"That's what they won't take from you": Irish rebel music as a resistance practice in contemporary radical Republican community

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The article presents the results of online fieldwork among the members of contemporary Irish Republican community, including physical-force Republicans, on the matter of genre boundaries and performative contexts of Irish rebel music as seen in said community. Part of the field data has been accumulated via email and phone interviews, and part has been collected from respondents via an anonymous Telegram channel. In reliance on this data, the author explores the performative functions of rebel music as established in scholarly literature, as well as attitudes of the informants towards the proclaimed "new" rebel music such as "dissident" gangsta rap (the latter is definitely not considered by the informants as even remotely Republican). Several points are argued, namely, the fact that rebel music can essentially be seen as *hidden transcript* as outlined by James Scott; the pragmatics of rebel music within radical Republican community are closely related to the need to counter the systemic public stigma experienced by Republicans; and that adherence to specific Republican values is crucial to ingroup definitions of genre boundaries and pragmatics. Whether there might have been a shift in attitude in radical Republican community towards punk scene, is also investigated.

Keywords: The Troubles, Irish rebel music, physical force Republicanism, Irish Republican Army, Irish Republicanism, Republican Sinn Féin.

«То, что им у тебя никогда не отнять»: ирландская повстанческая музыка как практика сопротивления в сообществе современных радикальных республиканцев

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В статье представлены результаты онлайн-полевой работы в сообществе современных ирландских республиканцев, включая сторонников вооруженной борьбы, касательно жанровых границ и перформативных контекстов ирландской повстанческой музыки (так, как она понимается в рамках означенного сообщества). Часть полевых материалов собиралась посредством телефонных интервью и интервью по электронной почте, а часть была собрана у респондентов посредством анонимного телеграм-канала. На основе этих данных автор рассматривает как уже известные в научной литературе перформативные функции повстанческой музыки, так и отношение информантов к так называемой новой повстанческой музыке («диссидентский» гангста-рэп и т. д.), которая респондентами никоим образом не причисляется к республиканской. Доказывается ряд тезисов, а именно, что повстанческую музыку можно рассматривать как *hidden transcript* в терминологии Дж. Скотта; что прагматика повстанческой музыки в сообществе радикальных республиканцев тесно связана с необходимостью противостоять системной публичной стигме, направленной на республиканцев; и что следование специфическим республиканским ценностям критично для внутригруппового определения границ жанра и его прагматики. Также исследуется вопрос возможной смены отношения сообщества радикальных республиканцев к панк-сцене.

Ключевые слова: конфликт в Ольстере, ирландская повстанческая музыка, радикальные республиканцы, Ирландская республиканская армия, ирландские республиканцы, Republican Sinn Féin.

This article is meant to be a part — and a first step, however tentative it may be — of a larger research project dedicated to contemporary Irish Republican community, specifically the community of those who did not accept the Good Friday Agreement and remain committed to the ideas of abstentionism and — not univocally, but to a very large extent [McGlinchey 2019: 144–170] — of armed resistance against British presence in Ireland. These radical Republican activists, both veterans of The Troubles and the younger generations, have been the subject of many scholarly books and papers — mostly in the field of social and political studies, and quite understandably so. My focus, however, is meant to be purely anthropological. The subject of this particular study is the pragmatics of Irish rebel music within contemporary militant Republican community.

But before I put my pen to paper any further, I should express my sincere gratitude to my informants, who took the time to answer my questions despite the massive inconvenience and risk, and were most kind and supportive to me every step along the way. I can only hope that my research does them justice.

Introduction

Nationalist folk music is crucial for constructing and transmitting a nation's identity — both on the conceptual level [Bohlman 2010: 92] and on that of performative practices and actional codes [Bohlman 2010: 95], and is specifically vital to the regions and cultures where matters of identity are, or were until the very recent times, a matter of very real politics and sometimes of literal life and death — such as the Balkans, Basque Country or Ireland. A non-political folk music canon, being as flexible and impersonal (and therefore possessing an unparalleled capacity of becoming personal to any performer) as oral tradition alone could be, obtains political incarnations and effectively becomes weaponized. One can recall the iconic "This machine kills fascists" sticker on Woody Guthrie's guitar to grasp the sentiment; or the 1747 ban on Highland bagpipe music unless played by a British Scots regiment that effectively placed folk

music under the same terms as weapons; or, for probably the closest example to the topic of our research, the rise of Albanian turbofolk in the 1990s Balkans, when Albanian folk music with distinctive Ottoman musical influence became an militant emblem of Albanian identity — specifically in response to Serbian anti-Albanian stigma that arose due to the conflict around Kosovo, and centered on presumed Albanian Islamism. On the other hand, the distinctively "Western" Albanian folk music became a nationalist folk music of its own, but this time putting an emphasis on Albanian Europeanness [Sugarman 2007: 295–297].

It is important to note that, just as with a bearer of a non-political folk tradition, who, if talented enough, can become a "professional" folk performer while retaining their "civilian", non-performer professional identity, the line between militant activists of a national liberation movement and performers of rebel folk music is also thin and blurry. For example, Marko "Thompson" Perković, a renown Croatian singer of Nationalist persuasion, was himself a participant of the Croatian War of Independence and wrote one of his later hit songs, *Bojna Čavoglave,* from personal experience of defending his native village.

Speaking of Irish rebel folk music, the essentiality of it to Irish Republican / Nationalist discourse is rarely underestimated. Unfolding on this in diachronic perspective, one may invoke rapparee ballads and poetry of the 17th and 18th centuries, or even earlier Gaelic-Norman literary lore that contributed to the construction of a new Irish identity, one going beyond mere pedigrees and bringing political and religious stance and cultural heritage in the limelight. This approach, which originated to provide a wider concept of Irishness that the newly assimilated Norman elite would fit into, soon became a notable element of the pro-Gaelic, pro-Catholic and pro-independence narrative that found its scholarly pinnacle in Geoffrey Keating's "Foras Feasa ar Éirinn". Keating, himself a close acquaintance with bardic tradition and the remnants of filidecht, places a heavy emphasis on the cultural component of this new political Irishness. What interests us in this regard is the pragmatic aspect of rebel music — its role in constructing, supporting and directing the political community. The exact performative context of the earlier rebel musical culture, i. e. the rapparee ballads mentioned above, is not easy to discern due to the obvious unattainability of participant observation. But fast forward to the more recent times. Richard Parfitt and Stephen Millar provide an extensive portrayal of how musical culture became crucially intertwined with Irish resistance movement in its many later incarnations, from mid-19th century to the years of The Troubles. The key landmarks in between those here would of course be the Easter Rising of 1916, the War of Independence and the Civil War (and its outcome, quite unfortunate for the pro-independence party). The Easter Rising figure most prominently known in connection with Irish rebel songs will be, of course, James Connolly — who advocated the use of rebel music in political struggle and wrote and published quite a number of rebel songs. Although songs by Connolly largely remained unincorporated into the rebel musical tradition, Connolly himself became the subject of many a rebel song that remains sung to this day [Millar 2020: 71].

The initial indifference of the authorities both sides of the border towards rebel music, which was not at the time perceived as an act of defiance *per se* [Parfitt 2020: 151], was not unanimous. For example, a heated dispute that took place in Dáil Éireann in 1962 concerning "Éire, Sean is Nua", a children's comic book on Irish history, featured a mention of a schoolboy singing "The Ballad of Seán Sabhat" (sic!) as an example of the book's presumed success in promoting Republican ideas and the general failure of the state to preserve public order as the speaker saw it [Dáil Éireann debate 2018, March 11]. That is, the performative act

of singing a song commemorating the death of Seán South (or, more so, the act of teaching a child this song) was perceived as a distinctively political gesture, considerable enough to be brought up as an argument in a parliamentary hearing.

In the following years, as the confrontation in the North became more and more physical, music played the increasingly important role as the antagonizing factor. Its potential in regard to community consolidation and promotion of Republican ideas did not go unnoticed as well [Parfitt 2020: 177–178]. Further cultivation of Republican rebel music as a distinct genre with certain textual conventions went hand in hand with its growing performative significance — and the corresponding escalation of state violence cemented performing (and listening to) rebel music as an act of rebellion in its own right [Parfitt 2020: 167–171].

Such textual conventions, having formed throughout the 20th century, can be described as follows:

> – commemoration of previous iterations of the struggle and outlining a continuity between the events of the past and the contemporary struggle [Millar 2020: 11–12, 70];
>
> – narratives of heroic self-sacrifice and Republican martyrdom, which — as should also be noted — take special prominence since the Hunger Strike [Ó Cadhla 2017: 271];
>
> – struggle for social justice in general, not limited to specifically Irish discourse [Millar 2020: 11–12].

Perception of rebel music as a political, or even more so, a military gesture, one of active defiance, was commonplace in the Republican community of the North during The Troubles and persists in the post-1998 era. Stephen Millar highlights several crucial roles rebel music thus plays. Firstly, it helps build the community identity, as Stephen Millar puts it, "allows republican audiences access to a specific form of working-class Irish republican identity, one tied to complex notions of resistance" [Millar 2020: 204]. Secondly, it educates, transmitting the historical narrative and maintaining the perception of historical continuity between the generations of resistance in the eyes of the audience. Thirdly, it serves — or at least is proclaimed to serve — to encourage further engagement in said resistance, including the *de facto* continuing armed campaign. Nevertheless, since the Good Friday Agreement and within the mainstream narrative of successful peace process and the armed campaign being but a remnant of the dark years past, the music scene primarily associated with said campaign both in regard to its lyrics and to relevant performative practices founds itself in an ambiguous place. On one hand, rebel music is in most cases[1] "rebranded" by this mainstream narrative as a matter of historical memory, the heritage of a war won and over, not a relevant political commentary. On the other hand, the hardline Republican community would employ the very same repertoire as the songs not of the past but of the present, perceiving rebel music as an act of continuous resistance [Millar 2020: 196–197].

This said, all the above mentioned relates to the traditional Irish rebel music — the body of ballads routed in historical songs and lore of Irish resistance, with certain lyrical and musical conventions. These ballads can surely cross the lines between the two realms — those of the pro-peace and of the pro-continuing struggle narratives. For example, in 2003 rebel songs by The Wolfe Tones were

[1] Although "Only Our Rivers Run Free", for example, the lyrics of which are definitely centered around the present moment, is more or less accepted as a mainstream ballad as well.

removed from Aer Lingus flights after a complaint from a unionist passenger [Wolfe Tones pulled from Aer Lingus 2003]; at the same time, the band would appear on the RTÉ's Late Late Show in 2007. In 2018, Rod Stewart made it public that he was banned from singing the ballad "Grace" on BBC — as the song was dedicated to the prominent Irish Republican and the widow of the Easter Rising leader George Plunkett, Grace Gifford Plunkett, and was therefore considered "anti-English", although Stewart himself insisted that he saw the ballad as a love song only [Boylan 2018, September 29]. Rebel music would still make it to BBC in 2020 though — both "Come Out Ye Black and Tans", an iconic rebel ballad, and "The Men Behind The Wire", another Irish rebel song banned by RTÉ, were performed by Steve Coonan on his show "This Time with Alan Partridge" "just for the mischief" [O'Brien 2020, February 16], which sent "Come Out Ye Black and Tans" topping the charts in the UK [How Alan Partridge helped 2020, January 14].

Also in 2020, "Celtic Symphony" by The Wolfe Tones, with its "Up the RA" lyrics, was played from a Sinn Féin election van in County Cavan [Pro-IRA song played 2020, February 6] — despite the party pointedly distancing itself from the armed resistance discourse and vocally denouncing radical Republicanism. David Cullinane, Sinn Féin TD for Waterford, was caught on video chanting the same. The media did not take these episodes lightly — despite Cullinane later insisting that the comments weren't about here and now and that they "were about the past, they were not about the future, the IRA is gone as everybody knows" [Bryant 2020, February 11]. "Come Out Ye Black and Tans" would also be sung first in protests against the Black and Tans' commemorations in Ireland, and then by Sinn Féin supporters during the elections. This too was seen as sectarian by the press. Brian Warfield, the lead songwriter of The Wolfe Tones, denied that singing either of these songs invoked political rather than historical connotations: "It says in that song «tell them how the IRA made them run like hell away». What is wrong with that? That is the truth of our history" [Grennan 2020, February 13].

Such instances can be listed further and further, but while the performative effect of the songs and the reaction to them might differ, the song material remains the same.

Nevertheless, 2017 saw the surprising dawn of the self- and media-proclaimed "new Irish rebel music". West Belfast rap trio KNEECAP exploit the visual and textual codes commonly associated with militant Republican aesthetics: from posing in balaclavas to selling merchandise that can be mistaken for purely political by spectators out of the context. For example, a person who was visiting Dublin on a student exchange program took a photo of a KNEECAP sticker and explicitly attributed it as a "political sticker" on social media (this photo is reproduced here with her kind permission, see *Ill. 1*).

> [Why did you decide that this sticker was political?] It deals with the realm of how the state functions (Ireland) and the realm of international relations (Ireland — England). That is, in principle, what politics is. [I see. But what exactly did tell this to you? The picture, the slogan in the top, or everything pieced together?] I guess, that was due to everything pieced together. [Thanks. And the caption in the bottom — KNEECAP — what is this and what is it about, in your opinion? Or you paid little attention to it whatsoever?] It was the last thing I noticed, and I thought that this might have been a name of some group of fighters for Irish unity, the ones that were posting these stickers. But I didn't check it out later, I sort of forgot about that[2].

[2] Interview taken in a written conversation on social media.



Illustration. A KNEECAP sticker on a lamppost in Dublin. Photo by A. S.

We can see here how the distinctive visual code (the Tricolour; the slogan; the no-border map of Ireland — a traditional piece of Republican imagery since at least the 1950s) helps the band sticker mimic after a political message, convincingly enough for the outgroup audience. As for the ingroup audience, that is, the citizens of Ireland both sides of the border, this also seems to do the trick. On one hand, members of the band admit in an interview that they are, in part, driven by the desire for iconoclasm which, in their opinion, is the only way to speak of the unspeakable:

> Móglaí Bap says: "They couldn't talk about this stuff. A lot of people carry that trauma still. For us, we take this opportunity to actually have a joke about it and look at everything and discuss it all, that's what our point is: nothing is safe from having the piss taken out of it. It's all in the equation" [Mullally 2019, April 12].

On the other hand, what is interesting about KNEECAP, is that the band's stance is presented as being at least partially genuine. The band style themselves as advocates of Irish language, claim rebel songs to be a musical influence on them and, while openly parodying the IRA and RAAD videos and glorifying drug use in their lyrics, would at the same time chant "Brits Out", utilize samples from "Come Out Ye Black and Tans" and accept the label of the "new Irish rebel music" that the media would almost unanimously assign to them [Conway 2020, March 24]. As Móglaí Bap, a member of the trio, himself puts it in an interview, "It's satire and it's not. The art's in the not knowing" [Lanigan 2019, June 14].

The other peculiar thing about Irish rebel music scene is that, despite the traditional placement of Republican movement into the far left of the political spectrum (albeit, as Marisa McGlinchey observes, not as uniformly as one would believe from the popular imagery [McGlinchey 2019: 69–70]), punk scene, a known voice of pro-socialist and pro-independence protest, did not assume that position as far as Ireland is concerned. Moreover, Irish punk scene during The Troubles was deliberately and pointedly apolitical in most of the cases, challenging the very idea of the division rather than picking a side [Heron 2015].

Therefore, my research goals for this article were the following:

a) to examine the definition, genre borders and performative role of rebel music as currently seen by Republican activists themselves — including those involved in the armed struggle;

b) to investigate if any "new rebel music" (including a possible shift in attitudes to punk) is really accepted and seen as rebel in the actual radical Republican community.

Field assessment and methodology (with a dash of spy thriller)

One of the major complications in my research was that at this stage I had to conduct it online from overseas. This made entering the field a lot more challenging, as I had limited possibilities of interaction with potential informants. For the above-ground part of my research, I reached out to major radical Republican political parties via email and social media — that is, to Republican Sinn Féin and Saoradh. Unfortunately, I never heard back from Saoradh, therefore, my fieldwork here is sadly limited in that regard. Republican Sinn Féin, on the other hand, kindly directed me to an esteemed activist who gave me a series of interviews both in writing and on the phone. Independently from that line of fieldwork, I have, after a prolonged period of networking, procured an anonymous contact of a person on Telegram who was presumed to be connected to more militant Republican activists. I have outlined the design of my research in the same manner as I did while reaching out to Republican Sinn Féin and Saoradh, and the person considered that some of the activists might be interested to partake in it. Nevertheless, both my anonymous contact and me were facing the challenge of securing extra safety of the potential informants' personal data, the challenge that went far beyond everyday academia standards due to extremely sensitive nature of my potential informants' presumed affiliations. To ensure this, an anonymous Telegram channel was used to communicate and to transfer the data, so that I would have no knowledge of my informants' personal details, locations, etc. Besides, I was careful to draft my questions in such a way that no answers to them could be considered potentially incriminating. All in all, I was able to accumulate 10 responses along this line. I asked my informants, both underground and "above-ground", the following:

a) whether the respondent identifies themselves as a Republican;

b) what function, significance and role, in their experience and opinion, does rebel music have in Republican community and Republican activism;

c) what would they consider exactly to constitute rebel music, and what would be the typical situations/practices in the community in regard to playing rebel music / listening to it;

d) and, last but not least, what was their opinion on artists exploiting paramilitary Republican imagery, and whether there would be any intersection between rebel music scene and socialist and anarchist punk scene and vice versa.

It should also be noted that, while coronavirus pandemic put my plans and arrangements for an actual field trip on hold, it made certain participant observation practices more readily available, such as attending concerts and fundraising gigs online; this has also been accounted for during the interpretation of my research.

The fact that none of my respondents were connected to Saoradh and doctrinally related Republican bodies was of a great importance to my research. Irish Republican community has been known for its extreme diversity; in fact, the sanctity of said diversity and the right to disagree with the "party line" was one of the crucial factors to the initial Republican split between Provisional Sinn Féin and Republican Sinn Féin [McGlinchey 2019: 44–47]. And of all these many diverse facets of Republican doctrine, Republican Sinn Féin is probably the most

inclusive of all. Two factors contribute to this: first, RSF being the oldest and most continuous strand of Republican movement, by definition embracing the widest range of its facets, and second, it being the only radical Republican party with a clear positive program, namely, *Éire Nua*. Said program literally sanctifies pluralism as one of the founding pillars of the new Republican democracy [Éire Nua: 15]. Therefore, while all Irish Republican creeds include both a cultural and civic Nationalist element and a Socialist element, the exact perception of what constitutes proper Nationalism and Socialism would differ a great lot depending on the individual / group [McGlinchey 2019: 57], from a more conservative stance to proper by the book Marxism-Leninism, and the views expressed by the people whose creed would be Éire Nua would probably be the most diverse and pluralistic of all. This is reflected in the data I gathered, as some of my respondents highlight the importance of national identity and their priorities clearly lean towards the Nationalist dimension of the doctrine, while the others tend to prioritize the Socialist aspect and reflect within a distinctively Marxist framework. This, on one hand, makes the opinions I dwell upon properly diverse; on the other hand, they would lack the uniformity of, say, Connolly Youth Movement or abovementioned Saoradh.

"Music was always something more": Genre boundaries and performative contexts

When asked to define what they would consider rebel music, some of my informants were rather conservative in conventions of the genre, providing a list of model rebel bands or specifying that, in their opinion, rebel music was synonymous to traditional music to a very large extent:

> Rebel songs are basically traditional songs / ballads for me. It's sometimes the same, sometimes it's not. There were likes of Christie Moore but that's before he sold out like many sadly did. Wolfe Tones much better, that's why you won't hear them on RTE or anywhere in the mainstream media. Plus there are The Irish Brigade, Eire Og, Charlie and the Bhoys and many others. I'd say in most of Irish towns there's a band or two like that[3].

> Wolfe Tones, The Druids, Eire Og, Charlie and the Bhoys, The Irish Brigade, pretty much all the bands hated by RTE, BBC and McCausland and the likes[4].

> Irish rebel songs are, first of all, the songs of the RA, from the times of the 1916 to nowadays. Those are also the least acceptable songs in the mainstream media. The songs about the earlier rebellions and risings might also count as they are the part of our history, rebel history[5].

We can see that in these band lists the contraposition of genuine rebel music scene to mainstream media and to artists of maybe the same repertoire, but nevertheless accepted by the mainstream media, is vital. Other respondents would not be as specific. But the common denomination in regard to genre boundaries would be the thematic conventions, in which the historical continuity, remembrance and transmission of knowledge, on one hand, and more general value paradigms, on the other hand, would constitute the two founding pillars:

[3] Handout 2.
[4] Handout 4.
[5] Handout 10.

> For me the songs of Irish rebellions are the rebel songs. It is all the same through the centuries. So Wild Geese, United Irishmen, Fenians, RA — all follow the same path. Another matter is the social protest songs. It is not the fight only (sic! — *M. M.*) to be a nation once again. It is the fight for better and equal future for Irish people[6].

> There's a difference between the rebel music and the rebel bands. Many of the mainstream bands and/or musicians would sing one rebel ballad or the other. Won't make them republicans or dissidents. But every single song about the struggle might be seen as a rebel song[7].

> Basically all the RA songs (old and new), songs of social protest, like No Use for him and stuff. I'd call CSC (Celtic Soccer Club — *M. M.*) songs of the Green Brigade too, cause there's strong Republican sentiment there[8].

> Now we have many. Very old ones, the ones from the 19th century, the Easter Rising songs, the War of Independence songs, Civil War songs, Border War, The Troubles and Civil Rights songs. That will be what you call Rebel ballads. Then it is working class struggle, so those ballads also rebel songs. Irish, Scottish, American sometimes. No borders for that. There are also Celtic FC songs. Their board will act like nothing but there is the unity of spirit[9].

> Rebel ballads are the ones that tell the story of our fight. Modern heroes, heroes of '16 and before that it's also the ballads of protest like during the water tax, anti-eviction, in support of workers and nurses. Real social justice is a part of it[10].

> There are plenty of bands, some of the more mainstream ones who would sing some rebel song or the other. I also count those who sing in support of the homeless people, "Save Moore St.", many other (there is too many to name, in the FS (Free State — *M. M.*) alone)[11].

> For me rebel songs and protest songs are the two sides of one coin. We fight not just for the 32 but for social equality, racial equality[12].

These common values necessarily manifested, as can be seen from the quotes above, well exceed the historically established mutual support and intersection, to a large degree, between Republican and other communities[13]. While all of the informants, including the "above-grounds" informants, did stress out the utmost importance of historical discourse in whether a song would count as a rebel song, only a minority (the authors of Handouts 2 and 10) would more or less limit the thematic convention to the history of Irish resistance. With the majority of the informants, any song in protest against social injustice and oppression can make it to the pantheon of rebel texts. This fact, apart from the obvious notion of simple human empathy, is closely tied, in my opinion, not to the comparative lack of manifested social conflict, as would be with those who do not see themselves as a part of continuing struggle [Millar 2020: 199], but to specific Republican code of values that would be properly outlined further.

Before dwelling on that further, we should outline the functions of rebel music as highlighted by the informants. To some of the informants the primary function would be, of course, that of transmission of identity — not just political of

[6] Handout 9.
[7] Handout 8.
[8] Handout 1.
[9] Handout 3.
[10] Handout 6.
[11] Handout 7.
[12] Handout 5.
[13] Namely and as exemplified here, that of Celtic FC supporters — which can also be seen in visual and artifactual codes [Millar 2020: 161].

any sort, but distinctively Irish one (one of the informants would even prefer to identify themselves as the Irish patriot rather than Republican[14]). This very notion is closely connected to Scott's reflection on symbolic resistance, namely, to folk culture being inevitably tailored to expressing the cultural identity of the oppressed. We should also note that, according to Scott, importance of expressing a rebel identity is driven from the necessarily antagonistic subculture of the oppressors [Scott 2008: 157–158].

> Music for me is a part of Irish identity and always was such. Republican identity is for me another word for Irish identity or should be. So music and Republican identity are intertwined. Like in the past it was that poets were the leaders of rebellions against English, likes of Padraig Pearse or James Mangan or Bobby Sands. Basically for me it seems natural in our spirit and maybe rebel spirit in general[15].
>
> No Irish Republic without Irish people. No Irish people without Irish history, language, music, sport. It is a part of who we are and who should we be[16].
>
> For Irish people, in Irish culture, music was always something more. Without music and without history there won't be a nation[17].
>
> ‹...› it is an inspiration and also a way to always remember who we are[18].
>
> Irish republicanism was always more than just a political movement and/or military struggle against the foreign occupation. It was always intertwined with the Irish culture, language, traditions. That's why rebel music is so important in Republican movement and that's also why there's no such thing as "unionist music", for while the Republicans represent the nation, loyalists represent the state, the empire[19].

Here we can also recall what has been already mentioned in the introduction: the ideological diversity of the field. As we can see, two of the authors listed above seem to hold strong Nationalist views and place a notable emphasis on the importance of cultural and civic Irishness, while some of the further responses would place the emphasis of the social — and Socialist — dimension of the Republican discourse and relevant aspects of rebel music.

Informants also put an emphasis on the utmost importance of music in education, teaching and transmitting the concepts of historical continuity which are impossible to be narrated through public transcript. Oral culture, due to its inherent flexibility, is a perfect container for narratives otherwise abridged or censored [Scott 2008: 160–162], in this case — those highlighting the continuity of Irish Republican struggle:

> People of '16 and '19 frequently did not know a thing about Irish history before joining the RA. If they knew, they'd join way earlier. Brits won't teach Irish history or language. FG/FF now also doing all they can to sweep it under the carpet. So if not us, who'll teach? Other than that, song of struggle, of rebellion will keep you alive, will keep your spirits high. Just another reminder of what we [are] fighting for[20].
>
> Here if you heard of it, if you've listened, if you've learned something — it is a victory already[21].

[14] Handout 3.
[15] Handout 2.
[16] Handout 5.
[17] Handout 6.
[18] Handout 7.
[19] Handout 10.
[20] Handout 9.
[21] Handout 8.

And as with any resort to the past, and in memorial discourse in general, the commemorative aspect of music is also professed as vital within the community:

> In my opinion, the rebel music first and foremost inspires, it keeps the fire alive so we remember the sacrifices that were made…[22]
>
> In my opinion when we listen or sing our songs we show the respect to our great heroes and follow their footsteps. It is up to us to finish what they began, so it is an inspiration and also a way to always remember who we are[23].

What is of particular interest here is that not only the song material, but the very act of listening to rebel songs per se is seen an act of commemoration — and, with that (and as one of my informants had put it), also "an act of rebellion"[24]. Such semantic and significance and performativity is, in my opinion, to a very large extent grounded in the anti-Republican stigma in the public transcript that community would experience and to which my informants (apart from the abovementioned examples) would refer more than often:

> Kind of acceptable for them to blame Republicans for everything[25].
>
> To me this (public commemorative practices. — *M. M.*) is a way of countering the negative propaganda from the state demonizing Republicans. ‹…› And the state propaganda mentioned earlier does have an effect, I have been shunned by people once they know of my political beliefs and sadly it did effect my relationship with my mother once she became aware of my involvement[26].

One of the informants would also specifically point out that they were proud to be Republican[27].

This wide anti-Republican sentiment have been remarked upon by the scholars dwelling on the subject of limited popular support of post-GFA Republicanism [McGlinchey 2019: 166]. While the Easter Rising, the War of Independence and — to a certain extent — the pre-GFA IRA activity is generally portrayed as heroic past, or at least as complex and nuanced one, the state media and pop culture consensus on the post-GFA Republican campaign is almost univocally condemning. Diffemisms such as "terrorists", "violent dissident Republicans", etc. would constitute the default terms of description in regard to anti-Agreement Republicans, and go at great length to highlight how Republican initiatives are "unwanted in the community". Fiction and mass media would portray post-GFA Republicans as career criminals (despite direct vigilante action against career criminals and drug lords being characteristic of militant Republican community policing). As a Republican periodical *Saoirse* writes, academic censorship in Republican studies is also prominent [Dalton 2020: 10], which once again relates us to utmost importance of rebel music as a means of uncensored education. While all abovementioned does not deter radical Republicans from their activism (as both anti-Treaty and anti-GFA Republican legitimacy is, and always historically was, based in the continuity to the First Dáil Éireann, not in numbers of popular support [McGlinchey 2019: 166]), it does put a considerable moral strain on individuals in addition to personal security risks. Countering such stigma both on outgroup and ingroup level, while maintaining personal safety in the situation

[22] Handout 8.
[23] Handout 7.
[24] Phone interview 1.
[25] Handout 6, when referring to punk music.
[26] Email interview 1.
[27] Handout 5.

of oppression and criminalization, would demand for hidden practices as outlined by James Scott [Scott 2008: 138–139]. Aside from transmitting historical and memorial narratives not welcome in the public transcript to the outgroup, the community would vest formally "neutralized" song material with its original rebellious meaning via placing it into certain performative contexts, i. e. specific marked locations. As Stephen Millar notes, there would be a big difference in how a song is perceived depending on whether it is played in a "mainstream" or a "hardline" Republican venue [Millar 2020: 196].

My informants have also referred to specific pub culture and the importance of correct location for an authentic experience of rebel music:

> There are many places to listen to such. ‹...› Less in touristic places, too plastic, too much cash around. Won't be a rich rebel[28].

> I'd say in most of Irish towns there's a band or two like that. Now there are also festivals of ballad bands so that's about it[29].

As James Scott puts it, there are two strategies of preserving anonymity within symbolic resistance: concealing the *action* or concealing the *actor* [Scott 2008: 148–152]. Attending a specific location that by its very nature reverts a text that has been appropriated into public transcript into its original rebellious self, can be interpreted as the former — not unlike Jacobite taverns three hundred years before. While attending a venue might seem a neutral action in itself to an outgroup spectator, and formally is so, attending avenue with a known established community associated with (and contrapositive to the mainstream as well) it is, in fact, a statement made without a statement, and a perfect performative hidden transcript. As Stephen Millar's informants note, showing up to play the very same repertoire in an unrepentant Republican venue would often mark a musician in the future as a person non grata in a Provisional Sinn Féin venue and vice versa [Millar 2020: 196]. Besides, the actual meaning of some songs would remain hidden from a person from outside of the community. One can also recall a story by Christy Moore (from the 1970s, long before he "sold out", as one of my respondents puts it). As rebel songs were unofficially (but no less effectively for that) banned from Irish media, Moore wrote a song that could be easily mistaken by a non-Republican listener for a love song with no political overtones, which enabled him to get it in rotation on RTÉ. There it remained for six weeks, until a well-meaning contributor to the Republican paper *An Phoblacht* wrote a piece explaining the song's actual meaning, after which it was, of course, banned as well [Ó Cadhla 2017: 266–267].

Speaking of Republican songs accepted into the public transcript, we should also note that, as with previously mentioned historical narratives, some of which are considered more "appropriate" and "peaceful" than the others, the "taming" of rebel discourse by appropriation is anything but new from diachronic perspective. The public discourse lays claim on some of rebel practices, narratives and texts, reframing them as "historical" and thus placing them within the realm of cultural heritage with no immediate political relevance: this exact same mechanism proved its effectiveness in the later half of the 18th century, reframing a militantly "rebel" Scottish Gaelic culture as that of imperial soldiers, and later — of courtroom "Jacobites" perfectly loyal to the Hanoverian throne, the most passionate "Jacobite" of all probably being George IV Hannover himself. Distinctively Gaelic imagery and music, that used to be an icon of anti-Britishness to the point of criminal

[28] Handout 1.
[29] Handout 2.

prosecution, would then become, during Victorian era, a visual emblem of Britishness. But unlike 18th century Scotland, in 21st century Ireland the memory of the past still remains a battleground between the rebels and those in power.

We can also note that all the public scandals described above have one important characteristic in common: they feature rebel music out of its conventional element, i. e. Republican venues and communities, and the backlash is motivated not as much by the song per se (which is usually very well-known regardless and hardly a shocking surprise for the audience) but by its existence "in the public" — blasting from an election van or broadcasted on an airplane. The very fact that the rebel discourse pours out into the "official" public space, where no wars are allowed to be mentioned indiscriminately, let alone waged, is seen as aggression.

That is not to say, however, that listening to rebel music lacks any tangible performativity. As I have already mentioned, I have attended two online concerts of rebel music, one hosted by Republican Sinn Féin and the other by Celtic FC supporters; both of the events were operationalized as charity fundraisers, the former in support of homeless people and the latter in support of a hospice. Attendees would be invited to send donations for charity recipients; thus, an act of symbolic rebellion would transform into an act of tangible community support. This quite aligns with already described notion of social justice as one of the prevalent thematic criteria of rebel music in the eyes of the informants. It should also be noted that Republican charity initiatives, while being politically inclusive and involving people from outside of Republican community, are seen by the activists as an inherent part of both Republican ideology and practice (Republican volunteers standing up for the vulnerable instead of a failed state), and a means to combat anti-Republican stigma[30]. Thus rebel music transcends from the realm of symbolic resistance to that of direct action with tangible consequences (namely, in case of the RSF event, providing the homeless). The militarization of the musical discourse can also be seen in fan practices during rebel music gigs. Millar describes both fans and musicians in Belfast invoke machine gun fire by audial and performative imitation [Millar 2020: 170], and the audience's behavior traditionally involved a lot of physical activity, as can be seen in various recordings of iconic rebel music gigs[31].

The one facet of rebel music pragmatics that might have been expected, especially from militant informants, was solely absent though, and that was utilizing rebel music as deliberate propaganda aimed at outgroup audience. The informants would, of course, mention the importance of rebel music as inspiration for continuing the struggle; but all these narratives would be distinctively ingroup and even more so, distinctively personal:

> I think it's hard not to sing, like when it's a hunger or a war, or a rebellion, or poverty, or you're homeless; that's something you will not lose. That's what they won't take from you in prison camp or block cell. That's why it is still there and will always be[32].
>
> Other than that, song of struggle, of rebellion will keep you alive, will keep your spirits high. Just another reminder of what we [are] fighting for[33].

The addressee of such message conveyed by a song, as perceived by the bearers of the radical Republican tradition themselves, are the members of the militant

[30] Phone interview 1.

[31] For example, this recording of a Shebeen live performance from the pre-GFA era: https://youtu.be/fG480s3XqqE.

[32] Handout 4.

[33] Handout 9.

Republican community, not an outgroup audience that needs to be "radicalized" — to the contrary of what might have been relayed of some musicians' experiences during The Troubles [Millar 2020: 178–180]. They form more of an inner narrative, aimed at sustaining dignity and dedication of the addressant-immediately-turned-addressee while maintaining a persecuted and stigmatized identity. The song serves as the manifest of the deepest personal self — not an outside illustration but an immanent part of lived personal experience. As other informants put it,

> At work we sing, at the party we sing, in prison we sing, at wake we sing, in the church we sing. People have songs for all struggles and all the occasions. We have our own songs for our own struggle[34].

> We sing of what we see. It's like in Marx. Basically we have the most rebel songs cause we had and have the most rebellions. Still going[35].

Drawing the preliminary conclusions to this part of my essay, one might suggest that:

– The very act of listening to / performing a rebel song does not just allude to active rebellion but, according to ingroup perception, *is* active rebellion, as it means sustaining a prosecuted and heavily stigmatized identity.

– Rebel music is transformed from a simple educative / commemorative narrative into an act of defiance due to a marked context, be it a specific location, a specific performer known as such, or a specific pragmatic context.

– While educating the general audience upon historical narratives is seen as an important function of rebel music, encouragement pragmatics are exclusively ingroup and are not seen as deliberate "propaganda" aimed at outgroup audience but exist within personal contexts.

– Strict adherence to Republican principles (altruism, active agency in pursuit of social justice, empathy, self-identification with the heroes of old and with the oppressed) is crucial to defining genre boundaries, which is also reflected in genre pragmatics within the community.

All in all, we can reasonably consider that, in ingroup radical Republican performance and perception of rebel music, one of the key pragmatic functions would be ingroup countering of outgroup anti-Republican stigma, both on state media and interpersonal levels.

"It's not a game and they waste it": Attitudes to "dissident" imagery in popular music culture

The attitudes towards the so called "new rebel music" amidst my informants constituted a wide range from very vocal disdain to indifference. With the non-military informants, according to phone interviews conducted, indifference was found to be prevalent:

> Nobody really cares. Now, if people want to use that imagery — and they got away with that... Basically, indifferent. Absolutely indifferent[36].

As with military informants, some did express the same point of view:

[34] Handout 3.
[35] Handout 1.
[36] Phone interview 2.

> Neither rap nor punk posers represent our ideals. So no, they have nothing to do with us. Couldn't care less about them[37].
>
> In case of Kneecap it's mostly an attempt to create the "Irish" gangsta style[38].
>
> That's just a poor attempt to shock the audience and journalists. But there's no love to RUC/PSNI among all kinds of people, so there's that. If they want to be chancers it's up to them[39].
>
> Rap is also mostly for pose[40].
>
> They are posers, like the Cranberries was, muppets[41].
>
> I personally don't know of them, too old for that. If they want, they might just as well. They won't like it, though, no Porsche cars and naked girls here[42].

In some cases, this indifference was visibly laced with disdain:

> Don't think they understand what they are doing. Balaclava is more than a mask. Like the brimmer before[43]. Won't go as far as to call it blasphemy but that's fucking stupid[44].

And some informants voiced their disdain in no unclear terms:

> Kneecap is a bunch of gobshites. It's not a game and they waste it. Could do some good tho, but not going to[45].
>
> KNEECAP is not what we stand for, it's the opposite. I'd say like they [are] worse than many American rappers, cause they actually do promote the stuff other than describe the reality. What I think, is that their "dissident" looks's a bunch of morons[46].

From these, we can say for sure that the so called "new rebel music", for all its balaclavas and chants, is not at all accepted by the *actual* people in balaclavas — to put that lightly. As with textual codes in what has been explored above, visual imagery and exploitation of some slogans is not enough to constitute any authenticity — only actual values and ideals are, to which the ideas voiced in KNEECAP lyrics (hedonism, glorifying drug use, "gangster" lifestyle) are obviously contrary, and even seem as harmful in some cases (especially given that, as one of my informants writes, Republican activists fight "not just for the 32"[47], but for a better society in general). Appeal to the visual codes commonly associated with militant Republicanism is seen either as little short of blasphemy (as those are vested with great symbolic significance), or as skating on thin ice — effectively asking for state repercussions while, at the same time, severely underestimating the actual stigma surrounding Republican activism (which has been discussed above).

The same priorities can be seen in informants' attitudes to punk scene. Everyone generally would confirm, with varying degree of criticism, that there is no considerable intersection between punk scene and rebel music scene:

[37] Handout 9.
[38] Handout 10.
[39] Handout 8.
[40] Handout 6.
[41] Handout 4.
[42] Handout 3.
[43] The brimmer referred to by the author is a centerpiece of another classic rebel song — "The Broad Black Brimmer". The protagonist, inheriting his late father's IRA uniform (including the brimmer in question), continues his path and struggle.
[44] Handout 5.
[45] Handout 1.
[46] Handout 2.
[47] Handout 6.

> Punk music has little relation to the cause around here. Some of the guys might be sympathetic but that's just generalities. Personally they are the same to me, like empty headed idiots singing Roll of Honour for fun. If God would grant them some brains that would be a blessing[48].

> Punk bands are mostly about neutrality and things like that, but they are fine. I know personally lads who do the volunteering, helping the homeless and such, so they are punks. But they don't sing much about the Rep. ideas. Some might have them tho, but they won't speak up that much[49].

> I don't think they ARE the republicans but if they want to help it's okay. No such thing as unnecessary help. Plus they might help in some other matters, not republican ones but in more general sense[50].

> Punk music in diaspora might sing some rebel songs (see DKM, The Pogues, etc.) however that won't make them republicans per se[51].

> Maybe. But no mainstream bands. They are mostly posers / West Brits. Kind of acceptable for them to blame Republicans for everything. There are non-Irish bands like Black'47[52] or Banda Bassotti[53]. Less so in Ireland[54].

> Punk is mostly pro-Republican in the US, not here[55].

> The old punk will be about peaceful cooperation and other shite (or about just booze and love, craic and all). New ones are scared the shite of all ‹...› like they might be good bands and all but it's no Republican music. I listen to some Basque punk and Italian punk though, they are closer to the idea. Sadly[56].

As can be seen from these quotes, including the repertoire traditionally associated with rebel music into a mainstream and non-Republican punk band set list will be seen as an appropriation of Republican cultural codes rather than a profession of solidarity. The concept of this solidarity is, again, axiologically driven: informants would mention members of punk subculture who partake in community help and the struggle for social justice, but unless the ideas are spoken out vocally, that would remain on individual, not group level. As we can see, shared values that can be described as Republican are more important than thematic conventions or borrowing of some traditional "rebel" repertoire — as well as musicians' willingness to be recognized as Republicans (which, once again, relates us to the aspect of countering the anti-Republican stigma). So in some instances, punk bands would be seen as somewhat closer to allies — but then again, based on personal views and biographies of people involved:

> Punk like Pogues? There is Birmingham Six song and I think his grandparents were in the 3rd Tipp. Brigade. Punk is not my cuppa but they might do[57].

We can see here how the presumed Republican family background of Shane McGowan contributes to the author's more positive attitude to punk scene (a long way from "West Brits" of the other author indeed), but nevertheless, the

[48] Handout 8.
[49] Handout 1.
[50] Handout 7.
[51] Handout 10.
[52] An American Celtic Rock band active in 1989–2014 that used to refer to Irish Republican struggle more than often. The band's name itself is the traditional term for the summer of 1847, the worst year of the Great Famine in Ireland.
[53] An Italian ska-punk band known for its political lyrics inspired by Communist and anti-Fascist ideas.
[54] Handout 6.
[55] Handout 4.
[56] Handout 2.
[57] Handout 3.

general pattern remains unbroken. Values conflicting with Republican ideas, be those promotion of drug use and criminality or political apathy on principle, would overrule both visual codes or even some common points in matters of politics. Adhering to a specific moral code would be the principal element in the rebel musical narrative.

It is also interesting to note that nationality and/or cultural identity of a band will not be that much of an issue. This is in agreement with general Republican sentiment towards the diaspora (radical Republicans being one of the few Irish communities accepting of Irish diaspora and validating diaspora Irishness — which has historical roots in diaspora support for Irish Republican struggle)[58]. Besides, the musical canon of Irish rebel music dwells on the 19th century canon of Irish urban ballads — which, in turn, emerged and was first recorded in the diaspora [Bohlman 2010: 81].

Conclusions

The extreme performativity of Irish rebel music within contemporary radical Republican community is to a large extent due to the public stigma, with which maintaining Republican identity is inherently associated. With rebel music thus becoming a hidden transcript, its main performative functions are that of sustaining and preserving the persecuted and heavily stigmatized identity, of transmitting it, and of assisting the members of the ingroup in struggle with that stigma on the personal level and maintenance of the dignity and determination that are put under considerable pressure. As such, the core of the rebel music and what is considered or not considered to constitute it, would be the specific value system, to which altruism, agency and unindifference to the suffering of others would be central. This value system would prove as important as the identity and heritage aspects, transcending thematic conventions and Ireland/diaspora Irishness division, and would also warrant resentment to the self-proclaimed "new" rebel music — which, despite all the decorum, will not be seen as rebel and/or Republican by the actual Republican community in the slightest. On the other hand, the perception of rebel music as an instrument of deliberate and calculated propaganda, was nowhere to be found among my informants; they would seek to keep the spirits high first and foremost within their own community[59] — thus responding to outgroup pressure.

Of course, this study is concise by necessity, because such a topic calls for prolonged in-person fieldwork on a much larger scale and with a much richer methodology, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, etc. But still, I do hold my hopes that this shall be the first and tentative step to a much bigger research, and that I will explore and re-explore this theme in the future.

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[59] Same point of view expressed by Republican musicians can be found in: [Millar 2020: 173].

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