful and submissive. In the context of the NI Conflict, the fear was palpable as there was a continued watchfulness amongst the families and often they were unable to speak to the researcher openly until they were outside their area or deemed themselves to be in a safe place. This rendered the families powerless within their community. Fear, watchfulness and feeling monitored was reported by participants as lasting for decades.

> *'You would talk to no outsiders (those outside the immediate family) cause you didn't know who was in your favour' P36.*

It was striking, therefore, that, despite the peace process and the indication that the IRA and INLA were no longer operational, the perceived omnipresence of paramilitaries still remains for the participants, over twenty years after the Good Friday Agreement (GFA). It was reflected across the interviews that the families of those disappeared continue to have to moderate what they say or do because of the perceived local presence of those who were involved or may still be involved in republican paramilitaries. At one level it could be argued that this is a clear legacy of many years of living under continuous threat (Smid et al 2020a), in which the longevity associated with the emotional trauma hasn't abated even with the recovery of the remains of their loved one. However, at another level, sporadic murders in NI

due to republican or loyalist paramilitaries reopen old wounds and reinforce this position of power and control, and the perception that paramilitaries have not gone away. For many of the participants the feeling of threat continues to be sustained as they report being stared at or smirked at or, in other cases, actively avoided by those they suspect of being involved in the abduction. For the families the feeling of threat has not gone away, as reflected by P3 and P21 below, even when their loved ones' bodies were recovered. This reflects the longevity of the emotional trauma associated with the disappearance and the intense fear that continues to have an influence across their lives.

> *'You do feel safe, but at the same token no, they could knock that door tonight, they definitely could and they would do it' P3*.
>
> '*Even now people are afraid to talk' P21.*

Being threatened over the years has left many of the participants fearful of further violence. However fear was also mingled with the feeling that there was a tacit acceptance of violence within the community, particularly if individuals have been accused of working against republican paramilitaries. This has compounded the families' isolation and marginalisation as they perceived that there was no buffer or protection should further issues emerge.

A central issue that continued to have resonance for the families was that intracommunity violence could be justified within the community.

> *'Most of the Catholic people think the IRA don't kill anybody unless they need killing; that's just the way they are' P32 No 2.*

The hatred of the police force and the State within the communities combined with the power, control and identity of the paramilitaries, meant that the communities accepted the paramilitary violence and didn't question their actions. For the individual or, indeed, the family who were viewed as guilty by association, they were singled out. At a psychological and practical level there was a shift from belonging in the community to being deemed a risk and an outsider and, by extension, not worthy of community support. Individuals, therefore, became a separate entity: outcasts who, at best, were ignored and marginalised or, at worst, were continually harassed and under the watchful gaze of the paramilitaries. P10 referred to the psychology of the area in which the community spontaneously effectively closed off from the individual affected.

'Whenever you are accused of doing something in an area like this, emotion can just shut off very quickly and its conflicted with the psychology of the area' P10.

Essentially, when individuals were deemed to be working against republican paramilitaries by extension they were viewed as working against the community and, as P10 contends, they were quickly rendered as outsiders within their own community. As McEvoy (2013) suggested there is a hierarchy of victimhood; P10 indicates that the families of the Disappeared quickly moved to the bottom of this hierarchy. This was very difficult for Catholic families whose loved ones had been killed by republican paramilitaries. Given this marginalisation and fear the paramilitaries were able to continue to orchestrate their strategy to manage the issue of the Disappeared. A central issue was the power and status held by the paramilitaries as discussed below.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: POWER AND STATUS OF PARAMILITARIES

A central theme across all interviews in relation to how power and status was maintained by paramilitaries, was through the use of implied or actual threats. The clear implication from participants was that if you spoke or did anything that would generate paramilitary attention there was an expectation of harm which could result in either serious injury or death.

'*Sure you couldn't open your mouth or you would be done in*' P36.

For some, threats were delivered by telephone, others were threatened in person or they received letters or faced other intimidation or violence associated with paramilitary activity.

'I was working in a bar that time and that's when I got the gun to the head and told to keep quiet' P5.

'When I was seeking Z's remains and making enquiries locally and further afield we got threatening calls to mind my own business, keep my mouth shut' P7.

These and the many more threats recounted were intended to control the situation, to impose silence and to invoke inaction in relation to the families highlighting their loved one's case. The immense worry associated with the threats to those who had started to speak out was very starkly illustrated in a number of accounts.

'Deep down you were always thinking, maybe they could come here some night and I would never be able to stop these thoughts. They might beat him (Z's father) to death or shoot him or whatever. You always lived with this fear' P23.

The proximity of paramilitaries within the community compounded this fear. This was exacerbated by the fact that, while the families suspected some of involvement in local paramilitary groups, there was the unknown regarding whether other neighbours, acquaintances, or indeed extended family, were involved too. They therefore had no one to turn too. This was illustrated in a series of threatening calls to the daughter of one of the Disappeared. These were often timed when her husband wasn't there and her children were in bed. It led her to conclude that local paramilitaries who could have been her neighbours were watching the house. She was frightened that her husband and family would be harmed.

> *'When he did come home, I told him what I was after getting (a threat) and he said "oh they will not take you, they will take me". I was so afraid of him getting hurt and of the children getting hurt, I said "if they come let them take me"'* P29.

In some cases paramilitaries did come to a family member's home - either to frighten or in anticipation of, or preparation for, causing harm. P6 recounts how two men sat outside her house on a motorbike for several hours. She could not call the police as this would have brought a greater backlash. Instead, she sat on the stairs with a baseball bat ready to fight back.

> '*I thought they must be getting ready to come in to me. I really thought that night I was going to die. I really did. I was scared so I sat on the stairs the whole night to protect the children. I was more worried about them' P6.*

As was often the case, this and the many other threats were never reported to the police. There was a real fear around the possibility of antagonising the paramilitaries by breaking the rule of engaging with the security forces. Any attempt to report these incidents would have been visible as uniformed police would have arrived into the neighbourhood, or started arresting individuals. This could have evoked further harm for family members. Across the board, family members (through a process of dealing with extended family or intermediaries) attempted to diffuse harm levy a degree of safety with the paramilitaries. The outcome of this was never certain.

> *'They threatened me they would do my kids…. That's when I went to their Granda and said "I don't give a shit about me but don't do anything to the grandchildren"' P5.*

In some cases a series of approaches through a chain of people to the republican movement were made to ensure the family's safety. One of the participants referred to this as going for 'reinforcements' in the hope that if others knew or were politically connected, any threat

would be diffused. Threats, however, led families to be very vigilant, leaving them in a continual state of watchfulness. A number of the interviewees referred to searching under their cars to check for under car booby trap bombs which were frequently used by republican paramilitaries. They was also careful about the areas they went into. A number actively avoided republican areas. This was a residual fear of being threatened. Participants still report that they feel unsafe now, up to four decades after the abduction of their loved one, when they enter particular areas or engage with businesses in that area. Such are the long term ramifications of repeatedly being threatened and exposed to violence (Walden and Zhukov 2020).

The context in which the disappearances happened was also important in relation to how threats were perceived and the power and status of the paramilitaries. The closeness of perpetrators within communities perpetuated the fear. Equally, for others, the proximity of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland added to the pressure associated with threats. For those disappeared close to the border the participants perceived that those responsible for disappearances often used the border as a way to ensure that the Disappeared were not found and that they could act with impunity. Abducted from NI in the main, the Disappeared were brought over the border into the Republic of Ireland to be killed and buried in secluded remote locations. Given that there was no help from respective police forces on either side of the border and the jurisdictional and legal complications, as well as a culture of remaining silent, family members felt particularly vulnerable. Johnson and English (2008) contend that the border was significant for the IRA as it allowed them to launch attacks in the north and to have safe havens in the Republic of Ireland to which they could retreat without the interference of the RUC or the British Army. For the families, this stymied anyone helping who may have witnessed the abduction as it intensified the fear of what could take place.

> *'So other people might know or have seen things and they are not going to say because, you know they don't want to end up the same way. But down here…with the border so close… they would be over the border in a couple of minutes' P24.*

It was, therefore, perceived that the border gave protection for those perpetrating, not only the abduction and disappearance of a loved one, but also any further violence against the family or anyone who reported or witnessed the abduction. The context of the border was a

factor that contributed to the prevalent threat associated with the actions of republican paramilitaries.

The issue of paramilitary power and control remains a central factor today in relation to the Disappeared. This has resulted in elongated searches when information has not been provided fully; it has denied other families the opportunity for Christian burial when information continues to be withheld. This resonates with other conflicts across the world where the families of those disappeared are at the mercy of repressive regimes who actively engage in processes to bring about obfuscation and ostracism (Nicholls 2010; Haugaard and Nicholls 2010; Somasundaram et al 2011; Sivayokan 2014; Dewhirst and Kapur 2015; Robin 2016; Hollander 2016 and Hussain 2019). One of the participants reflects:

> *'It's like somebody knows where somebody is and you know, they are playing cat and mouse with everybody'* P40.

The extent to which paramilitaries continue to exert power and control and orchestrate the agenda from the point of abduction to the point of recovery was referenced very powerfully by P40 as a game in which information was power. Power was also exerted in enforcing silence around the issue from the point of abduction to the present day. This was a prominent theme throughout the interviews.

HIGHER ORDER CATEGORY: ENFORCED SILENCE – PARALYSIS

Silence featured as a key issue for all the interviewees; it appeared in two ways. There was self-imposed silence as a form of protection, and enforced silence which was orchestrated by paramilitaries as a form of control, quelling any dissent. For the participants this enforced silence demonstrated the ongoing presence and power of the paramilitaries.

> '*The silence was crazy. That controlled world that you actually lived in was terrible'* P13.

A dominant theme throughout the interviews was the sense that the external environment regarding the disappearance of their loved one, was totally controlled by paramilitaries who enforced a blanket of silence through fear. Participants reflected on how they were caught in an invidious position in the days following their loved one's abduction – they were, in effect,

silenced – unable to report the disappearance to police because of the fear of the consequences of engaging with the police or speaking out. The initial reason for maintaining silence was the hope that a loved one would be released unharmed. Parents feared that speaking out could have the opposite effect to that intended leading to a loved one being killed as highlighted by P12 below. This rendered families powerless and paralysed.

> *'She wouldn't want the people who did it to be thinking that she was publicising it more because that would have made it worse for Z'* P12.
>
> *'X (Z's father) said "No, we're not going to involve the police. I begged him and I said "Look, we don't know where to start looking for him, they have technologies, they know everything, I don't care what you say, I want the police brought in on this"'* P23.

The consequence of silence was that often nothing was done. The silence was not solely the domain of the families - all aspects of civic society were silent and silenced too. It was evident across the community in which the families lived: while they were at school, where, for example, their teachers never acknowledged the disappearance of their loved one; from their employers in later life, and right across all aspects of civic life. There was also silence from Government and the media, neither of which reported or acted on the disappearances. As P10 indicates, a state of enforced silence around the disappearance was actively controlled by the paramilitaries.

> *'It was a very silent issue; it comes back to the fear factor and the control that organisations had on communities: nobody wanted to talk' P10.*

Whilst many subsequently did report their loved one missing, they saw very little action being taken by the authorities and they were left in a place of silence, fear and isolation.

> *'Nobody in the police, or the Garda or community, or anyone external would have come forward to talk to us about this and I think that was part of the whole thing'* P32.

The lack of response was not solely restricted to law enforcement. It crossed every aspect of the individuals' lives.

> '*Nobody, nobody in medicine, church, law, nobody was interested in helping. It was just everybody closed their doors in our faces' P4.*

Even if the family took the tentative step of speaking about their disappeared loved one to someone outside the family, there was a big issue as to whether the individual could be trusted not to go to the paramilitaries to tell them.

'You didn't know who to trust and who was linked to who' P13.

The response from civic society and indeed wider society resulted in the absence of a buffer for the families; this reinforced the silence and sense of total powerlessness in relation to the disappearance. Ultimately the families faced many years of waiting and wondering and dealing with it in an environment of enforced silent. Remaining silent and unquestioning was tied to the rules of community engagement discussed below.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: RULES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT- GROWING UP IN NI

'*Whatever you say, Say Nothing'* (Heaney 1975, p10). The title of Seamus Heaney's poem resonates with how the participants in this study lived their lives. It symbolises the mantra of paramilitary groups that demanded secrecy from the community on issues such as disappearance. Throughout the interviews, participants spoke of how they learned the rules of engagement from a young age. For example, children were encouraged not to look at, speak to, or engage with, the army because of the danger it could bring from paramilitaries.

> *'If the army were going around the street and the childer were looking out the window at them, he'd scowl and he say "mind your own business and keep to yourself, don't be looking out there at them" ' P36.*

The British Army and the RUC were perceived to be the enemy. It followed that if an individual witnessed any paramilitary activity within the community they would not report it; if they heard anything, it would not be repeated; these were the rules associated with day to day life within communities on both sides throughout the Conflict.

> *'Me father would have said, say nothing, see nothing, hear nothing, know nothing and that's the way it went on for years' P35.*
>
> *'In the 80's and 90's you kept yourself to yourself, you seen nothing, you heard nothing, you know nothing….because you don't want to be bringing trouble on yourself or your family you know. People would just get on with their work and say nothing' P24.*

Often individuals were sent to warn family members that they should not engage with the authorities; there was a fear that this might impact, not only on the family member, but also on the community in which they lived.

> *'One neighbour came up to the house at one stage and said to my mother not to bring the police into the area, for her sake and their sake' P15.*

For the families of the Disappeared these rules were particularly prominent, as were the consequences of being seen not to follow them.

> *'You had to protect yourself and protect your own people, or protect your family, so you didn't go against, you know, the grain. It was almost as though you had to accept your fate and you got on with it, and you know, how dare you, you know kick up about it' P31.*

The result of this situation was that Individuals were unable to fight back against what had happened. As P31 indicates, they had to accept what had happened and get on with life, regardless of the fate of their loved one. The ripple effect of these rules was that individuals felt they couldn't even speak openly in their own home. The omnipresence of paramilitary groups, and the secrecy around who was involved in the organisation, led to a continual state of watchfulness and adherence to the silence even within the apparent safety of their homes.

> *'Like any talk we ever did we had to whisper, they used to put things to the window and listen in, so you couldn't, you could never have a conversation' P29.*
>
> *'I didn't feel happy, I didn't feel, I, I was always looking over my shoulder' P7.*

The legacy of these rules of engagement has permeated individuals' lives leaving a lasting residue of unease, particularly for those whose loved ones' remains have not yet been recovered. A central issue that fuels this unease is the 'Omerta' that remains in relation to republican violence, particularly regarding the Disappeared.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: OMERTA WITHIN THE REPUBLICAN MOVEMENT

For over two decades, until the IRA/ INLA statements in 1999, there was total silence from republican paramilitary groups on the issue of the Disappeared. Given that there are still some families waiting for the return of their loved ones' bodies, or where the disappearance has yet to be officially recognised by the republican movement, the concept of Omerta - a deeply embedded code of silence, remains as prominent today as it did all those decades ago.

> '*They still got away with the Omerta- keeping the silence in place' P2.*

The participants contend that because there was such a high level of violence, with multiple murders and maiming's throughout the years of the conflict, the issue of the Disappeared was kept hidden. The paramilitaries hid behind this protracted community violence. P3 describes

the intensity of the violence as drowning out the issue of the Disappeared.

> *'There was so much going on, it probably drowned out something so terrible like people being taken and everybody was probably a lot more fearful then of any repercussions'* P3.

Over the last five decades, paramilitaries have maintained an Omerta around providing full information about the context and circumstances of the practice of disappearing individuals. Andriyenko (2019) posits that Omerta is a deeply rooted code of silence originating within the mafia that is not only a system for maintaining silence, and refusing to cooperate with the authorities, but also refers to specific ways of communicating inside the organisation. Andriyenko contends that a key component of Omerta is focused on social integration. This recognises that the real power is based on family values and kinship, both of which are promoted to ensure that there are no dissenting voices within the movement, which makes the maintenance of silence more manageable. By consistently denying that they had anything to do with the disappearances, within a community that they controlled, republican paramilitaries engineered an Omerta which resulted in family and community silence. They also engineered a process of silence within the republican movement. Such was the power of kinship within the republican movement they were able to maintain a prolonged stance of denial for decades.

Participants reflect that a central reason for the Omerta was also self-preservation, given the horrific nature of the abductions and disappearances. For someone to in any way admit that they were involved in disappearances or deaths would have caused them to be seen in a very negative light within the community. As highlighted previously, this was starkly illustrated in Moriarty's (2019) report from a court case in which the justification for hiding one of the Disappeared was that that the community would have actively disapproved. To protect their own reputations and that of the wider republican movement, and to save face, the Omerta around this case and others was not breached by anyone. P32 reflects that the perpetrators must have been ashamed of what they had done to be so intent on trying to ensure that nobody ever found out about it.

> *'I wouldn't like anybody, even close friends of mine or anyone else to know I had murdered anybody - never mind a woman with ten children, a mother with ten children. So I'd say they probably never spoke about it' P32 No 2.*

The Omerta didn't just rest with paramilitaries. It also applied in the case of the British Army.

A number of those disappeared were described by their families as naïve and would be viewed as vulnerable today with special educational needs. Before their disappearances the British Army reportedly had been involved in trying to use some of these vulnerable young men to gather information for them on paramilitary activity within their local community. Beyond the issue being highlighted by the families, this practice has never received any attention and a parallel code of silence exists within the British authorities.

> *'For the state to have played that role without any challenge, and of course it has been challenged and they have been found out on several occasions…there is the state of Omerta'* P34.

One family member concluded that they will not find out for centuries what role British Government state forces played in contributing to republican paramilitaries subsequently disappearing their loved one and a small number of others, as it will be protected under national security legislation.

> *'I mean you know it will be 100 years before people get their hands on these papers to find out and that's the reason, we are a secret society here'* P34.

It could be argued, therefore, that the British Government, by trying to use vulnerable young men and failing to protect them, contributed to the victimisation of these individuals. They also contributed fully to the Omerta that existed in republicanism by allowing the silence to remain unchecked over many decades. A number of family members feel very strongly that the actions of the security forces enabled the disappearances to take place.

> '*They say the MI6 fucking set him up and the fucking Provos finished him off, so I have as much hatred for them as I have for the IRA'* P25.

Across the world, enforced silence has been used as a strategy to keep the issue of the Disappeared hidden at local, community and societal level. Hussain (2019), in discussing the situation in Pakistan, argues that threatening families when they attempt to report their loved one missing, and silencing and intimidating activists and journalists, has facilitated a systematic failure that enables the issue to be hidden. Further, it facilitates disappearances being under reported and not addressed. In failing to account for the Disappeared, and by not recognising the issue for over two decades, the British and Irish Governments enabled the paramilitary Omerta to remain and the families of the Disappeared to remain hidden and silent. Had there not been political engagement at an international level, the Omerta may have continued not only by republican paramilitaries, but also by the British and Irish

Governments, leaving the families to continue to suffer in silence. A key strategy used to ensure that the silence prevailed and that the Omerta was held, was the process of controlling narrative and obstructing truth as examined below.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: CONTROLLING NARRATIVE AND OBSTRUCTING TRUTH

Across the data a central feature of the level of control exerted by republican paramilitaries was their control of the narrative around the Disappeared by which they obscured and obstructed the truth. The use of false narratives, whereby untrue stories or rumours were shared to suggest life and deny death, was echoed across all the interviews.

> *'In the first few years you never think he is dead. Stories were put out that he was seen in England, he's away to America or Australia' P19.*

At a more sinister level, the use of false narratives allowed the reputation of the individual disappeared to be further tarnished. This resonates with conflicts across the world where individuals are deemed to be amoral, and not the 'ideal' victim (Christie 1986) thereby clouding the reason for the disappearance (Nicholls 2010; Martinez 2013; Koc Menard 2014; Hussain 2019 and Isuru et al 2019). Throughout this study, a variety of narratives were given to explain the disappearances, many of which would have been viewed negatively by the community. These included the assertion that the victim had left of their own free will because they no longer wanted to be with their wife or their family; that they had joined the circus or the army or travelled abroad; or that they had done something so bad they deserved to fade into oblivion. The community was encouraged to believe that they were amoral and their absence was therefore to be welcomed. Given the circumstances of some of the Disappeared who left behind pregnant wives, or who were the surviving parent and left behind unsupported children, the negative connotations of this for the families were huge and represented a further grave injustice.

> *'You would always hear the rumour mill that ….they have ran here, they have ran away there. I don't think people actually knew the enormity of what actually had happened' P31.*

> *'They put out messages that he's away to America or that ……he rued his marriage. You knew that wasn't right' P13.*

This process of controlling the narratives through an orchestrated process enabled the truth

to be obscured. Many of the interviewees reported that this was extremely hurtful as the stories were often focused on an amoral loved one who had wanted to leave their family and home.

> *'All that did was create hurt for us' P32.*

These narratives were not one offs. They were often orchestrated over a long period of time with "new information", "new sightings" and further speculation. These stories became ingrained within the community as a form of justification for the absence. It was concluded by one of the participants that the paramilitaries appointed a series of *'planters'*. It was these planters who orchestrated the stories in which there were reported sightings and an indication that individuals were living their lives freely. Whilst this stopped any questions from the community who believed those disappeared were in contact with their families, cruelly it also maintained a sense of hope for the families of the Disappeared that their loved ones might still be alive. This included sending communications to the family reputedly from their loved one.

> *'The Christmas after he had gone …….we received a Christmas card through the post and it didn't have a postmark on it or anything and it was written to Mr and Mrs ….. It was very childish looking writing and Z wasn't a great writer, he would have written in a childish manner and …. to us (this was) a sign that he was somewhere else and he was trying to contact us…. that was like a little ray of hope'* P4.

Not only did the families receive cards, they also received letters and confirmations of job applications all of which were designed to make them believe that their loved one was alive. To counteract the community unease, even the media were used with a staged photograph of someone else to suggest that the individual missing had returned to the community. Thus the paramilitaries sought to diffuse any unease. The vulnerability and marginalisation of the family, compounded by silence and fear, meant that they had no allies to help them fight against this rhetoric. By orchestrating and controlling the narrative the paramilitaries compounded the family's grief and psychological torture.

> *'Then you are desperate you know, you clutch at anything and to us, that in fact he is somewhere, somewhere still and he is not allowed to contact us and this (card) is his way of telling us that he is still here. And we grasped on to that for a long, long time and we never, ever did get to the bottom of it'* P4.

Orchestrated narratives were also used strategically by the paramilitaries as the Disappeared cases came to light following family lobbying in the mid 1990s. Sometimes conflicting information was given to the families regarding where their loved ones were buried. This inaccurate information was traumatic for the families given their desperation to find their loved ones and give them Christian burials.

> *'We got phonecalls to say that Z was buried under a house….. I used to be standing physically sick thinking how are they ever going to find him if he's buried under concrete'* P23.
>
> *'Z was supposed to be buried under that motorway there, the Westlink (a motorway). And all this, getting letters sent to the priest with like a wee map. Sent a map, aye, this is where Z was buried'* P30.

Often these sites were in the most inaccessible places as highlighted above. In other cases, the lack of police investigation or engagement led families to search the areas themselves or to have areas searched often at their own expense.

> '*If we heard anything at all, we would follow it up*' P24.

Letters and maps forwarded to priests, media or anonymously to the family brought hope, but also distress. It was subsequently discovered that many of these reported burial sites were false and part of an engineered process to obstruct recovery (given that the Disappeared had been taken over 100 miles away and buried in some remote location). The families felt that they had to keep searching out of loyalty to their loved one or to their parent who had died in the intervening years,

> *'My daddy would still be throwing stones, pulling over in ditches, even down south like because they were feeding him a lot of nonsense and he was going to get the bottom of it no matter what. So if we hadn't found Z, my daddy would still be going. He would have paid for (named) dam to be drained, and then somewhere else and somewhere else and somewhere else… So when was he ever going to run out steam?'* P13.

These false narratives caused significant stress to the families involved who followed each lead through. In essence, they obstructed the search by diverting resources elsewhere and causing untold trauma and distress to family members.

As well as controlling the narrative regarding the life and death of the person disappeared, particular narratives were also orchestrated by the paramilitary groups to maintain their

image. The participants contend that there was significant obfuscation regarding the real reasons for the disappearance of their loved ones. Many of the families believed that their loved one had witnessed something or was wrongly identified to protect the person who was actually informing. Dudai (2012) contends that the paramilitaries often ensured that the individuals killed were implicated by someone else and killed in order to take paramilitary focus away from the perpetrators or the paramilitary organisation. This may have been why the issue of the Disappeared was so secretive.

In so many ways the families of the Disappeared represented a dissenting voice; they were a manifestation of the brutality and vulnerability of ordinary citizens who could be abducted and killed at will. They represented Cavanagh's (1997) concept of a rough justice which would not be tolerated by the community. Above all, the IRA needed to maintain the backing of the Nationalist and Republican communities (Johnson and English 2008). The participants believe that a main reason why these republican groups continued to control the narrative surrounding the Disappeared was that it affected how republican paramilitaries were perceived within their community. Paramilitary groups needed to control their external image as it impacted, not only on their power and status, but, more importantly, on their exertion of control within the community. To manage this they needed to maintain their own narrative in respect of disappearances.

> *'They would be afraid they would lose a lot of support, which they would at that time'* P36.
>
> *'They didn't want to disclose this. They tried to protect themselves and their image. They still do so*' P14.

An example of the need of the republican paramilitaries to protect their image was highlighted when a number of the Disappeared cases were claimed by the IRA and INLA in 1999, but the list was not complete. The remaining cases remain unclaimed by republican paramilitaries to the present day. Despite this, the ICLVR included these cases and subsequently recovered a number of the bodies through planned searches; this included the cases of Charlie Armstrong, who disappeared in 1980, and Gerry Evans, who lived in the same village, and disappeared in 1979. Their inquests revealed that the pattern of burial in which their hands were tied behind their back and their bodies were weighed down with stones, bore resemblance to the recovery of other young men who were secretly buried less than 300

metres away and whose cases were claimed by the IRA (O'Halloran 2011). This led forensic expert Geoff Knupfer, to conclude that, while their deaths had not been claimed by the IRA, he believed that, given the similarity with the other clandestine burials in the area, and the context and manner in which these deaths had taken place, they had been caused by the same republican paramilitary group (O'Halloran 2011). In continuing to deny any involvement in these cases after years of orchestrating false narratives around them, the paramilitary groups sought to maintain their local reputation and standing.

Controlling the narrative was, therefore, part of an orchestrated process to manage, not only the families and the community, but also the reputation of the paramilitary group within respective communities. This, along with a strategy of enforced silence and the maintenance of an Omerta around the Disappeared, contributed to extensive paramilitary control. Through an orchestrated process which started from the point of abduction, the perpetrators had a direct and detrimental impact on the families, compounding grief, injustice and betrayal. It also prevented the families fulfilling the normal customs and practices associated with burial. The legacy for the families arising out of the disappearance, and the subsequent process of control, became a central theme within the study and forms the third section of results.

SECTION 3: FAMILY TRAUMA

THEORETICAL CONCEPT	HIGHER ORDER CATEGORIES	LOWER ORDER CATEGORIES
FAMILY TRAUMA	Situating Trauma	Domination, Perseverance, and Survival Generational Transmission Family Activism

THEORETICAL CONCEPT: FAMILY TRAUMA

For the participants in this study, the legacy of disappearance and its impact on family life was immense, with long term ramifications for family relationships, and family cohesion. In many cases it manifested itself in the break-up of the family unit. For some participants the ripple effect of trauma on the family was stark.

'*It (the disappearance) destroyed her (Mum), she destroyed us'* P8.

The duration of the disappearances and the orchestrated nature of the paramilitary campaign resulted in some of the participants living with the impact of the disappearance throughout their childhood and for most of their adult years. It often subsumed their life, particularly when a parent disappeared or was so adversely impacted by the disappearance of their child that they became mentally ill, as highlighted by P8 above. In this case the impact was insurmountable and overwhelming which in turn rippled out to the remaining children.

From the data analysis it was evident that participants compartmentalised family life into three parts: their memories and accounts of family life before the disappearance; in the days, weeks, months and years following the disappearance; and, finally, in the case of those recovered, or where searches have been conducted, family life from that period of time onwards. This was a spontaneous and universal response across the interviews as the participants recounted what happened to their loved ones. In focusing on the circumstances of the disappearance they generally attributed the early days of life as happy, recounting

memories of time spent with their loved one and the cohesion of their family unit. Patterns and processes in family life were seen to change often quite starkly after the abduction, given the implications, context and circumstances of the loss. The proximity of paramilitaries and the orchestrated nature of the loss was reflected in the language and sentiments expressed when participants referred to this period of time as being one of anguish, powerlessness, fear, terror and uncertainty regarding why and how their loved one had simply vanished. All of the participants reflected that life was never the same following the abduction. There had been a full life before their loved one was taken and, for many, a half-life afterwards.

> *'I think that my Mum unfortunately constantly looks back , constantly looks back to the time in her life when she had Z and how perfect life was and then how her life you know half ended on (date)' P4.*

The years of uncertainty regarding the fate of their loved one emboldened the concept of a 'half-life' as they lived with a constant state of ambiguity regarding whether their loved one was alive or dead. This became a marker of change between life as it was and life from the point of abduction on. The engineered process, by which the public narrative around the Disappeared was controlled by the paramilitaries, perpetuated the families' suffering as it was often suggested that their loved one had made a choice to leave the family. However the participants' underlying fear over the years, as reflected in the data analysis, was that their loved one was dead. This constant state of uncertainty, oscillating between hope of life and dread of death, compounded by the powerlessness and threat associated with the paramilitary 'management' of the issue of the disappearance meant that life thereafter was never the same. Given this state of perpetual uncertainty, having notional markers to denote when life changed was the only certainty many of the families had throughout the years.

Whilst individuals referred to the issue of time and the ending of the life they knew, this presented not only psychologically, but also physically. For some families, the disappearance brought the disintegration of the family unit, as the sole parent had either been disappeared or had become psychologically absent due to impaired mental functioning arising from the disappearance. In cases where children were orphaned, or their care giver had taken ill, there was a permanent rupture of the family unit as the parent was either no longer present or they were unable to care for their children. Boss's (2004) Ambiguous Loss framework referred to the challenges for individuals and their families when those disappeared were physically

absent but psychologically present, as is the case for those orphaned. Boss also refers to those who are psychologically absent but physically present; this can be seen in the cases of those whose family members suffered severe impaired functioning due to the psychological distress associated with the disappearance. In some cases, as outlined by Participant 8 above, many families experienced both types of loss with detrimental consequences for the family unit. The rupturing of the family unit, however, also had a wider impact. It often compounded the silence, the threat and the fear around the disappearance as there was no adult left to speak out for the person abducted, or to help or advocate for the children who had been left behind.

> *'As a family unit, we were split up and we were broke up, and we never became a family after it. That ended our family life as we knew it like, and we just grew up not really knowing each other' P32 No 1.*

While some families never regained their family unit following the disappearance of their loved one, others attempted to coalesce in an effort to hold the family together, provide stability and cohesion, and to search for their loved one. In many cases gender was a central issue for these families as the female lead in the house provided stability, guidance and security for the children. Some family members were drawn closer into the family unit in an effort to buffer the negative effects of the traumatic loss of their loved one. It was also part of managing the disappearance given the fear that other loss and violence would be inflicted on the family unit by the paramilitaries.

> *'The fact that this did happen did bring us closer together if that is possible and made us really value each other and support each other and as a family, as children to support our parents. And we have remained that way all these years later' P4.*

Social exclusion and the context of the disappearances in this case resulted in the family unit becoming tighter and internalising what had happened as a way of coping and managing. There was also a sense that the children needed to care for their parents who were struggling with the loss of their sibling.

Across the data analysis there were family challenges in the years following the disappearance. Spokespeople started to emerge emerged in the mid to late 1990s from within each family to take forward the search for their loved ones by starting to highlight their cases. This was not a role the family members relished, as is evident in their accounts. The early spokespeople were nearly all female: the mothers, wives, daughters and siblings of the Disappeared. As well as carrying the support and security needs of the family they then

adopted the role of lobbying too. Even in the late 1990s, the women were reluctant to be photographed and pictures were taken only of their hands holding the photographs of their loved ones rather than including their faces. Such was the fear of antagonising the paramilitaries within their local community. There was a visceral fear of retaliatory paramilitary action, the residue of which continues to be present today.



Figure 14 Press Launch Belfast City Hall 1998. Photograph ©Brendan Murphy

As the years progressed highlighting their loved one's cases inevitably brought conflict for some family members and the participants in this study reflect conflicting perspectives regarding the rights and wrongs of how the campaign for the recovery of a loved one progressed. Traumatic loss in general, places tremendous strain on family relationships given issues such as role ambiguity, family separation, and divorce post-trauma; this is intensified given the traumatic impact associated with the longevity of disappearance (Henry et al 2011; Coulter and Mooney 2018). In conflict related disappearances, however, there are added complications for family relationships given the political context and circumstances of the loss. The impact of threat and fear on families is often immense and strained family relationships may often emerge around individual family members criticising the republican movement. Central issues revolved around family members' fear of a backlash for themselves or their children, or siblings or the further destabilisation of relationships within the family

particularly with those sympathetic to the republican movement. However, this also compounded the silence in families as some family members had concerns regarding what information could be shared about the case, and whether this could be inadvertently fed back to those responsible for the disappearance within the respective paramilitary factions. Inevitably this led, not only to mistrust but also resentment building in the extended family. As evident across the data analysis, resentment stemmed from participants perceiving that their loved ones were being further wronged by the inactivity or silence of family members, whilst some considered their loved ones as being betrayed by those who were supportive to the republican cause. The intimacy of communities, in which the families and paramilitaries lived in close proximity, compounded this resentment and sense of fear. Whilst threats were, in some cases, issued directly to the family, a more pervasive tactic was the orchestration, by the paramilitaries, of the marginalisation of the family within the local area. Topping and Bryne (2012) posit that the insidious capacity of republican paramilitaries to destabilise relationships within the community cannot be underestimated. Participants spoke of a deep underlying fear of speaking out. Yet if the context and circumstances of the loss had involved the opposing side, as discussed previously, then relationships, structures and neighbourliness within respective communities could have had a strong ameliorating effect post-trauma (Lambert et al 2018).

It is evident that when recovery came, it brought a sense of finality for the family in being able to lay their loved one to rest. In comparison, family issues were often not laid to rest and, in several cases, these emerged with intensity, with family loyalties severely tested post-recovery. Just as grief had been contained as a form of survival, it was highlighted by some participants that issues bottled up all over the years started to emerge when it was all over.

> *'It was an awful position to be in and that's when the family started to fall apart when he was found. It really got to you then that was the time you could change from being glad you had him, to being angry or wanting answers, that was the time you could see the change on the family. I could see it affecting the boys then, each one was different, each one it affected them differently' P29.*
>
> *'When you think what had happened it should have made the family stronger together, but it didn't - it just ripped us apart'* P32 No 1.

The recovery by the ICLVR of the bodies of those disappeared started a different process for the families in which the legacy of the disappearance came to the fore. The grief frozen for

years emerged (Section 6); questions of injustice were evoked; questions regarding why the disappearance happened emerged; and the lack of investigation and accountability came to the fore. There was a corresponding impact for the next generation regarding the injustice of the past. Salih and Samarasinghe (2017) postulate that the emotional cost of disappearance may often become intensified post-recovery suggesting that challenges and difficulties for individuals and their families may only emerge then.

> *'I am not degrading my Z or any of the other disappeared but once that bullet went into their head, they ceased to exist, nothing that they (the paramilitaries) could do, could hurt them ever again. It couldn't. So this was left to generations of families who are hurting for 40 years. Well they didn't do anything. Neither did the person that was shot, they didn't deserve it, but their families deserved it less' P14.*

Given the context, the orchestrated nature of disappearing individuals by paramilitaries has direct implications for the family unit. As reflected in the excerpt above, the suffering of family members does not abate with time and can last for decades. It can also bring a sense of anger at the injustice, not only for the loved one who has lost their life, but also for the wider family who were unable to let the issue rest until their loved one was found. As reflected in the data analysis, the participants were unable to let the disappearance go; they had to continue to fight for their loved one. In some cases this lasted for decades or is still unresolved. Whilst the individual disappeared is a victim, the family left waiting and searching are victims too. Their torment, as P14 suggests, does not end. They are left with years of pain and the torment of dealing with the cruelty associated with the disappearance. The engineered process adopted by paramilitaries intensifies the disruption of family systems, communication processes and family identity as family members cope with the loss of their loved one. It also compounds the grieving process for family members.

In relation to family legacy, a higher order category of Situating Trauma emerged from the data analysis with associated lower order categories to follow.

HIGHER ORDER CATEGORY: SITUATING TRAUMA

Across the data, the toll on the caregiver was reflected as a central issue given the context and circumstances of the loss. How they coped with the disappearance was individually determined. While some persevered, as discussed later in this chapter, others experienced

deteriorating mental health. The impact for the children in this case was stark. Bezo and Maggi (2018) and Cross et al (2018) contend that parental trauma has a direct correlation to children's risk of traumatic exposure. This was borne out in participants testimonies.

> *'She (Mum) would have took us out in the early hours of the morning, stopping cars, asking them could she look in the boot of the car'* P8.

The children were also taken around the doors of known republicans during the night as their mother searched for their brother. These searches caused immense distress to the children who had been taken from their beds. A central issue that existed for family members was mistrust in the community around them and the malign influence of the paramilitaries who seemed to have tentacles across all aspects of community life. There were limited safe places available to the families other than close family across the community.

For families the absence of any acknowledgement or validation outside of the family ensured that the traumatic impact was unrecognised and families faced a prolonged state of ambiguity compounded by a climate of fear and isolation. Being shunned by the community, as engineered by the paramilitaries, compounded the mental health impact of trauma across the family. From the initial loss at the point of the abduction, further issues emerged as is evident across the data analysis.

> *'I think that it has effected each and every one in their own way, depression, anxiety would have been a lot, the drinking come into it, you know there are so many things there, that even though you think it wasn't effecting them were' P29.*
>
> *'It was desperate so it was like, insanity, sleeplessness nights, drink, fighting with the wife and all' P2.*
>
> *'I would have been fighting me own demons you know like there was doors opening in my head and slamming you know'* P40.

Somasundaram (2007) referred to the spirals of loss arising in disappearances, in which one loss triggers others. This is reflected in the testimonies above. He suggests that the personal impact of loss often leads to anxiety, depression and loneliness which in turn spirals outwards causing social isolation, detachment from family, friends and community (Heeke et al 2017; Lenferink et al 2017a; Bezo and Maggi 2018 and Coulter and Mooney 2018). Somasundaram's work has much resonance with the experience of the families of those disappeared in NI's Conflict. However, as well as social isolation being a personal response to the trauma faced,

it could also be externally controlled by the tactics of paramilitaries. The participants reflect how being shunned and isolated by the community because of the influence of paramilitaries compounded the mental health impact associated with the disappearance. This process of excluding and threatening families had a direct impact on the lives of families over many decades as the process around their loved ones disappearance continued to be controlled and engineered by republican paramilitaries.

While changes were experienced at an individual level the impact of the disappearances on family life caused major life adjustments for many of the family members. Somasundaram (2007) contends that, not only do disappearances bring gaps in the functioning of the family unit, but the ambiguity of the fate of a loved one also adds to maladaptive family dynamics. Some participants refer to escaping from the situation whilst others reflect that it was harder on those who remained in the family home and had repeated exposure to the severity of how the issue impacted upon parents or those left behind. They were also living within a community that did not in any way address their loss. The context of fear with an underlying anticipation that there could be further violence, was highlighted by participants as never being far away. Coping mechanisms that aided survival during the years of violence such as the use of alcohol or other substances, or reinforced home security, often became maladaptive when the situation changed (Somasundaram 2007; Lunnemann et al 2019).

As the years progressed, there was an increased awareness by participants that particular coping strategies adopted could have a detrimental impact on their children in particular. As reflected in the literature, sustained trauma in childhood can create a predisposition and vulnerability to further harm or interpersonal and intrapersonal difficulties in the future (Isobel et al 2019).

> *'I had big bars on each door and then I realised that, one day I realised that I couldn't have all these bars on the door because my children were getting older and I didn't want the same thing brought into them' P33.*
>
> *'I was just lying in bed and trying to get a night's sleep and it just came into my head… the impact of it - what was going to happen to my kids with the way I was at the time; the impact this was having on my marriage; and the impact it was having with my own brothers and sisters' P32 No 2.*

The traumatic consequences of disappearances on family life, as reflected by P32 and P33, were immense. The impact of this was clear across the interviews in terms of the experience

of trauma and the influence of the external environment in exacerbating the effect it had across individuals' lives. However, the external environment also led to it not being adequately addressed. This does not just affect those directly impacted by the disappearance of a loved one; the physical and psychological health of the 2nd and 3rd generations may also be directly impacted (Bezo and Maggi 2018). This will be discussed in one of the lower order categories. As the years progressed there was cognisance of the impact of trauma on daily life. Participants reflected on the need to prevent the trauma being passed to their children. Three lower order categories which presented were: dominance, perseverance and survival; generational trauma; and family activism.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: DOMINATION, PERSERVERANCE AND SURVIVAL

The continuous impact of dealing with the trauma, the ambiguity around a loved one's death and anticipating their death, led a number of participants to highlight how that the disappearance of their loved one had dominated their family life.

> *'I just turned 19, so that was; the rest of my adult life nearly was just looking for him'* P35.

The disappearance not only dominated life due to the loss of a loved one, it also dominated every aspect of their social, religious, work and educational engagement given the orchestrated nature of the loss by paramilitaries. From the point of the abduction, families were restrained from addressing the issue due to fear and threat. Every aspect of their lives was impacted by the nature and context of their loss, including the level of paramilitary control and its noxious longevity.

Despite this, participants spoke of how they felt that they had to keep going. This was tied strongly to loyalty to their loved one and a sense of the injustice regarding the death and subsequent their treatment by the paramilitaries.

> *'Do you know and people ask, probably ask the same questions "how do you keep, how do you keep going day to day", it's part of your make up now, you just go on, that's all you can do'* P31.

Persevering and having to keep going was a recurrent theme evident across the data analysis. As P31 contends, it's part of your make up now, given the longevity (decades) of the search for his brother. It was tied to survival and for many there was the sense that they could not

give up looking for their loved one. It was a burden that they carried until their loved one's body was recovered. Alongside this they were holding down jobs and rearing their own families. The pressure on all aspects of family life resonates with the case of conflict related disappearances worldwide (Somasundaram 2007; Hussain et al 2010; Salih and Samarasinghe 2017 and Adams 2019). Across the data participants reflected on how their family life suffered because of their focus on their missing loved one.

> '*It's just been hard, you know, trying to rear my own family through it, because you are running about here there and everywhere else, trying to do the right thing by our Z and your own family is going to the wall'* P32 No 1.
>
> '*I had (3 children) but god love them to this day I don't know who looked after them and who made them their food or anything. I still don't know' P*1.

The phase repeatedly used was that '*you had to get on'.* There was no choice other than to persevere and continue living. Despite the sense outlined by P1 that the children suffered, it was reflected in interviews with these children that this was not always the case. In fact it could be quite the opposite, where the parents tried to ensure family life was as normal as possible. P3 acknowledges, however, the sense of sadness and deep unhappiness within the family home given her brother's absence.

> *'I don't know how Mummy really did it but she just really tried to keep life as normal as possible for me going out to school, coming in having my lunch and my dinner was there for me every day. And how she managed to be able to do that but she did. They made life, tried to keep life as normal as possible* even though there was a feeling of sadness in the house*' P3.*

The need for perseverance was also part of the legacy parents left behind. It was accepted that the remaining family would continue to campaign for the return of their loved ones' body. There was a sense that the mantle of responsibility regarding recovering their loved one had passed to them on their parent's death. Reflecting on his mum's wishes P25 states,

> *'Cause if she had a said to me 'listen", you know, "listen sure if anything happens to me or whatever, he's in heaven" and all this here, but she didn't, she said the opposite to me, you know "you want to keep looking for him and get him buried"'* P25 No 1.

This sense of responsibility and the need to continue to represent and fight for the return of their loved one was reflected across the data analysis. Given the context of the power and control being exerted by the paramilitaries, the bravery of the families in continuing to lobby, cannot be underestimated. The concept of continued responsibility to search for loved ones

is also reflected across the literature for families in Sri Lanka (Somasundaram 2007); Colombia (Cronin-Furman and Krystalli 2020); and Peru (Garcia-Godos 2018). In some ways it could be argued that the families of those disappeared continue to be constrained or saddled with the burden of the past. Given the context of their loss, whether their loved one is recovered or not, they are a continuing presence every day.

'You never forget. Every day I think of him, but you try just to get on with your life' P24.

The impact of the disappearance is, therefore, not just evident for the first generation, it also has intergenerational ramifications, as discussed below.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: GENERATIONAL TRAUMA

The vicarious effect of the disappearance of a loved one was not just restricted to those who were old enough to have cognisance of the significance of the event at the time. Despite being born after the disappearance had taken place, it was evident across the data that it had a deep and profound effect across the second and third generations.

> *'I don't even want to touch it, only I'm embedded, it's a family thing. I wouldn't want to go near, but it's just, it was one of those really, really shady, shameful, disgusting things, that happened, that you just can't justify' P20.*

Born after their loved one went missing, it is clear that the family legacy of disappearance has a deep hold on the niece of one of the Disappeared as outlined above. Not wanting to deal with the issue, but feeling that it was embedded within the family make up, reinforced a sense of responsibility to continue fighting for the recovery of a loved one. Hirscberger (2018) contends that deaths arising in wars and conflicts confront family members with the painful realisation that human life is expendable, deaths are unjustifiable and often life is not valued. As outlined above there was no justification for what had taken place, however the orchestrated process surrounding the disappearance by paramilitaries applied as much to the next generation as it did to older members of the family. This generational impact across the data analysis was particularly evident for those whose families had remained in the immediate area, within the same social, recreational and educational structures as their parents. Remaining in the environment in which the disappearance took place reinforced the sense that the impact of the disappearance was embedded within the individual. Given the

paramilitary orchestration of the process surrounding disappearance, family members reflected on the effect of their continued stigmatisation and the underlying feeling of threat that remain years later due to the proximity of those responsible. Shards of paramilitary control also remain given the continuing sense of fear, and the wilful withholding of information regarding the whereabouts of loved ones that still persists. Rinear (1988) referred to the secondary injury that comes in the case of a stigmatised death, given the associated feelings of shame, fear, isolation and injustice. These themes have resonance in relation to the data generated. Jordan (2001) and Isuru et al (2019) argue that in the case of disappearances the stigmatised nature of the death often lead the next generation to be silent. This was a key aim for those responsible for the disappearances in NI's Conflict who continued to engineer and manage the issue.

A key factor within families that conversely assisted republican paramilitaries was often a reluctance to speak about the issue to the next generation. It was repeatedly reflected by the participants that conversations surrounding the Disappeared were limited, or were completed avoided.

> *'Dad doesn't really have those conversations' P20.*

After receiving a threatening call to the family home, P13 recounts,

> *'He (Father) never had a direct conversation with me about it. It was something I had overheard, or listened into. But he never would have said' P13.*

Bar On (1993) postulates that children are more sensitive to incoherence in discourse in relation to what is said or not said, than those around them realise. Participants reflected on the impact of having not been provided with this information by their parent (s). Instead, they gleaned it by piecing information together from overheard conversations, by observing the emotional reaction of loved ones when names were mentioned, or by being taunted by others in the community about the fate of their loved one, as reflected in Section 2.

The third generation participants noted that whilst there was family silence, the issue was often palpable as they recounted incidents of family upset which have left an indelible imprint. This started them questioning what had happened to their loved ones.

> *'The disappearance of my uncle came on the news and I remember my granny taking very ill'* P10.

'The picture (of the young man disappeared) was there, but you would see her (Grandmother), when we came in from school, she would put out her dinner, she would go sit in her chair underneath his picture and just she would cry and we wouldn't know why, it was, and that was tough, she would say his name' P20.

Dalgaard et al (2019) posit that the style of family communication and the omission or inclusion of information can impact directly on the transgenerational transmission of trauma. In gaining partial information, the children were often left with an incomplete picture and, in its absence misinformation, took its place increasing fear and perpetuating the trauma of the loss. It was clear that myths in effect became reality.

'*We always thought, we kinda knew, he had been kidnapped but not politically, we just thought it was a random kidnapping, We used to walk home from school, home from granny's .. I remember looking over my shoulder thinking are we going to get kidnapped, cause he was kidnapped' P20.*

This was a traumatic way for any child to live in the absence of information regarding her uncle's disappearance. It made the community a more threatening place and intensified fear and distress. Adams (2019) suggests that fear, terror and uncertainty paralyse those left behind. It was reflected by participants that a lack of information and witnessing the distress of parents caused wider ramifications for their generation, burdening them with a legacy of fear and unresolved grief, and compounding the uncertainty in the world around them. This situation prevails 40 years on for the second and third generations.

'It took its toll on me emotionally and I can't imagine what it is doing to direct family members of the deceased, whenever I felt that…It's, it's a heavy cross to bear now, I can only imagine what it's like for them' P20.

Fear was a constant companion across the generations. Part of the orchestrated process is to embolden a climate of fear and threaten anyone who speaks out. As Somasundaram (2007) outlines, it was the psychological warfare adopted by the paramilitaries in Sri Lanka to ensure compliance, and the control of loyalties through intimidation and terror that left a legacy for families. This was also the case in NI, where paramilitaries managed a process of controlling the community to marginalise the families while threatening any dissent.

From an inter-generational perspective across the data analysis, there was a dichotomy in that parents thought that by not engaging in any conversation regarding their loved ones

disappearance they were actually protecting their children from further violence or from being saddled with the past.

> '*Like I know I had a young family at the time and I never discussed anything with them because I was afraid that they would, that, it would come back on them' P29.*
>
> *'We always made sure that they were safe and they didn't need to be weighed down by this problem' P6.*

For parents, the need to protect their children, both from any further harm and from being influenced or weighed down with the past, was repeatedly reflected as preferable to the situation their parents had found themselves in. Some felt they were sparing their children from the distress associated with the loss,

> *'I would never have put them through the agony of sitting them down and telling them exactly what happened. Do you know. They have paper clippings and newspapers and that there, so they know themselves, but I don't want to be starting another generation of this. Because they have to live here too, and do you know what, it is a new generation, it doesn't be mentioned now to them, so why should they bring it up?' P35.*

Yet, in the absence of information from their parents, children try to glean as much information as possible some of which compounds their levels of fear and feeling of threat as outlined by P20. According to Hobfoll et al (2011) and Jakoby (2012) the intensification of fear by not providing information can be prevented with a shared acknowledgement across the generations of the circumstances, context and reality of a loved one's death. They argue that this is beneficial for families in coping with loss. This sense of needing to protect children from the past remains for many of the interviewees. They want the issue addressed by republican paramilitaries and the bodies of their loved ones returned home, rather than the injustice passed on to the next generation.

> *'So would I want them to carry on in this? No, no, no, I want them to live their lives and have hope and live it in peace and to bring my grandchildren up that they never have to face this. They shouldn't have to. It's time that these people (republican paramilitaries) understood this' P14.*

Interwoven throughout the data analysis is a feeling of anger that the process in which the disappearances were orchestrated by paramilitaries continues to have resonance for the families today. Withholding information or drip feeding information as P14 highlights has an impact for her children and grandchildren. What families want, as reflected within the data,

is the Disappeared recovered and returned home in their lifetime. They do not want their children to be saddled with the past. Yet it is evident, as reflected in the testimonies of family members born after the abductions took place, that the issue is deeply embedded within their lives. In part, they have grown up unknowingly in a situation where the orchestration by paramilitaries applied to the whole family unit. They are, therefore, not untouched by the disappearance of their loved one. Whilst parent(s) may have believed that maintaining silence around the issue protected their children, conversely family and community silence was a key component engineered by paramilitaries to manage the issue. As the data shows, there were clear inter-generational trauma issues present for those born long after the disappearance had occurred. In the main this has been shaped and compounded by the engineered process adopted by paramilitaries in order to 'manage' the issue of the Disappeared on an ongoing basis. Whilst, on one level, there is a reluctance to confront the issue of the past, it is in fact embedded within the family, and is an associated impact on the activism undertaken across the generations in respective families.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: FAMILY ACTIVISM

For decades, as reflected across the data, some of the families lived in a state of perpetual fear, deeply isolated within their community given the context and circumstances of the disappearance. As the political context changed in Northern Ireland the issue of the disappearance gradually came into public prominence through a process of family activism. Family spokespersons emerged and a support group evolved of families all campaigning for the return of their loved one. Intertwined throughout the data was the sense of hope and belonging that radiated from this group, increasing resilience around the complexity and enormity of the disappearances of loved ones. The power and place of family activism through a group process has resonance with the experience of families in Colombia and in Sri Lanka, in which peer group processes facilitated the restoration of a feeling of control, fostering hope which had been eroded given the strategies adopted by oppressive regimes who were responsible for disappearing individuals (Caicedo and Cardenas 2018; Adams 2019).

Fostering hope through family activism does not diminish or remove the suffering but, according to Boss (2016), enables a feeling of increased control and progression that

something positive can come from something so destructive. This is of fundamental importance when families are living in the same communities as those paramilitaries responsible for the abductions. Whilst the group process was important in relation to NI's Conflict as reflected in the data generated, being a member of the group on its own wasn't enough. To gain any traction on the issue of the Disappeared family members needed to be active and have a visual presence. It was noticeable that if family members were silent, there was little action or redress from republican paramilitaries. In many ways the paramilitaries relied on family silence as this was a key goal in their overall 'management' of the issue. Participants reflected on other disappeared cases that they had heard of within the community that were never formally reported and attributed this to the lack of action from within the respective families.

> *'I've always said.. there was a lot of people out there. And, for some reason or other - whether their families are dead, or, they haven't came forward'* P32 No 2.

For progress to be made on the recovery of the body of a loved one, the family members had to be active. They also had to break the silence surrounding their loved ones case. For some participants this took time and they reflected that once they met other families they believed they were betraying their loved one and the other families if they didn't speak out.

> *'If I don't do this then I am letting down not only myself, I am letting Z down mostly but I am also letting other people, who need that information beside me. I am letting them down. So you want to do what's right. Well do it whether you like it or you don't. You know we all need help' P14.*

> *'I feel that no matter what anybody done to me, I have to speak out and if I don't, I am betraying my brother' P8.*

When some family members were quiet on the issues, others within the family deemed this as being uncaring or unconcerned, or that it reflected a family member's tacit support for republican paramilitaries. This was marked in families that were actively supportive of the republican cause.

> *'I only had family to talk to. It was kept within the family and there was fighting going on because one side of our family were dedicated to the IRA and the rest weren't'* P9.

> *'We always say that bringing up our own kids, how she (mother) survived, what she did and like she had nobody behind her because all my aunts were republican, all political, all and like V (republican family member) across the road from us' P5.*

While there are many positive factors associated with activism, the data reflects the internal conflict that emerged within families as a result of the path individuals chose. There was a difficult line for family representatives to tread. In highlighting their loved one's case, a key area of concern was not antagonising paramilitaries or, by extension, the community around them any further but at the same time family members should not feel silenced when they had chosen to speak out.

> *'I wouldn't be telling you any stories out of school if I said Y (sibling) and myself had a huge difference of opinion …. I just thought he was like a bull in a china shop for a few years. He has reined it in now and thankfully X (sibling) with her more emotional, non-political stance, it's become more salient and more important in our narrative than some political point scoring' P34.*

It was clear from interviewing several members of the same family that relationships were and continue to be complex. Over time relationships changed with some of the younger family members becoming the main lobbyists within the families. Equally, variations arose in the case of parents with one parent assuming responsibility for highlighting their loved one's case, while the other remained silent. For those active there was a sense that in lobbying they had greater control over the situation than those who were silent (Campbell and Demi 2000).

> *'My mum finds great comfort and it was very beneficial for her to talk about it over the years and to repeat her story and God love her because she did it, that's why we ended up getting Z's body . Daddy took a different approach and he kept quiet. He didn't like to talk about it' P4.*

In this case the father actively disliked the public campaign to recover his son's body and withdrew, becoming increasingly isolated. This led to family conflict. In comparison the mother moved from being socially isolated and frightened, to being a campaigner, engaging widely across the community. This was not only empowering, but was noted as her *'taking back control*' regarding her son's case. This process of activism enabled a type of social movement to highlight the Disappeared in which the grief became the political force for activism and organisation (Jakoby 2012). Equally, being part of a social movement that fosters support is also beneficial in helping individuals work through their loss (King et al 2006; Hobfoll et al 2011; Robins 2011 and Coulter and Mooney 2018), mitigating against complicated grief (Campbell and Demi 2000). Neimeyer (2006) suggests that the core process of enabling individuals to 'story' the circumstances of their loved ones death in a way that makes it understandable and hopeful is one of the most valuable aspects associated with

activism. As reflected across the data, there was a clear purpose and benefit in sharing what happened. Robins (2011) postulates that solidarity and sharing enables a social reconstruction of meaning and identity. That is crucial, particularly when individuals are living with the ambiguity associated with disappearance. These themes were reflected below.

Activism provided a purpose; it had meaning and confirmed, not only the identity of P4's sibling, it also confirmed the identity of her mum. In relation to politically motivated disappearances this was crucial as part of the strategy adopted by paramilitaries is to obliterate all evidence that those disappeared ever existed.

> *'When Mummy became involved with WAVE and they gave her that platform and encouraged her to talk about it, Mum took it like a baton and ran with it, and it was great because she was doing something for Z to try to find him again and because she talked about it so much it was therapeutic for her' P4.*

Family activism therefore, while therapeutically valuable to the families, also has a wider purpose in moving the issue beyond the community in which the individual lived. This in turn moves the family beyond the process orchestrated by the paramilitaries, reducing their power to continue to control the issue of the Disappeared. As the testimonies reflect, family activism didn't stop threats being issued, however, the participants felt bolstered to deal with these threats and to move forward in a process of solidarity and activism.

> *'You watch your mother and you look at her and you can see the, the heartbreak cause you can always see it in people's eyes…it's a tragic thing, you couldn't let that woman go to her grave not knowing where her son was do you know and if you were going to get hassle for it, yeah you get it' P31.*

Through this bolstered process family members started to take risks in fighting for the return of their loved one, as discussed in Section 5. As Boss (2011) posits, activism through peer support generates not only hope but also an increased sense of control. The marginalisation experienced within the community is replaced by the solidarity and support of other families which acts as a strong buffer for families. A key associated stage in the journey for the families is the Affirming and Re-humanising which will be discussed in the next section of results.

SECTION 4: AFFIRMING AND REHUMANISING

THEORETICAL CONCEPT	HIGHER ORDER CATEGORIES	LOWER ORDER CATEGORIES
AFFIRMING AND REHUMANISING	Existence	Seeing is believing The significance of belongings
	Rehumanising	Respect restored- righting the wrong of the past

THEORETICAL CONCEPT: AFFIRMING AND REHUMANISING

'If a person disappears, it's like they never existed' P15.

Jacobsen and Petersen (2019) point out that even though a loved one is physically absent in death, they often remain psychologically present through memories, recollections and in the connection to cherished belongings (Guillard 2017). This was reflected in the accounts given by participants in this study which referenced the significance of belongings held by many of the families. However, having a loved one disappeared leaves family members in a perpetual state of uncertainty that impedes them in the processing of memories which confirmed that their loved one existed at an emotional level (Jones 2020b; Eisma and Stroebe 2021). The manner and context in which the disappearance was perpetrated by paramilitaries is strongly tied to this, as the external environment in which the loss occurred contributed to this feeling of emotional and physical disconnection. The participants believed that part of the strategy of republican paramilitaries over the years was to ensure that all traces of their loved ones' existence would be removed. Just as the body would fade post burial, the paramilitaries intended that the memories would fade too within the family, and that they would cease to be remembered at a community and societal level.

'So like he was shot and buried like a dog, they wanted to get rid of him and hoped that it would wither away' P25 No 1.

This concept of withering away in P25's account did not only reflect the decomposition of the body. B by actively preventing anyone from discussing the victim or their fate over a period of time, and by actively silencing the families, the participants believed that the paramilitaries' aim was to ensure that the Disappeared would simply be forgotten about and would 'wither' away. The strategy by the paramilitaries of ensuring 'enforced forgetting' was not unique to the NI Conflict. It has also been used by those who instigated disappearances in Sri Lanka, Colombia and Peru (Hollander 2016; Robins 2016; Caicedo and Cardenas 2018; Garcia-Godos 2018 and Mir 2020).

Tied strongly to this concept of existence was the deliberately callous way in which the victims were killed and 'discarded'. This led the families to feel that their loved ones' memory had not only been obliterated, but that they had been dehumanised and ceased to matter as human beings. For some of the families the process of addressing these wrongs began with the first act of speaking out about their loved ones. Massimi and Baecker (2011) posit that making a story visible to others, not only acknowledges the loss, it ensures it becomes part of public history and confirms that loved ones existed. Rehumanising their loved ones and confirming their existence were key aims of the families in fighting back against the orchestrated strategy perpetrated by the paramilitaries. The recovery of a body, as reflected in the data analysis, was the point that many of the participants note as deeply significant, in reaffirming their loved one's existence and beginning a process of reintegrating them back into the family unit.

HIGHER ORDER CATEGORY: EXISTENCE

The concept of existence appeared consistently across the interviews. From the analysis of the data it was seen to be tied strongly to a number of factors. The ambiguity associated with the disappearance (in that family members were unsure whether their loved one was alive or dead) led family members to question the existence of their loved one. Many families throughout the years they left the key in the front door; and the person's clothes were left hanging on the back of the door, with personal belongings in exactly the same place as the day they left. However, even though there was this physical presence of belongings, many of

the participants said that, in disappearing their loved one, the paramilitaries tried to make them feel like the victim had ceased to exist. The silence in the family led family members who were younger when their loved one disappeared, or born after their disappearance, to question whether their loved one had ever existed at all.

> *'Sometimes as I grew up, I used to think to myself 'is Z real because it was never spoke about'' P8.*

Individual, family and community silence contributed to the feelings around contested existence.

The paramilitary strategy of curtailing any attempts by family members to raise the issue and of denying that they had disappeared individuals when challenged politically, also called into question the existence of those disappeared.

> *'In the same way as my Z's identity was stripped from Z for years and years- I was Z's' son and I wouldn't even speak about Z … It was as if Z wasn't ever on the earth' P32 No 2.*

As P32 indicates, removing the identity of individuals by not confirming their existence rendered the families silent and unable to talk about who their loved one was. It also affected their identity, as in P32's case in which his identity as Z's son was also contested. Given the duration of the paramilitary strategy, which lasted decades, the denial of the existence of the Disappeared was maintained and controlled through an orchestrated process. In their interviews, the participants reflect on how this process started by ensuring that those disappeared would at no time be acknowledged by the paramilitary group, the family or within the community; nor would their bodies be returned to enable them to be afforded the dignity of a Christian burial. This process of denying the death, excluding, threatening and marginalising the family - undermining their identity, while concealing the body - is symbolic of the process of disappearances in conflicts worldwide (De Alwis 2009; Haugaard and Nichols 2010; Isuru et al 2019 and Hussain 2020). This had a detrimental impact on each of the families.

At a community and institutional level the longer the disappearance went on without a firm indication of the fate of a loved one, the more there was a feeling that they had never existed. There was no record of them having disappeared; no account of what had happened; no investigation into the disappearance; no death certificate to confirm that they were dead;

and they were not remembered in any religious rites such as the Masses associated with the remembrance of those who have died. Even within the family circle remembrance often proved painful and too difficult to contemplate.

The lack of external recognition from across Statutory and Governmental Services where no official record or account existed to verify a loved one's disappearance compounded the family's feeling of loss. Despite the fact that some of the families had raised the disappearance with the RUC and An Garda Siochana at the time of the abduction, no official records of this were retained or available suggesting any form of investigation, process or recognition that the person disappeared existed. This lack of formal acknowledgement by the State played into the paramilitary strategy of denying those disappeared had ever existed at all.

It was only when individual bodies were recovered and their dignity restored that a sense of existence and identity was reclaimed by families.

> *'It never sunk in when they told us (Z had been recovered), somebody is actually speaking about Z, it was as if he was there, he existed' P8.*
>
> *'Z did exist in this world. He was a person; this person did exist, did live and his life was taken from him' P15.*

As reflected in the data analysis, there was a multitude of emotions associated with the confirmation of existence. For the participants there was the removal of the self-doubt they had carried for years surrounding the fate of their loved one; there was a regaining of control in that they could now look after and ensure their loved one was treated with dignity and respect in being afforded a proper Christian burial and laid to rest in the family grave; their identity as Z's parent, partner, sibling, child or relative was restored; and, it ended the process of gaslighting through which the families were made to doubt, not only themselves, but the memories and perceptions that they had held for years about their loved ones. Above all it was an awakening; they had finally restored their loved one's name and identity back to them.

Oyola (2021) suggests that locating the bodies of the Disappeared or acknowledging formally that they exist, constitutes a crucial process of individualisation in which the victims are recognised, not only as members of a particular family, but also as members of the human family. Oyola's summation is crucially important given that the families strive to re-humanise their loved ones. In recognising the individualisation of the Disappeared their identity and dignity is restored.

Across the analysis, recovery was perceived as a re-emergence of their loved one back into the family unit. Stroebe et al (1992) referred to the concept of '*social ghosts'* in which parents who had lost children continued to have a sense of their presence years after they had died (p 1210). The concept of social ghosts was particularly relevant when the families visited the clandestine burial sites, as they referred to feeling that their loved ones were present and waiting to be recovered. For some, guilt was expressed when they came to leave the site after each search, as they felt they were once again letting their relative down and denying them their right to be laid to rest. Stroebe's et al's (1992) concept of the Disappeared becoming '*social ghosts'* within the families has relevance. They are neither absent nor present when searches are being undertaken but their loss is an enduring presence. But they are 'social ghosts' within the community and within wider society, given that their existence is denied as they are not talked about or referred to in the community; the families are actively shunned around the issue; and there is no investigation or formal process to acknowledge the loss of their life. They seem to no longer have a place within society. It is, therefore, the external rather than the internal environment which contributes most to this feeling of non-existence.

When a body was successfully recovered and brought home, the families described how the process of 're-existence' was deeply symbolic for them. The emotional impact of this will be considered later. The re-emergence of loved ones through recovery represented a marker of an end to the surreal world families felt they had lived through, from the point at which their loved one went missing (often decades earlier), to the point at which they were carried from the clandestine burial site.

> *'It was like living in a surreal world, that's what you have been doing for 30 odd years until you actually see the coffin, the hearse, the funeral and then you go "this actually did happen"' P31.*

Dahl and Boss (2020) posit that it is the immobilisation and the ambiguity associated with disappearance that causes unresolved grief. When the surreal world ends, often after decades, and the families finally have confirmation of death and their loved one's body returned, they enter a different stage of the journey. For many families, as reflected across the data, the re-emergence and confirmation of the existence of their loved one upon recovery symbolised the unfreezing of the grieving process, as discussed later in this chapter.

Two lower order categories emerged out of this higher order category: seeing is believing and the significance of belongings. Both of these had an influencing effect on the family's journey to find meaning and resolution in the grieving process.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: SEEING IS BELIEVING

The need to bear witness when loved ones' bodies were returned was viewed by many of those interviewed as essential to them coming to a place of resolution regarding their loved one's death. As reflected across the data, it was borne out of years of living with the uncertainty regarding their fate; the questions around their existence; their lack of trust and feeling; and the orchestrated narrative by republican paramilitaries.

> *'21 years looking, you weren't prepared to believe anyone or anybody or anything you know' P2.*

Throughout the period of disappearance family members faced a myriad of misinformation, rumours and downright lies. Feelings of mistrust permeated all aspects of families' lives outside their immediate family cohort and small group of close friends. This issue of mistrust also arose when a loved one's remains were recovered. When recovery came it often emerged after weeks of searching and families remained in a state of disbelief until they saw proof that their loved one was there.

> *'I wasn't even convinced that down in (named place) the day he was found… How do we know there is something in that friggin hole?' P2.*

The lack of trust permeated across the entire recovery process. When recoveries took place families were placed into a protracted waiting period (often six weeks) for DNA confirmation of their loved ones identity. Whilst the recovery gave the families hope, it also evoked uncertainty **t**hat it might not be their loved one.

> *'I wouldn't have trust fully (in republican paramilitaries) because I would have thought to myself "right they are only saying this to get us to forget about it"' P8.*

The orchestration of the disappearances by the paramilitaries meant that, even when bodies were recovered, there was still a feeling of disbelief and unease that this was part of the paramilitaries' strategy to continue to control the family and cause obfuscation. P8's assertions that she couldn't trust fully, relate to the legacy of paramilitary control - she needed to see her loved one to believe that they had actually been recovered. The uncertainty

regarding whether it was their loved one even when a recovery happened was not without foundation. In June 2015 during a search for Joe Lynskey, the ICLVR recovered a body in County Meath. As his family travelled to the site, the team discovered a second body leading them to believe that they had actually found the bodies of Seamus Wright and Kevin McKee, who had also been reportedly secretly buried in that area two months after Joe. The emotional impact of believing that recovery had been achieved only for this to change is reflected in an interview given by Maria Lynskey at the time of the search. She indicated that she had believed the whole day that it was her uncle but now had to come to terms with the fact that this might not be the case (McDonald 2015).

Interwoven throughout the data in this study is the emotional impact of the searches. Families experienced periods of prolonged waiting, longing for the recovery of their loved one and fearing the final confirmation of their loved one's death. They describe the wait as torturous, as discussed later. The recovery of the bodies of Kevin and Seamus in June 2015 highlight the challenges that exist in relation to identifying and recovering the Disappeared. Even recovery of a body presents no certainty for a family until the final DNA confirmation is received. Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams at the time acknowledged how difficult the situation was for the families concerned,

> *'The uncertainty over who has been recovered must be hugely traumatic for the families involved. I am sure the Commission (ICLVR) will move as speedily as it can to verify the identity of those who have been found' (O'Brien writing in the Irish Times 2015).*

The confirmation of a positive DNA result represented not only the end of the uncertainty that began with the disappearance for the families (Fondebrider 2002), it also ended the feeling that their loved one continued to be at the mercy of those responsible for their loss.

The families need for physical proof was often at odds with the parameters around the ICLVR's remit. One of the challenges for family members, as highlighted by P2 above, was that they were unable to come close to the burial ground. They were always kept at a discrete distance. For some this caused distress as they wanted to see how their loved ones were buried. Fondebrider (2002), reviewing the processes for the recovery of politically motivated disappearances across the world, highlights that in some countries such as Iraqi Kurdistan and Ethiopia the families assisted the archaeologists and forensic team with the recovery. He

contends that this fulfils the families' need to do something more for their loved one and whilst the team adapt their forensic processes, the families wishes are respected. Whilst this is not possible in relation to the process that exists with the ICLVR, the families' wish for physical proof of recovery was understandable given the underlying issues of how the secret burial of their loved one had been managed by the paramilitaries for decades.

> *'I'd like to be able to see things and then be able to believe it and deal with it in that way. Some people just don't want to go there, but I'm not like that, I like to see it, be able to take it in and understand it for myself then, but we weren't allowed to do that' P12.*

At times, family members' wishes were at odds with the legislation protections under which the ICLVR operates. This extended beyond witnessing the recovery from the search area. A number of family members also wanted to see their loved one's remains. There are a number of reasons why this was so important. In Ireland, seeing the remains and having an open coffin is an important part of the funeral ritual in which respect is paid to the person who has died and to their family. Ronan (2020) contends that witnessing the physicality of the deceased in an open coffin is a long standing Irish tradition that helps the family adjust to the loss and also gives due respect to the person who has died. Given the context and duration of the disappearance, a closed coffin represented a further denial of the right of their loved one to be respected within the normal cultural traditions of the community.

> '*You know even someone coming home to you in the coffin, like I mean you can't look in the coffin, that's the part that's missing' P38.*

Whilst it was understandably not possible to bear witness to the remains at a public level, for a number of family members they needed to see proof that their loved one's remains were in the coffin. This was particularly important for some of the families given the myriad lies and mistruths told to them by paramilitary representatives; the lack of concern or investigation by state agencies; and the marginalisation and taboo nature of the disappearance of their loved one within the community.

> *'I still wouldn't have believed that we had Z here. I'm not saying that the Commission (ICLVR) would tell me lies, that they had found him and they didn't find him, but that wasn't enough for me' P12.*

Given the length of time taken to recover the remains of their loved one, seeing their remains was often one of the final acts of acknowledging their death and recovery for the family. It

also allowed them the opportunity to place family pictures and religious medals and symbols in the coffin. Of those who had been able to see their loved one's remains, no regret was expressed. Even though the remains were skeletal, as traumatic as that was, bearing witness to the physical remains was more important for the families in laying their loved ones to rest. The literature notes that this process of bearing witness to a loved one's body may assist in grieving (Smid et al 2018) or, conversely, it may complicate grief at a later stage if the images of the remains become intrusive or cause prolonged distress (O'Connor 2019).

> *'I was determined. That kept me going those six weeks we had to wait for confirmation because I thought I definitely have to do this. I'm definitely glad I did it. I couldn't not have done it' P12.*

For some they also needed the feeling of touching their loved ones remains.

> *'I literally lifted bits and kissed it .. that was a great comfort to me, a great comfort' P8.*

> *'You know I saw prominent teeth and I knew right away and I said "thanks lads that gives me peace of mind".. it did, it did' P2.*

Whilst the ICLVR has a very strong support structure for families, they do not arrange or support the families seeing their loved one's remains. On each occasion the families arranged this with the undertaker. The World Health Organisation's (W.H.O.) Guidelines on the Management of Dead Bodies in Disaster Situations (2004) advocates that seeing the remains of a loved one's body should be facilitated for families if they want it. The report states that the presence of exposed corpses, including skeletal remains, poses no threat of epidemics and, therefore, cultural norms and rituals associated with burial should be honoured by the authorities dealing with the issue. As demonstrated from Sept 11th, even having body parts returned is significant for the families, preventing the '*vanish factor'* in which there is nothing to signal a loved one's presence or provide a focus for the last goodbyes (Belkin 2002).

For many of the participants, seeing the remains was considered important at a psychological level. One of the greatest challenges in coming to terms with a loved one's death is making sense of what happened (Neimeyer et al 2006; Bath 2010). Seeing the remains was confirmation of their loved one's return. It demystified the condition of their body and it assisted some family members in bidding farewell to their loved one. Romero (2019), writing about a group of mothers who engage in physical searches for their children's remains in Mexico, contends that when they find a body it brings peace to the family; it allows for the

identity to be confirmed and it ends the ambiguity associated with the disappearance. Confirmation of existence is important. From the point of recovery families want to have a renewed connection with their loved one. One of the participants reflected that his mum wanted rosary beads placed in the coffin with her son before he was taken from the clandestine burial site. In the absence of seeing him at the site, she wanted something physical to connect her with him; she wanted, as the mothers in Mexico did, to have a connection to her son and above all for his religious and cultural needs to be met. The rosary beads were placed in the coffin beside him before he was carried from the site by the ICLVR search team.

> *'She wanted them (rosary beads) with him because like in spirit she was probably with him all the time but she wanted something physical to say, do you know, at the end of the day it was her son' P31.*

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BELONGINGS

Like the rosary beads above, belongings had a deep significance for the families. They often represented a connection to their loved one. When belongings were recovered their physical presence was the antidote to the gaslighting that had taken place over decades. The families' reality regarding their loved one's disappearance had been repeatedly questioned and disbelieved over the years, with repeated denials issued by the paramilitaries considered the norm. Belongings therefore were tangible proof of identity and possession of them gave the families some sense of agency.

> *'We got Z's necklace back and that meant something. U (sister) had given him the wee chain around his neck… It was part of Z. It's nice to get something that he actually had on his person' P15.*

While families waited for DNA confirmation, at times belongings gave reassurance that the body recovered was their loved one.

> *'During those six weeks I never thought it was not Z, I didn't doubt it because Z had a wee false tooth…… and then the chain around his neck' P15.*
>
> *'But that was what really convinced me, it was Z's medal (religious medal) because that was her (mother's) way of getting him to wear a medal and keeping him safe' P29.*

The connection to belongings moved beyond being solely reassuring for the family pre identification. It also symbolised a connection to their loved one and a confirmation of existence. As P24 stated when he went to identify his father's clothes they,

'maked him back into being a human being again' P24.

While disappeared families were caught in a state of ambiguity (Boss et al 2003) this was compounded by the ongoing actions of control and terror orchestrated by the paramilitary groups in an effort to obliterate all trace of the person disappeared. Seeing and identifying the clothes was often undertaken in the days following the recovery which the families describe as significant. Given their loved one was as Stroebe et al (1992) described previously a type of 'social ghost', the clothes represented a marker that this period had ended and their loved one had returned. Fuchs (2018) suggests that belongings 'presentify' the deceased, assisting individuals to move from a timeless and frozen state associated with the disappearance of a loved one, into a stage of acknowledgement and grief.

P24's comment about the significance of the clothes confirming his father's existence is important. A family member's last image was of their loved one in the outfit they had left home in before they were abducted. In seeing the clothes, family members felt reconnected back to their loved one, and able to relive the last memories they had on that day. Whilst this is entirely natural when a death has just occurred, for families who had lived in a perpetual state of uncertainty and ambiguity for years, seeing the last clothes their loved one had worn, after years in which their existence had been denied, was deeply symbolic. Hallam and Hockey (2020) posit that belongings often provide the dead with a social presence among the living. They also provide the living with a social connection to the dead. In the case of conflict related disappearance this is all the more poignant given the protracted state and context of the ambiguity around the death and disappearance, and the orchestration around managing the narrative of the loss and denial of existence.

In many cases the manner and type of clandestine burial preserved the belongings so well that they were easily recognisable to family members. Bogs, where most of those recovered had been buried, are known to preserve bodies, clothing and other artefacts for centuries or even millennia (McClean 2008 p302). As Seamus Heaney described the bogs as a *'landscape*

that remembered everything that happened in it' (Keefe 2018). Across the data the families commented on the preservation offered by the bog.

> *'Cause you would always remember the clothes he was wearing the day he went, you know what I mean, you were kind of shocked into it, but I know he was wearing this, wearing that and when you see them then 29 years .. they were like new, you know socks and that, socks and shoes, you know it's, it just brings it all home to you' P24.*
>
> *'His jumper and shoes was as good as the first day. The bog kept them you know and maybe him too' P36.*
>
> *'I have still got his trainers, I remember them and that coat he was wearing' P2.*

Belongings were viewed as an extension of a loved one. They represented who they were and the life they had lived (Hallam and Hockey 2020). Belongings also helped the families make sense out of the disappearance and provided acknowledgement and recognition of their death (Guillard 2017). As outlined in Chapter 3 theories of grief have increasingly moved towards transforming the link to a loved one, not abolishing it (Guillard 2017). The belongings recovered therefore became part of the start of the grieving journey for the families; this journey had been held in abeyance since their loved one went missing. In some cases, given the decades that had passed, family members had nothing else that belonged to their loved one. Given the chaotic circumstances during the NI Conflict when families often disintegrated and family homes were lost or destroyed, sometimes cases personal belongings were also lost. Multiple processes of victimisation throughout the conflict meant that belongings recovered from the search sites were, therefore, viewed as sacred. However, participants reflected on how they had felt deep sadness when their loved one's belongings were not with the body presumably having been taken by those who killed them. (This included wedding rings and wallets, for example). This may have been to prevent any subsequent identification if they were recovered (Weeratna and Tennakoon 2021). To the families, however, it caused further distress and was seen as a further process of dehumanising their loved one. In some cases, items such as neck chains or religious medals had been hidden under clothes and had not, therefore, been removed at the time of burial.

> *'They (IRA) didn't actually see it, like it's amazing. If they had of seen it (little chain and cross), it would have been away too' P13*.



Figure 15 A little gold cross found under clothing at one of the search sites. Photograph © Family member

Examples of yearning were also represented across the data analysis. In searching for a loved one, there was a clear sense of a yearning to find them. The need to maintain a connection to the individual missing was actively presented. Some of the mothers described wrapping themselves in their loved one's coats, belongings or bed to have a sense of continued connection to their son. Family members retained belongings or kept their belongings just as if the person had just left. The participants in this study spoke of this:

> *'His clothes never came off the hanger at the back of the door' P29.*
>
> *'Do you know for years and years like his room was never touched like'* P31.
>
> *'She (Z's mum) had all his clothes, everything was just, nothing was touched… it was never moved' P5.*

This yearning for recovery lasted decades. Belongings also gave a sense of what had happened a loved one,

> *'It's a hapney (coin), because that wee hapney was there, that makes me think whenever they took him down there (to the south of Ireland) that, they must have killed him very quickly down there because he had that hapney in his pocket. English money. He should have had punt (Irish money). Unless they took all his things off him and held him somewhere, so that he couldn't go to shops or get away' P9.*

In the early days of the ICLVR's work family members were given the clothes if they wanted them as reflected in the testimonies of the interviewees. In later years, however, the participants commented on how this process was stopped although some received coins, or buttons or toggles off duffel coats. There is no doubt that these provided comfort because they were the only belongings and the only physical connection many of the families had to their loved one. However, the full clothing or shoes were not released for a variety of reasons, including health and safety (given the nature of the burial in bog land) or if the circumstances of the recovery were not protected under the ICLVR legislation which prohibited further investigative processes being undertaken (Knupfer 2021). Some of the participants found this deeply upsetting as they believed that they belonged to the family and should have been returned to them.

> *'I would have liked to have had some pieces of his clothes, even if it was totally ragged. They said he had a zip up cardigan. Who gives them the authority to say to us "no you can't have them? " 'P12.*
>
> *'Not having anything belonging to him, even a piece of coat or whatever. You think well that was the last thing he had on, that was the only thing that we can have belonging to him' P13.*

As well as the loss this represented to the family members, there was also a feeling of powerlessness.

> *'How can officialdom overrule this and say "no, we can destroy it or we can bury it"' P14.*

For others, clothes were retained given the circumstances of the recovery. There was a growing resentment when these were held for years and were not returned particularly when family members were seriously ill and wanted the clothes before they died. Their fear was that the clothes would be lost forever and not returned to their rightful place among the family.

> *'That's the only thing we have left of our Z. Everybody else, as far as I believe, all got their family members' stuff back, and we are getting robbed of that as well'* P32 No 2.

The significance of belongings is reflected across the literature (Roster 2001; Hunter 2008; Richardson 2014; Tidball-Binz 2017 and Hallam and Hockey 2020). Guillard (2017) contends that if there is deritualisation, whereby the death has been denied and the rituals associated

with death and burial have not been undertaken, individuals may experience difficulty separating themselves from their loved one's belongings (p492). This resonates with the data generated in this study.

HIGHER ORDER CATEGORY: REHUMANISING

Interwoven throughout the data was the need for the re-humanisation of the Disappeared. Throughout the years of violence the participants believed that their loved ones had been dehumanised as their bodies had been hidden and the normal funeral rites had not been afforded to them. The manner of their burials reinforced the sense that their loved ones lives were irrelevant and that they were not afforded respect or dignity even in death.

> *'But these are human beings we are talking about. You know, you know they are not animals, you know and they were treated like animals'* P40.

The concept that the Disappeared were dehumanised to the extent of being treated as animals was a recurrent theme that emerged in interviews. Across the literature, this dehumanising treatment of those abducted and secretly buried is reflected in conflicts across the globe (Hollander 2016; Robins 2016; Duhaime and Thibault 2017; Isuru et al 2019 and Elghossain 2020).

The participants spoke of two main reasons for re-humanising. The first was that there was a sense that their loved one's position and standing in the community had been undermined; they had been rendered invisible and unwelcome, as highlighted in Section 1.

> '*Z's identity was stripped away …. For years and years… it was as if Z wasn't ever on the earth' P21.*

The family members felt that they needed to share who their loved ones really were and combat the negative images that had been created by the paramilitaries. As reflected by P21, they felt as if their loved one's identity had been stripped away; restoring their identity was essential.

The second reason for rehumanising was that politically the issue of the Disappeared was open to misuse and political opportunism, including by opponents of the republican movement. This was evident in cases where particular disappearances were used to score points against republican politicians in the Northern Ireland Assembly (see for example the

hearing on the Northern Ireland Assembly Debate: Oct 16 2012); or when republican politicians, to counter such attacks, suggested in media interviews that disappearing individual victims was not in fact a crime (Fealty 2005). All of these encounters only served to demean the life of the person who had been disappeared. In their interviews, the families stressed how they did not want to be used as political footballs as it would garner a greater backlash from the republican community and also potentially stymie any progress regarding recovery. There was also the central issue of fear; the families needed assistance from the republican movement in resolving around the disappearances.

Re-humanising was also important in addressing issues such as the names given to the Disappeared such as 'informer'. The families noted the change that took place when their loved ones started being recognised as who they were rather than what they had accused of validate their fate. Showing photographs, giving testimony and narratives about who their loved ones were brought about a systemic change at a public level which echoed similar family processes in Mexico (Smid et al 2020) and Colombia and Sri Lanka (Cronin-Furman and Krystalli, 2020).

> *'Eventually people stopped looking on the Disappeared as what they were being called 'informers' etc and started looking at them as human beings' P10.*

This change from being a labelled individual to being known as a family member, was crucially important as it represented, not only a shift in attitude, but also a recognition of the place and value of that person within their family. For the families re-humanising allowed them to share who their loved one was and to mark their life. One of the participants reflected that it was necessary to protect the memories and to protect the identity of a loved one as a parent, sibling or child rather than just being a named casualty of the NI Conflict.

> *'They needed to be protected to keep their loved one's memory alive and to keep them as family memories and not as a victim in the Lost Lives book' P6.*

This was important as Lost Lives (McKittrick et al 1999) lists the names and circumstances of all those who died due to Northern Ireland's Conflict. It includes details from the newspapers at the time. It repeats, therefore, many of the false narratives orchestrated by republican paramilitaries to label the Disappeared and mitigate against the negative PR that they would have suffered for being associated with these murders and secret burials. In some cases, however, the Disappeared were also not recorded as victims of the NI Conflict as their cases

were unknown. Re-humanising was, therefore, vital to the family in order to both correct publicly available records and to restore respect within the community.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: RESPECT RESTORED - RIGHTING THE WRONG OF THE PAST

Throughout the searches the connection between the family and those searching was important. The search team from the ICLVR from the start of each search made themselves aware of who they were searching for and the family members who were waiting. Mutual respect was at the centre of this relationship.

> *'They are totally committed to …doing their utmost to get a final end to it' P12.*

When bodies were recovered it was symbolic for the families that it not the undertakers but the search team, with whom they had established a relationship of trust, who carried their loved ones from the burial sites to waiting hearses. This was seen by the families as affording their loved one dignity and respect. It was also a supportive gesture to the families given how traumatic the recovery process was for those present.

> *'I can still see that today, the Commission (ICLVR) bringing his remains up from the beach, rather than the undertakers. It was lovely' P15.*
>
> *'I will always remember it was the people that was doing the digging, Jon and the guards leading, when they carried it up (coffin from the burial site), but it was tough' P24.*



Figure 16 Members of ICLVR's forensic search team carry the remains of Peter Wilson from Waterfoot beach- November the 2nd 2010. Photograph ©Mal McCann.

Whilst these were small gestures they were important for the families, given the ominous silence from paramilitaries over decades; the demonisation of their loved ones; and their active banishment from their communities. Working with the ICLVR in the years preceding, and leading up to the search enabled a relationship to be built between the ICLVR team and the families. During this time the families' experiences were recognised and validated. Families became known to all of the search teams and often a picture was placed close to the site by the family as a reminder of who their loved one was. This engagement by the search team at a personal level was vital. (Fondebrider 2002). Given the years of horrendous treatment the families had suffered at the hands of republican paramilitaries, the respect offered by the ICLVR, not only to the family, but also to the person who had disappeared, was significant. For the families such signs of respect were crucial at an emotional level; they signified the start of the process of external acceptance at a public level including recognition of what they had been through over the years.

The first visible sign, outside of the ICLVR, of this external respect was the escort provided by An Garda Siochana to each of the hearses bringing the Disappeared home, from the mortuary in Dublin to the border with Northern Ireland. Participants recounted how important this was.

> *'The other thing that Daddy was really taken with, which is quite strange, it's simple things he got a guard of honour from the Garda down to the border' P13.*
>
> *'I'll never forget that and they says no we will take him home and the police, God love the police, the Guards, and they took us and gave us an escort' P28.*

At a community level there were also signs that respect had returned for the family as neighbours and members of the community attended the wakes or came to the funerals. The numbers attending were in sharp contrast to the lack of support or engagement offered over the years. As McGarry (2020) contends, death is no hushed whisper in Ireland, rather it is a rallying cry to the whole community. There was solace for the families in the levels of support and the engagement from right across the community. It was repeatedly reflected by participants whose loved one had been recovered how surprised they were at the level of support.

> *'The two days that he stayed in the house they came out of the woodwork the amount of people. The roads were all closed and we didn't ask anyone to close the roads' P29.*
>
> *'I think everyone came out in a kind of solidarity' P24.*

In addition to offering support, the symbolism of the community being present demonstrated a righting of the wrong committed against the family which had rendered them isolated and stigmatised, often over decades. Many of the participants remarked that some in the community expressed embarrassment at how the family had been treated, others, deep regret for the nature of their loss. This will be discussed later in this chapter. Recovery also enabled the family to feel that they and their loved one had now been accepted back into the community, with their loved one laid to rest in the local church graveyard**.** One of the most significant changes that came about was the ending of the orchestration process by paramilitaries which had had such a profound impact on the families over decades. This ceased once the body was recovered and the process for rightful Christian burial was underway.

> *'Giving someone a burial in their local graveyard is a way of showing respect for the person who has died, that they were human, and a part of society. It's important to*

keep that connection, that they're now part of this society and back with their family' P6.

Throughout the data, the orchestrated nature of the paramilitaries' strategy to manage the issue of the Disappeared created a cruel and hostile environment in which those disappeared were never named, nor the plight of their families, recognised. This had a profound effect on the families leaving them feeling as if their loved one had never existed. Given the levels of fear and underlying threat over decades the families themselves were unable to talk about their loved one in public; in parallel, the community were silent too. However, through a re-humanising process initiated by the families, the Disappeared ceased to be known by the labels imposed on them by paramilitaries and instead became known again for who they were as a partner, son, parent, sibling or family member. This restoration of respect was hugely significant, both in reinstating the identity and existence of the Disappeared as members of their communities, and also in providing an environment in which respect returned to their families. For the community, the opportunity to support the family, was an attempt to right the wrong of the past. The impact of this is considered in the next section of results on the Transformative Action on the Disappeared.

SECTION 5: TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION ON THE DISAPPEARED

THEORETICAL CONCEPT	HIGHER ORDER CATEGORIES	LOWER ORDER CATEGORIES
TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION ON THE DISAPPEARED	Acts of Defiance	Breaking the silence A reconnection to life Group identity; Fighting as One Not addressed until all addressed
	Local & International Brokerage	Acknowledge (local/ national/international) 1999 Public Acknowledgement

THEORETICAL CONCEPT: TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION ON THE DISAPPEARED

The participants contend that, for many years, their families were unable to highlight or fight for their loved one's return. As discussed previously, the wall of silence that surrounded their loved one's case, the repeat denials of involvement by republican paramilitaries and the underlying threats of further violence placed the families in an invidious position. This state of abyss lasted, in some cases decades, before the families started to highlight their loved ones' cases and begin a process of agitation for their return. Many of the participants describe how their parents' lives effectively stopped the day their loved one went missing. They were powerless to bring about the change needed given the perceived authority held by the paramilitaries in the community and the silence from those in the community and in civic society that lived around them.

> *'Her life stopped that day, do you know when he disappeared….and all she strived for then was to get her boy home, that's basically all she wanted' P31.*

P31 contends that it was only when his mother started to trust other people outside the family, and from outside the area, that the first crucial steps were taken in breaking the silence surrounding what had happened to his brother.

Throughout the interviews, the participants recounted the point at which their families began to lobby, highlighting their loved one's case. This was noted as a defining moment and as a marker of change. It was when the families began to see the barriers to the recognition of their loss begin to lift; and to experience the validation that came from talking to, and meeting with, others who understood their pain and suffering (Smid et al 2020). Speaking out was an act of defiance. They describe the first step as breaking the silence at a personal and family level regarding the disappearance of their loved one. Given the context of the loss and inherent threat that existed around the family, this was deeply significant. When memories are traumatic or their circumstances are unknown they may be suppressed as a form of coping (Jones 2020b; Eisma and Stroebe 2021). However, the participants recounted their memories as being ever present, with the disappearance never leaving them. They also describe the intense ambiguity that surrounded the fate of their loved one (Boss 2011) and the residue of fear of the paramilitaries that permeated all levels of their lives rendering them powerless (McAlister et al 2021). The same issues were experienced by the families of those disappeared in Peru (Martinez 2013), Colombia (Haugaard and Nicholls 2010) and Sri Lanka (Weliamuna 2012). Here, too, the families were faced with dominant and oppressive regimes embedded within their own communities. Given the intimacy of the violence, breaking the silence was a huge risk for the families to take.

After years of family silence, as P31 identifies above, his mother's first tentative steps to speak about her son, who had disappeared, were hugely significant. Throughout the interviews, the participants speak about meeting others. This process began in 1996 with Margaret McKinney, the mother of Brian McKinney, who disappeared in 1978, visiting some of the other families who had reached out to her when she had highlighted the case publicly. Together the families discovered the commonality across their cases. This, in itself, provided validation of their individual and collective suffering given the circumstances of their loss. Reaching out and engaging with other families whose loved ones had disappeared was important as it reduced isolation and bolstered family members in raising the profile of their loved ones and why the issue of the Disappeared needed to be addressed. The bolstering provided by the

group processes was beneficial as it also fostered greater resilience and provided hope (Adams 2019).

For many families, engaging in these acts of defiance was challenging. As a result, it needed to be an incremental process which focused on building trust between the family and the WAVE Trauma Centre; and importantly, between each individual family and the other members of the families of the Disappeared support group. Essentially, as participants outline, they were all strangers. At first this was met with some concern regarding who the families were, and whether any information would be taken back to the IRA or IRSP.

> *''In terms of all the other families of the Disappeared, at first I was a bit apprehensive – "Who are all these people?" We didn't know one another. You're wary. Did they know all about the IRA involvement and we don't?' P19.*

Given the context of the disappearances and the intimacy within communities, participants reflected on how meeting others from outside their community, whilst initially daunting, was ultimately important from the perspective of building trust in others outside the family. Participants recognised that assistance within the group, as a collective force, was the only way they might see the issue progress with republican paramilitaries given their modus operandi of secrecy and invisibility within the community.

> *'You know that's (group campaigning) the only avenue that you have. Other than that you have nothing you know. There is no door like 10 Downing Street, there is no door that says IRA, that says all enquiries given. They are not going to give anything. So that's the only avenue you have' P14.*

It was contended by the participants that group campaigning was the only process that could bring change. Given the hidden nature of the IRA and INLA, there was no place that families could go to raise their issues. The only process, therefore, was a public campaign. Dudai (2011) suggests that campaigns led by families for truth and accountability regarding intra community violence are more difficult for republican paramilitaries to ignore when they come from members within their own community. The families contend that the solidarity and support of the other families was the only way in which change would come.

The higher order category Acts of Defiance represents internal processes for the family members. However, of equal prominence in the overall concept of fighting back was the external process that was needed to enable a conducive environment in which the issue of

the Disappeared could start to be addressed. This incorporated the higher order category of Local and International Brokerage: with the involvement of the Clinton administration; the Northern Ireland Peace Process; and the subsequent IRA/ INLA statement in March 1999, listing some of the Disappeared and identifying the burial sites as lower order categories. The first of the higher order categories, Acts of Defiance, is examined below.

HIGHER ORDER CATEGORY: ACTS OF DEFIANCE

As outlined previously, in August 1994, just weeks before the IRA Ceasefire, the mothers of Brian McKinney and John McClory spoke to a journalist from the Irish Times about the disappearance of their two young sons (Breen 1994). This was the first time that the story of those who had disappeared came to prominence. Three months later, Helen McKendry, the daughter of Jean McConville, gave a heart-breaking radio interview to the BBC NI Talkback programme about the abduction of her widowed mother, 22 years previously (BBC NI Talkback Programme Dec 7th 1994). This was the start of the stories of the Disappeared gaining prominence at a societal level. It was the first time any of these women had ever spoken in public about the abduction of their loved ones. There was a strong sense, reflected across the data, that these interviews had started to challenge the paramilitary rules of silence and invisibility. This in itself was an act of defiance.

> *'It wasn't going to go away. It wasn't going to go away 'cos families were then starting to fight back' P5.*

These early interviews, bravely undertaken before the IRA ceasefire in 1994, gave a voice and hope to the other families. Given the deafening silence on the issue up until this point, participants reflect that they moved from a passive role, in which they had felt paralysed, to an active role in starting to fight for the return of their loved one. Engaging in this active role involved demonstrating acts of defiance in which the families vowed to keep going until their loved ones were brought home. Badshah et al (2021) posit that women are often the instigators of a social movement around the Disappeared in which they challenge social structures that exist within their community and occupy male dominated, socio-political spaces. In defying the rules imposed by paramilitaries and bringing the issue out into the open, the women in effect started to challenge, not only the paramilitaries, but also the

political establishment, locally and nationally, to recognise and address the issue of the Disappeared.

By breaking the silence and rehumanising their loved ones, the families made the communities and the public at large aware of the individual who was missing and their significance within the family unit. In doing so family members actively worked against the paramilitaries' strategy of impugning their loved one's reputation. By sharing personal details about the victim, the families ensured that the individual ceased being just a name with a label such as suspected informer; instead the public got to know who they were within their family and within the community (Isaacs 2010; Caicedo and Cardenas 2018; Garcia-Godos 2018; Adams 2019). In speaking about their loved one, family members also moved from having a suppressed profile within the community to being identified as a relative of the individual disappeared.

> *'There was a defiance in Daddy and "I'm going to let them know and I don't care who knows"' P13.*

This act of defiance had positive and negative ramifications for the families. In engaging in media interviews, family members reflect how they had to move beyond the community, sharing information that they hoped would raise greater public awareness. While working with local politicians raised awareness, the families found that they had to bypass local politicians and go to the US political administration to get assistance. This process represented a series of trade-offs. This enabled a higher public profile which generated greater media and political coverage of the issue of the Disappeared and the particular implications of their respective cases. It also ensured that misinformation concerning the person who was disappeared was addressed. Lewandowsky et al (2013) postulate that, during wars, media have an essential role to play in debunking and correcting propaganda used by combatants, insurgents, guerrilla groups or Governments. The difficulty for individuals in situations arising from conflicts and wars is that their narrative is often less effective and at odds with the politically driven, historical narrative of the protagonists (Hansen and Sriram 2015). After decades of silence, during which there was no media coverage at all of their plight, the families had to fight hard to get recognition, with 1994 being the breakout year. It was evident that the paramilitary orchestrated silence had ensured the issue was kept in abeyance. When, in 1999, republican paramilitaries publicly declared

responsibility for some of the Disappeared, issuing a list of those they had abducted and killed, they moved from silence and denial, to a position of justifying these disappearances by creating and controlling the narrative around why individuals had been killed. In doing so, they attempted to reduce any negative PR that might have damaged them in the eyes of the community.

The negative aspects for participants of having a raised profile were described by them as feeling that their public identity had been subsumed by the issue. They ceased to be X and instead became became known as Z's son or daughter, wife, parent or sibling. The literature reflects the impact that death has for family members as it disrupts identity, social roles and relationships (Jakoby 2012; Lopez-Zeron and Blow 2015). In the case of the Disappeared, the context of the disappearance, and the ambiguity and unresolved nature of the issue added to the complexity of difficulties experienced by family members (Somasundaram 2014). In some cases, this had a negative impact on relationships as families struggled to find the best way forward in the circumstances (Monin 2007; Robins 2016). However, issues around the loss of identity and labelling may often have a longer term effect, not only on individuals, but also on the wider family circle within the community. It can become a type of tarnished identity (Bryant et al 2018). In adopting a public profile family members contend that this becomes more pronounced for them within the community as they became publicly identified. The loss of identity and imposition of labelling was reflected across the data as being one of the most negative aspects of adopting a public role.

In undertaking acts of defiance, many of the participants were mindful of the continued power of the paramilitaries. They identified in the interviews the need to protect themselves, given the emotions associated with talking about their loved one and the implications of their loss. They maintained strategies of protection as they did not want to give any further control back to those responsible for their loss by breaking down on interviews or being fully open about how they felt. They perceived this as identifying their points of vulnerability. As a result maintaining strategies to manage this was key.

> *'I'll stand up in front of any of them (republican politicians) and tell them exactly what I want. I'll never tell them how I feel, I'll tell them what I want..I've done it for Z…I've done it for me mum' P11.*

Given that many relatives of the Disappeared had experienced a rupture of their immediate

and extended families arising from the disappearances, and a breakdown of the social and community circle in which they lived, the priority of protecting themselves and their family was prominent (Jayasundara-Smits 2018; Adams 2019 and Mir 2020). Having a group support mechanism mitigated against feeling publicly exposed or vulnerable given the content of the interviews undertaken (Coulter et al 2013).

One of the strategies of the orchestrated campaign of paramilitary control was keeping the families isolated. As the families started to engage with one another and build trust they reported feeling less marginalised and isolated. This act of defiance was reflected as being crucial, as highlighted below.

> *'It's a united voice, it's like a big choir rather than a solo which makes a bigger impact. They (republican paramilitaries) weren't imagining that anything like that would ever happen. They would still say we didn't know anything, we just do whatever we want' P12.*

Across the literature there is commonality in relation to the acts of defiance undertaken by families in speaking out and bringing greater attention to the issue of the disappearance of their loved ones in conflicts across the world (Danziger and MacLean 2010; Hollander 2016; Robins 2016; Adams 2019; Mir 2020; Smid et al 2020; Badshah et al 2021 and Solar 2021). Given that, in many cases, these families remain within the communities where the disappearances took place, their courage in bringing about change is all the more remarkable. Some of the journeys made by families of those disappeared have been public and high profile, such as the Mothers of the Disappeared de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina who confronted the Junta in the 1980s. Others have not had the same public profile. For example, young women lobbying for the return of their fathers and brothers in Pakistan have had to assume a political role to gain traction on their loved ones' cases (Hadid 2020). This theme of feeling forced to adopt a political role resonates across conflicts worldwide and chimes with the experiences of the families of the Disappeared of NI's Conflict. Unless the families spoke and engaged in acts of defiance to bring the issue to the fore of the political sphere at local, national and international level, those responsible for the disappearances would continue to keep the families silent and the issue hidden.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: BREAKING THE SILENCE

A significant time, as reflected throughout the interviews, was the point at which participants started to speak out. Breaking the silence around the abduction of a loved one was a deeply personal decision which the participants reflected was shaped by internal and a number of external factors. These were: changes within their own family as children grew into adults; a growing awareness of the circumstances and enormity of the disappearance; the growing voice of the other family members whose loved ones were disappeared; and the evolving political process that emerged following the paramilitary ceasefires and Good Friday Peace Agreement, in 1998. The impact of these external factors brought forward a conducive political context that contributed to the issue of the Disappeared being addressed as detailed later in this section. The timing mirrors other campaigns by families after peace agreements, such as by families of those alleged to have informed against the ANC's treatment who came to prominence after the South African peace agreement (Dudai 2011). Dudai suggests that pressure from within is harder to resist for any organisation and for, republican, they could not defend their position by saying it was British state forces propaganda.

For many of the participants the decision to speak out was a difficult one given the context of their loss and the orchestrated strategy of the paramilitaries to obliterate any memory of their loved one, as discussed previously. The families note that their campaign was focused solely around the humanitarian aspect of the recovery of the remains of their loved ones rather than any questions of why it happened.

> *'It was the simple message of "Where are they"?... "Where are our sons, our mother, our father"? .. "give them back to us". That's all we wanted' P31.*

The participants reflect that, in the early days, extended family members or, indeed, individuals within the community would not get involved if it was perceived to have the potential to bring trouble to the family. The underlying nature of the impact of threats and the context of the violence at the time compounded family members' reluctance to engage.

> *'Like years before people thought that you don't get involved in things because you'll only bring more trouble' P31.*

The reluctance to get involved was shaped, not only by the fear, but also by the indifference of the police and army on both sides of the border throughout the 1970s and 1980s. There

was no active investigation into disappearances and, as many of those taken were young men, people it was concluded by police that they would return. This contributed to the process of enforced silence as outlined in Section 2, in that the families had no one externally who was working proactively on their case. Given that there was no external agency or police force assisting them at the time, and with the omnipresence of the paramilitaries, it allowed silence to prevail and intensify, making it difficult for families to break the silence around their loved one's case. P31 recounts the lack of assistance and indifference from the Garda Siochana when the family sought help regarding their missing relative.

> *'The Garda man said, 'maybe he's lying out in a field somewhere' or something like those words and it was as though you're supposed to help us' and that was it, the help was gone. Then I think that was, do you know, their (parents) despair started then, that if you can't help us …then who's going to help, so .. as a family unit we got on, do you know, we just had to get on' P31.*

This statement highlights the powerlessness facing the families when approaches for help were met with indifference. P31 suggests that when the feelings of despair started to take root this led family members to feel paralysed around what they could do to bring their son home. Bringing the issue to the fore was challenging. There was no one lobbying externally on behalf of the Disappeared. This included Health and Social Services, the local family doctor, the church, school or employer. There was no proactive help available. This silent profile changed in the mid 1990s when, as highlighted, some of the women started to speak out. They began to proactively push for the issue of the Disappeared to be resolved. Other families, however, felt unable to engage initially but realised that in order to get their loved ones case moving they had to take a public stand.

> *'We didn't, we didn't, I'm not sure if you noticed but we didn't do anything….I thought, you know what, it is no coincidence that the people who is doing the most shouting is the people who is getting the most success'* P25 No 1.

This resulted in P25 moving from having a private profile to a public one. Other family members struggled with breaking the silence, such as P23, with a public role causing tension within the family. Some, like P14, were equally reluctant to adopt a public role because she perceived it to be outside her comfort zone, and felt it might bring unwanted attention from others in the community.

> '*Me and Y (husband) had a run in over this, but I couldn't stop him from doing this. He thought the more he spoke out, the more publicity he would get, it would help the case which it probably, yes it did' P23.*

> *'It has been hard taking the lead in highlighting Z's case.. I would say you are, you have to do right. Ignoring things doesn't solve anything.. And it took me a long time to even understand that and come, because I didn't want to be interviewed, I didn't want my photograph taken, I didn't want that, because that invades your privacy and is out of your comfort zone' P14.*

Engagement as a group, as well as reducing the isolation, bolstered individuals in breaking the silence. As highlighted previously a key strategy orchestrated by the paramilitaries had been to dehumanise the Disappeared and to render them invisible and forgotten within the community. Given the community dynamic, the coalescence of family members into an active lobby group replaced the role that the community would have assumed in circumstances that did not involve the paramilitaries. Boss (2011) contends that the emergence of family support groups rallying around a particular incident or cause can often replace ineffective and unsupportive family networks or community support. Peer support can, therefore, mitigate against unhelpful community reactions by providing validation of suffering, a continued lobby for the return of the bodies, and, a non-judgemental support mechanism which is vital given the negative messages portrayed as justification for the disappearances by those responsible (Smid et al 2020). As reflected by P14, the presence of the group enabled momentum to build and the silence to be broken.

> *'It takes the families to publicly state it, as the IRA don't respond otherwise. And this all would have went away, for all of them, if yous (WAVE) hadn't been keeping momentum going, to keep it in the public eye' P14.*

> *'I think that...being involved with, with WAVE and the other people that had people disappeared, you're carried along in that, so she (Mother) had that hope at the end of the day that she would find him' P31.*

Given the circumstances of the disappearances, which carried such a heavy politically laden stigma, speaking out about what had happened was extremely difficult. Stigmatised deaths, as discussed earlier, are often unrecognised and unacknowledged at a public level (Hibberd et al 2010). This, in turn, can leave family members not only unable to grieve (Doka 2002a; Charmaz and Milligan 2006), but also unable to speak publicly about what has happened to their loved one. For many of the families in this study, whilst they may have anticipated the

death of their loved one, in the absence of a body to bury or the confirmation of death and place of burial, they were caught in an invidious position, unable to grieve but unable to let go of their loved one's death. The decision to speak out, particularly pre the 1998 Good Friday Peace Agreement, was therefore seismic as the families had not only been pilloried within the community but ran the risk of invoking further violence from the local paramilitaries. This was of particular relevance as the ceasefires did not see the end to the intra community violence (Morrison 2016).

For many family members, taking these crucial steps forward to break the silence, represented a reconnection to life.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: A RECONNECTION TO LIFE

The sense that life stopped from the point of the abduction was a shared emotion,

> *'I remember my mother, saying years ago like her world stopped that day'* P31.

There was family life before the disappearance and family life after the disappearance. For many participants, particularly the parents, the time of the abduction was viewed as one of pain and trauma when life effectively stopped. Interwoven throughout the data was the belief that had their body been recovered at the time, it would have been deeply traumatic but the death would have been confirmed. Instead, the families were forced to live in a continued state of fear and uncertainty regarding what had happened to the victim. It was only when the silence was broken that family members felt life had restarted.

> *'It was as if your life stopped for a while and it came back once you found out that youse (WAVE) came on the scene and we found out that we were getting somewhere like…. you know that made the difference' P28.*

The sense that life had stopped was shared throughout the interviews. The impact of this was cataclysmic at an emotional level with a devastating impact on family life and emotional wellbeing (Smid et al 2020) placing an intolerable burden on those left behind (ICRC 2014). Boss et al's (2011) Ambiguous Loss theory in which a loved one is physically absent but psychologically present usefully reflects the oscillation between hope and despair. However, whilst Boss's theory captures the internal process for families, the strong influence of the external environment can either ameliorate or exacerbate the impact of the disappearance

(Robins 2011). The participants reflect that the powerlessness associated with the external environment led to a feeling that life effectively stopped from the point the disappearance took place until they started to highlight their loved one's case.

Despite these challenges, taking the step forward to start to address what happened to a loved one is very significant given the context of the loss. As outlined earlier it can assist in finding meaning and adapting to the process around the death (Neimeyer 2019; Stroebe et al 2017b and Prigerson et al 2009b). The benefits can be further bolstered when they bring external changes, such as changes in the justice system regarding victimised deaths, or changes in policy (Holt 2021). For the participants, starting to address what happened symbolised life restarting. In addition, it represented a feeling that the families had regained a sense of control over their lives. This was important given that for decades their lives had been controlled by the paramilitaries. The concept of taking back control was important.

> *'Once they chose to kill and secretly bury him, they took control away from us completely and we haven't got it back until today' P6.*

For family members still searching, the group played an important role as it provided greater security and a feeling of control. It also enhanced their sense of resilience and empowerment (Paloma et al 2020). In addition, the ICLVR was viewed as an important resource for the families. It provided a meaningful mechanism to highlight issues and address questions around the searches or processes deployed to try to elicit better information on where individuals had been buried. From the participants, there was a sense that, whilst there were increased feelings of control through the period of campaigning, it was only when loved ones were recovered that full control was restored. For those families interviewed who continue to search for their loved ones, the paramilitaries are still viewed as exerting control by not giving the correct information to enable recovery.

Throughout the literature on grief there are many examples of families who have used what happened to them to bring about social change. In becoming agents of change they have shaped society. Examples of this are evident when we consider the mother and baby unit run by the Bon Secours Sisters in Tuam, Ireland (Grierson 2017), state abductions in Chile (Dorfman 2017), or the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina (Navarro 2020). In the same way it took a small group of women to take a stand that led to the development of a support group that became an effective lobby for those disappeared in NI's Conflict. Taking

that stand was associated with life restarting and bringing the issue to the fore.

Holst- Warhaft (2000) points out that political potential can arise from grief in which it drives political activism and organisation. In the case of working to recover the Disappeared, the families were central to bringing about political change. Dorfman (2017), writing about the Disappeared in Chile, contends that in forming resistance to the Disappeared in Chile, the mothers of those disappeared were not going to let their loved ones fade into the darkness. They were going to illuminate the issue at the highest political and humanitarian level possible.

In the same way, family members needed to drive the recovery of their loved one in order that republican paramilitaries would respond. As Monica McWilliams (2012) contends, the families of the Disappeared did not just sit and curse the darkness but instead focused their energies on keeping the issue in the public eye. They, therefore, had a key role individually and collectively as a group of families, as discussed below, in which they became galvanised to fight as one, shining a light on the issue.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: GROUP IDENTITY: FIGHTING AS ONE

While the preceding section focused on the internal process for the families in starting to campaign for their loved ones return, there were three key external elements reflected that assisted the families: engaging with WAVE, meeting the other families of the Disappeared, and the work of the ICLVR.

> *'Getting the support of and supporting other families makes a huge difference because you know they understand what you are going through….all those things that they went through, we went through, so there was empathy. You know other people could sympathize with you, but they hadn't walked in our shoes. Maybe it's an old cliché, but in this case it's true' P18 No 1.*

One of the central issues facing the families of the Disappeared was trust. Who could they trust? The legacy of threat, the indifference and, at times, hostility experienced within the community, as well as the omnipresence of paramilitaries, as reflected earlier, had a long term legacy. Starting to trust individuals who they didn't know from an external agency which operated outside their area was a major leap of faith. The involvement of some of the families

of the Disappeared in WAVE provided a conduit for others to engage and this led to a strong support group forming. As Heeke et al (2017) highlight, the benefit of a shared identity and acknowledgement of, not only the reality of a death, but also the experience of loss can assist with coping. For the families of the Disappeared this was crucial given the lack of recognition of their loss and the active marginalisation they had faced within their community and, in some cases, from those politically aligned within their own families. As highlighted by P18, it was only those who had gone through similar experiences that could fully understand the true magnitude and ramifications of having a loved one disappeared by paramilitaries. From gaining a greater awareness of the experiences of others, through identifying with many of the issues they had faced, family members supported the establishment of an effective support group. The realisation for family members that they were not on their own and that others had suffered in the same way brought an immediate sense of connection.

> *'All of a sudden when the help starts to come and you realise other people have been living this nightmare, some people have been living it for 40 years almost' P31.*

These connections within families in the main took place before republican paramilitaries claimed any of the deaths in 1999. From the point at which the abduction took place the standard response from republican leaders within the community, and later political representatives, when asked about the Disappeared was to deny that such an issue existed. The significance, therefore, of meeting other families who were facing the same issues was life changing. From these origins the 'Families of the Disappeared' support group started. A process began to highlight the disappearance of individuals at every opportunity. Freephone confidential numbers were set up to access information (given the distrust of policing): public appeals were made; local community Masses were arranged; the stories of who the Disappeared were, were recorded and shared publicly, as outlined earlier as a process of re-humanisation; exhibitions were created; and books detailing the stories were published.



Figure 17 Baroness Nuala O'Loan launching the Disappeared book and large display boards detailing who the Disappeared were in May 2013 at the Lyric Theatre, Belfast. Photograph ©The Detail

Throughout the interviews, the value of meeting and engaging with others was a common theme. Reducing isolation and enabling a greater sense of engagement and control were key elements of success. As highlighted earlier, a key benefit of social support is reducing the risk of grief complications such as the emergence of PGD or PTSD (Burke et al 2010; Hibberd et al 2010; Heeke et al 2017 and Smid et al 2020). The wellbeing impact of group involvement for families is evident from the data generated in this study. Given the marginalisation experienced by many of the families within their respective communities, the support group became an invaluable resource and a place in which family members could speak openly without fear and without judgement (Adams 2019). It was also useful at a familial level given at times the conflict that arose within families regarding the best way to proceed in campaigning to bring about recovery. Hibberd et al (2010) contend that, when the circumstances of the death are stigmatised or contested, families face a second injury as they are left unsupported. This injury can be compounded further as the families seek to isolate themselves as a form of protection from the expected reaction of the community. There is no doubt that, in the early years, the families experienced a second injury given the nature of the disappearances and the active processes of marginalisation within the community. However, the Families of the Disappeared group subsequently mitigated against this by providing space, a place of understanding and non-judgemental support, guiding families through the journey and helping them avoid the many potholes associated with the political context of their loved ones' deaths.

> *'We could say exactly how we felt; we couldn't do it at home. We had to travel to Belfast to get together as a group, and that was the only support, and without that support we would have been lost…we needed to be guided on what direction to go cause we had nothing, we were just all families left stunned' P29.*

The solidarity gained through the group and through lobbying as one was immense both individually and collectively. As P29 shares the families were left 'stunned' therefore having each other was crucial in building resilience and empowering the families to advocate for their loved ones return (Kennedy, Deane and Chan 2019; Paloma et al 2020). Campaigning also had a wider effect. It provided a form of memorialisation which was important for the families in the longer term (Andone 2017). This was evident across the data as the participants referred to the processes of remembrance, acknowledgement and validation of their loss and the impact this had on their wellbeing from an individual and family perspective (Section 6).

Given the support group operated within WAVE there was a sense that a wider victim and survivor organisation was in place which bolstered the families in their campaigning endeavours.

> *'We had to spend a lot of time publicising the case, …. and not everybody was always comfortable with doing the media stuff, and whatever but it was absolutely vital, absolutely vital, to put forward the humanitarian side of it' P9.*

Throughout the interviews the value of working with an organisation that was non-politically aligned and working in the interests of victims and survivors was crucial. It was described by P3 as providing a '*blanket of comfort'.* The reassurance of having the back up of an organisation emboldened the family members in their lobbying. Unfortunately, at the time of the abductions in the 1970s and 1980s no specific victims and survivors group were in existence to support any of the families affected by the NI Conflict. The only assistance available was the local GP, clergy or generalist advice and community groups. The women's movement in NI had led to greater services within communities, however when WAVE Trauma Centre came much later, in 1991, it was one of the few groups that was not politically aligned but worked on a cross community basis. As reflected in the data the families were reassured that the organisation worked with all sections of the community without distinction and had no political alliances. It therefore provided a natural home for the families in supporting their campaign.

'I think coming under the umbrella of WAVE was the start of it, ..and being able to push as a group rather than single families going out individually and trying, and the publicity of being there at the start to back you up' P29.

The solidarity and identity of a collective group has continued, even when individuals are recovered their families have continued to fight for the return of others as outlined below.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: NOT ADDRESSED UNTIL ALL ADDRESSED

An overwhelming theme highlighted by the participants was the fact that the issue of the Disappeared is not addressed until all the bodies are recovered. Even as the loved ones of some of the families had been recovered, the group has continued to support and advocate for the families whose loved ones remain disappeared. The participants have reflected that this stance has evolved as the group developed, demonstrating not only the depth of the relationships, but also the sense of natural justice in that they have been collectively fighting for one goal: the recovery of their loved ones.

'I couldn't let it go. I couldn't switch off, I never would have switched off, even yet. I still would like to see them all found, every one of them, because it's only when you go through it, that you realise what every family has gone through and the pain of it and, you know you just can't settle' P29.

As P29 highlighted, the families of those whose loved ones' bodies had been recovered felt that they had to continue to lobby and support the others waiting for information. On one level this was a direct result of the solidarity and relationships built in the group, as highlighted in the section above. The group process had, therefore, sustained individuals in their respective searches and offered, not only solidarity and support collectively, but, as importantly, fostered greater resilience amongst those who continue to campaign for their loved ones return (Robins 2011).

As P29 indicates above, it was only those who had gone through similar experiences that could relate to the orchestrated nature and pain of the paramilitary campaign. Continuing to fight was, therefore, tied to readdressing the injustice of the paramilitary strategy and had the ultimate aim of ensuring that the bodies of those disappeared were recovered and that paramilitary control was ended. As a result, participants stated that they needed to continue to work to ensure recovery. The feeling of connection was very strong.

'We are married into this thing now, you know .., they were there for us so we have to be there for them' P39.

'Even though we have got Z, I still feel that I want to belong with them' P17.

As a result of this connection, the families of those whose loved ones' bodies have been recovered have continued to attend events, undertake interviews and highlight the issue. For those waiting for information the feeling that they have not been abandoned has been reassuring. There is no doubt, as indicated by one of those families, as the circle of those still missing has got smaller, it has become harder for the families who wait; each worries that they will be the only family not to have their loved one returned.

It is important to note the ongoing impact of continued lobbying from those whose loved ones have been found. The connection, as highlighted by P39, that they are *'married into the Disappeared campaign*' shows their dedication to continue to fight for the return of the rest of the bodies. Whilst this is positive, it does not allow them the freedom to move away from repeat exposure to the impact of disappearance. Conversely, group allegiance can have a negative impact for some on identity and health (Osborne et al 2009). The interviews reflected the depth of feeling around the concept that it is not resolved until all the bodies have been recovered. The injustice associated with disappearances and the strength of the relationships built determines a family member's involvement with some being more active than others. The question arises, however, whether this in any way impacts upon a family members' grieving, or hinders them becoming reconciled to what happened in the past, post recovery. The data analysis in this study shows that continued group lobbying has not hindered family members from dealing with the grief associated with the loss of their loved one. Vollhardt and Staub (2011) contend that altruism can be born out of suffering, enabling an empathetic approach that does not hinder individuals who have experienced similar experiences, but can, rather, empower them from a social justice perspective. Continuing to work as a group to address the ongoing issue of the Disappeared was considered by the participants as a process of social justice, as outlined in Section 8. The interviews reflect the indelible link back to the past and the continued drive from those whose loved ones have been recovered to ensure that collective reconciling on this issue takes place.

'It's not closed yet, and it will not be closed until they are all recovered and all home' P35.

As highlighted earlier in this chapter, the sole focus of families is on recovery. As the interviews reflect, when the bodies are recovered it often leads families to question why they were disappeared and what happened to them. However, a central reservation expressed in the interviews with those whose loved ones were recovered was that they are always mindful that they in no way want to undermine or derail the search for those still missing by their actions or words. They have, therefore, had to sacrifice a demand for answers to their questions in return for the bodies. Having to make this sacrifice could be viewed a continuation of paramilitary control as the other families are still waiting for information to be given. It is clearly evident that there is an overriding sense of responsibility until all are recovered. For those still waiting, this sense of shared responsibility is important and brings immense reassurance.

> *'They haven't forgotten and they haven't fallen away, which is very good. Sure you need them. Jesus Christ what would we do if it was only us ..? You know what I mean you need the group' P27.*

The external processes that ran in tandem with the internal processes were significant in respect of the journey made by the families, as examined below.

HIGHER ORDER CATEGORY: LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL BROKERAGE

As the families started to become more proactive in highlighting the deaths of their loved ones, a number of external factors facilitated the process. One central driver was the move by republican and loyalist paramilitaries towards a Peace Process in the 1990s, starting with the IRA ceasefire on the 31st August 1994, with the INLA following on the 22nd August 1998. This heralded a change with a move away from violence to political negotiation, as highlighted by P34 below.

> '*They (the British and Irish Governments) couldn't set up the commission (ICLVR) without the cooperation of Sinn Fein who had turned their guns into chairs at that stage, so it couldn't have been done without Sinn Fein being involved, which is pretty evident' P34.*

For the families, the move away from violence by the paramilitaries was welcome. However, it did not remove the fear and underlying threat that existed within the community. It also did not remove the feeling of control that still existed in that a Commission could only be

operational if Sinn Fein (SF), the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) and republican paramilitaries cooperated fully with the process of providing information on the respective cases. Despite the peace process, republican paramilitaries continued to control the issue of the resolution of the issue of the Disappeared. The families contend that the power was, therefore, still with the perpetrators. As the families started to campaign, paramilitary shootings, assaults and bombings continued albeit at only one third of the levels of the violence in the 1990s (Hogg and Butler 2018). Families reflected that fear and threat persisted as well as the feeling of being controlled. It was 2005 before the IRA 'officially stood down' to enable the democratic process to progress under the leadership of Sinn Fein (Tonge 2014). The threat of violence continued to be real. As P29 contends,

> *'They (paramilitaries) lived on fear, they, they thrived on the fear they could put into people' P29.*

As reflected across the data, the underlying feeling of threat and control was always present and it was more than explicit violence. Control and threat permeated community life. As P32 states,

> *'They control with fear in the communities' P32 No 2.*

The feelings of control and fear did not abate, neither did the issues around stigma and labelling, and the active community marginalisation, as discussed previously, which continued beyond the 1998 Good Friday Peace Agreement. Change only came when the IRA and INLA, in the spring of 1999, released a list of some of those disappeared. This was followed by the creation of the ICLVR by the British and Irish Governments, as discussed earlier.

In coming to a political agreement, participants suggest that republican paramilitaries were forced, through a series of external brokerage processes with the US administration and the British and Irish Governments, to engage in key issues around addressing the Disappeared. In doing so it opened the issue up to external scrutiny. This was vital, as the paramilitaries' key strategy up to this point had been to keep the issue of respective disappearances localised and hidden at a community, national and international level, with the families marginalised.

> '*Well with WAVE and the media and politicians and all now behind it, it, it has taken it all to the surface, and it's a lot harder to hide from it and with the political situation the way it is at the minute everyone has to clean their hands, and the sooner they clean them all the better' P36.*

According to the families, bringing the issue into public conscience politically, at a local, national and international level, was crucial, in bringing about the recovery of the bodies of the Disappeared. In their interviews, the participants reflect that the brokerage, particularly by the US Administration, was the turning point in enabling the recovery of their loved ones,

> *'They (SF and the IRSP) didn't do it for our reasons, they done it for their own reasons really, didn't they, they wanted something in return, didn't they. And they must have wanted something bigger' P11.*

Political brokerage, precipitated, by the rising voices of the family members brought the Disappeared to the fore so that it became an issue that was part of negotiations between the British, Irish and US Administrations with SF and with the IRSP. However, as P11 indicates, progress on the Disappeared arose because there was something more significant at stake for SF and the IRSP that went well beyond the humanitarian right to a Christian burial for those abducted. The environment had to be conducive to enable this brokerage to be successful. It was reflected within the data that the Good Friday Agreement provided the mechanism for SF and IRSP to support the creation of the ICLVR which would work within the parameters of specific legislation to provide legal protections for the provision of information. This provided a safe method for information to be given by those involved in the disappearances. It gave SF and the IRSP the means to address the issue, shifting the focus away from prosecutions to the recovery of the bodies. For the families the ICLVR gave them hope that they could finally lay their loved ones to rest. P18 suggests that the only way the families could get their loved ones returned was if all of these factors: peace agreements, the engagement of SF and IRSP, an independent commission and legal protections were in place to enable progress to be made.

> *'This wouldn't have been done without the Commission, without the Good Friday Agreement, without being able to offer immunity and confidentiality and all that goes with that' P18 No 1.*

From the higher order category of Local and International Brokerage, two lower order categories were identified: Acknowledgement (Local, National and International); and 1999-Public Acknowledgement.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: ACKNOWLEDGEMENT (local/national/international)

External engagement with a variety of political leaders was commenced after the story of the Disappeared broke in 1994. Before the support group formed, some family members started to engage in meetings with senior local and national politicians which raised the political profile of the issue of the Disappeared. Whilst these meetings were perceived as useful and a certain amount of pressure may have been levied, participants conclude that they did not bring the change needed to force republican paramilitaries to reveal where the bodies of the Disappeared were located. Whilst the families hoped that the moral issue of the recovery of the Disappeared would be enough to bring change, it was reflected across the data that greater pressure needed to be applied on those who had influence on republican paramilitaries.

> *'We had years of her speaking to John Major, Mo Mowlam and countless politicians and everything but these people don't have an influence on the IRA' P4.*

The US administration had been actively engaged in early work on the peace process and this intensified during the 1990's. The participants, throughout the interviews undertaken, reflect that the ultimate breakthrough came when Margaret McKinney, the mother of Brian McKinney who was abducted in 1978, met President Bill Clinton and the First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton in Washington in May 1998.

> *'Who was going to break them at the end of the day it was President Clinton probably the most powerful man in the world. Probably threatening them with your Sinn Fein money drying up here, if you don't do something about those disappeared people' P2.*

As P2 suggests, the external pressure that came with the involvement of the US administration was crucial. He believed there was something at stake for the republican movement given their relationship with the United States administration that meant that if they did not take action on resolving the issue of the Disappeared there would be implications for them in their engagement within the USA.

Throughout the interviews the participants refer to the symbolism of Margaret McKinney's meeting for the families of the Disappeared. For families to have access to the most powerful leader in the world, and to gain a commitment that he would help broker the return of Margaret's son and others was seismic. Not only did the legacy of this meeting feature

strongly for the families, 15 years after he met Margaret, President Bill Clinton recounted that meeting in a TV documentary.

> *'She was a very impressive woman just in her simple love for her son. She was willing to go on with her life but she wanted her baby back so she could bury him properly' (President Clinton 'The Disappeared' film, Millar 2013).*

International involvement at such a crucial time was a game changer for the families in their fight for the return of their loved ones' bodies. However, this brokerage only had traction because the context in the eyes of the participants was conducive. Issues such as republican paramilitary groups declaring ceasefires and moving away from violence to a political process were key. There was also an optimism within the community, as interwoven throughout the data, that political negotiation would bring about peace. For the families of those disappeared this peace included the return of their loved ones' bodies. The Good Friday Peace Agreement had been signed one month prior to Margaret McKinney's meeting with President Clinton in the White House. As P19 indicates, all of this combined to bring about change,

> *'It was probably through a combination, of the fact that it was the right thing to do, but politically it would help them (SF and IRSP). It had to be solved or they wouldn't benefit from American support. And over history that is usually the case or it (the disappeared) might not have come to the fore' P19.*

The overriding sense of the participants was that the issue of the Disappeared was only addressed because there was a wider benefit, particularly for Sinn Fein. The participants suggest that the relationship with the United States was crucial to Sinn Fein as their leaders were given access to visas to visit the United States where they were able to fundraise and increase their profile across the Irish American community, which was crucial in the pursuit of a peace process (Dixon 2010). The participants conclude that it was the relationship between Sinn Fein and the US Administration which enabled the brokerage undertaken by President Clinton to produce a solution to the plight of the Disappeared families.

> *'If there was nothing in it for them (SF), they would never have admitted this here only for this. Remember they were getting visas to visit the States where they were barred for decades. Gerry Adams and all and then the States was opening up to them and they liked what they seen and dollars flowing in and they most likely said this is what we have to do to continue here' P2.*

The involvement of the US administration in trying to foster greater community engagement to bring about a peace process pre dated President Clinton. US leverage over many years had

helped to bring an IRA ceasefire in August 1994 (O'Dowd 2010). However, the Disappeared were damaging to the reputation of Sinn Fein as the stories of who the Disappeared were emerged, not only in the United States, but on home soil too.

'What they did - disappearing these people - it came back to haunt them' P32 No 2.

In gaining greater international engagement, Sinn Fein needed to demonstrate a willingness to address the Disappeared. Ultimately, the participants believe this was of crucial importance in the organisation's political engagement in the United States. In claiming responsibility for the disappearances, Sinn Fein, according to the participants, sought to manage the negative global opinion that inevitably came their way. Spencer (2019) reflects that the influence of the United States on Sinn Fein and the IRA in the 1990s was major, with a recognition that for peace to hold, the proponents of violence needed to engage in a democratic process and follow a non-violent path. Given this international engagement, the issue of the Disappeared, which had been both controlled and orchestrated for decades, now needed to be managed to mitigate any fall out that would arise in relation to them failing to recover the bodies. When family members subsequently returned to the United States in 2005/ 2006 initially there was a negative reception from some of those that they met.

> '*When P (another family member) and I went to America for the first time to meet with members of Congress and others with an interest in Ireland, one of them got on the phone to someone in Belfast … and whoever it was on the phone said: "tell them to get back to Belfast. We said give us 30 minutes"' P19*.

P19 reflects that when it became clear that the focus was humanitarian recovery rather than political lobby in the United States, the reception they received with some individuals changed. However their presence in the States was not welcomed by some as indicated by the reaction back in Belfast.

The participants reflect that if there had not been local and international brokerage then disappearances would have remained hidden as they did in the disappearances arising out of the Irish Civil War and War of Independence in the 1920's, as outlined in Chapter 2. As P2 posits, he believed that if the issue hadn't been forced then those who were responsible would have taken the secret of the Disappeared to their graves.

> *'I would love to know every detail but nobody is going to tell. These people were quite happy to go to their graves without telling anybody anything until their hand was forced' P2.*

Ultimately, intervention by President Clinton as an external broker became the leverage required to bring about the IRA and INLA releasing a list of the Disappeared in 1999 the impact of which will now be discussed.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: 1999 PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

On the back of the international brokerage outlined above, some 10 months later in March 1999, the IRA and INLA released a list of some of the Disappeared. This was significant, as captured in the BBC News headline on the 7th June 1999, which states that the Disappeared had returned *'to haunt Ireland's conscience'.* The families reflect that they had succeeded in bringing the issue into public consciousness. However, for the families, the impact of their loved one's name being included was both significant and traumatic.

> *'There was a sense of me feeling a bit guilty but there was a sense of shock, and a sense of, a wee bit of a sense of relief that it's out in the open' P25 No 1.*

As outlined by P25, seeing a list that included their loved one's name evoked shock, feelings of guilt (survivor guilt) and official confirmation for the first time that their loved one was dead. It ended the uncertainty, but and also the hope that their loved one might still be alive. The relief that the cases were now public was also tinged with apprehension regarding how the community would react. Some participants reflected that they were fearful that this would lead to greater marginalisation, as there was now official confirmation that paramilitaries were responsible for the death and secret burial of 10 people. However, the participants were also concerned about the immense influence the paramilitaries continued to have, post conflict, over the community, and how this might shape how the issue was perceived at a community level given the purported reasons for the disappearances (Hogg and Butler 2018). Maillot (2005) posits that the rhetoric often used against the victims contributed to a veil of silence and lack of solidarity shown across the community. The fear of the families was, therefore, real and justified given the isolation and the active marginalisation they had faced over the years.

For many participants, however, bringing the issue of disappearances out into the open was reflected as being positive in that it enabled the families to start to talk about their loved one and the circumstances of their disappearance. This had a significant impact, as highlighted previously, on community dynamics and also in relation to reversing the isolating and stigmatising effect of the death. At a wider level, the participants suggest that this public acknowledgement also demonstrated the culpability and duplicitous nature of republican paramilitaries given the myriad of lies, deceit and denial they had faced for in excess of two decades.

> *'At the time I said to myself, 'all the lies that was told from '72 to '99… this was the first time they had told the truth, maybe they were telling the truth where my Z was buried, because they gave Z's whereabouts' P32 No2.*

With public acknowledgement also came apparent justifications from the IRA and INLA as to why those disappeared had been killed. The paramilitaries doubled down on the labelling of the Disappeared as 'informers' or as engaging in anti-social behaviour which was detrimental to the republican case. The listed reasons for the killings suggested that the Disappeared had precipitated their own demise – this was in effect an effort at victim blaming. Rueda and Tanner (2016) contend that the process of labelling and representing individuals as deviant allows paramilitaries to maintain an aura of ensuring social conformity and acceptance within the community. Citing the example of Colombia, they argue that the paramilitaries' actions feed into the idea that the victims were not innocent and, therefore, not 'ideal victims' who precipitated their own victimhood by virtue of their alleged role as an informer. Maillot (2005) concurs with this assessment suggesting that republican paramilitaries also used victim blaming as a strategy, thereby controlling the rhetoric, and ensuring that the harm committed to the families was dismissed with no empathy shown across the community. In the main families were isolated and shunned (Lawther 2021).

> *'Informers were a huge thing at that time. They (families) would have been isolated, polarised, no doubt in saying they would have been targeted afterwards' P10.*

For some families whose loved ones had disappeared, there was also the disappointment of their loved one not being named on the 1999 IRA/ IRSP list. There was a dichotomy between, on the one hand, wanting your loved one listed as a form of acknowledgement, while recognising that inclusion on this list represented confirmation that your loved one had been killed and secretly buried.

'We were hoping which is a strange thing to do, hope that your father's name is on more or less an execution list' P24.

For those families who believed that their loved one was dead and should have been on the list, it represented a further injustice and a feeling that the family would get left behind as their loved one's case remained unaccounted for and unconfirmed.

'*It was a right slap in the mouth that, I couldn't believe that, I took that very bad. I knew in my heart he was, he was dead and I knew they were the cause of it, and the cover up, so then why go and put other names in and not .. his' P29.*

Despite some not being on the list, work on their respective cases continued leading ultimately to their loved ones being recovered. The impact of the 1999 IRA and INLA statement heralded a change at a community and political level. The families had no prior warning that a process in which the IRA/ INLA claimed responsibility for some of their loved ones' deaths, was imminent. Before it was publicly announced, many family members of those whose loved ones' deaths would be claimed received a visit from a republican representative. It was reflected that this added to the shock and trauma faced as the announcement was so unexpected.

'He read out this statement from Oglaigh na hEireann , you know it was a prepared statement. . He stood on the fuckin doorstep and read it' (statement from the IRA) P25 No 1.

The emotions associated with these statements cannot be underestimated as family members recall they were left to tell their parent (s) or siblings or children that their loved one had now been confirmed as dead. The statement from Oglaigh na hEireann was released to the media the following day. A process quickly followed in which the British and Irish Governments passed legislation to establish the ICLVR to receive information and to search for and recover the bodies of the Disappeared. This was needed to bring about change.

All of this had an emotional impact for the families as discussed now in the next theoretical concept: Journey of Pain.

SECTION 6: JOURNEY OF PAIN

THEORETICAL CONCEPT	HIGHER ORDER CATEGORIES	LOWER ORDER CATEGORIES
JOURNEY OF PAIN	Day to day Torture	Visualisation of death Intimacy of violence Progression of needs
	Frozen Grief- A trajectory of the experience of loss	Hope ends with recovery Vacuum created by recovery

THEORETICAL CONCEPT: JOURNEY OF PAIN

The emotional cost of disappearances for the participants and their families was a recurrent theme presented in the data. It manifested as day to day torture a journey of pain, as the families waited for confirmation of their loved one's death.

> *'Disappearance is the worst thing that can happen….not knowing, that's the worst thing that happens; that wrecks your head. Everything keeps tripping over in your memory all the time, and the flashbacks that you get' P32 No 2.*

Kennedy, Deane and Chan (2020) referred to heightened psychological symptoms being linked to the rumination around 'What If ?'. They contend that how individuals cope with these thoughts explains the variations in symptom levels of psychological distress and PTSD that may arise for individuals and their families. As P32 reflects above, the ambiguity regarding a loved one's fate causes ongoing anguish and *'wrecks your head'*. This is compounded by the political undercurrent to the disappearance and manipulation and control by paramilitaries increasing fear and silencing families. Boss (2011) contends that it is the ambiguity around the disappearance that intensifies the emotional impact. She labels this as one of the most traumatic types of loss given the uncertainty associated with a loved one's fate. However, as is evident from the data analysis, the context and circumstances of the disappearance, in the case of political violence, heightens the emotional distress given the proximity and practice of the perpetrators. A review of the literature indicates that dealing with the ambiguity of disappearance is linked to depression, anxiety, anger, prolonged

grief and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder for the family members and associates of the person disappeared (Hollander 2016; Robins 2016; Lenferink et al 2017b; Spillane et al 2017; Isuru et al 2019; Kennedy, Deane and Chan 2019; 2020).

Throughout this study the participants reflect on the challenge presented by the ambiguity and the oscillation between hoping that their loved one was alive and fearing that they were dead. This was very eloquently illustrated by P34 who contrasted the death of his father and mother. His father died before there was confirmation that his brother had been disappeared and killed. His mother died after several unsuccessful searches for his body.

'*My father lived in hope. My mother, my mother died in sorrow' P34.*

His mother's wish to lay her son to rest was not achieved in her lifetime. She campaigned until the end of her life for the return of her son so that she could lay him to rest in the family grave. Her sorrow was mirrored by the hope experienced by her husband that their son would return alive.

Many of the issues presented by the participants through the data analysis, such as hyperarousal, intrusive memories, disturbed sleep and a preoccupation with the traumatic incident are reflected across the trauma literature, most often as post traumatic stress and related disorders. (Franzen et al 2012; Silove et al 2017; Zukerman et al 2018; Isuru et al 2019 and Kennedy, Deane and Chan 2020). Reliving the trauma associated with the disappearance was a dominant feature across the interviews. In particular, the last images the participants had of their loved one before they were taken; the frantic nature of the searching following the abduction; and the deafening silence within the community. They also visualised their loved one's last moments, of being walked to their death. Often these images emerged when least expected. As Theidon (2013) points out it is the body of the individual disappeared that becomes the focus of history and memories. Memories and visualisations were re-lived when asleep in distressing dreams or during the day when stimulated by an image, sound, smell or touching something associated with their loved one. Intrusive memories and flashbacks feature within the symptomology of PTSD (Sullivan et al 2018; Brooks et al 2019 and Nixon et al 2021). As P18 outlines, images would emerge unannounced.

'It was a subconscious thing….it would just bubble up' P18 No 2.

There were many examples of the types of things that reawakened the traumatic images: from seeing a sibling's child and recognising the loss to the child of not having got to know their father who was disappeared; wall murals in areas of Belfast featuring men with long hair and the same type of clothing from the seventies that their loved one wore; and photographs, belongings and sounds, such as particular types of music. While the flashbacks and the evocation of strong memories by different stimuli features strongly with the symptomology of PTSD around flashbacks and intrusive memories, the participants reflect that it was the contextual issues and circumstances surrounding the disappearance of a loved one which caused/ magnified and elongated their distress around these stimuli, leaving an indelible legacy. Images, in particular, stimulated memories because their loved one was missing. The context, was therefore, deeply significant in intensifying the emotional impact of the disappearance. The orchestrated process undertaken by the paramilitaries marginalised and silenced the families, managed the narrative around the disappearance and created a climate of fear. The psychological distress of the disappearance for the families was, therefore, compounded by the omnipresence of republican paramilitaries within their community. All of these factors coalesced to create an environment in which intrusive thoughts and memories were normal responses to the abnormal situation the families were facing. The abnormality lay in the situation the families faced, not how they coped with it (Becker 2008). This contextual experience was not short lived. It could not be referred to as 'post', as in the case of PTSD for the families, as the legacy of disappearance was pervasive and elongated, mirroring the psychological distress associated with this type of loss (Becker 2008).

Given the contextual and circumstantial issues of the disappearances it is important, therefore, to focus on the lived experience of the participants within the social, cultural and environmental context of their loss (Sheehy 2012), in addition to the wider political context in which the loss occurs (Moya 2018). Kennedy, Deane and Chan (2020) postulate that, when loved ones go missing, family members are at heightened risk of mental health difficulties. For the participants the distress and indelible legacy of the disappearance was associated with inherent fear, coercive and malign control by the paramilitaries and the injustice of the disappearance. Participants highlighted that this was continuous. This experience was mirrored even when the bodies of their loved ones were recovered and laid to rest in family graves. The recovery did not lessen the psychological grip fully associated with the context

and circumstances of the disappearance. There were a number of reasons for this. Many of the families continued to live within the same community and under the same paramilitary rules in which the disappearances had taken place. Control, fear, and injustice were, therefore, still present post recovery. Violence was also ongoing with shootings, beatings and intimidation a stark reminder within paramilitary controlled communities (Johnston and English 2008; Napier et al 2017). Violence within the community reinforced the feeling of threat for the participants. It also fuelled a feeling of injustice. Mendeloff (2009) posits that injustice contributes to the hindrance of psychological healing citing increased anger, a desire for vengeance and an enduring sense of grievance. The impact, he suggests, reduces social reconciliation. The concept of social reconciliation is important in relation to the Disappeared given the role played by the community in rendering the families isolated throughout the years, and the proximity of paramilitaries who operated within and across the community. Whilst social reconciliation does not address the core injustice of the disappearance of a loved one, it did have an ameliorating effect as relationships within the community were reconstructed and respect was restored to the family following the recovery of their loved one in preparation for the funeral. Given the changing social and environmental context within the community, social and informal justice had, therefore, a corresponding impact on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the participants.

One of the central features associated with disappearance is the longevity of the experience. Families in some cases waited decades to have confirmation that their loved one was dead. Throughout the interviews, family members spoke of carrying the disappearance with them at all times. What happened to their loved one was never far from their thoughts; the adage that it was a '*living death'* signifies the turmoil faced by the families over decades (P15). P18 contends that it was only when his brother's body was recovered that he realised the emotional impact it had had on him throughout the years.

> *'And then, about 4 months later I suddenly realised, it might have been six months, I realised one day that I am not thinking about him every day. Because it used to be every morning when you waken up and every night when you are going to sleep. And then of a sudden I realised I am not thinking about him. And you obviously, you then reflect on all that. It was because he was at peace and so were we' P18 No 2.*

The participant group involved interviewees whose loved ones were recovered and those whose loved ones were still missing. For some, as P18 shares, recovery provided a sense of

peace. For others it also brought the challenge of the injustice and feelings of loss to the fore. For participants the magnitude of recovery was immense, given the long wait they had had from the point at which their loved one went missing to recovery, often decades later. The feeling that their loved one was not at rest featured prominently for the relatives who continued to search for them. P18's contention that because his brother was at peace the family could finally be at peace, demonstrates the emotional hold disappearances have for families who continue to search for their loved ones.

HIGHER ORDER CATEGORY: DAY TO DAY TORTURE

A higher order category emerging across all interviews was the participants' contention that the disappearance, even when recovery takes place, never totally leaves family members, it is a day to day torture that never lifts. They carry it with them even post recovery.

> *'That cloud has always been there through everything. Always there. And for my Mummy of course, worse than any of us you know. It will never have … left her. There is not a day that goes by that she doesn't think about it' P4.*

Many of the participants reflected that the disappearance of their loved one will never leave them. Morina et al (2011) postulate that psychiatric sequelae can endure years after the traumatic loss for children who lost their parents in wars and political violence; the legacy remains. Equally Lenferink et al (2017b) suggest that when individuals are missing, their families constantly ruminate about their fate. For parents, particularly as outlined by P4, the loss of a child appears to be intensified and was described by Hollander (2016), as a type of persistent yearning. The persistent yearning which dominated parents' lives following disappearance was highlighted by parents in Argentina (Thornton 2000), following 9/11 in New York (Boss 2004), in Nepal (Robins 2010; 2016) and in northern Uganda (Hollander 2016). From the interviews for this study, the traumatic turmoil for parents was reflected by their children. P27 speaking about her mum said.

> *'She used to say to me….there's not a day passes I don't think of him', I says 'Mummy I'm sure you do' ….and 'I pray for him every day' and I said 'God help him, I'm sure you do' P27.*

It was reflected that parents continually focused on the past, living in hope that their loved one would return but fearing the worst. P2 shares the physical feeling that arose because of the ambiguity.

> *'Not knowing, it's just like a gnawing oul feeling in your stomach'* P2.

There was a clear sense that the hurt lies deep within and does not lessen with time. This was highlighted by P35 who stated.

> '*They say time is a great healer, but not in a case like this' P35.*

Even with the recovery of a loved one, whilst the families have referred to taking solace from laying their loved one to rest, the legacy of what took place remains dominant. Whilst the yearning and uncertainty ended with recovery, the injustice and profound sense of loss led to the grieving process starting. As Robins (2016) contends, even when a body is recovered following a period of disappearance, the psychological impact continues. This chimes with Boss (2004) who argues that with Ambiguous Loss there is no such thing as closure, as even with recovery, questions remain. For P8 the disappearance of her brother was compared to a record replaying over and over again in her head.

> *'You know, just all these things just constantly went around like a record in your head. And there was no taking it away, so there wasn't' P8.*

In discussing the use of therapeutic approaches with families of those whose loved ones are missing, Kennedy, Deane and Chan (2020) referred to family members constantly reliving the trauma and ruminating about what may or may not have happened. The researchers describe the rumination as a type of brooding. A central challenge in the case of the Disappeared, in contrast to other traumatic losses, is that so much of what happened to their loved one is unknown. For many years there was silence about the issue of those disappeared. Their cases were unrecognised and unknown.

> *'To have years of nothing you know, is the one thing that we can share. We always understand that feeling'* P3.

The burden of the loss, therefore, lies entirely with the family. Given the orchestrated nature of the loss there was no buffering process provided by the community during the years of the disappearance or indeed within some extended families. The vacuum created by the process of disappearing often allowed family members to imagine what had happened without any

firm evidence, as referenced below. In addition, the lack of investigation by the police at the time of the disappearance and the ongoing Omerta that existed within the republican movement about what happened to the Disappeared, contributed to a feeling that it was not resolved and, therefore, the legacy remains with the family members. This lack of formal acknowledgement by the state, coupled with the paramilitary Omerta, fosters a feeling of injustice which heightens the psychological distress as the disappearance remains unaddressed (Mendeloff 2009). In the absence of 'official' information, periodic news coverage in later years, speculating on the circumstances of the disappearances, contributed to the families' psychological distress.

> *'There would have been pieces coming through about what happened and all of that, it just sends a shiver down your back really when you think of it….This is my brother you are talking about you know, the newspapers don't think that way, do they?' P39.*

The public aspect of the cases brings an unpredictability as news coverage can emerge unannounced. It can contain deeply distressing information which is intensified by the void in 'official' information and the ongoing ambiguity.

It is clear that, for the families, disappearances have left a legacy beyond recovery as evidenced by the vividness of the accounts and the degree of commonality around the fact that they continue to carry the impact of the disappearances, decades after they took place.

> *'It is something that never goes away. The events of those years are to me in my mind like yesterday' P7.*

Even in the case of when loved ones are returned, there is an unfinished residue that resides within the families. In part, the absence of an official investigation intensifies the emotional impact of the disappearance as families visualise their loved ones' deaths as outlined below.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: VISUALISATION OF DEATH

Throughout the interviews the visualisation of a loved one's last moments featured strongly. They were intrusive in nature which has resonance in traumatology (Morina et al 2011, Silove et al 2017 and Zukerman et al 2018).

> *'I started not sleeping at night thinking to myself, did they let him die before they put him down the hole. I was like suffocating with anxiety thinking about what they done*

to him before they put him down the hole. Did he know he was going to his death, did he know it was his last steps he was taking?' P8.

There are so many unanswered questions regarding their loved one's last moments. Decades after the disappearances took place the visualisation of death continues to cause distress. McMahon (2010) refers to the visualisation of death as the hidden scars which are irreparably etched on individuals' minds. Participants contend that being left with an information vacuum contributes to the visualisation of their loved one's death. Often stories can emerge in families that may be based on information that may be accurate, inaccurate or just speculation. After so many years it is often difficult to separate myth from reality. Given the orchestrated Omerta strategy adopted by the paramilitaries, gaining an accurate version of what happened is impossible in relation to the NI Conflict (Keefe 2018). This mirrors the position of paramilitary inflicted disappearances internationally (LeGrand et al 2017; Berman-Arevalo 2021 and Demirel 2021). Participants speak of how information that emerged in newspapers or books contributed to the visualisation of their loved one's death. Often it is difficult to substantiate the claims made.

'Because of stuff that originally was in the papers, speculation, terrible things about him being tortured and cigarettes being stumped on him and tied to a tree. That's hard, it's difficult to cope with, just the image of that. It's difficult to think about how it all ended for him' P18 No 1.

When bodies are subsequently recovered information can become available in pathology reports and in inquest statements that may provide some clarification regarding the cause of death. It may either confirm the family members' fears, or conversely be contrary to what has been claimed or circulated or visualised by family members for years. In some cases, the families found the information deeply distressing, as the injuries may suggest that a loved one fought with those who abducted them prior to death. Families often ruminate and visualise scenarios such as these in considering the final moments of their loved one's life.

'At the Inquest we heard that he was shot four times in the head. He had a fractured jaw too; he must have put up a fight - it did annoy you hearing that' P22.

Details such as fractures can confirm family members' fears regarding other injuries incurred pre death and can add to their distress. As P3 outlines, her mother struggles each night with the image of her brother being put into a grave and then shot. Participants overwhelmingly questioned whether their loved one knew they were going to be killed.

'He was put in the grave and shot. For Mummy to have that thought, while lying in bed is just terrible' P3.

Details such as these, when shared at inquests, can add to the distress faced by family members. Equally, visiting the site at the time of recovery and asking questions regarding the position of a loved one's body in the grave can endorse the belief that a loved one had been degraded and treated with contempt given how they were buried.

'Thinking that somebody brought him there and just left him, it was pretty tough…the way they had him, bent over, that would have saved them time digging a bigger grave' P12.

These are harrowing accounts. Details such as these cause distress with family members reporting flashbacks, sleeplessness and nightmares picturing how their loved one died. Intrusive and repeated thoughts and dreams about a loved one who is disappeared are perpetuated by the ambiguity regarding their fate (Boss 2006; Robins 2013 and Robins 2016). Many of the interviewees spoke about visualising their sibling crying for their mother. This was particularly prominent for those young men who had learning difficulties.

'He wanted home, he wanted his mummy, he would have cried for his mummy' P16.

Others visualised their brother's distress when they pictured him standing in the bog.

'I can hear him crying' P11.

For some of the interviewees these images picturing the clandestine burial proved very damaging for their mental wellbeing.

'I bet you he was shaking. How many of them was there, how long did it take them to do it? That's my problem with sleeping, I cannot put that out of my head' P23.

For many of those interviewed, the identification of the place of death and subsequent burial, and its remoteness, reinforced their fear and traumatic imagery around their loved one's vulnerability. This was juxtaposed against the family's need for recovery and the price they had to pay to get their loved one returned. Many interviewees spoke about retracing their loved one's steps and wondering what they had gone through.

'Sometimes when I go down, I'm just wondering what was going through Z's head…walking those last steps, knowing fine rightly they were Z's last steps' P32 No 2.

The fact that individuals were taken so far from home and often walked across bog land or beaches to their death was viewed as cruel. A recurrent theme was the visual image held by family members, of them being on their own and left in such a remote place. This intensified the distress for the families. However, a factor relevant to some of the cases was a suspicion that their loved one had known the people who had taken them to these remote areas and that their loved one may in fact have viewed them as 'friends'. For the families this was the ultimate betrayal. These were not strangers. These were often people their loved one knew. Many lived within their community. This proximity compounded by the climate of fear contributed to the longevity of the emotional distress associated with visualising their loved ones last moments.

> *'You know he was alone at the end of the day, no matter that there were other people, he was alone and people he thought were his 'friends'. It's absolutely, it's scary to be controlled to that level in relation to what you would do'* P13.

The issue of the cost of closure is deeply significant. The participants were caught either way. In locating their loved one they are provided with some of the details of their loved one's burial, but no mechanism to achieve justice. If the bodies are not recovered, participants continue to visualise how it ended for their loved one, in a remote place with no one by their side, compounded by the ongoing ambiguity associated with the disappearance. Either process brings memories, intrusive thoughts and visual images to the fore. The contextual issues and circumstances surrounding the disappearance, as orchestrated by republican paramilitaries, contributes to this torment. Even decades later, visualising what happened to their loved one remains as prominent as it was following their recovery. A central factor is the intimacy of violence given that the perpetrator often lived within the community as discussed below.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: INTIMACY OF VIOLENCE

The data analysis reveals the intimacy to the violence experienced in relation to the Disappeared, as the families suspected that their loved ones were often abducted by paramilitaries who lived within their community. In speaking out or talking about their loved ones, participants pointed out that they could never trust that the information wouldn't be

fed back to republican paramilitaries, as a result of which there could be consequences for the family, as outlined by P1.

> *'You never know who you are talking to and where it will go' P1.*

Given the political situation, republican communities were close knit and their supporting communities were localised within neighbourhoods and extended family networks (Dudai 2012). According to Mulholland (2007), republican paramilitaries were representative of the communities in which they operated. This close knit network legitimised the fear and mistrust felt by family members as the paramilitaries placed a strong emphasis on community loyalty and maintaining community boundaries, rules and control (Davies 2009). Control for the families extended across all aspects of life. Referring to the local doctor, P13 contends that you could not trust where the information would go, given that the doctor was from the local area and had extensive family links, some of which may have been politically orientated within republicanism.

> *'Even professionals you couldn't trust them, who could you trust? Who was not connected to who? It was so wrong' P13.*

The interrelatedness within communities did not just apply to key professional groups. Family connections were interwoven too.

> *'It was locals done it and because of the close knit area it was too, everyone in our area were married in and out through each other. So it would have been an awful big blow-up if anything ever had to come out because everyone was connected to everyone else' P29.*

The intimacy of the violence, in that the perpetrators lived within the community, was noted as contributing to the psychological torture associated with the disappearance. This resonates at an international level in Peru, Sri Lanka and Colombia (Haugaard and Nicholls 2010; Somasundaram et al 2011; Medina 2013; Sivayokan 2014; Garcia-Godos 2018; Bassel 2019 and Holmes et al 2021) as referred to in Chapter 3. Referring to this intimacy of violence in Peru, for example, Theidon (2013) postulates that the political violence there signalled a time when former enemies may have been someone who lived close by, a family member or the next door neighbour. Theidon suggests that terror became interwoven throughout the community, where words became weapons to be used by the paramilitaries to legitimise or

justify disappearances. For the participants in this study, the fear over who they could trust was compounded by the interrelatedness of families and connections across the community.

From the point at which the abduction took place seeds of mistrust were sown for the families. As they frantically searched for their loved ones, there was a sense of betrayal around the fact that members of the community held the crucial information that their loved ones had been abducted, murdered and secretly buried.

> *'You know you are in that town where your father was abducted, murdered and probably by locals, you know, look I am meeting them, I am speaking to them, like I'm talking to people that might know and sometimes it does get to you' P24.*

This undermined family members' trust, sense of belonging and identity in the community around them. With time, it became clear to the families that from the outset of the abduction the paramilitaries engaged in a process of monitoring what action the families were taking. In the weeks and months following one of the abductions the family reported that those who were involved called them to enquire if their loved one had returned. According to the participants, this served two purposes. Firstly, it allowed the perpetrators to gather information about what actions the family were taking, such as whether they were engaging with the police. Secondly, it allowed the callers to distance themselves. They may have been the last people who had been with the individual pre disappearance.

> *'In fact, some of them you know with Z's wife they used to phone her up and ask her if there was any news of him. I mean, how low can you get? When they were party to taking him away' P13.*

The participants contend that this level of duplicity caused further hurt, and the degree to which the paramilitaries orchestrated a strategy of surveillance to obfuscate responsibility compounded the grieving process further. The legacy of surveillance remains with the families today.

> *'I still have doubt about people around me, that I could annoy them by asking the wrong questions or saying the wrong thing. There's still evil people in our society that would harm you' P6.*

For those who knew who was involved in taking their loved one, there was the ongoing distress of meeting these individuals at Mass, or in shops, or elsewhere within the local community. They were described as being brazen, showing no regret for the part they played in taking a loved one away.

> *'You still see those people, they can look you in the eye and that's what I find. One of them I would think can't, but the majority still look you in the eye' P13.*

This brazenness hasn't diminished with time and adds to the ongoing feeling of injustice that they have never been held to account for what they did. Equally, in Peru, the sense of injustice felt by families whose loved ones had disappeared was heightened when former Shining Path militants known as the Huk Kuna continued to walk the streets intimidating members of the community (Theidon 2013).

Knowing who was involved in the disappearance of their loved one had wider ramifications for family life. It limited the involvement of some of the children in community activities such as sport, for example, given the potential for interaction with the children of those who were responsible for their relative's death. Equally, schooling proved challenging given that, in some communities, the children of those whose loved one had been taken were often in the same class as the children of those involved in the disappearance. This demonstrates how the intimacy of the violence and the ramifications of the disappearance impacted not only on the first generation, but also on the second.

> *'Because of the local community you had kids in school and in the same class as maybe them and you had to be so careful of inviting kids to birthday parties. And you are thinking is there any links here or is it safe to do this? It's a really small community' P13.*

The proximity of the paramilitaries and the intimacy of the violence within the community had a detrimental impact on family life that went beyond the loss itself; the sense of fear also had a direct impact on wellbeing, permeating all aspects of family life. Even with the passage of time, this fear persists and the ongoing sense of injustice for the participants is not diminished. This fear of injustice continues to impact negatively on the wellbeing of the participants. The possibility of an unguarded comment for example, evoking a violent or threatening reaction, is still an issue today.

The final lower order category emerging out of this higher order category is the progression of needs.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: PROGRESSION OF NEEDS

Throughout the data it was clear that, despite having multiple needs arising out of the

disappearance, family members adopted a phased approach and prioritised their needs relating to trauma, grief and a sense of justice. As Coulter and Murray (2008) postulate, given the intense psychological impact following conflict and human rights abuses, forgetting is not a choice. This was evident across the testimonies of the families. However, victims and survivors may often prioritise their needs in response to the challenges faced (Coulter and Murray 2008). This was evident from the data analysis as family members adopted a phased approach, starting with the recovery of their loved ones remains. However, running in parallel to this approach was the orchestrated strategy by paramilitaries that sought to control the issue and ensure that little or no record or evidence existed outside the information they strategically released. P32 outlines the phased approach he adopted in the search for his parent.

> *'When my brothers and sisters asked me at the time to take this over, I said, 'first and foremost I want to get our Z's body back'.*
>
> *'Then, when I got that done, the second thing was to clear Z's name; and the third thing was to get the truth'.*
>
> *'Now, we've got the first one - we have got the body back; and, in my eyes, I've cleared Z's name'.*
>
> *'Because they haven't told the truth from (date of disappearance) to the present day about this case, and that's the thing that we need from them; it's the thing I need from them' P32 No 2.*

P32's outline of the stages he went through provides a useful insight into the journey family members make. In a phased approach, he prioritised his needs: first for recovery; then moving to ensure that the reputation of his loved one was restored (which comes with recovery of their remains); to finally hoping for the truth about why the disappearance took place. This approach chimes with the experience of others,

> *'First you want him found, then when you have them, it's great to have a grave to go to, but when all that dies down you wanna know well, why did this happen ?' P35.*

The recovery of loved ones provided an immediate sense of relief for the participants. It brought an end to the psychological torture and trauma which arose from not knowing whether their loved one was alive or dead and where and how they were buried. However, this went beyond the recovery of the body, it also ended the paramilitary orchestration of their loved one's disappearance.

'It's like a weight off my shoulders like, it's like I'm breathing fresh air like, …it's because he's home' P8.

Notwithstanding the sense of relief, the enormity that followed for many families was the stark reality that their loved one was dead. They report that their emotions in fact oscillated between despair and relief. Despair that their loved one was now confirmed as dead (Isuru et al 2019; Puerto et al 2021) juxtaposed with relief that the ambiguity regarding where they were buried had ended.

'I was sick. One part of me was sick and the other part of me was relieved. Because all I could think was at least now I know where he is. It was just that not knowing' P23.

There was now confirmation of death, which brought a change, not only within the family, but also within the community who in turn started to support the family. This had a positive impact on relationships and, correspondingly, on mental wellbeing (Denov et al 2019). It also started the grieving process, which had been impeded by the ambiguity associated with the loss (Boss 2011). Taylor (2010) suggests, however, that the cost of the psychological turmoil inflicted upon the families by the paramilitaries over many years often only manifests itself post recovery of the body. Jewkes et al (2018) postulate that traumatic exposure continues until the conflict ends. For some of the families the traumatic exposure did not end with the recovery of their loved one's remains. Feelings of injustice and grief emerged post recovery, while the legacy and potency of threat from those who had been involved within the community also remained. The psychological turmoil was, therefore, continuous, changing with recovery but not abating totally. Whilst being reunited with their loved one brought great relief, the detrimental impact, particularly for parents who had recovered the body of a child was noted across the interviews. The literature reflects the disproportionate effect of the disappearance of a child on parents (Hollander 2016; Heeke et al 2017; Lenferink et al 2017b; Isuru et al 2019). Throughout the interviews the siblings of those disappeared reflect about the cost to their parents which often emerged post recovery.

'Not only for the closure but for the release that my mother could let go, it was stress free …like a big weight off her shoulders and she needed this. That was a release for her, and then the stress as I said started leaving her, and then that's when she took sick' P5.

It is reflected that, once the recovery happened, parents often took ill within a short period of time thereafter. This chimes with the ripple effect of bereavement on family members'

health often in the weeks and months after their loved one has died in traumatic circumstances. Here physical, psychological and psychosomatic difficulties, such as physical pain, can emerge in response to the bereavement (Prigerson et al 1997; Spillane et al 2017). Prigerson et al (1997) differentiate between traumatic grief and bereavement-related depression and anxiety that may emerge in later life. They argue that traumatic grief is associated with an increased prevalence of impairment in relation to health and quality of life. As outlined in the testimony above, when recovery took place, ill health started for the parent given the traumatic nature of the loss of her child. Pearse and Komaromy (2020) suggest that the body can be a means to recovery or can represent resistance to, or distraction from, the reality of the death in which the impact is internalised, leading to health difficulties. Those who were children when their siblings disappeared conclude that the stress of living within an orchestrated environment of silence and hostility, often for decades, had longer term implications for their parent who internalised the disappearance as a form of coping and to ensure that the family were safe from harm.

> *'She was a strong woman … but the mind was taking all the brunt of it, you know what I mean…I think it wrecked her head. You know, the pressure led to the strokes, .. she had a couple of mini strokes and then she had the big stroke that took her like. I have no doubt that contributed' P25 No 1.*

Over decades, family members often internalised the impact of the disappearance and suppressed questions and demands for justice because of the fear of the consequences of speaking out. When republican paramilitaries admitted to disappearing their loved ones the suppression of questions around their loved ones case continued in the hope that those responsible for their disappearance would engage with the ICLVR and indicate where they were buried. This was a debate internal to the family. However, the families were also mindful of the other families of those disappeared who were seeking their loved ones. Once recovery took place, the focus of the families moved to questioning why they were taken. As P3 states,

> '*when you find them it then opens up for the questions' P3*.

This will be explored further in Section 8 on Notions of Justice.

HIGHER ORDER CATEGORY: FROZEN GRIEF - A TRAJECTORY OF THE EXPERIENCE OF LOSS

When a loved one's body was recovered, grief, which had been suspended for years, emerged in the weeks and months following burial. This represented a change as individuals moved from the day to day torture, outlined in the preceding higher order category, into a new phase in a trajectory of dealing with suspended and frozen grief.

> *'I think the grieving is stalled, sure you don't know where they are, that unknown is horrendous for people' P13.*

Participants noted that the intensity of the emotional turmoil of the disappearance had not lessened with time. It was reflected that hearing that their loved one had been recovered felt as if he/ she had just died despite the fact that they had been disappeared often for decades.

> *'When we got word that he was found, it felt like he was just shot that day. You weren't going back years, when he went missing - it was just as if it had just happened' P22.*

It was from this point that the participants contend grieving started. This surprised family members who did not expect grief to be so dominant in their lives given the longevity of their loved one's disappearance. Rando's (2000) summation that, while families may anticipate a loss, death can only be fully realised when the death occurs, would appear to resonate with families in this study. While family members may have anticipated that the recovery would cause an emotional response, the intensity of grieving as shared across the interviews, was unexpected.

> *'When he was found, I started grieving - then it was reality' P22*.

It was evident across the data analysis that there was a trajectory of loss that was pertinent to the families of those disappeared. The psychological day to day torture, as discussed previously, when loved ones were missing and their fate was unknown, was associated with the suspension of grieving. Alonso et al (2016) postulate that the state of limbo arising from disappearance leads to frozen mourning. They question how families could grieve when their loved one's death had not been confirmed and their body remained unrecovered? This finding is echoed by the participants who spoke of feeling paralysed when their loved ones disappeared; they reported withholding and internalising emotions associated with their loss, and living in a state of uncertainty. This feeling of paralysis was compounded by the lack of any external acknowledgement of their loved one's death and disappearance by republican

paramilitaries, by the police or across wider society. After years of denial and the paramilitaries' orchestration of the disappearance, the participants contend their grief was in effect, frozen. Grief was, therefore, not a linear process but a frozen experience as families were caught in the midst of unending uncertainty.

> '*Some people say "Time heals", but it doesn't in regard to a disappearance. It's the sense of loss. We are not able to resolve it, because we are still in the middle of it' P6.*
>
> *'You can't grieve, you can't grieve because you don't know, you know what you think and what you feel , but you can't grieve cause you don't have them ..you can't grieve unless you have the body' P29.*

It was overwhelmingly evident from the data analysis that the emotional consequences of disappearance did not lessen or resolve themselves with time. When physical searches for the Disappeared were being undertaken by the ICLVR there was an expectation and hope that their loved ones' bodies would be recovered. The participants reflected on the precarious emotional impact of waiting for this confirmation.

> *'You are just hanging on a thread, you know just waiting and hanging, just waiting' P16.*
>
> *'We are like in limbo. The disappearance impacts on grieving. We nearly get there, but then we get pulled back because we don't have a body' P6*.

When a body was recovered grieving commenced. However, when a body was not recovered, and the funeral rituals were not permissible, the psychological torture continued, as outlined previously. As P6 outlines above, you were pulled back each time from grieving when a search ended without success. Betz and Thorngren (2006) postulate that disappearance is unending in both its cruelty and torment. When recovery does not take place families are left again in a suspended state (Blaauw and Lahteenmaki 2002) with grieving once again held in abeyance. The literature reflects the inherent difficulties for those anticipating the death of a loved one which leads to poorer mental and physical health (Boss 2004; Adams and Sanders 2004 and Duggleby et al 2009); family conflict (Hollander 2016) and a feeling of being abandoned and isolated (Sanders et al 2003). These themes resonate across the data. Searches ending without success had a strong emotional impact for the families who were once again returned to a state of limbo and psychological torture. The cost for family members of repeated searches was noted.

'And the longer it was going on, and the longer it was going on and then it stopped, then it was complete dejection, then another dig started and you know.. it just wrecked her I think like' P25 No 1.

Throughout the interviews it was repeatedly reflected that grieving could only fully begin when a body was recovered. Families could not release themselves from the anguish of continually searching for their loved ones. The disappearance continued to have a hold over them regardless of the timeframe. They were unable to let go.

'You can't grieve unless you have the body…. you can't release yourself, you can't let go' P29.

The searches each time brought families to a cusp, anticipating that their turmoil would end. Often, as P25 outlines, the psychological ramifications for it ending without success were significant. This was borne out through the experience of the family members who engaged in the study. Out of 40 interviews, 31 of the participants had recovered their loved ones, with nine still searching. Searches were ongoing during the period of this study and the acute nature of the associated emotions for the families was clear as searches started and ended without success.

While participants reflect that they were unable to grieve until the body of their loved one was recovered, there were a number of external factors that contributed to the outworkings of the grieving process for families. Robins (2010) points out that disappearance is chronic in nature having emotional, physical, economic and social consequences. The contextual issues associated with the Disappeared also have a strong influence on the grieving process, given the orchestrated nature of the paramilitary strategy around managing the disappearance and response of the community over the years Across the literature, disappearances have been described as impeding the grieving process (Powell et al 2010; Thornton 2000; Robins 2016 and Hollander 2016). The political context of these disappearances is a strong determinant in the grieving process. Thornton (2000), who worked with the mothers of the Disappeared in Argentina, referred to the families of those disappeared having '*arrested grief' (p280).* Hylton (2020) writing about women whose loved ones were murdered and secretly buried in Srebrenica contends that they '*die all over again'* as all of their grief and feelings of injustice surface when they see the person responsible for the murders as they go about their normal lives within the community (p3). In the same way, the participants in this study spoke of how feelings of grief and injustice are intensified when the families meet those they suspect of

being responsible for their loved one's disappearance at church, the school gates or in their local neighbourhood or town. It is clear that grief is impacted by the context and circumstances of the loss, the denial of the religious and cultural rites associated with the death and by the intimacy, of the violence as outlined earlier. Boss (2015) contends that the source of pathology, when family members suffer from depression, anxiety or health challenges arising from the disappearance of a loved one, lies in the external social context, not in any perceived weakness or vulnerability of the family member. Hollander (2016) echoed this finding when he interviewed the mothers of children disappeared in northern Uganda. He postulates that the complications that arise in grief are due to the external environment and context of the loss, rather than any pathological weakness of the family members. In the case of the Disappeared in NI's Conflict, the external environment was a strong contributing factor to their grief.

> *'Whatever way you want to term it atrocities happened almost 30 years ago and these people are still living through it day by day because they had no closure of one sort' P31.*

As well as having no closure, participants reflect that how their loved one died also impacted upon the grieving process. The inhumanity of the death and lack of respect around the burial had a residual effect post recovery, intensifying grieving (Preitler 2015; Petersen and Jacobsen 2018 and De la Fuente-Herrera and Soria-Escalante 2021).

> *'You know if somebody in your family dies, you bury them and then you grieve, you know …. you know being taken away, kidnapped, what did Z go through before Z was killed you know… the way they killed Z and the grave they threw Z in, you know, you wouldn't do that to an animal' P40.*

It has been suggested that the visualisation and imagery associated with the death and the traumatic nature of the burial, when added to a perceived lack of institutional legitimacy given the state's failure to recognise or investigate disappearances, prohibits the completion of grieving (De la Fuente-Herrera and Soria-Escalante 2021). Participants contend that while they attempt to bury the grief, it remains with them.

> '*I bury it to some degree, but it never goes away'* P18 No 1.

There are implications in continuing to bury the feelings associated with the abduction of a loved one. As P40 posits,

'Then you are thinking about that, that's grieving, thinking, grieving, thinking, you know, depression and all, you know there is a lot of things come together, you know' P40.

It is clear that, regardless of the time since the disappearance, the contextual issues and circumstances have impeded the grieving processes. Previous studies by Currier et al (2006); Boelen and Prigerson (2007) and Morina et al (2010) have concluded that violence due to armed conflict, state oppression and violent death have a significant impact on an individual's grieving process. These contextual issues include how the community and society reacted to the death. As outlined in Chapter 4, disenfranchised grief emerges when a death is not publicly recognised, acknowledged or when the families are not supported by the community (Doka 1999). Hollander (2016) termed this social disenfranchisement in which the grief of the parents of children abducted in northern Uganda was not communally acknowledged, openly mourned, socially supported or publicly expressed (p12). In NI's Conflict, change only came for the family when the body was recovered. It enabled them to start grieving and for the funeral and community rituals associated with death to begin (Bernard 2018).

'It's like your grief is put on hold until it actually happens – the day he was found' P29.

Recovery also symbolised the end of hope as discussed below.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: HOPE ENDS WITH RECOVERY

Any hope that the outcome for a loved one would be different ended with the recovery of the remains. As P21 contends, the hope that he carried that his brother was still alive ended when the coffin was carried from the clandestine burial site by the ICLVR forensic team.

'When they brought the coffin over to the road, and we put our hands on the coffin, it was very emotional, but it was what we were looking for, for a long time. He was dead. Any hope that he wasn't was over, but at least the search was over' P21.

The recovery ended the psychological torture associated with the search for P21's brother. It was also tied directly to the ending of hope. Hollander (2016) postulates that, when a loved one is disappeared, there is no concrete finality to the loss as hope always remains. Examples of living with hope are reflected by P4 who suggests that you are always preparing yourself for what you will say to your loved when they return home. She contends that the conversation she intended to have was replayed many times in her head over the years her

brother was missing, telling him how worried they had been and the places they had looked for him. However, in tandem she suggests that she was also preparing herself for the fact that he would not be coming back, that he was dead and that the memories of family times needed to be treasured. This battle between hope and despair was reflected as being deeply traumatic.

> *'It's a real battle in your mind and for that to go on for so many years, it's enough to send anybody over the edge, you know' P4*.

Living with the complexity of emotions associated with the ambiguity of disappearance has a direct impact on trauma and on grief. For families, it has been suggested by Hollander (2016) and Wayland et al (2016) that living with hope can ameliorate the intensity of the trauma. However, Isuru et al (2019) argue that this impedes grieving and results in psychological morbidity. Betz and Thorngren (2006) refer to the unending cycle of hope and disappointment suggesting that this may last years or even decades. In the case of the NI Conflict, even when some of the families in this study were made aware that their loved ones were dead, following the publication of the IRA/ INLA list in 1999, the absence of a body meant that they still maintained a glimmer of hope that their loved ones might still be alive, as reflected in P21's opening statement.

Boss et al (2003) referred to the oscillation between hope and despair, living with both options, as being more helpful, given the ambiguity associated with disappearance. This ambiguity is evident across the spectrum of disappearances, whether it's those killed in 9/11, or in boat or airplane tragedies, or in natural disasters. However, in war and conflicts the ambiguity surrounding the disappearances can be manipulated by those responsible for it. It can be used to foster collective distress that, according to Robins (2016), can be misused for political and social ends. This first was borne out throughout the participants' interviews where the use of false narratives by paramilitaries, to suggest that individuals were alive but had chosen to stay away, was blamed for contributing to the hope that families continued to feel that their loved one might still return unharmed. The orchestrated nature of this process thereby yielded immense power and control to the paramilitaries and contributed directly to the ongoing turmoil and anguish of the families, thus influencing the grieving process.

'Prior to his recovery we didn't grieve because there is always no matter how much you would think about it, like the logic was always that he was gone he was dead, there was always something in the background saying well maybe he is not' P18 No 2.

It was clear from the interviews that the families retained a degree of hope throughout the years even though, as P18 indicates, the logic dictated that their loved ones were dead. Hogben (2006) referred to this period as one of waiting in which hope and worry bring a state of an extended or suspended present. As highlighted in Section 4, life for many of the families in effect stopped when their loved one disappeared and they began living that extended or suspended present. This new reality only stopped when the recovery of their loved one's remains took place. Even then, until DNA confirmation was received, families still had to wait in case the DNA testing concluded that the remains weren't those of their loved one. For many, this confirmation represented the end of one process, that of searching and hoping for a safe return, and the beginning of another one, that of fulfilling the rituals of Christian burial and grieving for their loved one. For the families a vacuum had been created throughout the years when their loved one was missing. This vacuum was mirrored post recovery as participants adapted to their loved one's return and the grief associated with their loss.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: VACUUM CREATED POST RECOVERY

For decades family members have been on a journey. From the testimonies shared it has been described as a tortuous route given the context and circumstances of their loss. However, campaigning gave the families a purpose and a drive which sustained them throughout the years. It also acted as a form of recognition and memorialisation (Smid et al 2020). At a community level, family involvement in campaigning had a wider impact. It helped to humanise who their loved ones were, which may have reduced the stigma and discrimination associated with the loss (Thornicroft et al 2016). However, many of the participants noted the transition that came for themselves when a loved one was buried and the purpose of the campaign had been addressed.

'I found the next day, you know the day after the funeral that it seemed your purpose had gone and the realisation that someone had actually died belonging to you … You know and suddenly there's a body buried in the graveyard that should have been there 31 years ago and that that's basically the way I felt' P31.

In highlighting the case of a loved one, family members had a purpose, a clear direction around fighting for the recovery of their loved one's remains. Once recovery had taken place the reality and enormity of the death came to the fore with the intensity of the loss invoking the grieving process. Holt (2021) suggests that, for many families whose loved ones die at the hands of others, there can be emotional and practical challenges which can intensify the impact for the grieving process. The context and circumstances of the loss in the case of P31 had a direct impact for the grieving process which had been delayed for 31 years. Suddenly he was faced with the reality of the loss.

It was often only in the post recovery phase that the burden of the disappearance was recognised by the participants.

> *'When you live with it, you just live it, it's there, there's nothing you can do about it, it's a burden but you live with it' P18 No 2.*

At a psychological and emotional level recovery of the body of a loved one was cataclysmic. The data from this study show that the disappearance becomes interwoven throughout all aspects of a family member's life. Across the data, the transition post recovery for family members brought change at a personal and public level. Matthies–Boon (2017) posit that there are two main stages following a period of political activism, reintegration and reinterpretation. Reintegration is described by Matthies–Boon (2017) as the movement of traumatic experiences into a safe holding space. Reintegration in this context had two main components, psychological and physical. At a psychological level the pain and uncertainty associated with the disappearance was finally addressed with the recovery of the body of a loved one. Reintegration allowed traumatic experiences to be stored, but in a changed environment. The environment had been shaped by recovery which in turn enabled grieving to commence. Family members reflect on the mixed emotions evoked through recovery as it also represented confirmation of the death of a loved one,

> '*It may seem very bizarre to say that you are lucky to be told, or to find out, or realise that your loved one, has been murdered and are not coming back. But yes we feel lucky and relieved' P4.*

At a physical level family members could retreat and reintegrate within the community as the purpose of their lobbying had been achieved. This was important as the community which had been, (by its silence and exclusion in the eyes of the participants) unknowingly complicit

in the paramilitaries' orchestrated campaign, now became a support and validator of the wrong committed against the family. In relation to reinterpretation, Matthies- Boon (2017) describes it as the reappraisal of the trauma through the achievement of positive outcomes. The ultimate success of recovery brought a positive outcome albeit, as P4 highlights above, it was a dichotomy as the family were grateful for confirmation that their loved one had been murdered and was now recovered. It also brought a change of attitude and acceptance of the reality of what had happened, both to the individual disappeared, and also to their family at a community level. This enabled participants to start to build trust in their social surroundings post recovery. This was vital as the disappearance, as with all intracommunal conflict related violence, had shattered individuals' trust and sense of safety. This led to a view that the community was malevolent, social relations were meaningless and they were powerless to fight against the oppressor (Stolorow 2007).

For participants there was a firm belief that the actions they had taken in campaigning for their loved one throughout the years had been beneficial. This is important as Janoff- Bulamn (1992) postulate that establishing meaning and benevolence is beneficial for trauma survivors given the meaninglessness and malevolence often associated with the loss. It was clear that, for many, recovery saw the establishment of meaning and the start of a painful grieving process. As P34 contends, the void created post recovery brought a reinterpretation and painful realisation of the cost of the disappearance for the family.

> *'And then you go into a process of being really down, because all the anger has left you and all the hard work is away. And so you sort of come away from it – and, to be quite honest with you, I wasn't in a good place after it. I felt very low; no self-esteem or anything else. I didn't want to go anywhere; I didn't want to mix with people; I just wanted to be away from the whole lot of it to tell you the truth' P32 No 2.*

It was evident that during the years in which their loved ones were disappeared the ultimate priority for the families was on locating and recovering their loved one. That was their sole aim. When it ends there is a corresponding impact given the reality of the loss which had an emotional, physical, familial and social impact. As P10 describes, the recovery was '*putting an end to something'*. However, the ending of the campaign was often viewed as having a wider toll on family members' health. It is difficult to discern from the data whether it is the ending of a drive to achieve a goal or the reality of the death coming to the fore as grieving starts, or a combination of both, which contributes to ill health.

'Then when finally she got him, her health started to go downhill and then she didn't get much of a life out of it' P35.

'It was as though it was her goal to get Z home, and I think after that, do you know, she sort, she sort of started to show her age, if that was the way to put it' P31.

When searches are being conducted there is an anticipation of recovery. Equally it is clear that searches represent an anticipation of death. In the case of the Disappeared this only happens when the body is recovered. Searches starting and ending unsuccessfully are deeply distressing at a psychological level, as reflected earlier in this chapter. Participants shared a myriad of emotions in addition to the impact of the perpetual wait for the call to confirm recovery. It was only with recovery that the enormity of the disappearance was realised. As P38 contends,

'You think 'no I will be grand and you thought I'll be all right because I know it's coming' ., but that's just like someone with cancer dying, you're with them all along and you know they are dying, then when they die it's a different story' P38.

It is clear that post recovery there is a transition as family members cope with the loss and the magnitude of the years of waiting and searching for their loved ones. There would also appear to be a transition as they move from having a public persona to a private role as the campaign for their loved one comes to an end. As highlighted previously, until all of the Disappeared are recovered there is a collective sense of responsibility to keep campaigning. The nature of the deaths and the contextual issues and circumstances around them have a longer term legacy. There is, too, a residue for the families from the orchestrated nature of the strategy adopted by republican paramilitaries.

'No matter what you do with your life .., as great as my kids are, I have never known real happiness, it will always be marred with…something that is missing or something that is sad. It will always be there' P13.

Others describe the void created post recovery as a type of emptiness and quietness.

'I remember that, our house was quiet, it was as though something had settled you know as I said quietness descended on the house' P31.

The quietness of the house was synonymous with an ending of the psychological distress associated with not knowing where a loved one had been secretly buried. It also represented an ending of the campaign for recovery in which family members could retreat into relative

obscurity following a proactive public drive over several years. However, many did not retreat. Instead they continued to campaign for the families whose loved ones are still missing.

Under the Journey of Pain theoretical concept, a trajectory of loss is evident that emerges pre and post recovery, as reflected in the higher order categories. From the point of abduction family members are living with the disappearance daily. Grief is frozen. From the point of recovery this changes as the grieving process is evoked and the intensity of the loss is noted by participants. There are many external factors that contribute to this trajectory of loss. The most significant of these is the orchestration of the disappearances by republican paramilitaries. Another is the denial of the religious and cultural rites associated with death, which will now be discussed.

SECTION 7: RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DEATH RITES

THEORETICAL CONCEPT	HIGHER ORDER CATEGORIES	LOWER ORDER CATEGORIES
RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DEATH RITES	Ritualisation of death	Political framing and Religious Engagement Faith and Prayer Spiritualists Troubled Souls

THEORETICAL CONCEPT: RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DEATH RITES

The need to honour and show respect to the dead is recognised around the world and is shaped by the customs and beliefs of the families who grieve. It is no different in Ireland, where customs, practice and ritual, honed over decades and centuries are viewed as an intrinsic part of life.

> *'But it's really hard to understand the process of disappearing the body, that they would do that in a country like Ireland, honouring and respecting the dead is very important to everybody' P19.*

McGarry (2020) contends that a Christian funeral is of profound importance in Irish society, in which the life of the deceased is celebrated. She argues there is a deep-seated respect for death that is innate in Irish society. Many of the rituals associated with death are viewed as religious. However, social and cultural norms that form part of a process of respect for the deceased, support the family and contribute to a recognition of the mourning process. For some individuals, when rituals such as a funeral are prevented, there is a fear that their loved one's safe passage into the next life is hindered (Grainger 1998). In these cases, families are left with a further burden and concern that impedes the grieving process, as reflected later in this section on Troubled Souls.

In Ireland, the rituals associated with death often follow a process in which the body is returned to the family for a period of days during which a wake is held. This is often open to the community, and then a Christian or other type of burial is undertaken. McCoy (2012) defines a wake as an ancient Irish custom in which the body of the deceased is laid out in the family home in order that members of the family, neighbours and friends can pay their final respects so that their loved one's spirit can pass to the next life. A wake is deeply significant in Ireland as it allows family, neighbours, friends and acquaintances to come to the house to spend time with the family and to show respect to the person who has died. The importance of the rituals associated with death cannot be underestimated as they often bring harmony and respect to situations that are deeply traumatic, and can provide acknowledgment and meaning that is beneficial for grieving (Theidon 2013). While ritual can, according to Hoeberichts (2012), offer meaning, it can also allow individuals to move beyond their personal suffering, as they perceive their loved one's death is recognised and acknowledged within the community. For those disappeared it often represented the end of one process and the start of another that focuses on grieving and a sense of justice.

Interwoven throughout the data in this study was the significance for family members of being able to exercise the religious and cultural rites associated with burial. There was a strong sense that until a loved one was laid to rest through Christian burial, the family were not at rest. As P15 states,

> '*Knowing that he's buried with my mother gives you a sense of peace' P15*.

For the families there were physical and psychological needs related to ritual and burial. When family members were unable to bury their loved ones it was reflected that their loved ones were not at rest.

> *'A Christian burial is something that needs to be done'* P11.

The processes surrounding the death are significant in symbolising not only the re acceptance of a loved one back into the community, but also an acknowledgement of the journey of the family.

> *'It's important to keep that connection, that they're now part of this society and back with their family' P6.*

Religious and cultural death rites were deeply significant for the families. When these normal rituals could not take place families relied on prayer and symbolic religious symbols as a form of comfort and coping. They also reached out to spiritualists in the hope of reconnecting to their loved one. Across the data, two higher order themes were identified: religious rites, and undoing the harm. A number of lower order themes emerged from the data, as presented below. The role of religion and, in particular, prayer was repeatedly referenced by participants as sustaining them through the years of searching for their loved one and in the time since. The importance of Christian burial was enshrined within this belief structure. Tied to this is the ritualisation of death which will be examined below.

HIGHER ORDER CATEGORY: RITUALISATION OF DEATH

In Ireland death is highly ritualised particularly in the Catholic Church. As P4 states, once burial took place, the family believed their loved one was finally at rest.

> *'Once you have that Christian burial and your body, your actual remains have been committed to God then we believe that you are now with God and at rest' P4.*

It also had a corresponding effect on the family whereby they were at rest too. Grainger (1998) suggests that burial represents finality. For the families it represented an ending of their psychological torment and a recognition that respect had been restored. It also represented an end of the orchestration of their loss by paramilitaries.

Burial was significant in that it provided a final resting place for their loved one and was described in the interviews as providing *'safety'* (P11), *'closure'* (P35), *'reunification'* with family members (P14), and *'warmth'* (P23).

> *'The fact that he is not lying outside there on his own and getting him back, even though you are getting a dead body in a coffin back, but still you know he's there, he's safe. Isn't that awful like that he is inside and he is warm and you have a wee grave to go to pray to' P23.*

Once this religious rite was met, having a grave brought families into other religious based remembrance processes in the community such as Cemetery Sunday. P28 defines Cemetery Sunday as a day when the whole community come to their own graves and the graves the people who are interred there are blessed with holy water. Participants reflected on the

importance of Cemetery Sunday and the annual Remembrance Mass on the anniversary of the death of the Disappeared victim. Both these events brought comfort but as important was the associated recognition of their loss.

> *'There's a sense of community at it, like there is thousands at it… It's kinda belonging, you know, you belong there now, or your family belongs to the grave now you know' P24.*

For those families who continue to search for their loved ones this sense of isolation from these comforting rituals will continue until recovery is achieved.



Figure 18 The funeral of Peter Wilson 37 years after he disappeared in 1973. Photograph © Brendan Murphy.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: POLITICAL FRAMING AND RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT

All of the families looked to the Catholic Church, as they were all from the Catholic community, to help them at the time of their loved one's disappearance, and in the years afterwards. While there were some exceptions, with individual priests supporting the family

and pushing for information, in the main the families contend that the church distanced itself from their plight.

> '*The church wanted nothing to do with us'* P32 No 1.

Religious engagement was, therefore, politically framed with the families left isolated, marginalised and unsupported by the church during a deeply traumatic period. P32 outlines the stance of the church following Z's abduction,

> *'The church didn't want anything to do with us; it was found out … from some of the social workers documentation …. they went to the priest, the local parish priest, and he didn't want nothing to do with it. He said he didn't know what he could do for us. This was coming up to Christmas time -….. no Z, …. no food in the house - and the local priest didn't know what he could do for us? To me, the Catholic Church should be ashamed of themselves for what they done' P32 No 1.*

This left a deep legacy for the families regarding how they were made to feel. P32 believed that the church were, therefore, complicit in the silence orchestrated by the paramilitary group. In not standing up for the families he believes that the church, in effect, colluded with their marginalisation within the community. Even when asked to support the family members, help was scarce and the seriousness of the situation went unrecognised. P1 contends,

> *'I remember a priest coming and I had got dressed and tidied up and he said 'you don't look too worried'. They didn't help'* P1.

He didn't help P1 and no effort was made to reach out to her after this or in the intervening years as she searched for her son. A common statement throughout the interviews was that no one from the church ever came near them, despite the families attending Mass and contributing to the running and upkeep of their local church. This proved challenging for the families many of whom had a strong faith and looked to the church for support, reassurance and guidance,

> *'Faith is really important for her, but as I said, back then you hadn't a priest to talk to. It was not a conversation you were encouraged to have or you were afraid to have either, not knowing what could happen' P13.*

Over the years the attitude and stance of the church did not change and the families believe they adopted a selective blindness to the reality of the disappearance for the families. Even whenever other deaths in the family took place the Priest did not mention by name their loved one who was still missing or the circumstances of the loss. This gave a wider message

to the community, the fate of their loved one was not even recognised which prevented the issue from being addressed.

> *'Even on me Mum's and me Dad's funeral, Z's name was never mentioned. Especially at me, at me Mum's funeral, because that picture* (of her son Z) *that had the pride of joy you know the pride of place in that kitchen, that was took to the church that day for her funeral. And even that day he never even mentioned Z, which he should have done' P11.*

In failing to mention Z, P11 contends that the priest endorsed the actions of those in the community who sought to ignore Z's existence. She suggests that, for decades, they were complicit in the silence around his disappearance and even locally to this day there has been no specific action on the Disappeared from her local parish. All of this played into the families belief around a denial of their loved ones' existence as outlined in Section 3.

Some of the families reflected that there was a connotation to intracommunity violence that reflected the Catholic Church's reluctance to get involved in highlighting the issue of the Disappeared. They contend that throughout the NI Conflict the Church made clear differences deeming some issues, such as including republican prisoners and their families in the weekly prayers as acceptable, whilst at the same time refusing to pray for, or even acknowledge, the Disappeared. This gives a clear sense that NI's Conflict in itself was not a barrier to receiving religious assistance, but that the issue of the Disappeared was politically framed within the Catholic Church which deemed it unacceptable and best avoided. Given the span of many of the disappearances, from 1972 to 1985, the families pose a number of questions: if the church had not been silent could the campaign of disappearance orchestrated by republican paramilitaries been stopped sooner? Could the church have played a more active role in recovering the bodies of those disappeared, and spared the families decades of psychological torture (Section 6)? Could the families emotional suffering and isolation have been eased with support from the church? Why was there such a reluctance, on the part of the church, to help the families?

It is clear from the interviews that a number of factors are relevant. Fear was a prevalent issue across the community, but the extent to which this affected individual priests is unknown. In the case of Patrick Duffy in Derry, as outlined in the introduction members of the church proactively intervened in his case. This led to his body being returned. However, this was the exception and the church hierarchy, despite being asked, did not support the families of the

Disappeared, either publicly or privately, throughout the NI Conflict. The church is a microcosm of wider society and, in some cases, the families believed that some of the priests were sympathetic to the republican movement. There may, therefore, have been a tacit acceptance that the course of action taken by the paramilitaries to expel, exclude or remove was justified. If that was the case then the orchestrated nature of the action taken by the paramilitaries against the families may have had tacit agreement too. P25 recounts a priest engaging with the family when it was confirmed that his brother had been murdered and secretly buried. He believed that the priest was trying to manage any negative views about the IRA or Sinn Fein that the family may have had when their son and brother's death was confirmed.

> *'At this stage my goat was getting up in a big way, cause your natural reaction is 'they fucking murdered my brother' and me mother is in a bad way and he is trying to, I could sense that all the talk was that he was like an apologist for the IRA' P25 No 1.*
>
> *'How dare you come and be an apologist you know what I mean a priest' P25 No1.*

P25's statement demonstrates the insensitivity of the priest to the family's plight given that they just had the devastating confirmation that their loved one had been murdered and secretly buried. It also demonstrates the challenges when political framing of the issue led the priest in the eyes of P25 to prioritise the need to protect the IRA and Sinn Fein over his pastoral responsibility to the family. Despite their reluctance to engage on the issue, many of the families remained respectful and loyal to the Church. They were grateful for any individual support shown by a small number of Priests who stood by them over the years and took comfort from prayer and religious symbols which will be explored below.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: PRAYER AND RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS

In the course of the disappearances, the use of prayer was mentioned across all interviews. It was initially focused on keeping loved ones safe when they went missing as P4 outlines below, to then being focused on the return of their loved one.

> *'I remember going to the xx I worked in, I remember and its seems really funny the things you do remember, the xx had a big bathroom… and I remember going in …… and locking the door and leaning down on this bare bathroom floor and just getting my rosary beads out and praying, praying and praying' P4.*

> *'My prayer to Our Lady was to please protect Z and if it was all in her power to bring him back to us again…. praying and praying that he would come back again but it never was to be'* P4.

Tied to prayer is the significance of religious symbolism, particularly medals and rosary beads which also featured prominently in the accounts of the families. Dues (2006) suggests that religious medals symbolise personal faith and religious commitment. They were left at search sites and on the temporary altars or monuments some of which the families created at the site. Several of the mothers requested that their rosary beads be placed in the coffin when their sons were found. Leaving religious items at the search areas provided comfort to family members that they were doing all that they could to aid the search. It was also a reminder to the search team of the importance of the search to the family members. Tayamo (2020) suggests that it is often the religious significance of recovering the Disappeared for their families that encourages and inspires forensic teams in their search for the bodies of those disappeared. For families leaving religious items at the site was also about having a connection to their loved ones and represented their faith and devotion (Dues 2006). The concept of religiosity was important to them.



Figure 19 An altar created by the family of Brian McKinney at the clandestine burial site. Photograph © Cathal McNaughton

As P8 shared in her interview, in leaving flowers or medals at the search site at a makeshift altar, she wanted her brother for whom the team were searching, to know that she was there and that they were searching for him. Medals and rosary beads and other religious items are, therefore, viewed as deeply symbolic. They are tied strongly to both religiosity and faith. P36 believed that the religious medal his brother had sewn into the waistband of his trousers was instrumental in the recovery of his body.

> *'Maybe only for it (little medal sewed into the trousers) she mightn't have got him' P36*.

Whilst prayer and religious symbols brought comfort, in the absence of help and assistance families often turned to spiritualists in the hope that they could provide help finding their loved one as discussed below.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: SPIRITUALISTS

Over the years desperation drove the families to look at all options that could assist them in locating their loved ones. One area that featured prominently throughout the years across the data analysis was the use of spiritualists also known as psychics, mediums and clairvoyants. Spiritualism is defined by Kalvig (2017) as contact with, and transmission of messages, from the dead. The central tenet around how they work is the same. They purport to be able to link in with the souls or the spirits of those disappeared. Their involvement transcended the lack of help in the real world. None of the spiritualists who offered their services to the families were able to identify the locations of the burial sites that they were brought in to find.

> *'She said 'He's in that area' and pointed at a particular area. Of course that was me 'Oh God he is here', she was getting strong vibes and all' P23.*

As highlighted by P23, spiritualists took families to different geographical areas signposting the places of burial or recounted or in some cases re-enacted how loved ones had died. This proved to be deeply distressing and family members often got into conflict when the police would not search the area identified or dismissed the information being provided. P23 confirms the desperation that sets in during the years when the families are searching and

trying to get information on where their loved ones are and no one is helping or supporting them.

> *'They just play on people's minds…. But you know when you are desperate you turn to anyone' P23.*

Throughout the interviews '*we would have done anything'* is mentioned time and time again as participants describe providing clothing, pictures and other personal belongings in the hope that some connection could be made to the spirit of their loved one. They also paid these people for their services leading a number of the participants to conclude they were exploited at a time of immense turmoil.

Ladwig (2012) postulates that the focus in working with spiritualists is on establishing a connection between the dead and the living. The basis of this connection straddles religious and secular belief frameworks (Kalvig 2017). The use of spiritualists is not restricted solely to disappearances, they are prominent where vulnerable individuals believe they can connect to their deceased loved ones (La Grand 2005; Klugman 2006; Dannenbaum and Kinnier 2009 and Doehring 2019). Beischel et al (2015) argue, however, that there are clear benefits contending that a focus on maintaining a bond with the deceased, through the use of psychics has been beneficial in the resolution of grief. Others, such as Parker (2005) and Sanger (2009) suggest that this can bring improved psychological wellbeing. It also fits with Boss's (2016) theory regarding the ambiguity of living with the disappearance of a loved one, as living with the *'both/and'* p269. They can be living or dead. However, Dannenbaum and Kinnier (2009) posit that it is less about the content of the communication but more about how it makes individuals feel. They argue that there can be benefits in problem solving, decision making, confidence and motivation based on those bereaved believing that there is positive engagement and connection with their loved one. They suggest that it can also help ameliorate the emotional day to day psychological torture as outlined in the preceding section as individuals believe they still have a connection to their loved one through these various mediums.

At one level feeling that they could connect to their loved one, whether through spiritualists or in dreams, empowered the families and in some cases brought comfort post recovery. This may have been because it was perceived as confirming the existence of an afterlife (Nowatski and Kalischuk 2009). As reflected for many of the families they perceived that faith and prayer

had helped sustain them at a psychological level. A belief in the afterlife, therefore, was perceived as reassuring and comforting. However, as reflected across the interviews, many families who engaged throughout the search process with spiritualists were left with information that was inaccurate and caused immense distress and conflict, bringing little comfort as accounts were shared of the numerous sites identified. Sadly, the use of spiritualists was reflected by the families as, in the main, exploitive. This is evident in other areas of the world such in Kashmir, South Africa and Nepal (Dewhirst and Kapur 2015; Robins 2016). P36 reflects on his engagement with a spiritualist as they identified another area to search,

> *'Just in there that's where he is', so that was all dug and dug and dug and one thing and another and in a lot of days they got him back and he says 'no he is on the other side', he was a gangster' … But you'd have done anything' P36.*

A key reason for reaching out to spiritualists was the belief that a loved one who was not laid to rest was a troubled soul who was out there alone. In none of the disappeared cases has a spiritualist been able to correctly identify the burial site for any of the Disappeared. At a psychological level this has intensified the distress and grieving as examined below.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: TROUBLED SOULS

> *'If you haven't been given a Christian burial we kind of feel your spirit and your soul is constantly troubled and not at rest' P4*.

The concept that your loved one's soul is not at rest when they have disappeared has resonance across the international literature (Malin 1994; McHugh 2001; Eppel 2014; Dewhirst and Kapur 2015; Robins 2016 and Hollander 2016). Eppel (2014) suggests that in Zimbabwe how the soul or spirit of a loved one is perceived is shaped by regional and local belief systems. She contends that the past is never dead. She states that to heal the living, we must heal the dead (Eppel 2014, p408). It is clear from the literature there is an impact at a family, community and political level when bodies remain missing and the customised burial rituals that include laying a loved one to rest are absent.

At a family and community level there are ongoing psychological consequences of disappearance that do not abate with time. It is not just the physical absence of a body. The concept of a troubled soul or a spirit not at rest exacerbates and perpetuates the anguish and

prevents grieving. In Rwanda, Jessee (2012) contends that restless spirits mean that relatives feel unstable and depressed. In Sri Lanka when a body is absent through disappearance, the death cannot be mourned as everything is uncertain and the individual's soul is out of reach (Walker 2015). When discussing Zimbabwe Eppel (2014) referred to troubled spirits haunting the living through dreams and apparitions to indicate they are not at rest. She posits that unrested and unsettled spirits do not heal themselves.

It is often only when recovery takes place that the rest of the rituals associated with death are able to be performed. Eppel (2014) describes the ritual of '*umbuyiso*' which is undertaken each year in Zimbabwe to ensure that the deceased person has transcended into the spirit ancestry (p409). Engaging in this only becomes possible when recovery has taken place. In the same way rituals within the Catholic faith such as the month's mind, religious blessing of the graves on Cemetery Sunday or anniversary Masses cannot be performed in the absence of a burial site. Reburials therefore allow families to put terrifying histories and the spirits or troubled souls to rest (Eppel 2014). Eppel (2014) suggests that the benefit, however, goes beyond facilitating the spirit or soul in their quest for eternal rest. It also allows the families to mark and control the past. They can visit the grave when they want and can participate in the rituals associated with death that focus on remembrance and acknowledgement. This concept of control is important given the context and orchestration of the disappearances. P6 refers to the importance of taking control back from the paramilitaries in laying her loved one to rest,

> *'I think it's all to do with control, you're controlling what's going to happen next. Not someone who did this 30 years ago… it's about bringing him back to where he should be, with the family, and the family deciding how they want to send him off. Not in the dead of night and not with 3 or 4 men with guns standing about. We're going to do this respectfully' P6.*

While P4, in the opening excerpt, referred to her loved one as being a troubled soul until he was recovered it can be argued that the families are troubled souls until recovery takes place. As P11 contends,

> *'There is not one of them people that's still missing that's at rest, they are not laid to rest, they were dumped in a hole, that's not laid to rest and neither are we' P11.*

Religious and cultural death rites were viewed as deeply significant for the families given the context and circumstances of their loss. When the normal rituals associated with death could

not take place families relied on internal processes to help and sustain them, as discussed. This also applied to the theoretical concept of Notions of Justice which is the final section of the results.



Figure 20 The search site for Charlie Armstrong. A harrowing place of remembrance. Photograph © Cathal McNaughton

SECTION 8: NOTIONS OF JUSTICE

THEORETICAL CONCEPT	HIGHER ORDER CATEGORIES	LOWER ORDER CATEGORIES
NOTIONS OF JUSTICE	Systemic failures	Legislative Context Taking back control
	Natural Justice	Righteous Justice Apology as a form of justice

THEORETICAL CONCEPT: NOTIONS OF JUSTICE

Notions of the concept of justice were interwoven throughout the data analysis. Barton (1999) suggests that, despite its association with statutory institutions, and, in particular, the criminal justice institutions of the state, justice is essentially a moral concept much broader than criminal laws. However, for many retributive justice was prominent given the loss and circumstances of their loved ones life.

> *'You took the life of someone else and you should be paying the price with life imprisonment- and that's my honest opinion' P32 No 2.*

For P32, however, and a number of the other participants, the framing of the terms of reference of the bodies set up by the British and Irish Governments to facilitate the recovery of the bodies of the Disappeared meant that the families had to sacrifice the possibility of retributive justice to ensure the recovery of the bodies of their loved ones.

For all of the families the return of their loved one's body was of paramount importance.

P15, for example, states,

> *'We got Z's remains back; we had to waive justice, so that's the way it is- you have to accept that' P15.*

And P5,

> *'We got him back, we got him back, I didn't agree with them getting away with murder but then again, it was just like a catch 22. I mean she* (Mum) *had to get him back so this is the only way to get him' P5.*

They believed this overrode the possibility of getting retributive justice for their loved one.

For others, however, getting the body back represented justice.

> *'In terms of justice people don't know what it's like to not have the bodies back of their loved ones, they don't understand that justice isn't about…. court dates and seeing someone go down for it' P20.*

Whilst most of the participants felt that the legislation was framed to facilitate the recovery of the bodies rather than accessing justice, they also felt that they had been let down by the authorities during the duration of their loved one's disappearance. The legal frameworks prohibited forensic examination of the clandestine burial site other than to confirm identity. However, it did not prohibit associated police investigations into the abduction, murder and disappearance should other information have become available.

There was a confirmed belief, reflected across the interviews, that over the years the families had been failed by the authorities, with no meaningful police investigation and no punishment of those responsible. In some cases the families had learnt information regarding their loved ones case through media investigative processes. This is not peculiar to the issue of the Disappeared. The absence of a legacy process in relation to all conflict related murders relating to NI's Conflict has, on occasion, led to information regarding deaths emerging through media investigations. This mirrors the experience of families in conflicts worldwide (Lewandowsky et al 2013; Trajkova 2019; and Gayer and Kirmani 2020). Connolly (2006) postulates that the ability to undertake investigations and hold the perpetrators accountable for their crimes, is the cornerstone of state sovereignty and authority. Yet, he argues that the approach of the authorities to investigations and prosecutions, in relation to the NI Conflict, is contradictory. In the main, victims were abducted in the north of Ireland. However, they were then taken to the Republic of Ireland where they were killed and secretly buried. As a result, neither police force, the RUC in Northern Ireland and the Garda Siochana in the Republic of Ireland, took responsibility for investigating the cases. This was repeatedly reflected by participants as a central failing of the whole process.

For some of the participants getting their loved one's body back represented justice. However, others didn't perceive recovery as justice and concluded that,

> *'It's more important to get your loved one home than to get justice'* P15.

Families, therefore, focused on justice at an interfamilial and intracommunity level. Given the context and the levels of control exercised by the paramilitaries it is likely that any public focus on retributive justice would have added to the alienation experienced by the families within their communities. In some ways the families had to modify their thoughts and actions to take account of the community context. They had to accept republican paramilitaries trying to control the final recovery of remains and any fall out arising from the practice of disappearing members of their community. Throughout their journey they engaged in repeated trade-offs to ultimately get their loved one's body recovered. The orchestration of the perceived fall out was noted by P10 in relation to the tactics used by republican political parties to defuse the seriousness of the issues.

> *'I still think it's ironic that they (SF and IRSP) would use the Disappeared, from what I see in West Belfast, as a symbol of "we're working with these ones" - it's almost like an election ploy. How were they able to turn that around? That used to annoy me, but if you let them annoy you, they are winning, so just go out and do your thing' P10.*

Part of the strategy was to portray the republican political parties as supporting and helping the families which, as P10 highlights, compounded the feeling of injustice. Faced with criticism regarding the Disappeared, Gerry Adams (2013) wrote,

> *'As a Republican Leader I have never shirked my responsibility on this issue… The failure thus far to find the remaining bodies is not due to any lack of resolve or cooperation by me or other republicans'.*

John Finucane MP, speaking on behalf of Sinn Fein at a hearing for the Joint Committee for the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement at the Oireachtas, in the Dail Eireann on November 18 2021, described the Disappeared as *a 'terrible legacy of the decades of conflict',*

> *'This generation of republicans identified the wrong that was done and is trying to undo that wrong… The failure thus far to find them is not due to any lack of resolve or co-operation by republicans… we appeal unambiguously to anyone with information.. to make it available'.*

Statements such as these are important. However, for the participants, those within republican armed groups were not only responsible for the disappearances but also for

perpetuating and controlling a continuous campaign of enforced silence against their families and anyone within the community seen to be sympathetic to them. The disappearance was not an isolated incident, rather, the continuous pain and distress experienced by the family's and the orchestrated nature of the campaign against them, is not recognised in any of the statements from republican leaders/ representatives. For many of the families this continues to be perceived as a further injustice. P40 shares the view that, at a community level, the perceived transition of republicans from combatants to political activists focused on restorative and peace building practices.

> *'You know they wanted the world to know that they were the revolutionaries but now they were the peace people now and they wanted peace and they want to love everybody.. It was going to work for them ones, but it was never going to work for us and the rest of the people' P40.*

Despite this apparent transition, the feeling of fear remains within the community. This undercurrent of fear continues to impact the actions and words of the families today. It perpetuated the initial sense of injustice as the impact of the disappearance never left the family. In addition, the fact that not all of the bodies have been returned or other cases of the Disappeared publicly claimed by republican paramilitaries, reinforces a belief that the tactic of denial is still in operation and that information is still being wilfully withheld by those responsible and only released when it is strategically useful. In reviewing the trajectory of the journey the families have been on, the families contend that information is only released when they have publicly pressurised SF and the IRSP. P20 questions the wilful withholding of information and contends,

> '*At some point it has to end. You can't keep making people pay your whole life'* P20.

Families conclude that having the story of the Disappeared told was an important element in addressing the injustice; it was the only method they had of maintaining pressure on those who had the information on the whereabouts of the bodies, to release it to the ICLVR. At a wider societal level, it was important that the story of the Disappeared was told and publicly acknowledged. Cronin-Furham and Krystalli (2020) postulate that telling the story of the disappearance of their loved one and sharing the iconic pictures and media records that accompany it, served two purposes for the families; it validated memories and assisted in the search for justice. P32 contends that establishing the truth and engaging in the ritual of

memory was important for his family and for future generations as the truth might often have been obscured for political reasons. This was a particular risk for the families given the extent to which all aspects of the process had already been orchestrated by the paramilitaries. Reflecting on the importance of establishing the truth and sharing memories of that time in the public domain P32 contends,

> *'Not until the IRA do the rightful thing, that's the way it is going to be. I know that for a fact because going back over history they write books, the way they want to write books to suit themselves' P32 No 1.*

This in itself represents a further injustice as the dead have no rights and the false narratives as reflected in Section 2, can continue to be propagated.

Two higher order categories emerged from the data: systemic failures and natural justice, with a series of associated lower order categories. In relation to natural justice a number of key areas emerged from the data reflected throughout the higher and lower order categories as depicted in Figure 21 below.



Figure 21 Concepts of justice for the families of the Disappeared.

The first higher order category to be considered in the Theoretical Concept of Notions of Justice is systemic failures.

HIGHER ORDER CATEGORY: SYSTEMIC FAILURES

There was a systemic failure to address the Disappeared from the moment the abductions took place. As P30 highlights above, the families didn't know what to do, and neither the RUC nor Garda sought to identify where their loved one was or the circumstances surrounding their abduction.

> *'We didn't really know how to handle it (disappearance) because we did not have any support, only ourselves…Nobody in the police or the Gards, or community or anyone else external would have come forward to talk about this and I think that was part of the whole thing' P30.*

In some cases, families were failed multiple times across a range of institutions where social services, political representatives and the church remained silent, despite the disappearances being raised with them repeatedly over decades. A central difficulty for the families was that their story of witnessing an abduction, or their assertions that their loved one must have been abducted because they had not returned home, were not treated seriously. Nor were the families able to register their loved one's death given the absence of a body. The practical and financial impact of not being able to register a death, or deal with a loved one's estate, left the family in limbo (Cronin-Furman and Krystalli 2020). In recent times records, such as those provided by social services, have shown that key institutions were aware that disappearances took place but they failed to act. As P32 states,

> *'Through the records they had at the time, they knew fine rightly that our Z was taken away by the IRA' P32 No2.*

Learning that the records were available but were not acted on at the time represents a sense of betrayal. As P39 outlines *'you were on your own and that was it'.* This highlights the success achieved by the paramilitaries in obscuring the truth and controlling the narrative. A central contributing factor was the silence of the authorities.

In the absence of any police investigation and in the face of the silence emanating from the institutions, the families were forced to assume the role of investigators retracing the steps of their loved ones and trying to engage with paramilitaries either directly or indirectly. Baines (2017) termed family members '*agentive actors'* given their active search for their loved one, and their demand that someone be held accountable for their death and secret burial (Edkins 2019; Cronin-Furman and Krystalli 2020). The process of physical searching undertaken by the

families has been described in Section 1. The families retained any records that they had, in particular photographs of their loved one and media reports of their case. Cronin-Furman and Krystalli (2020), in an exploration of the iconic photographs and news reports from families of the Disappeared in Colombia and Sri Lanka, highlight that the lack of official papers serves as a rebuke to the state for their inaction. The participants reflected a similar experience in relation to the Disappeared of NI's Conflict. While in some countries, families have access to police reports which certify their loved one as disappeared, the families in this study reflect that very little exists in the respective files of either the RUC or Garda Siochana recording the abductions. The participants report that some of the evidence that was gathered from the police investigations undertaken at the time was not shared with the families for over two decades. In one case, gunpowder residue was found in the car of one of the Disappeared. Had this fact been shared with the family it would have ended some of the ambiguity for them regarding the fate of their loved one. The family contend that it would have confirmed that it was a paramilitary related abduction. This illustrates the failure of state authorities to account for, or fully investigate, the disappearances on either side of the Irish border.

In the absence of any robust investigative police processes, families describe arranging meetings through intermediaries with members of the IRA or INLA. These were frightening experiences at times, leading to threats of violence against family members or providing misleading information or blanket denials. Interwoven throughout the interviews is the fear evoked for family members by these encounters. P23 spoke of her husband's experience of trying to get information from the IRA when he went to meet them about their son,

> *'He told me it was one of the scariest things he had to do because they were all masked. He was on his own in work clothes, they strip searched him, he had to go into a barn and they talked behind barrels and he didn't see them' P23.*

The IRA denied having anything to do with the disappearance of P23's son and the encounter did not progress the case. Equally, other families received visits from members of the IRA. As P8 shared, they were promised information regarding her brother's disappearance which was never forthcoming,

> *'They were the people that I asked 'was he tortured' and they says "no" and then I sort of lost it a wee bit and I says to the girl, I said "sure you are sitting there telling lies", I says, I just didn't believe her, you know I just lost trust in the whole lot of them, they weren't people that you could sit and listen to and believe'* P8 No 2.

These encounters and many others, as reflected throughout the interviews, led the participants to conclude that there was a cloak of silence. The absence of a robust police investigation reinforced this feeling. However, it is worth noting that the families were caught in an invidious position for decades regarding the authorities. From the outset they feared bringing the police into their area as this would have generated unwanted attention from local paramilitaries. A number of them recounted being warned not to bring the police into the area. If their loved one was still being held alive, or had been exiled to another place, the fear was that this may have precipitated their death. The fear of reporting the disappearance or fighting for an investigation resonates with the experiences of the families of victims of enforced disappearance across the world (De Alwis 2009; Robins 2013; Cronin-Furman and Krystalli 2020). As highlighted in Chapter 2, the fear of reporting the crime was clearly evident for the families whose loved ones were disappeared during the Independence Conflict period in Ireland in the early to mid 1920s (Hart 2009; Murphy 2011). The lack of investigation and, above all, the response of the paramilitaries, when questioned by the families, fed into a process of total mistrust in which the family members did not expect to receive the truth. P32 concludes that his life after the disappearance of his parent was one categorised by lies and mistruths. This has contributed to his view that there was a systemic failure on behalf of the authorities in relation to addressing the issue of the Disappeared.

> *'Like when the IRA came and said our Z was only going away for a short time - that didn't happen. When the social workers came and told us they were going to keep us together - that didn't happen. So all the older people that I had experience of were all telling me lies, so you say to yourself, "why trust people" - that's the way it was. As far as I was concerned, it was one lie after another. Even with the social workers' P32 No 2.*

In 2009 the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly introduced the Presumption of Death Act (Northern Ireland) 2009. This legislation allowed for deaths to be registered if a loved one was missing for seven years. Despite supporting the legislation the families of the Disappeared did not apply for death certificates. They feared that by doing so they would allow the republican movement to avoid returning their loved ones remains and that they would be betraying their loved one by not fighting for their return. This was their first priority. This resonates with the experiences of the family members of the Disappeared in Colombia who viewed their government's decision to issue death certificates in the absence of a body, as an attempt to avoid truth and justice (Cronin Furman and Krystalli 2020). While the Presumption of Death

Act benefitted anyone whose loved one had been missing for more than seven years, it did not adequately address the issue of the Disappeared because it normalised what was a very abnormal, symbolic human rights violation.

The literature on the conflicts in Colombia, Sri Lanka and Peru as outlined in Chapter 3 (Haugaard and Nicholl 2010; Isaccs 2010; Weliamuna 2012; Heeke et al 2014; Sivoyakan 2014; Dewhirst and Kapur 2015; Dulitizky 2019; Cronin Furham and Krystalli 2020 and Mir 2020) highlight systemic failures at a political, governmental, societal and community level which allowed the issue of the Disappeared in each situation to remain hidden and unaddressed. In relation to the Disappeared of NI's Conflict, systemic failures lasted decades until, due to family pressure, the issue became public in the mid-1990s. It could be contended that this systemic failure enabled the issue of the Disappeared to remain hidden. However, equally it is clear from the data that republican paramilitaries orchestrated a process which contributed to the silent response of key institutions. This compounded the families' isolation and contributed to the perceived injustice. The legislative context which arose in the late 1990s brought the issue to the fore, enabling information on where the bodies were buried to be passed to ICLVR, and organisations to become more active on the issue as discussed below.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

Given the decades that had passed from the point of abduction to the establishment, in 1999, of the ICLVR, the participants conclude that they would have accepted any mechanism that brought about the recovery of their loved one.

> *'You know what, nobody was going to say no (to ICLVR legislation), because as far as they were concerned their loved one was missing and they wanted to get them, so they weren't going to say anything you know' P25 No 1.*

As P4 indicates,

> *'Although it pains me that they will get away and they are not going to be ashamed themselves and publicly shamed as perpetrators but if that is the only way we can get these bodies back, then so be it' P4.*

In order to get the information that would enable them to get their loved ones' bodies back, the families had to set aside the normal societal expectations of justice. In conflict related

disappearances across the world, families are often constrained by the perceived dominant force and have to follow the processes put in place to address the issue of the disappearance whether they agree with it or not (Hollander 2016; Robins 2016 and Isuru et al 2019). Rauchfuss and Schmolze (2008) and Genovese and Van der Wilt (2014) suggest that if there is an atmosphere of impunity regarding recovering the Disappeared, this places family members under high risk of retraumatisation and incomplete mourning. They contend that perceived injustice may have a detrimental impact, prolonging the grieving process.

The creation of the ICLVR had followed the 1999 IRA and INLA admission that they had disappeared a number of individuals during the course of the NI Conflict. Across the interviews, it was welcomed by the families of those disappeared. However, as P25 highlights above, the families were left in a position whereby, irrespective of any concerns they might have had regarding the positive and negative consequences of the legislation, they were not going to oppose it. A central difficulty from the inception of the legislation was an assumption that the recovery of remains would be a fairly rapid process, as an initial seven burial sites were identified. Whilst there were a small number of initial recoveries, the majority of searches were unsuccessful. This contributed to the families feeling that they had supported legislation which, in effect, granted immunity from prosecution to those responsible for their loved one's disappearance but that the perpetrators had not reciprocated by providing accurate information on the location of bodies.

Over the years, sporadic searches of the clandestine burial sites demonstrated that pressure had to be exerted by the family at a community, national and political level, to get results. Dulitizky (2019) posits that family members, in fighting for the return of their loved ones in conflicts across Latin America, have changed laws, policy and political consensus through creativity and perseverance. Likewise, the families of the Disappeared in NI evoked these changes, as outlined in Section 5. When families did not become active in pushing for their loved one's return then the disappearances were not addressed. The fact that families had to continually push for action represents an injustice to those families who did not want to engage at a public level, as reflected through the data analysis. It also demonstrates that the management of the issue of the Disappeared by political groups is more strongly influenced by the political ramifications and PR that arise from the case than by the reparative, moral or humanitarian nature of any recovery. As P32 contends,

> *'The other side of the coin is that the IRA wasn't going to move to give the whereabouts unless it was signed up for. As I say, it's a real bitter pill to swallow- it definitely is- and I often say to myself 'what right had they to do what they did to us' P32 No 2.*

P25 equally felt that the families were placed in a position of having no option around the terms of the legislation,

> '*It was basically a gun being put to your head like'* P25.

Whilst the participants still endorsed the ICLVR legislation, two decades after it was introduced by the British and Irish Governments, the interviews indicate they have two central concerns. Firstly, the ICLVR legislation on its own is not enough. It will not bring individuals forward to provide information; a concerted process of community and political engagement is necessary, as outlined in Section 5. This mirrors the experience of families of enforced disappearances internationally (Hollander 2016; Robins 2016; Dulitizky 2019 and Cronin-Furham and Krystalli 2020). Continual pressure needs to be applied to the political wings of republican paramilitary groups to ensure that the issue is not allowed to fade away. They are the people who hold the information or can access it, as they know who was present when the clandestine burials were taking place. Secondly, the limitations of the legislation regarding the immunity clauses can often leave families feeling that the need to protect the perpetrator(s) is greater than their family's need for information or access to key documents or belongings (Section 4). P12 contends that she was prevented from having access to clothing by the ICLVR as it might present evidential opportunities. She questions,

> '*What evidence would be there? He (ICLVR Representative) said that it could be evidence, there might be something there. I said so you're more interested in protecting the people who did this to Z than you are in helping us' P12.*

This shows the ultimate dilemma for the ICLVR, who are working in the best interests of the families. The parameters and application of the legislation can present challenges if the families feel that the perpetrators' needs and rights are being prioritised and protected. It is important to mitigate against this further if the process is not to be perceived as unjust. Lie et al (2007) postulate that, psychologically, justice is necessary if the trauma of the past is to be addressed. They argue that anything that mitigates against this, such as the challenges of the practical implementation of legislation, can undermine the recovery process and, therefore, affect the grieving process, weaken the legislative agreement on disappearances and destabilise the political landscape. Whilst there were challenges associated with the

implementation of the legislation the families believed strongly that it was the only way to get their loved ones back,

> *'So what would the likelihood of anybody engaging if there hadn't been no immunity from prosecution, nil, nil' P25 No 1.*

With regard to recovering the bodies of a number of those disappeared, the legislation has delivered. However, given the conditions surrounding the implementation of the legislation, it is clear that the absence of perceived justice has left some of the participants feeling that no one has been held to account for either ordering or perpetrating the abduction, murder and secret burial of their loved ones. The legislation, in itself, was never going to provide answers or accountability regarding who was responsible or the circumstances. Its sole purpose was to facilitate the recovery of remains. It is clear from the data generated that it has served this purpose at a humanitarian level, albeit all of the bodies are not as yet recovered. The families' expectations were that the legislative framework for the ICLVR would enable recoveries to be fairly instantaneous with search teams working concurrently at the various sites. These expectations were not met as information was either inaccurate, with the place of burial wrongly identified, or incomplete, with some vital details being withheld. In some cases recoveries have taken a further decade or more to achieve. The unsuccessful searches have compounded the trauma of the families involved, casting them into an emotional, endless waiting vortex and preventing them from grieving (Testoni et al 2020; Crocker et al 2021). Rauchfuss and Schmolze (2008) argue that laws around the disappearance internationally may often, whilst providing valuable information, restrain public debate around the issue and prevent the necessary acknowledgement of the families concerned. They suggest that the families continue to feel stigmatised and excluded which has a corresponding impact on grief and trauma (Robins 2016; Hollander 2016 and Isuru et al 2019). The interviewees, both those whose loved ones have been recovered and those whose loved ones are still missing, continue to refrain from expressing their views and frustrations as they are relying on those who have information to hand it over to the ICLVR. The reality for the families in this study is that the full details and circumstances of the disappearances are unknown at a public level and the plight of the families has not been fully acknowledged or addressed.

It is evident across the international literature that those responsible for the disappearances, and who can provide the information that can bring about the recovery of the bodies, need to have confidence in the processes set up to achieve this if they are to cooperate (Braid and Roht-Arriaza 2012; Dulitizky 2019). Removing the fear of prosecution has also featured prominently in the literature (Fearon 2005; Popkin and Bhuta 2012 and Paramentier and Aciru 2017). In comparison to other countries that have introduced reduced sentences for information or provided some type of benefit for engaging in such processes, the only leverage applied to those responsible for the disappearances of the NI Conflict is a moral imperative. The early release of prisoners as part of the Good Friday Peace Agreement in 1998 did not have any conditions attached in relation to the provision of information concerning the Disappeared or other legacy cases. This illustrates the varying treatment of the families of those disappeared in peace agreements across the world (Tieger and Shin 2005; Sriram 2013; Brewer et al 2018; Musalo 2018; Kreft 2019; Tellez 2019 and Murphy 2021). Often the needs of the victims have been of secondary importance to the political management of a process that may prioritise the protection of the perpetrators as part of a peace settlement. Punishment and justice are often negotiated in the context of peace agreements (Guzman and Hola 2019). In relation to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement or, specifically, the regulations around the ICLVR, there is no sanction in place for withholding information. Some of the participants have argued that those responsible are wilfully withholding information. However, P19 doesn't believe this is the case. He suggests that fear was and is a factor for some of those involved and that whilst they may have been engaged in their youth they may well have moved away from the republican movement and are afraid of crossing their old comrades.

> '*The people who were involved in the process of disappearing our loved ones were fearful to say that they were involved…trust in the process had to be built'* P19.

It is clear that the ICLVR process has worked given the number of disappeared individuals who have been recovered. Whilst the ICLVR have specialist technical approaches available to them, as Knupfer et al (2018) indicate, theirs is an information led process; they need information to undertake searches. In building the credibility of the ICLVR, the families have also had a role. Many have had to put aside very strong views on perceived justice or on the involvement of republican parties in the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly. They have also accepted the protection clauses established in the legislation, even when it meant

forgoing the possibility of identifying those involved from forensic evidence found with the bodies. As P29 contends,

> *'I have said all along I wasn't going down that road. I wanted everything buried with him, there was no way there could be come back, because it would affect others. And to this day I still think I have done the right thing' P29.*

The families have, therefore, been willing to set aside their natural desire for justice for the sake of the other families whose search for their loved ones continues. In this way they have shown both solidarity with, and respect to, each other, acting as members of the Families of the Disappeared support group rather than pursuing their own agendas as individuals.

A key area linked to this that was reflected across the data was taking back control, as examined below.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: TAKING BACK CONTROL

From the point of abduction to the 1999 IRA/INLA statement there was silence. From 1999 onwards, the Disappeared were often used for political point scoring, primarily by Unionist political parties against SF and the IRSP, given that they were the political wings of organisations responsible for the disappearances. However, other republican entities have also attempted to use the issue of the Disappeared to score points. As the data highlights, one group sought to include one of the Disappeared on a memorial to republican volunteers to embarrass the republican paramilitary group responsible for his death.

> *'We are going to honour Z, and we asked them (republican group) not to, we would rather they didn't trail his name around the place but they went ahead and did it anyway. It's only a small thing, but it's a big thing in the locality' P39.*

As P39 outlines above, he did not want any group recognising his brother or using his name. However, the group involved wanted the chance to score some political points and, against the wishes of the family, the memorial was created using the name and picture of the individual disappeared. Smolensky (2009) posit that, as the dead have no rights, anything can be written or said about them and their image may be used without any recourse for their family. For P39 and other families this represented a further injustice and violation of their loved one's memory. It also flew in the face of the family's attempt to take control of the

narrative surrounding the disappearance. Political exploitation can take place at any time for the families and can often have a public dimension that exacerbates and intensifies the hurt experienced by the family. It can also have a residual effect within the community as highlighted by P39,

> '*It's a big thing in the community*'.

His fear was that it may have undermined support for the family from sections of the community who believed that the family were actively involved in this republican group and frowned upon it.

P34 suggests that the Disappeared are often used as a mechanism of deflection when criticism is levied at a political level. He suggests that the cases of the Disappeared were publicised by those who wanted to attack SF rather than as a means of bringing about the recovery of the bodies.

> *'So when they (SF political representatives) are getting it in the neck by people having a go at them, as we invariably do, we like to resurrect the last atrocity and mull over it' P34.*

Throughout the interviews the political misuse of the Disappeared featured strongly. The families were placed in many difficult situations. Examples given included refusing individuals who had been involved in paramilitary groups or who had served prison sentences access to the wake, with the family having to stipulate that they did not carry the coffin of their loved one. In some cases, prior comrades wanted to show their respect. The lack of sensitivity of this request created a dilemma for the family who wanted a family funeral and not a paramilitary one. It also had the potential to further isolate the family if it was perceived that they were politically aligned to a republican group. P5 describes her mother refusing entry to one of the republican leaders at the time of her brother's funeral. She asked him not to come to funeral. Her daughter contends,

> *'I think that was the last stance, it was 'no, you are not coming, he's with me now, so no'* P5.

For the families, these were further acts of defiance (Section 5) and were part of the process of re-establishing and taking back control. In preventing political manipulation of the funeral or exploitation of a loved one's memory, families were preventing their loved one from becoming, as P10 outlines,

'A political pawn to score points' P10.

This demonstrates the multiple levels of challenges facing the families. The fact that there was an intimacy to the violence and that the families were living in tightly knit communities often in close proximity to those responsible led to the potential for ongoing political exploitation. This is the reality of many in internal wars and conflicts in which victims and their persecutors often lived within the same locality (Humphrey 2005; Sivayokan 2014; Hollander 2016; Robins 2016 and Mir 2020). The families contend that they were powerless to fight back against this given the paramilitary community rules and the continued power, within the community, of those who had been active within paramilitary groups. They also suggest that they knew they were relying on these individuals for assistance. Therefore, denial and the threat of withholding information was just another strand of the orchestrated campaign waged by the paramilitary groups against the families, which resulted in the families having to modify their views and try to maintain an equilibrium that would ensure they did not do anything that would prohibit the information being given to the ICLVR.

The second higher order category under the notions of justice theoretical concept was natural justice as examined below.

HIGHER ORDER CATEGORY: NATURAL JUSTICE

There was a process outlined by participants that pertained to a concept of natural justice.

> *'What would make a difference in the whole for the other families is that they will find the rest of them, that those responsible will disclose their whereabouts, give the bodies back, give an apology, own up to them and give some comfort to these people' P35.*

Some of the interviewees had been able to bury their loved ones whilst others were still searching for theirs. The concept of how unjust the practice of disappearance had been, came across in all of the interviews. Family members concluded that their loved ones had been hidden away because they hadn't committed the crimes they had been accused of by republican paramilitaries. P4 suggests that,

> *'The people that were disappeared,...none of them, none of them committed a crime that warranted execution and ..in fact all of them, they (IRA/IRSP) know that those people shouldn't have been executed and that's why they were hidden away' P4.*

Tied strongly to the idea of summary execution was the belief that the paramilitaries had assumed the role of Judge, Jury and Executioner and ultimately that their loved ones had been treated unfairly.

> *'Everybody deserves justice and a fair trial. All of these people didn't have that, they were just assumed to have done something and got the final sentence' P11.*

The concept of natural justice, however, also involved holding people to account for their actions. Barton (1999) suggests that the concept of justice is broader than the adversarial process of criminal law and is essentially a moral concept enshrined within a principle of fair treatment. Across both local and international literature the evidence suggests that holding paramilitary or insurgent groups to account for disappearances has proved to be challenging, at best, and in many cases impossible as evidenced in Chile (Winn et al 2014), Guatemala (Isaacs 2010), Sri Lanka (Sivayokan 2014), Colombia (Haugaard and Nicholls 2010) and Peru (Dulitizky 2019). A key issue is the hidden and clandestine nature of the crime. Clark (2001) suggests that an adversarial legal system often fails to establish the truth or punish all of those who are guilty of disappearances. Conflict related disappearances have the added complication of occurring at a time of reduced social order which leaves no accountability mechanisms with the police or State forces who may, in some conflicts, have instigated or been complicit in the disappearances. Often the focus is on other killings and maimings, with the insidious practice of disappearance hidden. In addition, the longevity of the families' quests to bring their loved ones' cases to the fore meant that attention inevitably moved from retributive justice to recovery justice. The ultimate aim of recovery justice is having a loved one returned. As P20 contends,

> '*That's the most important thing, getting them back'* P20.

However, getting loved ones back also confirmed to the family the cruelty of clandestine burials. As P14 contents,

> *'They were war crimes that we didn't believe happened. You know who would ever think of taking someone and just putting them in a bog and walking away. That's barbaric' P14.*

For the families the normal expectations around justice were strongly voiced,

> *'It's always been there, that's always been in my head- if I committed a murder 40 years ago and came out and said to the police 'I killed someone 40 years ago.. this is where they are buried', I would get life imprisonment- why do they not ?' P32 No 2.*

The fact that conflict related murder was viewed in a different way to its non-politically defined equivalent brings to the fore issues of unfairness and devaluation of a loved one's life. Throughout the interviews it was clear the families accepted the legislative frameworks which had been set up to address recovery from a justice perspective. However, it did not provide any sanction or legal redress for the family. As P12 suggests about the perpetrators,

> *''Nobody's going to do anything to them, they don't have to pay the price by going to prison' P12.*

The immunity from punishment as a trade-off for information on what happened to the Disappeared and why, could be considered a type of unconscionable abandonment according to Cronin-Furham and Krystalli (2020). This concept of abandonment is important. As reflected in the accounts of the participants, the families felt abandoned throughout the years at a community and societal level. This feeling of abandonment was reinforced by the participants' belief that the barbaric nature of disappearance had been minimised because it was politically linked to a wider peace process. The lack of a comprehensive process for investigating murders undertaken during the NI Conflict; the reduction to two years of prison sentences for conflict related murders, which was a condition of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998; and the immunity protection offered through the Disappeared legislation, all contributed to this view. A perceived trade off with paramilitary groups in respect of justice, because of the peace process, was repeatedly reflected. This has resonance in conflicts across the world, for example in Macedonia (Volchevska and Zdravkova 2020); Peru (Garcia-Godos 2018); northern Uganda (Hollander 2016), Mozambique (Zartman and Kremenyuk 2005), Somalia (Keating and Waldman 2018); East Timor (Thakur 2016); Sri Lanka (Jayasundara-Smits 2018) and Colombia (Caicedo and Cardenas 2018). Patel (2008) argues that not pursuing justice for disappearances sends a clear message to would be perpetrators that this type of behaviour is permissible. However, Gono et al (2009) outline the detrimental impact on the individual's wellbeing suggesting that any sense of impunity compounds grief, trauma, injustice and exclusion. Transitional justice is about balancing competing rights. For the participants in this study there was a clear sense that justice had been traded as part of the peace process.

> *'Like the Ministers (Government Ministers) in England, would they swallow it, if it had been their loved ones…and still negotiate with these people? No, I don't think so- that definitely wouldn't have happened' P32 No 2.*

From a public perspective, P21 concurs suggesting that deaths that take place in conflict areas across the world are viewed as barbaric, unjustified and inhumane. He compares the killing of his brother to scenes of executions in the Middle East being shared on television.

> '*Learning that he had been shot, probably on the spot there, in the forehead at close range. You see these things on television…..just as grim' P21.*

He argues that the disappearances were just as barbaric as the murders depicted from across the world, but that their impact and circumstances have been downplayed in the wider quest for peace in Northern Ireland.

It is clear from the interviews that, ultimately, the participants believe in a retributive justice process, but that they have had to move beyond that to secure the recovery of their loved one's bodies. Despite the focus on recovery the inherent principles of what justice means in practice do not abate for families. Several of the participants, however, contend that, regardless of a desire for justice, seeking it is futile for a number of reasons such as: the immunity clauses whereby potential evidence from the burial site is not collated; the psychological cost for family members of continuing to search for answers; the potential for further violence against the family from those who remain involved or aligned with republican paramilitaries; the challenge of finding out that those involved in their loved one's disappearance lived within close proximity in the community; and the lack of trust regarding the accuracy and validity of any information that would come from the republican paramilitaries concerned. P31 contends that if you start searching for answers 'I*t will eat you up' P31.*

He suggests that,

> *'If you go down that road looking for, for answers, you're never going to get the right answer. And that means you're going to be searching and searching and searching again and with no closure at the end of it' P31.*

P31 suggests that, in searching for answers as a form of justice, you may never achieve the truth given the political context of the deaths. Mendeloff (2009) contends that on one level truth telling can provide a sense of justice for victims and survivors. In turn, a sense of justice reduces anger, mitigates against vengeance and may help to heal psychological trauma. It may also help foster social reconciliation. However, Hamber (1998) argues that truth telling can increase the risk of traumatisation, while Isaacs (2010) contends that the truth unhinged

in Guatemala may have triggered an aggressive reaction from the perpetrators- it does not therefore assist in any way with social reconciliation. Robins (2016), however, posits that those who have coped least well with the ambiguous loss which arises from the disappearance of a loved one have been those who are fixated on truth, seek closure and focus on justice. He suggests that human rights processes that emphasise truth over other aspects can have a significant impact on physical and psychological wellbeing as this reinforces negative coping. With disappearance the process can be unending and the answers not forthcoming. This highlights the challenges of orthodox grief frameworks in that they do not account for the contextual issues and circumstances surrounding the loss. As Robins (2016) outlines there are very specific psychological consequences that arise, not only in relation to the ambiguity created by the disappearance, but also in relation to the contextual and circumstantial issues that can influence the coping strategies individuals adopt. For some this may include the cyclic process of seeking answers within a conflict controlled environment. As P31 contends above the end will never be in sight if the families hope to achieve answers and redress for their loss. This may often compound the grief and trauma experienced.

The group solidarity of fighting as one, as discussed in Section 5, influenced some of the families who may have wanted to progress along a justice route but didn't as they felt it would have affected the family campaign for recovery. P10 outlines the challenge,

> *'Some families move on and want to see prosecutions but I think that would be a wrong move because it would be jeopardising the others who haven't been found. I don't think that my Mum would want that, she believes Z is at rest now' P10.*

Interwoven throughout the data in this study was the solace and solidarity obtained by engaging as a group. The importance of peer support groups as a form of solidarity; building and fostering internal resilience; and emboldening families in their campaign for the return of their loved ones' body is enshrined in groups across the world (Hollander 2016; Robins 2016; Hernandez, and Romero 2020 and Testoni et al 2020). Group support was particularly important for the participants in this NI study given the family dynamics which often arise in coping with the ambiguity and context of the disappearance. It also buffered the negative impact of the lack of community recognition, support and engagement. And it bolstered the families in building their resilience to engage in campaigning, as they were stronger as a group, particularly as fear and threat were a daily feature of their lives. Testoni et al (2020)

contends that the resilience fostered by a peer support group can transform uncertainty into an inner strength that gives hope to those dealing with the disappearance of a loved one. This was evidenced in the testimonies of those who engaged with the Families of the Disappeared support group; it was clear that they gained inner strength from being part of a group that had a very strong social identity, working and supporting each other even in some cases when their own loved ones' bodies had been recovered. They didn't abandon the other families but instead continued to campaign and support them at every opportunity.

While there was a strong focus within the Families of the Disappeared on not jeopardising the prospects of those families who continued to search for their loved one, there was also a wider appreciation that finding out information about what happened to a loved one could also be damaging on a psychological level.

> *'I don't know if I could ever do it because one, would they ever tell you the truth and what are you going to gain? I am sure his last moments of being walked down a path and to know he wasn't coming back out of that. Do you want to hear that he said a prayer? Do you want to hear that he begged for his life? I don't know. Things like that aren't good things to hear' P13.*

Mendeloff (2009) argues that the empirical evidence in studies focused on those families who received information through truth commissions, such as that in South Africa, or information recovery processes does not support a definitive finding as to whether these mechanisms are either beneficial to, or harmful for, individuals. He argues that victims' responses to truth telling are individualistic and reflect personal choice. As P13 outlines, families have questions, but getting answers to these questions may be more harmful in the longer term. This places the families in an invidious position. P29 shares the conundrum for the families

> *'I would like to know and I wouldn't like to know at the same time*'.

Equally the families are left with images visualising their loved one's death that they cannot let go of. Rumination may often cause the families to rethink, time and time again the cause and circumstances of the disappearance (Testoni et al 2020). Continuing to remember and share the stories of their disappeared loved ones at a private and public level may, however, be viewed as the last living link to a missing loved one (Cronin-Furham and Krystalli 2020). Cronin-Furham and Krystalli posit that for those who continue to search, this enables them to continue to connect into the life of their loved one (p16). This can be beneficial at a

psychological level in recognising and celebrating their loved one's life and in maintaining a connection to who they were (Testoni et al 2020). This ties strongly to the re-humanising of the Disappeared as a form of justice which is outlined in Section 4. It can be viewed as a constructive way to restore the reputation of their loved one and their place within the family and community and contribute to the campaign for recovery justice as outlined above.

An area that featured prominently in respect of justice was that of righteous justice which will be examined next.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: RIGHTEOUS JUSTICE

The concept that those responsible will be punished in the next life by God as a type of righteous justice featured strongly across the interviews. It was tied strongly to religious beliefs (Section 4) and brought the comfort that, whilst perceived justice had not been forthcoming in this life, it would be in the next life.

> *'I'd say on their deathbed it will be a different matter. They will have to meet their maker like the rest of us. I'm not afraid to meet mine, I can tell you' P38.*

The role of conscience and living with the impact of your actions also featured as a form of righteous justice.

Watts et al (2015) posit that many religions worship moralising high Gods who monitor and enforce moral codes. Bader et al (2010) contend that this is a form of divine justice in which individuals believe that their God can be a harsh and an angry judge, holding those who have undertaken criminal acts to account by imposing a harsh punishment. They suggest that divine justice is a combination of moral, philosophical and religious beliefs and that when you die, God gives everyone what is due to him or her, whether it be good or bad. For the families an expected process of eternal justice brought a degree of comfort as reflected by P7.

> '*Whenever I pass on, I mightn't see justice done in this earth but there is one thing rest assured, that the man above will be the greatest judge of all. I will leave it in his hands' P7*.

At one level righteous justice provided reassurance with statements such as

> *'The judge is up there waiting on them'* P35.

> *'God knows exactly what they have done'* P40.

'I have good hope that God will judge them, that's my belief' P8.

This highlighted clearly that there was a perceived need for justice to be addressed and the participants were assured that it would be achieved in the afterlife.

Johnston (2016) suggests that humans subconsciously or consciously believe that we live in a just world, a moral world, in which we will be held to account for our actions (P3). While recovery of the body, as reflected earlier, represented a righting of the wrong which was crucial for families, the innate quest for justice remained, in which the families wanted those responsible to be held to account for their involvement in the disappearance. For many of the families, the idea that their loved ones had been put before a paramilitary 'kangaroo' court process and had been degraded through clandestine burial and the withholding of information, fed strongly into the need for justice to be served. As P7 reflects,

'He'll be the judge, the final judge; there will be no kangaroo courts'P7.

For many of the participants the legacy of the emotional impact of disappearance and the circumstances and context of the loss (Section 5) compounded and intensified the need for justice to be served. At one level a belief in this type of justice provided solace.

The doctrine of many religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, or Islam, encompasses a supernatural punishment for wrong doing (Johnston 2016). For those impacted by violence, such as enforced disappearance, this can provide a sense of solace knowing that there will be a consequence for those who have perpetrated such loss (Fowler and Smith 2019). Whilst some of the participants considered justice to be served when life ended, others suggest that a component of justice was how those responsible for the disappearances lived with what they had done.

'At the end of the day, they have their own consciences to live with' P15.

With time some of the families believed that those responsible had engaged with the ICLVR as their '*conscience was pricked*' *P15*. Evans et al (2007) postulate that conscience is a moral breach in which the offender perceives the community would not condone their actions. Barton (1999) suggests that the concept of a conscience can introduce remorse for perpetrators which is important for victims and survivors.

For other participants it was clear that the proverb '*you reap what you sow'* had resonance. As P40 outlines

'The people who done this here, will have no, no luck in their life, you know' P40. Throughout the interviews participants spoke about the reality of this concept for some of those they believed were involved in disappearing their loved one,

> *'At the end of the day .. some of the ones that did our Z, two of the ones are alcoholics, one died an alcoholic you know. So you know they seem to forget that we know who most of them were so, you know so, their consciences are making them drink, so they are not having a good life' P5.*

P5 concludes that the impact of her brother's disappearance had been wider than her family, in which those involved had suffered from ill health or had suffered ongoing difficulties given their past paramilitary involvement. She views this as a type of righteous justice in that she perceives that there have been consequences for those who had been involved in her brother's disappearance, in the absence of a retributive justice process.

In essence, righteous justice applies to a religiously defined concept of punishment. As Johnston (2016) highlights, whether people are believers or nonbelievers in different religions, there is an inherent sense of fairness and the need to be held to account for your actions. For some of the families there was comfort in a belief that those responsible would be held to account by God in eternal life, for others there was a clear focus on how those who perpetrated the disappearances were living their daily life. Some considered that the concept of a conscience was a form of justice. Equally, they considered that the health problems and other challenges experienced by those involved was viewed as a form of redress. As highlighted in Section 6, the impact of disappearance has never left the families. It would appear not to have left some of those involved in the disappearances either as reflected by P5.

The final section under natural justice to be considered is apology as a form of justice as considered below.

LOWER ORDER CATEGORY: APOLOGY AS A FORM OF JUSTICE

The need to have a loved one's body surpasses everything else. This was the ultimate aim of the families. Once recovery took place a second stage emerged in which the families started to grieve and wanted answers to questions (Section 6). For P35, information alone was insufficient. He contended there was a clear need for an individual apology.

> *'Now he's found, he's buried and now it's just that last bit of information, why? And an apology, then I'll die happy. Until that's done, no, it's not closed' P35.*

Solomon (2010) posits that an apology is an acknowledgement of the harm done by the wrong doer who also needs to provide an explanation to the person harmed. An apology, therefore, underscores the family's right to a full explanation and an acknowledgement of the wrong committed.

Across the interviews the focus on what an apology should contain had five strands: an acknowledgement of innocence; confirmation that it was a wrongful death; recognition of the injustice; recognition of the inhumanity associated with the clandestine burial; and, cognisance of the torturous punishment of the disappearance on the family unit over the years. P12 contends that,

> *'I'd like them to come out and say that Z was an innocent victim of it all. I don't know why they did it' P12.*

Weyenth (2001) contends that a further strand of an apology concerns forgiveness in which the process allows those responsible to ask for forgiveness. An apology according to Goffman (1971) is part of the remedial work which serves the function of repairing relationships after injury. Given the context and gravity of the situation regarding the Disappeared, this is difficult. In addition, given the repeated denials and mistruths told by the paramilitary groups responsible, many families are sceptical that any acknowledgement and explanation of the wrong doing will be forthcoming. In relation to forgiveness, at the funerals of those disappeared the families have consistently thanked publicly those who came forward with information. They acknowledge that it could be the person who killed their loved one. They share across the interviews why this acknowledgement is important with some viewing it as a type of reparative gesture. For some of the participants, however, they felt that forgiveness

was important as bitterness and hatred experienced throughout the years had a detrimental impact on their wellbeing.

> *'I was lucky enough I was able to forgive these people; I'll never forget what they've done, and people look at me sometimes when I say, 'I forgive them', but it was wrecking me' P32 No 2.*

At a personal level, forgiveness allowed P34 to escape from negative emotions associated with his loss. However, P18 expresses the dichotomy between feeling that he could forgive those who killed his brother but could not forgive them for hiding his remains and punishing the family for decades.

> *'You know it might be a bit of a contradiction to some people "You can forgive somebody for killing your brother, but you can't forgive them for not telling you?' P18 No 1.*

P18's focus is on the legacy of living with such an orchestrated process over decades. The psychological torture associated with the disappearance in this case had a long lasting effect. Whilst P18's view was not shared across the entire interviewee group, the actions of the families at the funerals demonstrates a brave attempt to acknowledge those who took a step forward to break the republican movement's Omerta and facilitate the location of the bodies.

Without exception across the interviews, there was, however, a fundamental lack of trust- a disbelief that the truth would ever be told (Ferguson et al 2007; Blatz and Philpot 2010). As P30 contends,

> *'Everything has been a lie. To me, we have been told nothing but lies and have been led up the garden path' P30.*

For P30 and other participants the repeat mistruths and denials led to diminished trust. Trust is fundamental to how any apology issued is perceived (Hornsey and Wohl 2013). In the case of where trust has been repeatedly undermined, an apology will be perceived with scepticism (Bobowik et al 2017). However, apologies are also tied to accountability. Bobowik et al (2017) postulate that apologies are perceived more favourably if those responsible for disappearances are held to account. With the Disappeared of NI's Conflict, no one has been held to account.

The lack of trust that the truth will ever be told is shaped by the political context and by the actions of the republican paramilitary groups to date. It was believed that republican

paramilitaries only engaged in resolving the issue of the Disappeared because of political pressure from the administration in the United States. This started with the visit of Margaret McKinney in May 1998 to the White House (as outlined in Section 5) and not as a result of any truth and reconciliation process. The raison d'etre of the process is central to how it is perceived by those directly impacted by the political violence (Foot 2006). In this case, the reason for the ICLVR was because of political pressure, as opposed to moral pressure.

Part of the role of an apology is, according to Bobowik et al (2017), a resetting of the moral image of the offender. In this case, according to the participants, it was the moral image of the paramilitary organisation which was prioritised to enable them to become more socially acceptable, rather than a focus on them accounting for their negative past misdeeds. Whilst the limited apology issued by the IRA and INLA acknowledged that they took full responsibility for the disappearances and the prolonged anguish of the families, the list of the purported reasons as to why these individuals were killed and disappeared nullified any perceived benefit of the apology for the families. In addition, not all of those disappeared were on this list. In giving reasons that the families contend were spurious, the IRA and the INLA were trying to make this more socially acceptable to the community. There was a very clear reason for trying to make the issue more socially acceptable. The list of the Disappeared included young men with learning difficulties and sole parent (s) whose disappearance had left children orphaned. As highlighted earlier in these results, these disappearances would have been perceived as unjustified rough justice that would have undermined support for the paramilitaries within respective communities (Cavanagh 1997). The participants suggest that the justifications given by the paramilitaries had a negative impact on them and their families at a community level, which confirmed their lack of trust and confidence in the groups involved. As P5 concludes,

'I don't think they (republican paramilitaries) made an apology that they meant'.

This lack of trust is also evident with P32 who contends that

'They haven't told the truth from (date) to the present day' P32 No 2.

This is important as it is suggested by Bobowik et al (2017) that for an apology to work it needs to be sincere. Across the interviews it was concluded that the limited apology and the one that followed in 2003 was solely for political and PR reasons, as outlined in Section 5. The

second apology issued in 2003 by the IRA after the recovery of Jean McConville, acknowledges that they were sorry for the prolonged suffering and grief endured by the families. Given that there was no acknowledgement that it was a wrongful death, the participants reflect that little solace or regard is taken from this statement. It could, therefore, be perceived as a continuation of the resetting of the image of republican paramilitaries rather than any sincere and meaningful response to the families as indicated across the data (Bobowik et al 2017)

It is clear from the interviews that, whilst those families who had recovered their loved ones were trying to move forward, grieving only started when the recovery had taken place (Section 6). Up until this point their grief had been frozen. P35 however suggests that an apology is tied directly to grieving.

'*Until the apology is got you are still grieving'* P35.

The grief associated with the disappearance is, therefore, not insulated but rather is open to so many external influences tied back to the context, trajectory and circumstances of the loss, which is compounded by the omnipresence and proximity of those who perpetrated the violence within the community. Kristensen et al (2012) posit that grieving is intensified when a death is caused by fellow human beings rather than an act of nature. The researchers suggest that this may often lead individuals to feel anger and bitterness that does not necessarily abate with time. The injustice of having no-one brought before the courts to answer for disappearing their loved ones is an extra burden that the families carry (Black 2021). As outlined previously, the grief associated with the Disappeared is not normal grief. Given the ambiguity associated with the death it is held in abeyance and is compounded by the orchestrated manner in which the paramilitaries managed the families' loss. When recovery happens, as indicated across the data, feelings of injustice emerge which continue to impede grieving even when a loved one has been laid to rest

With respect to an apology, Solomon (2010) suggests that a component of apology is making sense out of what has taken place, with a full explanation of what happened being given. As highlighted earlier in this section, the processes in place to bring about recovery through the ICLVR do not provide any channel for information about why or how the disappearances took place. Families are, therefore, left with questions that cannot be answered. This could be

viewed as a weakness of the legislative framework given the longer term needs of the families around information recovery.

While apologies at a public level have their place, it is argued that they may not always achieve their goal particularly when the violence has been protracted and severe (Blatz and Philpot 2010; Hornset and Wohl 2013). In conflicts, public needs and the private needs of the families may be at odds. The need for a public apology may not be undertaken for the true benefit of the family, rather it may be related to political, public and societal relations. Often private apologies may be more conducive to the family's needs. Through the interviews it was clear that, in a small number of cases, participants had received private apologies, not from those involved in the disappearances, but from others who were involved within the republican movement over the years. The families deemed these genuine apologies because there was no personal gain for those involved and they concluded that these individuals could have chosen not to have spoken to them about what had happened. An admission that the disappearance was wrong brought some redress and it was clear that this was beneficial to the family members concerned. An apology, therefore, could offer a type of justice if it was undertaken in the right way and at the right time. As P35 states,

> *'It would help to right the wrong'* P35.

Whether there is the political appetite on behalf of the republican parties to provide this to the families is, in their view, open to debate based on their performance to date. However, as the participants reflected, for the families the issue is not fully addressed, and neither is the grieving process, until an unequivocal apology is issued. This may well pose challenges for some of the families in the years ahead, based on Robins (2016) summation about the negative impact on psychological health of focusing on truth and reparative processes that may not be achievable.

CHAPTER 7: ORCHESTRATED LOSS THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To date, little has been written about the impact of having had a loved one disappeared in Northern Ireland's Conflict beyond that which has appeared in the media. The central thrust of this study was to provide a voice to those families whose loved ones had been disappeared and, using their voice, to allow the key themes emerge from the data. These themes then served to inform the theory building that will be discussed in this chapter. At an academic level the area is complex, multi and interdisciplinary conceptually immature and has been under-researched. Utilising grounded theory overcame many of the challenges faced in dealing with the data and facilitated the gathering of a rich data set of material from participants whose stories were until now untold but also unacknowledged.

Overwhelmingly what has emerged from the data analysis in a general sense is an increased understanding of the complexity of loss which arises from a conflict related disappearance. Comparing the data collected and analysed in this study against the experiences of similarly affected families in Colombia, Sri Lanka and Peru, as discussed earlier, indicates that, although there are nuances particular to each situation, a number of core issues are common to all. Whilst all of these conflicts are relatively recent, and literature on the processes used to deal with the disappearances in these locations is more readily available, a review of the experiences of the families of those disappeared during the Independence Conflict period in the 1920s in Ireland illustrates that the same core issues were in evidence then and many of the same core issues exist for the families of the Disappeared of the NI Conflict now. The similarities between the 1920's and the 1990's Disappeared in Ireland also demonstrate the importance of local nuance in understanding how disappearance as a tool of war is relevant to the impact and outcome of the violence.

Inherent within all conflict related disappearances are the issues of silence, isolation, denial, fear, victimisation, the emotional consequences of disappearances for individuals, and their families, prevention of cultural and religious rites around death and burial, and lack of accountability and justice (Betz and Thorngren 2006; De Alwis 2009; Selim 2017; Garcia-Godos 2018; Lambert et al 2018; Crenzel 2020; Sivayokan 2014; Elghossain 2020; Smid et al 2020; Blasi 2020; Tamayo 2020; Badshah et al 2021; Hamid et al 2021 and De la Fuente-

Herrera and Soria- Escalante 2021). At a superficial level, the experiences of the families in this study and those of the families in Peru, Colombia and Sri Lanka are broadly similar across these categories. However, as mentioned above, and as considered later in this chapter, while the families may experience similar issues, the cultural, social and political context of the respective conflicts is not the same and neither are the practices of the perpetrators. In considering the issues arising out of disappearances that took place during NI's conflict, cognisance was required of the particular context and circumstances of each abduction and its impact on the trajectory of the family's loss.

From a rich data set, the Grounded Theory approach yielded eight theoretical concepts that accounted for the data. The analysis pointed to the importance of Boss's (2004) Ambiguous Loss theory, defined as the uncertainty of a loss associated with not knowing whether a loved one is dead or alive, or absent or present. At an obvious level interwoven throughout the data was an uncertainty that lasted decades with family members repeatedly questioning whether their relative was alive or dead. Boss's (2004) hypothesis that there are two main types of Ambiguous Loss, the first where individuals are physically absent but psychologically present and the second where individuals are physically present but psychologically absent has resonance for this study in relation to the emotional trajectory of the family's loss. However, Robins (2016) posits that of equal importance in considering the influences on the grieving process, is a focus on the effect of the external environment. He suggests that those who have coped least well with Ambiguous Loss are family members who are fixated with finding out the truth, seeking closure and obtaining justice all of which pertain to conditions that exist within the external environment. Robins (2016) argues that the psychological implications of the disappearance are therefore very much influenced by the social, political and cultural environment that precludes truth and acknowledgement from being attained, prevents the recovery of the remains, and ensures that the concept of justice is not achieved. This highlights why generalist grief frameworks on their own do not adequately explain the experience of families of those disappeared. Whilst the Ambiguous Loss framework provides a useful insight into elements of the personal and familial psychological processes following a disappearance, the analysis of the data for this study illustrates that it fails to address the malign influence the social, political and cultural environment has on an individual's experience of loss. The testimonies of the families of the Disappeared suggest that these

external factors often block or impede grief, but also put families on a fundamentally different trajectory not captured by existing theoretical frameworks.

Another concept that was expected might have utility in considering how the impact of disappearance impacted the families in this study was Anticipatory Loss, defined by Overton and Cottone (2016) as grief which may occur when a major loss or death is expected. In the case of conflict related disappearances the expectation that a loved one may be dead is a reality for many, particularly if those who are suspected of abducting the victim have a reputation for brutality. Testoni et al (2020) considered Anticipatory and Ambiguous Loss in respect of a small group of individuals who had been disappeared in Italy. A few of the group were found alive and the bodies of a few others were recovered. The bodies of many victims were not recovered. The researchers suggest that the concept of Anticipatory Mourning was more appropriate to the circumstances than that of Ambiguous Loss. Mourning, as outlined by Jakoby (2012), encompasses the practice, ritualisation and expression of grief and is shaped by the society and culture in which it takes place. Therefore, Testoni et al (2020) in suggesting anticipatory mourning rather than focusing solely on the loss or grief are acknowledging the influence external factors may have on the grieving process.

A central difficulty of framing the experiences of the families of those disappeared as Anticipatory Loss is that whilst they may have anticipated that their loved ones were dead, the families still hoped that somehow their family member might still be alive right up until the point that their loved one's body was recovered. Rando (2000) suggests even while family members may anticipate loss, grief is often only fully triggered when the death has been confirmed. In the study anticipatory grief only became a central feature when searches were being undertaken, at which stage family members concluded that they felt as if they were waiting for their loved one to die. Boelen (2012) posits that the anticipation of death is a greater determiner of post loss grief than the type of death. However, across the data there was an overwhelming consensus amongst those whose loved one's body had been recovered, that grieving started when this event took place. It was as if their loved one had just died. The particular circumstances and context of conflict related disappearances would suggest that Boelen's (2012) contention that the anticipation of grief is a greater determiner of post loss grief than the type of death, is not an appropriate framework within which to view the

experiences of the families of the Disappeared, given the circumstances and trajectory of their experience of dealing with their loved one's recovery.

The final theoretical framework that was considered important for the experiences of the Disappeared was the notion of Disenfranchised Grief, defined by Doka (1999) as grief which occurs when death is not socially supported, publicly acknowledged or mourned. While Ambiguous Loss can often lead to grief that is disenfranchised as the death of a loved one has not been officially verified, the concept of Disenfranchised Grief focuses solely on the external factors that enable deaths to be verified, i.e. publicly acknowledged, remembrance of the dead and the families to receive public support. This close tie between these two theoretical frameworks certainly has resonance for the families in this study particularly regarding the lack of validation of their loss (Currier et al 2006; Boelen and Prigerson 2007; Morina et al 2010 and Testoni et al 2020). Hollander (2016) citing the grief of the parents of children abducted in northern Uganda whose loss was not communally acknowledged, openly mourned, socially supported or publicly expressed, suggests that grief is not only disenfranchised at a psychological and emotional level but that it can also involve social disenfranchisement and importantly the disenfranchised loss framework does go beyond the individual and family and takes into account the context and conditions in which grief can become disenfranchised. Whilst this theory has strong relevance for this study, particularly in those cases where the death had been confirmed, it does not on its own account for the orchestrated nature of the disappearances and how this process impacts on the trajectory of each family's loss from the point of the abduction.

When considering the existing theoretical frameworks that have been applied to disappearances it is clear elements of each have some explanatory power for the themes that emerged in this study. Internally focused frameworks such as Ambiguous Loss and Anticipatory Grief capture the emotional impact of disappearance, but the social, religious, political and international contexts which surrounded the families also need to be considered (Sheehy 2012). While disappearance, regardless of the context, brings challenges and ambiguity to the families of victims, the data suggests that the dynamic shifts when there is a political connotation or connection to the death. The impact of this on the grieving process needs to be considered given the orchestrated and coercive nature of the violence inflicted on the families by the political protagonists and the backdrop of intra community violence.

While Ambiguous Loss accounted for the oscillations of the families between hope that their loved one was still alive and despair that they were dead (Boss 2011) and led them to experience elements of what might be recognised as Anticipatory Grief (Overton and Cottone 2006), these frameworks do not take account of the political control and management that is associated with conflict related disappearance.

The political context of disappearance not only precludes the recovery of the bodies of the Disappeared it also denies their families access to the social, cultural and religious rites associated with death. Paramilitary involvement renders the deaths untouchable both for the families and for the wider community. There is also an associated cost within the family, of not knowing if a loved one will return which may erode family roles and marital status and structures (Testoni et al 2020). The analysis suggests that families were marginalised within their communities and when combined with a lack of recognition of their circumstances by wider society, resulted in them being subject to an enforced silence leaving them ostracised. Charmaz and Milligan (2006) state that when deaths are not acknowledged, validated, recognised or publicly mourned, survivors are not given the *right to grieve*. This is magnified when the circumstances are ambiguous, as is the case with disappearances. In addition, the deaths also lead to social censure, with families open to ridicule and stigmatisation within their communities which compounds the grieving process (Hollander 2016).

The social censure of the families, in which they became perceived as outsiders within an otherwise tight community, was a pivotal part of the orchestration which ensured silence and powerlessness and prevented any support being offered from within the community. Externally the lack of acknowledgement at either a local or societal level, including by the church, which in the main did not support the families during the years in which their loved ones were missing, fed into a collective social censure which lasted decades. The analysis suggests that the families felt that their *right to mourn* only appeared to become socially acceptable when their loved one's body had been recovered. The impact of this censure and the complexity of grief associated with the disappearances chimes with Doka's (1999) Disenfranchised Grief theory, as socially the families were not given the right to grieve and their loved one's death was not publicly acknowledged or openly mourned for a prolonged period of time. However, whilst this theoretical framework resonates with this singular aspect of the study, on its own it does not account for the issues arising from the politically

motivated, conflict related disappearances. In particular, the theory fails to address the issues that arose for the families from the engineered coercive process to which they found themselves subjected. Given the inability of the established academic grief frameworks considered earlier to adequately account for the emergent themes from this study, a new framework is being proposed, grounded in the analysis which is termed Orchestrated Loss.

BACKGROUND TO THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Politically motivated, conflict related disappearances are not ordinary deaths. Grief that emerges from this type of disappearance is recognised as having specific outcomes given the ambiguous nature of the loss (Boss 2004). However, these deaths also bring additional challenges to the families involved as the social, political and cultural environment can impede and complicate the psychological reaction to the loss (Sheehy 2012). The ongoing coercive control of those who perpetrated the disappearances directly impacts on the grieving and mourning processes of the victim's family. A family's ability to grieve is therefore orchestrated by the perpetrators from the point at which their loved one was abducted until the point of confirmation of death and/or recovery through a series of actions as outlined below.

The analysis suggests that from the moment each individual was abducted, control of the situation was managed by the paramilitary perpetrators through an orchestrated process starting with **repeated denials** that they had anything to do with the abduction. This strategy of denial in many cases lasted for decades. This caused a prolonged state of ambiguity as to the fate of the victim from the point at which the family became aware their loved one was missing (Boss 2011). The data indicated that after an initial period of frantic searching, family members became paralysed in a cycle of fear and uncertainty because of the political and social context of the Conflict. The level of control exerted by the paramilitaries within their communities and the associated fear of paramilitary retribution for any perceived wrongdoing led the families to retreat and become silent which was the desired outcome of the orchestrated process adopted by the paramilitaries. Fear, uncertainty, silence, retreat was a cyclic process that lasted in some cases for over two decades. Keefe (2015) describes disappearances as leaving a purgatory of uncertainty; it also left a purgatory of silence. The strategic effect of this cyclic process for the families was one of paralysis in which the

paramilitaries **issued threats or inflicted violence** if family members tried to raise the issue at all. Fear permeated all aspects of the families' lives.

This cyclic process represented a form of psychological torture given the purposeful infliction of fear (Hurst 2020). Hurst (2020) suggests that there are four elements of psychological torture: severe pain or suffering (which can be mental suffering, that leads to physical problems); intentionality (whereby the perpetrator knows that distress will result); purposefulness (manipulation or coercion of the victim); and powerlessness. Hurst's (2020) categories are relevant to the study in the context of the continued use of fear by the paramilitaries as a form of psychological torture of the families. The disappearance of their loved ones caused the families severe pain and suffering; there was intentionality given that the paramilitaries knew that disappearing their loved one would cause the families distress; the paramilitaries coerced and manipulated the families by orchestrating the situations and circumstances in which each family found themselves; and their control of their communities and ability to exact retribution from those who crossed them rendered not only the families powerless but also those in their communities who tried to assist them. The omnipresent threat of retribution enabled the paramilitaries to continue to control the narrative and, by extension, the families, into a state of silence and compliance for a prolonged period of time.

Topping and Bryne (2012) posit that as paramilitary groups embed themselves within their communities they have an insidious capacity to destabilise relationships within those communities and have a vested interest in doing so. Given the political context to the violence at the time in NI the paramilitaries encouraged those in their communities to think of the local police force as the enemy and to look to the paramilitaries for protection and to maintain order. This left the families in the invidious position of having to decide whether to report the disappearance of their loved one to the police and break the **community rules** established by the paramilitaries or to remain silent. The families were afraid that by reporting the disappearance to the police, any chance of a safe return of their loved one would be jeopardised. As a result there was often no official police record of any of the disappearances and no follow up investigations. Those who had been disappeared simply ceased to exist.

A key strategic goal in managing an enforced disappearance is to erode the victim's family's sense of being part of a community (Walker 2005). Thus the active marginalisation of families within their communities was strategically important for the paramilitaries. Not only did it

isolate the families, it also ensured there would be no discussion in the wider community about the individual disappeared. This intensified the state of fear and risk to which the families were subjected and also deterred members of the community from acting as a buffer between them and those perpetrating the violence. The old adage that there is no smoke without fire meant that some in the community believed that the victim must have had it coming to them, a belief that the paramilitaries fomented. Others actively avoided discussing the missing individual for fear of evoking the wrath of the same paramilitaries. Still others in the community and indeed within some of the families, were sympathetic to the republican cause and were prepared to condone any action taken by the paramilitaries. They didn't discuss the situation because to them it was open and shut.

The paramilitaries were aided in their aim of marginalising the families by silence from across a broad swathe of civic society including the Church, Government Departments, Justice and statutory agencies. As the data suggests, there were **no official records of the disappearances**; there were no records of the deaths; there were no accounts of what had happened; no investigation into the disappearances by the police; no death certificates to legally confirm death; no help from key professional groups outside the families; there was no recognition by health professionals or others across civic society of the trauma associated with the disappearances; and no cultural or religious ceremonies to either mark their loved one's lives, denote their deaths or remember them at anniversaries.

This resonates with the experiences of other families in conflicts across the world who, when faced with repressive regimes actively engaged in obfuscation, marginalisation and ostracism, found few in their broader civic society willing to help or stand up for them (Nicholls 2010; Haugaard and Nicholls 2010; Somasundaram 2011; Sivayokan 2014; Dewhirst and Kapur 2015; Robin 2016; Hollander 2016 and Hussain 2019). Deaths in Colombia, Peru and Sri Lanka following a prolonged period of disappearance were not officially recorded or reported and in some cases formal legal processes such as inquests were not undertaken when bodies were recovered (Haugaard and Nicholls 2010; Davies and True 2017; Garcia–Godos 2018 and Dulitizky 2019).

When loved ones disappear Boss (2004) posits that families may live in a state of hope and despair which may last for some time (Hollander 2016; Robins 2016; and Dahl and Boss 2020). The analysis suggests that the families experienced highs and lows. The difference between

the experiences of those covered by the research undertaken by Boss and colleagues and the families in this study was that the highs and lows experienced by the families were orchestrated by the perpetrators of their loved one's disappearance. These perpetrators sought to **control the narrative** by circulating rumours that suggested that the Disappeared individual was alive and well. The paramilitaries used the local communities to spread misinformation of reported sightings of the victim in other parts of the country or across the world. The data suggests that in some cases they also manufactured written evidence to further convince the families that the Disappeared individual was alive and had relocated. This included in one case sending a Christmas card to a mother and father, in which the writing reflected their son's poor literacy due to his learning disability. This led the mother to try to trace her son through the post office which she reported as very distressing.

A variety of reasons were circulated in the community as to why the individuals had left including regretting their marriage, obtaining work, running away with a new partner, joining the circus and committing a crime. The families were unable to verify the validity of these narratives with the paramilitaries controlling their attempts to get answers and ensuring that all their efforts came to nothing. This strategy compounded the families' uncertainty and ensured that they were living in an intensified state of ambiguity, with their loved one physically absent but very much psychologically present.

From the data analysis it is clear that the families thought that a key goal of the orchestration of their situations by the paramilitaries was to try and **obliterate their loved one's identity and any remembrance of them**. By impugning their reputations, the paramilitaries sought to ensure that on those occasions that they were talked about in the community, it was in negative terms and that the families would find it hard to enlist help to find someone who didn't really deserve to be found. Medina (2013) contends that false narratives remove the name and the dignity of the person disappeared. The impact of this strategy of control leads to a **social death** in which the Disappeared are viewed as pariahs within their community who shouldn't be remembered. This resonates with what happened in Sri Lanka, Peru and Colombia (Somasundaram et al 2011; Rojas-Perez 2017 and Caicedo and Cardenas 2018) (Chapter 3) where those responsible for the disappearances attempted to obliterate the memories of those abducted. As discussed, in the Tamil communities in Sri Lanka, Tamil widows withdrew, removing all traces of their loved one such as photographs, to ensure that

no further violence would be inflicted on their families. In essence, disappeared loved ones publicly ceased to exist. With no formal records of the Disappeared their identity was in effect, erased (Haugaard and Nicholls 2010; Somasundaram et al 2011 and Medina 2013).

The data suggests that the social death of their loved one had other implications for the families beyond losing a close member of the family. In the eyes of their communities they were deemed to be guilty by association with all the negative connotations that came with that. For some this manifested itself in difficulty accessing work in the local community while for others their work was affected by third parties attempting to misuse their loved one's disappearance or confirmed death against them. The majority of the families reported being taunted and abused and repeatedly victimised.

The orchestrated attempts of the paramilitaries to control the narrative surrounding the disappearance of the loved ones of the participants however have not ceased but have continued. The 1999 IRA/INLA statement identifying those who had been abducted and murdered excluded a number of cases. In some, paramilitary involvement had been highlighted at inquests (O'Halloran 2011) whilst two others, Joe Lynskey and Peter Wilson, were eventually claimed 10 years after the initial statement (Smyth and Quigley 2009; Maloney 2011). A further case, that of Seamus Maguire who was last seen in 1973/1974 was announced, on February 3rd 2022, as a case ICLVR will now include on their list of disappeared cases (WAVE Trauma Centre 2022). The data indicates that the participants feel that the practice of controlling the release of information by the republican representatives has extended to the timing of the release of information regarding the burial sites. Throughout the families' campaign for the return of the bodies of their loved ones, the participants feel that the release of information regarding the location of the remains of their loved ones has been undertaken, when it is politically opportune and in such a way as to maintain control of the agenda thereby perpetuating the trauma associated with the loss. So far this process of recovering of the remains of the victims has taken in excess of twenty years.

Pushing back against the orchestrated strategy occurred when the participants began to engage in acts of defiance. This involved speaking out about their loved ones within both their family and their community and it began the process of re-humanising who their loved ones were. It was also about engaging with others and forming a support group, which was invaluable in bolstering each of the families in the absence of effective, supportive family and

community networks (Boss 2011). The families sought to break the silence and bring the Disappeared back into their communities by getting their story out across all aspects of civic life. This process began with them engaging with local organisations such as the church, key sporting and community hubs and lobbying politicians.

Given the political and social context of the disappearances, increasing visibility and actively lobbying placed families at huge risk of further violence. The participants' responses indicate that when their loved ones disappeared their lives stopped and family members withdrew from the community which the perpetrators were trying to engineer. They went about their daily lives in a quiet way to avoid bringing any more trouble to their door and in effect were paralysed. Engaging in social activism began the process of reversing this paralysis and in the view of the participants saw them re-exerting some degree of control of the narrative. However, it is clear from the responses of the participants that they continued to live in a state of uncertainty, oscillating between hope, despair and feelings of powerlessness. They lived in hope, while fearing the worst, with their grief stalled and suspended until the bodies of their loved ones were finally recovered.

While there are changes at an emotional level when a loved one's body is recovered, there are also changes noted at a societal level. The impact of breaking the cycle of orchestration can be seen in the reintegration of each of the families back into their community when recovery took place. This enabled the normal cultural, social and religious processes around death such as the Irish wake and the Christian rituals associated with death to be undertaken. These are central cultural and religious processes which are viewed by McGarry (2020) as vital processes and markers in the overall grieving processes. Some of the participants believed that their loved ones were not at rest until they were recovered and the rituals associated with enabling the rite of passage into the next life had been undertaken, with their body laid to rest in a family grave following Christian burial. For the families however this represented a wider process of the acceptance of their loved one back not only as a member of their family (confirming their existence), but also as a member of the community and this was the final step in taking back control of the narrative.

For the participants waiting for recovery was viewed as akin to waiting for their loved one to die. There was an anticipation of death. However, it was only when the recovery finally came that the grief emerged as if the loss had just happened, even though their loved ones had

been secretly buried for decades. This chimes with Rando's (2000) summation that grief is only fully realised when the death has actually happened, even though loved ones may be anticipating this to be the case. This highlights the uniqueness of the grief associated with politically motivated, conflict related disappearance in which the process is orchestrated from the start right up until recovery. The impact of this orchestrated process on grief is not reflected fully in any current theoretical frameworks.

It is evident through the data analysis that the social, political, cultural and the international context surrounding the disappearances have a direct impact on the emotional experience of the families. Whilst the ways in which the perpetrators in the conflicts in Peru, Sri Lanka and Colombia orchestrated disappearances differed in some respects, essentially many of the same engineered processes are evident at an intracommunity level. The key aim of the orchestration was to control the narrative with a view to obfuscating, obstructing and ultimately denying responsibility for the disappearances. The notions of loss and grief in relation to disappearance are one element of the experience which cannot be simplified solely into individual or family reactions to loss. To understand the impact of a politically motivated, conflict related disappearance on families, the orchestration of the process by the perpetrators needs to be considered given its direct impact on the grieving process. An increased understanding of how the external environment can be manipulated by the perpetrators and its impact on the grieving processes of the families of the victims, may be of benefit to those working to support the families therapeutically or practically through aid agencies and non-governmental bodies. As none of the existing frameworks adequately explain the findings of the data analysis, the researcher is proposing a new theoretical framework called Orchestrated Loss as discussed below.

THE ORCHESTRATED LOSS THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Orchestrated Loss is the process by which the conditions surrounding a disappearance and the aftermath of the disappearance are manipulated by the perpetrator/s and their supporters (explicit and implicit) giving rise to a significant negative impact on the normal psychological, familial and societal functioning of the family subject to the traumatic loss. This process is no doubt exclusive to the families of those disappeared, but in this study the focus is specifically on the NI's contemporary Disappeared. This framework offers an insight into

the unique situation the families of those disappeared in politically motivated, conflict related situations find themselves. The disappearance and orchestration of their loss may be undertaken by paramilitaries, state forces, and insurgent or guerrilla groups or, depending on the nuances of the conflict, a combination of groups working tacitly together. The strategy of the perpetrators around the Disappeared, which starts with denial and threat, can intensify the psychological suffering associated with the disappearance and impede the grieving process, the ability to mourn, impact family relationships and cause isolation and disenfranchisement from communities.

There are two central components to the Orchestrated Loss model. The first is instilling fear. The paramilitaries involved with the families in this study created and maintained a climate of fear around the families through threats, intimidation and in some cases, physical violence. This ensured the families stayed silent and marginalised within their community (Hurst 2020). Marginalisation precludes any outside assistance being offered by the local community, who often become silent too. Equally members of wider society can assume a 'neutral' role in which they do not interfere in community issues particularly anything that has a political connotation to it (Haugaard and Nicholls 2010). This enables the issue of the disappearance to remain hidden. In this study it prevented the families from speaking out, rendering them paralysed and fostering a state of enforced silence. This lasted for decades. This process of fear, uncertainty, silence, marginalisation and retreat is cyclic in nature as represented in Figure 22 below:



Figure 22 Cyclic process of Fear in Orchestrated Loss

The second component of Orchestrated Loss is Control whereby the narrative around a disappearance is managed by those who perpetrated it. Control starts from the moment of

the abduction and begins with denial. A series of other techniques and strategies are then deployed as required as set out in Figure 23 below.

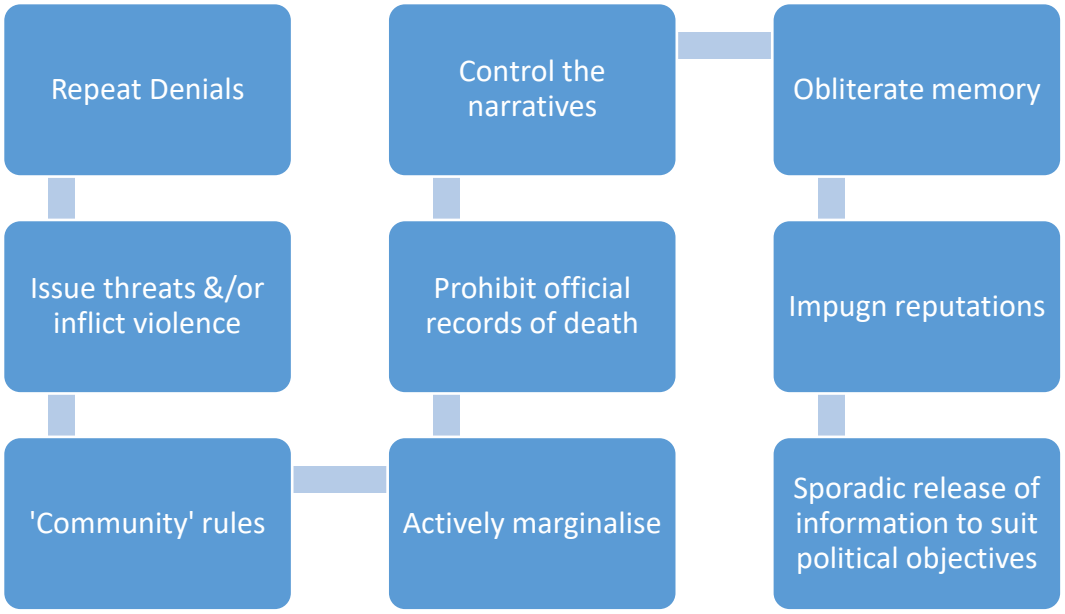


Figure 23 Strategies of Control in Orchestrated Loss

The family's silence is coerced by threats of or actual violence; community rules prevent official reporting or even speaking with state authorities. It also prevents the families from talking about their loss with anyone outside the family. In this way the isolation, marginalisation and ostracism of the families within the community is controlled, the narrative around the Disappeared person is controlled- with rumours and false or misleading testimonies designed to obscure and obstruct recovery, there is an attempt to obliterate memory and identity within the family and community, the reputation of the Disappeared person is impugned ensuring social disenfranchisement and, even when processes to enable recovery of the Disappeared start, control can continue to be applied with the sporadic and even incorrect release of information on the location of remains. The orchestrated process of control only ends when the bodies are recovered. But other processes then take over in which the memory of the Disappeared is used for political benefit, however this may not necessarily be carried out by the original perpetrators.

ORCHESTRATED LOSS FRAMEWORK

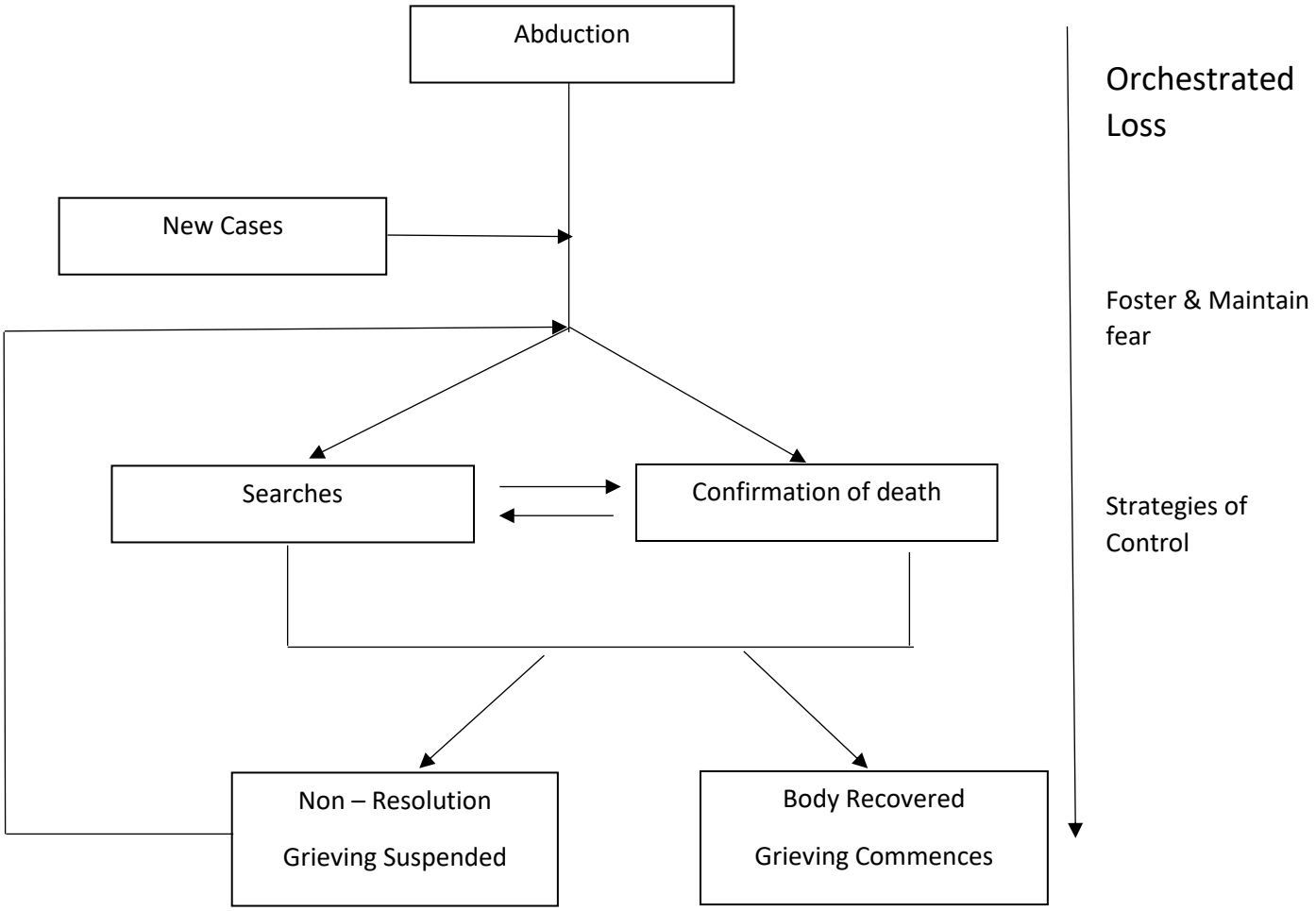


Figure 24 Orchestrated Loss Framework

The ability of the perpetrators to instil fear and exert control is dependent on the external context and circumstances of the conflict in which the disappearance takes place. When conflict related violence is ongoing it precludes any attention being paid by the authorities to disappearances which are in the main invisible acts, with a lack of available evidence to confirm the victim's fate. Their fate is determined by their captor (Brody and Gonzalez 1997). When there is no investigation or confirmation of death, it prevents the death being acknowledged and any official records from being created that confirm the disappearance. This fulfils a central aim of the perpetrators which is to dehumanise the victim. The failure of the local police force to conduct an investigation into the individual's disappearance and the omission of any legal recognition of their death by other statutory bodies contributes

significantly to the process of dehumanisation, and feelings of isolation and abandonment. When deaths are not recorded or recognised it also prohibits the socially and culturally defined religious rituals from being undertaken.

Through this process of orchestration the Disappeared are dehumanised and rendered social ghosts (Stroebe et al 2008) within their families and also within the community. The families are unable to grieve for their loss and this state of suspended reality, in which their loved one's fate and place of burial is unconfirmed, leaves them to question their loved one's existence. However, what is reflected across the data and across the international literature (ICRC 2014) is that the disappearance of their loved one never leaves the families. They carry it with them and at a psychological and emotional level, the feelings of uncertainty and loss do not abate with time. This particular type of loss within a conflict environment creates a situation in which family members live in a continued state of uncertainty or as Tribe and Silva (1999) posit, a state of '*suspended animation'* (p185). The families often maintain the silent hope that their loved ones are still alive until definitely proven otherwise. Given the ongoing gaslighting and coercive control, many need to see the body or identifiable remains to accept that their loved one is dead (ICRC 2014). This mistrust is born out of the perpetrators' orchestration of their loss and compounded by the failure of the State to investigate, address or confirm their loved one's death. The orchestration and manipulation of the disappearance feeds mistrust. Grieving is therefore kept in abeyance while families wait for that final confirmation that it is their loved one who has been recovered.

It is evident from the data analysis that it was only when recovery had taken place that the families were able to begin grieving. While Currier et al (2006); Boelen and Prigerson (2007) and Morina et al (2010) have concluded that violence due to armed conflict, state oppression and violent death have a significant impact on an individual's grieving process, the context and circumstances of the disappearance may generate a delayed grieving process, as may the issues of injustice and achieving justice that inevitably follow the recovery of remains. Boss (2011) referred to grieving in cases of ambiguity as being frozen. The concept of frozen grief parallels with the family's summation that they felt paralysed and unable to address what happened to their loved one until they were recovered.

When recovery was a reality, the attitudes of both the local and wider communities, which for years had enabled the paramilitaries to isolate the families, changed to work in their

favour. The communities galvanised around them with a recognition of the reality of not only the loss of their loved one, but also the length of time they had been living in fear and powerlessness. It also enabled the families to undertake the cultural and religious rites associated with death which assisted the family in grieving.

For many, recovery represented one form of social justice, as their loved one was accepted back into the community through the performance of rituals associated with death. In part this normalised the death as the routine rituals and cultural traditions associated with death in the community were undertaken, the religious rites were met with the community responding and supporting the family. Bew and Gillespie (1999) contend that one of the early stipulations from the IRA was that the families would have "quiet" funerals without press coverage. Thus they were trying to control the agenda right to the point of burial. However, the subsequent negative publicity surrounding their intentions meant that the IRA did not seek to impose these restrictions. This was important as all of these normative death rituals and cultural traditions were key in ensuring that the disenfranchisement of the death, or as Hollander (2016) suggests, the social disenfranchisement of the family, did not continue. For the families it was only when recovery took place that the orchestration of the family's loss ended and grieving started.

Finally, it is important to consider the role of the families as an antithesis to Orchestrated Loss in their challenge to the silence and the de-humanisation of their loved one. From the point of abduction family members report living in a state of yearning for their loved one and with the uncertainty of what had happened to them. When caught in the midst of the psychological torture of having a loved one disappeared it is difficult for families to unpack or recognise the degree to which the narrative around their loss has been orchestrated by the perpetrators. It is often only when the cycle of fear, threat, silence, and marginalisation is broken and families feel emboldened by the support of either a peer group of other families who have experienced disappearance too, or other third party advocates and start to fight back through acts of defiance, that the levels and extent of orchestration may become evident. Ultimately these acts of defiance provide the families with a sense of control which is vital given the powerlessness experienced before their loved one's death was claimed by those who perpetrated their loss. It also provides them with the opportunity to re-humanise their loved one in an effort to try to pressurise those with information to give it and to reclaim and

confirm their loved one's existence in the world. Despite the families feeling emboldened, ultimately the feeling that someone else is in control and can continue to orchestrate the release of information continues to rest with the families until their loved ones are finally recovered. This was aptly described by one family member as a '*living death*' P15.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The concept of Orchestrated Loss is an area that would benefit from further research scrutiny, as conflict related disappearances are a recurring feature of violence inflicted against individuals and families across the world. Gaining an understanding of the link between the orchestration of loss and grief may be beneficial in work with individuals and families from a therapeutic, humanitarian, and psycho social perspective. For example, representatives of the Iraqi and Syrian governments have engaged with WAVE and the families to gain a better understanding of the support structures and processes regarding ICLVR.

Although each conflict has specific nuances the central thrust of all conflict related disappearances is to control families through fear and obfuscate responsibility for disappearances. From a policy and humanitarian perspective Orchestrated Loss may be useful in considering how families, communities and aid agencies can mobilise to push back against the perpetrators and hold them to account for their actions.

Intergenerational aspects arising from the disappearances were reflected throughout this study however the sample size was small. Yet tentative indications from the data analysis are that the orchestrated process had a detrimental impact generationally within families. This is an important area of study that has not received due prominence at an academic level. Further research and scrutiny on this issue would be invaluable from a psychoeducation, therapeutic and policy perspective.

Each of the theoretical concepts produced a wealth of data. Many of the issues have not been considered in a meaningful way specifically in relation to conflict related disappearances. Issues such as justice and finding meaningful mechanisms to ensure the recovery of the bodies of those disappeared are of fundamental importance from a policy and governmental perspective. Further research scrutiny needs to be given to issues such as justice, the role of

apology and reparations for families impacted by intracommunity disappearances to ascertain whether this is a continuation of the orchestration of their loss.

The process of disappearance was enabled by the lack of engagement from across the wider community in which no record of those disappeared was retained, no investigation or public account of their loss was undertaken, and no processes were established to mark and honour their lives. Further research is required to explore the early processes that need to be in place within civic society, particularly when the violence is intracommunity based, to prevent Orchestrated Loss from taking hold and continuing undeterred.

Many of the participants in this process reflected on the powerlessness they experienced when trying to deal with their loved one's disappearance. Sharing the resources of how the particular context and circumstance of disappearance may impact on loss would be an invaluable resource for families from a psychoeducation perspective.

While the subject of this research was to consider the families who had experienced the disappearance of their loved one within a protracted intracommunity conflict, the study may have wider applicability to disappearances undertaken for domestic or criminal intent in which the perpetrator may be known to the family. Further research scrutiny would be useful on the applicability of this model to these types of disappearance given the intimacy of the violence.

The research produced a greater insight into the trajectory of loss as a result of disappearance during NI's Conflict and in particular to the suspension of grieving until the bodies of those disappeared were recovered. Further attention needs to be given to a longitudinal study focused on the health and social consequences for individuals and families who have been affected in this way. This could be usefully applied in the areas of education and therapeutic practice.

CONCLUSION

The central aim of this thesis was to give the families of the Disappeared a voice and to include this voice in the development of a conceptual framework to understand their experiences. Ensuring their voices were acknowledged and respected was vitally important in making them visible. This visibility was juxtaposed against the intention of paramilitaries which was to make the Disappeared victim, and, by association, their loved ones, invisible, through an engineered process that ensured silence, powerlessness and marginalisation. Underlying this paramilitary strategy was the need to maintain a climate of fear which, in tandem with a series of mechanisms of control, actively manipulated by the paramilitaries, resulted in the family's loss being orchestrated from the time of their loved one's abduction until the point at which their body was finally recovered. The impact of the disappearance for family members was cataclysmic, affecting all aspects of their lives. However, there was a particular impact on the grieving process which was frozen and effectively stalled for decades until the bodies of those disappeared were recovered leaving the families in a situation one described as '*a living death' (P15).*

A review of the data gathered, and of the relevant literature, makes it clear that disappearances can never be regarded as "in the past". They remain part of the present for the families concerned. McKay (2008) contends that families often remain 'haunted' by the presence of the missing family member however hard they try to banish it. This was evident in the testimonies of families whose loved ones disappeared in Ireland a century ago during the Independence Conflict and the experiences of the families caught up in the conflicts in Peru, Sri Lanka and Colombia.

Whilst there are a variety of theoretical frameworks, such as Ambiguous Loss (Boss 2004), Anticipatory Loss (Overton and Cottone 2016), or Disenfranchised Grief (Doka 1999) that address aspects of the families' experiences, none fully account for the extent to which the situation was manipulated by the paramilitaries nor its impact on the grieving process. As a result, the researcher is proposing a new theoretical framework called Orchestrated Loss which seeks to explain what happens when the narrative surrounding conflict related disappearances and, by implication, the grieving process of the families involved, is controlled by the perpetrators of the disappearance.

The tragedy of the Disappeared of NI's conflict would have remained hidden had it not been for the tenacity, bravery and dedication of the subjects of this study who, once they realised that they were not the only ones who had had loved ones disappeared, galvanised into a support group. This group, as well as providing an effective support mechanism for one another, has provided a buffer to the 'toxicity' often associated with the politics of victimhood in NI (Breen-Smyth 2018). So far, 14 of the Disappeared have been laid to rest. Whilst they have been recovered there are others who are still languishing in bogs or farmland across Ireland. The work of reclaiming the Disappeared of NI's Conflict is not, as yet, complete. The voices of the families still need to be heard as it is only with repeated pressure that the orchestration ends - when the final piece of information that enables recovery is received.

> '*When the whole world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful*'.
> Malala Yousafzai (2013).

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS ON THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The central thrust of this research study was to ensure that the voices of the families of those disappeared during the NI Conflict were heard, particularly those within each family who have remained hidden or felt silent. In addition, this study sought to understand the experience of the families and to develop a conceptual basis for capturing their journey using grounded theory.

Trust, which is essential when dealing with hard-to-reach groups, was crucial in this study. The researcher had a long established a bond with the participants through her role as advocate and activist; she had worked with many of them over a period of 20 years. The levels of access thus afforded to the researcher was reflected in the depth of detail revealed in the data analysis and would simply not have been possible without this relationship. It also

highlights a major obstacle standing in the path of any third party seeking to undertake a similar study, or seeking to follow up on the findings of this study.

The process of locating the bodies of the Disappeared did not stop while this study was being undertaken. As a result, the access the researcher had to the families during periods of searching enabled her to gain a unique insight into how this process impacted on family members, in particular on the grieving process, the ending of hope of a safe return and the questions the families had around confirmed existence, as discussed in Chapter 6.

A fundamental issue for anyone seeking or replicate the study is that a number of the interviewees have passed away. Since the study began, seven of the participants have unfortunately died, whilst others are now in poor health. As a result, whilst their interviews have been audio recorded, there is no mechanism available to clarify comments or to seek further data to follow through on theoretical concepts identified across the interviews.

By using the Grounded Theory approach the researcher generated copious amounts of data from first, second and third generations of the families concerned. This reflects the conclusions of Ali (2022) who suggests that an insider researcher undertaking a study will get more information from participants than a stranger. However, despite the wealth of data generated, the results in this study may not be completely generalizable. For example, there were only a small sample of family members interviewed who were born into families were a disappearance had taken place and who subsequently became actively involved in the campaign to have their loved ones returned. Whilst the data analysis suggested a strong transgenerational impact in which the second and third generations had taken on the trauma associated with their antecedent's disappearance, further research attention on this issue is required to conclusively establish that this is indeed the case across the issue of conflict related or even domestic disappearances.

A review of paramilitary disappearances in Columbia, Sri Lanka and Peru demonstrated similar themes to the issues presented by the participants in this study. It is important to acknowledge that each conflict has nuances and cultural dimensions that in themselves lead to questions regarding generalization of concepts across local and international conflicts.

A final limitation that needs to be considered in any study relates to interviewer bias. From the outset, consideration was given to this issue and a series of protections were put in place

to mitigate this risk, as outlined in Chapter 5. However, it is well documented that research findings in qualitative studies are more easily influenced by the researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies (Zhang et al 2021). To compound the issue further, when individuals live and practice while a conflict is ongoing, they can seldom have a completely neutral stance on the issues being presented. Equally, if they have been advocating for a long period of time, they may become desensitized to the reality of the issues under scrutiny (Dominguez et al 2022). The possibility of bias represents a potential limitation of any qualitative study. Recognising and accounting for this bias is crucial as it may be a central influencing variable that may skew data analysis. Supervision, peer review and participant feedback are essential protections whose inclusion is critical in ensuring a study of this nature remains valid.



Figure 25 - The first Silent Walk on All Souls Day- November the 2nd 2007 at Parliament Buildings, Stormont, Belfast.

In 2007 nine bodies were still missing. The lilies on the wreath are removed by family members as their loved ones are recovered. New lilies are added as new Disappeared cases come to light.

The families undertake this Silent Walk each year on the 2nd of November at Parliament Buildings as a reminder that the issue of the disappeared is not as yet addressed until all of the Disappeared are brought home.

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APPENDIX I INFORMATION SHEET

INFORMATION SHEET

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Purpose of the Study. As part of the requirements for a PhD degree at UCC, I have to carry out a research study. The study is concerned with the experiences of the families of the Disappeared of Northern Ireland.

What will the study involve? The entire study will last for a period of three years between September 2015 and September 2018. However, your involvement will consist of being interviewed on one occasion at your home or at WAVE or at a place of your choosing. The interview will last for approximately one hour and a half and will be arranged so that the timing is suitable to you. Should the need arise to re-examine ideas emerging from the interview, a second interview may be arranged, again with your permission. I will record the interview on tape as well, with your consent.

Why have you been asked to take part? Primarily, as you belong to a section of the community who have had a family member who was 'Disappeared' during the conflict in Northern Ireland. I would like to discuss with you as a family member the impact and circumstances of your loved one's disappearance.

Do you have to take part? No, it is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide at any time to withdraw your consent then you are free to do so without any question or reason up to six months after your participation. Your consent will be continuously sought verbally throughout the period of the study to ensure you are comfortable with the process at each stage.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes - All information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential. However there is no such thing as absolute confidentially and any information that is requested by police or security services can in theory have to be made available.

Any information provided in this study that in any way relates to current or future criminal investigations thus cannot be guaranteed to be kept confidential. Given this I will discuss with you the need to exclude details such as names and locations that may identify individuals linked to the cases of the Disappeared. If names and locations are given, they will be anonymised however this does not guarantee confidentiality.

Finally, any information given of relevance to past or future criminal activity cannot be kept confidential.

However in this study any information about you or information you have provided us with, will be anonymised and kept securely. All computer entries will be coded and encrypted, I will ensure that no clues to your identity appear in the thesis. Any extracts from what you say that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous.

It is important to remember that while the information in this study will be anonymised and only short extracts from the transcribed interviews will be reproduced in the thesis and subsequent publications, there is always the potential for being identified based on the data being presented, the small pool of participant and the public interest in your case. As I cannot guarantee total anonymity this is something for you to bear in mind as you consider participation.

What will happen to the information which you give? The information you give during the interview will be *kept confidential from third parties and it will be destroyed after a period of seven years.* The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study, available only to me and my research supervisor. It will be held securely.

What will happen to the results? The results will be presented in the thesis. They will be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner. The thesis may be read by future students. The study or excerpts of the study may be published in a research journal or a book.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? Some people may find this process therapeutic; however, you may find talking about the 'disappearance' and the circumstances surrounding it very distressful and difficult to manage. You should take this into consideration when you are deciding whether to take part in this research. If you decide that you do/ or do not want to take part there is a holistic package of care and support available to you through the WAVE Trauma Centre, if you wish to avail of it. There will be no charge for these services. If you decide to take part and subsequently find it difficult you can withdraw without explanation. I have enclosed in this pack a leaflet detailing support organisations in your local area, who can provide a range of support services.

What if there is a problem? At the end of the procedure, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you subsequently feel distressed, you should contact in the first instance WAVE Trauma Centre 02890779922. You can also contact my

research supervisor at any time if you would like to discuss any issues with the research - Orla Lynch orla.lynch@ucc.ie University College Cork, Ireland. 00353214903000

Who has reviewed this study? Both the UCC Social Research Ethics Committee and WAVE Trauma's internal management board have reviewed this research proposal and approved its content.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me: Sandra Peake,

WAVE Trauma Centre, Belfast, NI. s.peake@wavetrauma.org. *+44 (0)2890779922*

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

APPENDIX II INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM



I……agree to participate in Sandra Peake's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with Sandra Peake to be audio-recorded.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within six months of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand the information I give during interview will be kept confidential from third parties and will be destroyed after a period of seven years.

I understand that any information provided in this study that in any way relates to current or future criminal investigations cannot be kept confidential and can be requested by police or security services.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please delete one line below)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview □

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview □

Signed: ……. Date: ……..

Print name: …….

Address: …….

…….

Postcode:…….

APPENDIX III SUPPORT STRUCTURES

Contact details	Summary	Services Available
Victim and Survivors Service (VSS) 1st Floor Seatem House Belfast BT2 8EN Tel: 02890279100 Email: enquiries@vssni.org Website: www.victimservice.org	Inter-agency group responsible for sign posting victims and survivors of the conflict to support services. Provide free signposting to services. One to one financial support programmes if required.	VSS has published a service directory which describes a comprehensive range of organisations which provides help and support to those experiencing distress following bereavement, or injury as a result of the conflict.VSS will signpost individuals on to other organisations for support. They also offer support care financial packages to meet individual need.
Independent Commission for the Location of Victims Remains (ICLVR) Dublin Tel: 00800 55585500 Website: www.iclvr.ie	ICLVR was established by the British and Irish Governments to obtain information which may lead to the location of the remains of victims of paramilitary violence	ICLVR is an information led unit which was set up to receive information on the location of the remains of anyone disappeared by paramilitary violence. ICLVR works with the strictest confidence and all information received within ICLVR is treated as privileged. ICLVR have a family liaison officer and a specialist forensic team. They also offer support to families in relation to media coverage.
Contact Details	**Summary**	**Services Available**
Commission for Victims and Survivors Equality House, 7-9 Shaftesbury Square,	Promoting the interests of victims and survivors	The Commission is a non departmental body established by the

Belfast BT2 7DP Tel: 02890311000 Email: commission@cvsni.org Website: www.cvsni.org Twitter: @nivictimscom	through giving advice to Government. Signposting to service provision.	Northern Ireland assembly to promote the interests of Victims and Survivors. The Commission offers advice and signposting to victims and survivors referring in the first instance to the Victim and Survivors Service as detailed overleaf.
Family Trauma Centre Belfast Health and Social Care Trust 1 Wellington Park Belfast, BT9 6DJ Tel: 028 95042828 Website: www.belfasttrust.hscni.net	To provide a therapeutic service to individual (up to 18yrs) and families suffering from psychological trauma including troubles related trauma and other types of severed trauma	Open referral policy including self-referral. The Family Trauma Centre provides a regional service with 10 clinics operating regionally across the province as well as Belfast.
Contact Details	**Services Available**	**Summary**
WAVE Trauma Centre, Belfast 5 Chichester Park South Belfast BT15 5DW Tel: 028 9077 9922 Email: adminhq@wavetrauma.org Website www.wavetraumacentre.org.uk	To provide care and support for individuals bereaved, injured or traumatised as a result of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Provides access to services free of charge in any of the WAVE Centres or in individuals own homes or chosen safe venues.	Befriending: Centre and on an outreach basis; counselling and psychotherapy; complementary therapies; advice and welfare; youth programmes; peer group support; trauma training courses; research and publicity. Dedicated support groups are delivered from WAVE Belfast for families of the Disappeared and Injured Support Groups.
WAVE Trauma Centre, Armagh 6 Mallview Terrace	To provide care and support for	Befriending: Centre and on an outreach basis;

The Mall West Armagh, BT61 9AN Tel: 028 3751 1599 Email:admin@wavearmagh.co.uk Website www.wavetraumacentre.org.uk	individuals bereaved, injured or traumatised as a result of the Troubles in Northern Ireland	counselling and psychotherapy; complementary therapies; advice and welfare; youth programmes; peer group support; trauma training courses; research and publicity.
WAVE Trauma Centre , Ballymoney 13 Castlecroft Main Street Ballymoney, BT53 6TD Tel: 028 2766 9900 Email: admin@waveballymoney.co.uk Website www.wavetraumacentre.org.uk	To provide care and support for individuals bereaved, injured or traumatised as a result of the Troubles in Northern Ireland	Befriending: Centre and on an outreach basis; counselling and psychotherapy; complementary therapies; advice and welfare; youth programmes; peer group support; trauma training courses; research and publicity.
WAVE Trauma Centre, Derry Londonderry 23a Bishop Street Derry Londonderry, BT48 9PR Tel: 028 7126 6655 Email: admin@wavederry.co.uk Website www.wavetraumacentre.org.uk	To provide care and support for individuals bereaved, injured or traumatised as a result of the Troubles in Northern Ireland	Befriending: Centre and on an outreach basis; counselling and psychotherapy; complementary therapies; advice and welfare; youth programmes; peer group support; trauma training courses; research and publicity.
WAVE Trauma Centre, Omagh 18 Holmview Avenue Omagh, BT79 0AQ Tel: 028 8225 2522 Email: admin@waveomagh.co.uk Website www.wavetraumacentre.org.uk	To provide care and support for individuals bereaved, injured or traumatised as a result of the Troubles in Northern Ireland	Befriending: Centre and on an outreach basis; counselling and psychotherapy; complementary therapies; advice and welfare; youth programmes; peer group support; trauma training courses; research and publicity.

APPENDIX IV ADVISORY GROUP

Advisory Group

Professor Jean Orr

Geoff Knupfer

Dennis Godfrey

APPENDIX V INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

General comments pre interview:

As outlined in the information sheet the aim of this study is to explore the impact and circumstances for individuals whose loved ones were 'Disappeared' in the conflict in Northern Ireland.

This interview will last for approximately one hour and a half. If you think about other points after the interview please feel free to give me a call. If the need arises to talk further we can arrange to meet again.

I will record the interview on tape as well, with your consent. The use of the tape recorder will ensure that no important details are missed.

The interview is an informal process, so please relax and we will have time at the end to talk about anything not covered. You will get to see a record of the interview transcript before it is included in any report. And finally you will not be identified in any written report by name, your identity will be protected. It is important however that you do not name anyone you feel was responsible or involved for the disappearance during the course of the interview.

I want to start with some general questions about you and your brother/ son/mother/father and then some specific questions about the impact of his/her disappearance for the family. Finally we will talk about the Independent Commission and its work on behalf of the families.

We can stop at any time for a break or to continue if you wish at a later time or if you decide you do not want to proceed.

General background of the participant:

1. **General background of the participant within the family.**

- Demographic details:

2. **What is your relationship to the individual 'Disappeared'?**

Circumstances of the disappearance:

3. **Can you tell me about the circumstances around the disappearance of your loved one ?**

- What do you remember from the time ?
- What age were you when they disappeared ?
- Where you still living in the same house/ home?
- Who else was in the family at the time ?
- What were you told by others/ family members/ relatives/ community or police?
- Has this changed over time?
- Who in the family took the lead on highlighting your loved one's case at the time?
- Has that changed within the family ?
- Did you always talk about your loved one not returning home ?

4. **What help or assistance was provided at the time of the disappearance?**

- Did anyone come to the family following the abduction ?

- Where there people in the community who would have been the leaders/ ‘go to person’ at that time ? Did they help ?
- What about-
    - Police: RUC/ Garda
    - Local paramilitary representatives
    - Church
    - Community organisations
    - Media
    - School or employer
    - Others ?

Did anyone speak to the family ?

5.How did the community react ?

Has it changed relationships ?

Support and Assistance:

6.a. How do you feel support, assistance or awareness has changed over the years ?

- What agencies/ groups/representatives are now more supportive ?

b. If yes why do you think it has changed ?

7.What has been the impact of living with a loved one who is/ or was disappeared ?

For you personally ?

For your family ?

For the wider family or community ?

8.How did you cope with your brother's/ son/ husband's / mother's disappearance?
How did the person cope/ manage what had happened?
Negative coping –
Positive coping-

9.How did the family unit cope?
Immediately after the disappearance
Longer term
Has there been any longer term effect for the family ?

10. What impact did your loved ones disappearance have on your identity ?

11.Why is it important for a family to be able to bury their loved one ?

Why is a grave important ?
What does the ritual of burial mean to a family ?

12.What impact does the disappearance of a loved one have in relation to grieving ?

13.In the case of where an individual has been found, what impact did this have for you and your family?
What have you been able to do ? i.e. family grave
Are there are things that you would have liked, that didn't happen ?
Are there questions that remain unanswered ?

14.How do you feel your needs can be addressed?
i.e. Health, justice, truth etc

Those responsible for the disappearances:

15. Why did republican paramilitaries disappear individuals ?

What was the impact for your family and the wider community

16.Do you feel safe in your community ?

Has this changed over time ?

17. Do you feel the Good Friday Agreement had any impact on the issue of addressing the issue of the disappeared ?

Independent Commission for the Location of Victims Remains:

18. What difference has the work of the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims Remains (known as the Disappeared Commission) made to your family?

In the case of those recovered – did the Commission recover your loved one?

19. Is there anything you would change in relation to?

- **The Disappeared Commission, or**
- **The legislation that it works from?**

  i.e. The Commission is limited in what it can tell- are you content that this is the case?

Is there anything you want that the Commission can't provide because of how they are have to work?

Is there anything else you wish to add that I haven't asked you about ?