

Surviving whistleblowing in the military – a personal, professional and ethical journey

Capt.(ret) Dr. Tom Clonan



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The Rape of Proserpine, Sculptures in the Galleria Borghese (Rome)

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Foreword

There have been many attempts to evolve coherent theoretical models to describe the act and processes of whistleblowing in the workplace. This chapter consists of a self-reflective account of my own experience of whistleblowing as a serving army officer – Captain – in the Irish Armed Forces during the period 1996 – 2000. As a commissioned officer, with command experience in high-tempo operational environments in Ireland and the Middle East, I completed a PhD by research with Dublin City University (DCU). The research explored the status and roles assigned female personnel in Ireland’s armed forces. The work revealed shockingly high levels of sexual violence against female personnel, including widespread allegations of sexual assault and rape. The findings, conclusions and recommendations of the research prompted what Transparency International, Ireland described as a ‘text book’ case of whistleblower reprisal against the author on the part of the Irish general staff.¹

This consisted of a sustained campaign of character assassination against the author, conducted in the Irish media in the summer and autumn of 2001, which alleged, inter alia, that the PhD research had been fabricated and the findings falsified with regard to sexual violence. The author and his family were also subjected to an intense and personal campaign of intimidation – including verbal harassment and physical assault – isolation and threats of criminal prosecution under the provisions of the Irish Official Secrets Act. In short, the Irish military authorities declared the PhD research to be ‘fake news’ and the author, a ‘persona non-grata’. There was a concerted attempt to destroy the reputation, livelihood and service record of the author – to render him a ‘non-person’ – to existentially

¹ <https://www.transparency.ie/taxonomy/term/229/all>

deny his military identity, his role as ethical researcher and his status as officer, scholar and good citizen.

This chapter sets out to describe this experience of whistleblowing, whistleblower reprisal and the aftermath – personal, professional and psychological – for the author. The chapter also sets out the positive consequences of the act of whistleblowing and the subsequent independent government enquiry – which vindicated the author’s research, findings and conclusions – for the Irish armed forces.

The self-reflective components of the chapter are written in the first person and describe the whistleblowing journey in distinct stages. Each stage is then discussed and analyzed within the context of recent theoretical treatments of the act and process of whistleblowing. In terms of phronesis, the chapter is an opportunity to articulate precisely the lessons learned on the part of the whistleblower, and within the context of the theoretical framework, to generate further insights and contribute to knowledge in the specific case of the academic researcher as whistleblower.

In terms of *Bildung*, this reflective chapter demonstrates clearly the manner in which the act of whistleblowing has positively impacted on the ethical, professional and intellectual development of both the whistleblower, and the Irish armed forces. As a consequence of the research-related whistleblowing, the Irish armed forces have transformed culturally with regard to equality, diversity and dignity in the workplace. As such, the Irish armed forces are better equipped to succeed in their mission, better fit to fight, and better able to survive and evolve as a pro-social organization in a rapidly changing, modern Irish Republic.

Due to the very public nature of the ‘whistleblower reprisal’ experienced by the author in the years following the publication of his PhD thesis, there have been a large number of newspaper articles, radio and television news broadcasts and considerable online commentary on this case. These print,

electronic and digital media publications date from 2000 to the present day. The author, in his capacity as a journalist (*Irish Times* Security Analyst 2001 – 2016; Columnist and Security Analyst, the *Journal.ie* 2016 – to date) has written a number of opinion and analysis pieces on whistleblower reprisal in the republic of Ireland. ²

The author, also wrote a book in 2013, *Whistleblower, Soldier, Spy* ³ which is a personal account of his experiences as an army officer in a combat environment, his experience of whistleblower reprisal and his experiences as a journalist covering the Global War on Terror in Syria, Iraq and Guantanamo Bay. The book, like the newspaper articles is a highly personal account of his experiences which has no theoretical or social scientific analysis. This chapter is the first time the author has contextualized his experiences within a theoretical framework. Its contribution to knowledge lies within its status as a social science case study which formally charts – in detail – the stages of the whistleblowing process and the subsequent whistleblower reprisal.

In terms of academic articles, Flynn, G., Hogan, J., and Feeney, S., (2019) recently wrote an article in the *Journal of Military Ethics* ⁴ which provides an overview of the definitions of whistleblowing and the stages of the whistleblowing process as they apply to this case. Flynn *et al* concentrate on secondary sources in their excellent article but do not incorporate the unique perspective – or detail – as presented here of the whistleblower's own experiences as professional soldier, doctoral researcher and whistleblower. Whilst other academic

² Clonan, T., "We need to tackle culture of whistleblower reprisal," *The Irish Times*, 20 April 2014; "Ireland never rewards whistleblowers like Maurice McCabe and me – It punishes us," *The Journal.ie*, 11th February 2017.

³ Clonan, T., *Whistleblower, Soldier Spy*, (Liberties Press, Dublin 2013).

⁴ Flynn, G., Hogan, J., Feeney, S., "Whistleblowing in the Irish Military: The Cost of Exposing Bullying and Sexual Harassment," (*Journal of Military Ethics*, 2019 <https://doi.org/10.1080/15027570.2019.1650454>).

articles have charted the nature of whistleblowing in the international military – with some noting the prevalence of whistleblower reprisal within military organizations⁵ – this chapter differs in that it provides an in-depth and forensic practical and theoretical analysis of the attempt by a military organization to systematically destroy the reputation and livelihood of an ethical researcher. The chapter’s significance lies in the manner in which it describes the attempt on the part of the Irish military authorities to existentially destroy the status of the whistleblower as an ethical researcher, army officer and good citizen. The chapter does so whilst incorporating the experience within an objective theoretical and analytical framework.

Note: For the reflective component of this paper, I have written personal reminiscences in italics. This is in order to distinguish the personal subjective experience from the broader theoretical context within which these experiences are located

⁵ Rehg, M., Miceli, M., Near, J., Van Scotter, J., ‘Antecedents and Outcomes of Retaliation Against Whistleblowers’, *Organisation Science*, (19 (2): 221-240, 2008).

1. Stages of psychological and emotional development related to internal whistleblowing in a military organization

As a Captain in the Irish armed forces, my status and role as organizational whistleblower can be clearly understood in my dual roles as serving officer and academic researcher pursuing a PhD. From the outset of my doctoral study, as discussed in detail in this Occasional Paper, I conducted my research fully under the formal supervision of both the university (Dublin City University, DCU) and the military chain of command. When I encountered data, gathered in interviews with my female colleagues, of bullying, sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, it became a categorical ethical imperative to report such findings and to end the shockingly high levels of sexual violence against women within the Irish armed forces. I became a de-facto whistleblower through the act of research. As a consequence of the subsequent Whistleblower Reprisal experienced by the author, my status as Whistleblower brought with it grave personal, professional and ethical consequences.

In much of the academic literature on whistleblowing, the whistleblower is often constructed as a ‘heroic’ and often ‘tragic’ figure. According to Kenny, in her work *Whistleblowing – Toward a New Theory*, whistleblowers are ‘perceived in an ambiguous way: sometimes seen as heroes and other times as traitors’.⁶ Kenny elaborates on the deeply ambiguous terms that are used to describe whistleblowers, such as ‘saints or rats’,⁷ to the extent that she concludes ‘It is clear that whistleblowing is ambiguous, contentious and poorly understood’.⁸

⁶ Kenny, K., *Whistleblowing: Toward a New Theory*, (1st edn, Harvard University Press 2019) 22.

⁷ *Ibid*: 23.

⁸ *Ibid*: 23.

Kenny is clear however, that the whistleblower is almost exclusively seen as a lone individual – an existential ‘hero’ who faces almost certain martyrdom for deviating from the group. She describes how whistleblowers are often regarded in organizations as ‘deviants’ or ‘transgressors’.⁹ Kenny identifies a pattern within the literature on whistleblowing that focuses on the individual as opposed to group dynamics. To whistleblow is to ‘effectively step outside the prescribed moral order’,¹⁰ such that the whistleblower is instantly ‘cast out’, deemed ‘outside organizational norms and therefore inspiring incredulity, misunderstanding and suspicion’.¹¹ According to Kenny, this focus on the whistleblower as an individual who acts alone, suddenly deviant to the group, invites descriptions in the literature approximate to ‘inexplicable beings’ or ‘space walkers not of this world’.¹²

This emphasis on whistleblower as ‘hero’ or more worryingly, as ‘martyr’ fits well with psychological, mythical and narrative theory paradigms that describe the transition from ordinary citizen, through apotheosis to hero or anti-hero status. Jung in *Four Archetypes* proposes primordial archetypes such as ‘Mother’, ‘Re-Birth’, ‘Spirit’ or ‘Trickster’.¹³ The archetypal whistleblower as mythologized in many popular and media accounts of whistleblowing seems to fit the problematic ‘Trickster’ category. An individual who interrogates, challenges and up-ends accepted norms.

Campbell,¹⁴ describes an archetypal journey or process experienced by the individual that leads to apotheosis or ‘heroic’

⁹ *Ibid.*: 24.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*: 24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*: 25.

¹² *Ibid.*: 25.

¹³ Jung, C. G., *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, (2nd edn, Routledge, 1968).

¹⁴ Campbell, J., *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, (3rd edn, New World Library, Novato) 263.

status. A hero – in all narrative forms, from folk tale and myth to popular culture in film and digital platforms - is an ordinary, unremarkable person who is propelled from normal life to a supernatural realm, where they battle evil, triumph against the odds, attain a ‘boon’ for all of humanity, return to the normal world and are rewarded handsomely for their efforts. They live, ‘happily ever after’ so to speak. Unfortunately, however, for whistleblowers, heroes of the workplace, there is seldom a reward or happy ever after. On the contrary, Kenny observes that for whistleblowers, there is a consensus view that they are likely to be ‘penalized with impunity’ and that

The status quo is therefore that whistleblowers will be retaliated against, they will suffer and laws will continue to fail to protect them.¹⁵

Kenny argues that in order to fully understand the process of whistleblowing, whistleblower reprisal and society’s responses to inconvenient truths, we should not reduce the whistleblower to the notion of a lone actor as recurring tragic hero. She states,

We need to account for how they are positioned amid wider social, economic and political structures ... thus viewing whistleblowing incidents as constituted in and through the social order that generates them ... it would enable us to perceive whistleblowers as complex nuanced selves rather than clichéd, tragic heroes.¹⁶

¹⁵ Kenny, K., *Whistleblowing: Toward a New Theory*, (1st edn, Harvard University Press 2019) 30.

¹⁶ Kenny, K., *Whistleblowing: Toward a New Theory*, (1st edn, Harvard University Press 2019) 31-32.

Elaborating on this contested view of the whistleblower and the whistleblowing journey as mythic ‘hero’ and mythic ‘quest’, I believe that Tzvetan Todorov’s¹⁷ five stage narrative theory to describe the journey and transition from ordinary ‘character’ to hero status provides a useful model within which to interrogate the process of whistleblowing. Given that Todorov¹⁸ identifies universal and – appropriately – positive outcomes for the hero or ‘whistleblower’, his narrative modelling provides a structured context within which to question and challenge the acceptance of negative outcomes or the current toxic ‘status quo’ for whistleblowers as described by Kenny¹⁹.

Todorov describes five key stages to the process of transformation from ordinary citizen or member of the group to heroic status. The first is ‘Equilibrium’, where all is normal and in harmony – analogous to that moment in an organization or workplace where hegemonic values and norms remain unchallenged. This is the ‘once upon a time’ moment that precedes that act of whistleblowing within an organization. The second stage is ‘Disruption’, where the individual recognizes a threat to the stability of or sustainability of the prevailing norms and values of the organization. According to Todorov, this is the moment in folk tale, fairy tale or mythology, where evil reveals itself to the hero, and cosmos is threatened by the chaos of wrongdoing. For the workplace whistleblower, this is the moment at which they discern wrong-doing that requires an existential response.

The third stage is that of ‘Recognition’, where the individual or whistleblower realizes that the situation will not resolve without positive, proactive action on their part. This is

¹⁷ Todorov, T., *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, (1st edn, Cornell University Press 1975)

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Kenny, K., *Whistleblowing: Toward a New Theory*, (1st edn, Harvard University Press 2019).

the point at which ‘apotheosis’ takes place, that transformative moment at which the ordinary individual becomes a ‘hero’ or the member of an organization or institution becomes ‘whistleblower’. The fourth stage, ‘Repair’ is analogous to the benefit or ‘boon’ that the action of the hero or whistleblower brings to the organization or work-place setting through their actions. The fifth and final stage – the one to which we might aspire for whistleblowers – is ‘New Equilibrium’ where harmony is restored, leading to a new ‘cosmos’ with significant improvements, benefits and rewards for both the organization and the whistleblower as ‘hero’. In myth, folk and fairy tale, the hero – or whistleblower – is permitted to live happily ever after.²⁰ This literary device serves as ethical reinforcement, in that altruistic acts in the interest of the greater good, are rewarded and that evil-doers are sanctioned and punished. Real life it seems – particularly as it applies to whistleblowers - is more complex and less predictable.

²⁰ Todorov, T., *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, (1st edn, Cornell University Press 1975).

2. Equilibrium – Internalization of Societal Values

‘Once upon a time, there was an idealistic young man who dreamed of joining the army’

§ 1. MOTIVATION TO JOIN THE IRISH ARMED FORCES – THE SOCIALIZATION PROCESS

My motivation for joining the army was straightforward. Uniformed service was a prominent feature of my family background. My grandmother was a member of a female nationalist militia, Cumann na mBan and fought in the Irish War of Independence and Civil War. She was attached to the 6th Battalion, South Dublin Brigade of the IRA during the period 1919-1922. In her retirement, she lived in our family home and instilled in me, as a young boy, a great interest in the liberation of the Irish State and the role that women played in that armed struggle. In many ways, our home was a matriarchal household with strong feminist values.²¹ My grandfather, was a member of the IRA and Free State Army, having fought in the Irish War of Independence and the Irish Civil War. He subsequently joined the unarmed Irish police force, an Garda Síochána at its inception and served in Dublin’s south inner city at Kevin Street Garda Station until his retirement in the 1960s. My father was also a policeman in south Dublin’s inner city at Pearse Street Garda Station. My older brother was a naval officer in the Irish naval service. He was commissioned in 1980 and was cited for commendation as arresting officer on the trawler ‘The Marita Ann’ in 1984. The trawler was carrying a shipment of seven tons of weapons and ammunition to the Irish Republic for use by the Provisional IRA. My brother boarded the vessel and at gunpoint, arrested the Provisional IRA members on board. His action and leadership was swift and decisive with no injuries or loss of life in the operation. I grew up in a family that was

²¹ <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/health-family/1916-granny-was-a-freedom-fighter-but-never-spoke-about-it-1.2587063>

committed to public service in general and uniformed service in particular. I also grew up in a family that had strong ethical convictions about our democratic republic and the importance of moral – and physical courage – in doing the right thing.

I graduated from Trinity College, Dublin with a Bachelor's degree in Education in 1987. The late 1980s in Ireland were characterized by high unemployment, mass emigration and a serious internal security crisis posed by Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries on the island. This euphemistically termed 'low intensity conflict' – colloquially known as 'The Troubles' – focused international attention on terrorist operations and civil strife in Northern Ireland. Paramilitary actions within the six counties – along with the highly provocative operational posture adopted by Northern Ireland Security Forces (NISF) and the British security, intelligence and military authorities – threatened the security and stability of both NI and the Republic of Ireland.

It was in this context that in 1989 I applied to become an officer cadet in Ireland's armed forces.

§ 2. PRIMARY (FAMILY) AND SECONDARY (UNIVERSITY) AGENTS OF SOCIALIZATION AND THE ARMY OFFICER CADET

As a young officer Cadet, entering the Irish Army's Military College in November 1989, I possessed many of the character traits and attributes as described in the literature as 'pre-requisites' for whistleblowers. As a Trinity graduate, my ethical and intellectual formation as a young man had taken place in the university environment – a powerful socializing agent. As such, I entered the military environment as an assertive, confident and idealistic novice. Bjorkelo,²² cites Kroeck & Brown,²³ Grundlach,

²² Bjorkelo, B., *Whistleblowing at Work: Antecedents and Consequences*, (Dissertation for the Degree of Philosophiae Doctor, Bergen, University of Bergen 2010).

²³ Kroeck, K. G., Brown, K. W., "Work applications of the Big Five Model of personality," in Hersen, M., & Thomas, J. C., (Eds) *Comprehensive Handbook*

Douglas & Martinko,²⁴ and Pincus, Gurtman & Ruiz,²⁵ to hypothesise that whistleblowers ‘are extraverted and domineering ... that they verbally dare to act and report wrongdoing at work more easily than others’.²⁶ She goes on to describe whistleblowers as ‘relatively powerful, effective and confident employees ... and share dispositional characteristics that cause them to fight to the finish’.²⁷

In terms of the character traits of the potential whistleblower, Bjorkelo²⁸ cites Dozier & Miceli,²⁹ and Near & Miceli,³⁰ in stating that ‘The motivation to help and prevent harm is the starting point for understanding whistleblowing behavior’. In addition to being generally pro-social however, Bjorkelo states that a strong, confident personality is also an indicative trait in many workers who act on the impulse to right a wrong in the workplace.

of Personality and Psychopathology – Industrial and Organisational Assessment, (Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley and Sons 2004) 100-29.

²⁴ Grundlach, M., Douglas, S. C., & Martinko, M. J., ‘The Decision to Blow the Whistle: A Social Information Processing Framework’ (2003), *Academy of Management Review* (2003) 28 (1) 107-23.

²⁵ Pincus, A. L., Gurtman, M. B., Ruiz, M. A., ‘Structural Analysis of Social Behaviour (SASB): Circumplex Analyses and Structural Relations With the Interpersonal Circle and the Five-Factor Model of Personality’ (1998) *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (1998) 74 (6), 1629-45.

²⁶ Bjorkelo, B., *Whistleblowing at Work: Antecedents and Consequences*, (Dissertation for the Degree of Philosophiae Doctor, Bergen, University of Bergen 2010) 65.

²⁷ *Ibid*: 65.

²⁸ *Ibid*: 26.

²⁹ Dozier, J. B., & Miceli, M. P., ‘Potential Predictors of Whistleblowing: A Pro Social Behaviour Perspective’ (1985) *Academy of Management Review* (1985) 10 (4) 823-36.

³⁰ Near, J. P., & Miceli, M. P., ‘Organisational Dissidence: The Case of Whistleblowing’ (1987) *Journal of Business Ethics* (1987) 4, 1-16.

An employee who reports wrongdoing at work must be able to transcend a general prosocial motivation of helping others to actually being proactive and report wrongdoing. It is therefore assumed that whistleblowers are relatively confident in their ability to effect change when they approach others.³¹

This observation recognizes that not all individuals – as is the supposition in Todorov’s stage-theory – are capable of existential action. Bjorkelo contends that strong, leadership qualities are usually present for those individuals who are capable of existential action within highly normative organizations – particularly ones as hierarchical as the military. She cites the ‘Four Component Model’ of personality (Bebeau, Rest & Navarez³²) to describe the necessary pre-requisites for such action. The first is ‘moral sensitivity’ or ability to discern a moral hazard. The second is ‘judgement’ or the capacity to recognize that such wrongdoing is capable of remedy. The third quality is ‘motivation’ or the altruistic desire to do ‘the right thing’ however difficult the circumstances. The fourth quality is that of ‘character’ or simply, the ability to act on these motivations and to act effectively and decisively. This conceptualisation of the temperament of the whistleblower is at odds with contested and contentious labels for whistleblowers as cited by Bjorkelo such as ‘company traitors’,³³

³¹ Bjorkelo, B., *Whistleblowing at Work: Antecedents and Consequences*, (Dissertation for the Degree of Philosophiae Doctor, Bergen, University of Bergen 2010) 27.

³² Bebeau, M. J., Rest, J. R., & Navarez, D., ‘Beyond the Promise: A Perspective on Moral Education’ (1999) *Educational Researcher* (1999) 28(4) 18-26.

³³ Hersh, M. A., ‘Whistleblowers: Heroes or Traitors – Individual and Collective Responsibility for Ethical Behaviour’ (2002) *Annual Reviews in Control* (2002) 26: 243-262.

‘informers’,³⁴ ‘Rats and moles’,³⁵ ‘licensed spies’,³⁶ and ‘internal muckrakers’.³⁷

As a graduate, I brought a mixture of idealism, intellectual curiosity and a capacity for critical thinking to the military environment that would become the primary drivers for my subsequent act of whistleblowing.

§ 3. EQUILIBRIUM - INTERNALIZATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

Officially designated ‘Oglaigh na h-Eireann’, the Irish Defence Forces are directly descended from the Irish Republican Army that fought the Irish War of Independence. The Irish Armed Forces are proud of their revolutionary genesis.

Officer Cadet training in the PDF is extremely demanding – physically and psychologically. In my cadet class – the 66th Cadet Class, November 1989 – April 1991 – approximately one-third of the group failed the training. The strategic doctrine which underpinned the PDF’s course of officer training resided within the tactical assumption – rooted in its insurgent past – that in any conflict, we would be the under-dog and that we would in all cases face a numerically and technically superior adversary. As a consequence, the training conditioned each officer cadet to relentlessly exploit, himself or herself to the maximum – and in addition to exploit the maximum potential from the personnel and resources at his or her disposal.

It was in this unrelenting and unforgiving environment that I was commissioned as an officer in April 1991. After 18 months of training I

³⁴ Drucker, P. F., ‘What is Business Ethics?’ (1991) *Public Interest* (1991) 63(2) 18-36.

³⁵ Miethe, T. D., *Whistleblowing at Work: Tough Choices in Exposing Fraud, Waste and Abuse on the Job*, (1st edn Colorado Westview Press 1999).

³⁶ Vinten, G., *Whistleblowing: Subversion or Corporate Citizenship* (2nd edn Sage 2007).

³⁷ Peters, C., & Branch, T., *Blowing the Whistle: Dissent in the Public Interest* (1st edn Praeger Publishers 1971).

came sixth in the class and was assigned my officer number on that basis. The day of my commissioning in the Curragh Camp, Co. Kildare, was the proudest day of my life. I thought particularly of my grandmother, Mairead Ni Bheaglaioich, who fought in the War of Independence as a member of Cumann na mBan attached to the South Dublin Brigade of the IRA.

In organizational terms, at this point, I was completely immersed in the culture, norms and values of the organization. As a commissioned officer, I was at the heart of an organization engaged in a live internal conflict with organizations such as the Provisional IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA).

On commissioning I was posted to a combat appointment with the Artillery Corps. From 1991 to 1995, I commanded troops in a range of 'Aid to the Civil Power Operations' or ATCP Ops. These counter-insurgency operations were conducted in support of Irish police (Garda Síochána) operations targeting terrorist organizations within the Republic and on its borders with Northern Ireland. During this period, I was promoted from 2nd Lieutenant to Lieutenant and was fully accepted within the organization as an officer in command of troops in an extremely sensitive operational environment.

During this period, as part of my ongoing professional and intellectual development, I completed a Master's Degree in Communications and Cultural Studies in Dublin City University (1993-1995). In addition to enhancing my prospects for promotion, I felt this course would also assist me in getting appointed to the Defence Forces Press Office at the army's national headquarters as a staff officer.

In October 1995 I was deployed to south Lebanon in the Middle East as a UN Peacekeeper with the 78th Irish Infantry Battalion – United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). During that deployment, in the Spring of 1996, Hezbollah increased the frequency and intensity of attacks on Israel and de-facto Israeli Defence Forces targets within the Irish Area of Operations. Israel responded with a punitive mass retaliation against Lebanon termed Operation Grapes of Wrath. Hundreds of Lebanese civilians were slaughtered during this onslaught and the Irish area of operations was subjected to a pattern of intense and indiscriminate attacks by air-strike, helicopter gunship, missile, artillery and direct fire weapon

systems. The Unit History of the 78th Battalion along with subsequent UN investigations into the operation record thousands of such attacks in the Irish area of operations in April of 1996. As an officer commanding the Battalion Mobile Reserve, I spent that period providing armoured mobile security to Irish medical and engineering staff tasked with removing the dead and injured – including men, women and children – targeted by the Israeli military. The operation culminated in the massacre of over 100 innocent men, women and children at the village of Qana – just a few kilometres from my own UN position, 6-40 Al Yatus.

I had one further deployment overseas as an election monitor with the Organisation for Security Cooperation Europe (OSCE) in Bosnia in the former Yugoslavia in the Autumn of 1996.

At this point of my military career, I had participated as an officer with command experience in highly sensitive – and secretive – operations at home and in a high tempo combat environment in the Middle East. I was completely accepted and highly valued by my subordinates, peers and superiors.

§ 4. MILITARY SOCIALIZATION – THE STATUS AND ROLE OF THE ARMY OFFICER

At this point in my career, prior to the act and process of whistleblowing, I was a high status and well-regarded member of the Irish armed forces. I was on the cusp of promotion to the rank of Captain – and subsequent appointment as a staff officer for the Chief of Staff of the Irish military. I was completely invested in the mission of the organization at home and abroad. I was the consummate ‘insider’ in a ‘Total Institution’ as described by Goffman.³⁸ I was 100% loyal to the organization, immersed in its culture and completely committed to its aims and objectives - including the willingness to use lethal force to those ends. In their 2019 work, *The Social Psychology of*

³⁸ Goffman, E., *Asylums* (1st edn Garden City, NY First Anchor Books 1961) 5.

Whistleblowing: An Integrated Model, Anvari, Wenzel, Woodyat & Haslam provide a ‘psychological’ definition of whistleblowing that ‘speaks to the important psychological feature of whistleblowing as an act of reporting on one’s own group’.³⁹

Anvari *et al* argue that for such an insider to report wrongdoing among their own group, the degree of wrongdoing must be so egregious that it presents an existential and severe ‘normative conflict’⁴⁰ sufficient to over-ride loyalty to the peer group or superordinate groups such as higher management – or in my case, the general staff. In this case, the severe normative conflict would prove to be my discovery of widespread sexual violence against female soldiers – my sisters in arms – within the armed forces.

Anvari *et al* hypothesize in their social psychology of whistleblowing that in addition to the existence of this normative conflict, for the whistleblower to act, status and role within the organization are important determinants.

Once an individual is motivated to act against ingroup wrongdoing, the form of that action will further be determined by perceptions of power the capacity to change or influence things.⁴¹

Anvari *et al* set out four criteria that determine the likelihood of a witness to wrong-doing taking the crucial step of blowing the whistle. These include:

Their capacity to exert leadership by virtue of being someone who represents the group’s goals and values ... their informal position or status within the group ...

³⁹ Anvari, F., Wenzel, M., Woodyat, L., Haslam, S. A., *The social psychology of whistleblowing: An integrated model* (Research Gate 10.31234/osf.io/3259b 2019) 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*: 14.

⁴¹ *Ibid*: 17-8.

their general communicative skills and capacity to form social networks and alliances; as well as the degree to which the group has open communication practices.⁴²

As an army officer with significant command experience in live operational environments in Ireland and in combat conditions in the Middle East, I was the very embodiment of the army's goals and values. In addition to this operational experience, having completed an MA in Communications as a junior officer, I was considered a capable and popular member of the organization. My communication and networking skills were exemplary. However, in terms of open communications practices within the organization, the highly hierarchical nature of the military in general, coupled with the highly secretive nature of the Irish armed forces in particular, would prove problematic during the whistleblowing process and aftermath as they unfolded.

At this point of my career however, everything was in harmony and equilibrium was unchallenged. I had not as yet encountered the data that indicated the systemic and systematic levels of sexual violence against my female colleagues within the armed forces. When I did, the PhD examination and publication process would provide the de-facto mechanism for blowing the whistle.

§ 5. DISRUPTION – THE ETHICAL CRISIS AND APOTHEOSIS DISCOVERY / INCIDENT – LEADING TO COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

On return from Bosnia, I decided to undertake a PhD study on the experiences of female soldiers within the Irish armed forces. My experiences of conflict in Bosnia and the Middle East – along with my observations on the hyperactive role that women played in terrorist organisations at home

⁴² *Ibid*: 18.

such as the Provisional IRA – provoked a strong interest within me on the experiences of women in combat and conflict. I therefore formulated a doctoral research proposal which would seek to explore the status and roles of female personnel within the Irish Defence Forces.

Under military law and the provisions of the Irish Defence Acts, in order to conduct such research, I was required to make a formal written application to the military authorities in order to carry out the study. In 1996, I wrote a formal application through the chain of command to the Director of Training on the General Staff in Defence Forces Headquarters. After a period of time, in late 1996, I received formal written approval to conduct the research.

The academic literature on research methodology deals extensively with the issues that confront researchers seeking to gain access to sensitive or secretive workplace settings by way of powerful institutional or organisational gatekeepers. As an ‘insider’ – consistent with my status as a serving officer and consistent with such definitions of researchers with ‘privileged’ access contained within the literature – I was able to elicit formal written permission from my superiors to conduct the research, albeit with certain conditions attached. The imposition of conditions upon researchers by powerful gatekeepers is a phenomenon which is also dealt with in the academic literature on research methodology.⁴³

In my case, the conditions were as follows. They would have a serious impact on the progress of the PhD research. My original letter of application was referenced DA/CS3/2 ‘Doctoral Thesis: Lt Clonan, T.’ Under this heading, I was informed that ‘I am directed to inform you that D Trg (Director of Training) approves Lt Clonan’s request to produce a Doctoral Thesis ... provided that (a) The work is not published, (b) The exercise is funded by himself, (C) Any time off necessary is sanctioned’.

Despite these restrictions, the formal letter of application was invaluable as a ‘letter of introduction’ when conducting an audit of all Defence Forces documents as they pertained to the service of female personnel. The letter, signed by the Adjutant of the Curragh Command (Army

⁴³ Renzetti, C., M., Lee, R., M., *Researching Sensitive Topics*, (Vol 152 Focus Editions Sage 1992) 27.

reference CC/A/S3/8 of 1996) facilitated my access to all of the records regarding the service of female personnel since the first intake of female personnel in the early 1980s. The letter acted as a passport which gave me access to all of the Defence Forces Regulations, SOPs, Letters of Instruction, Training Instructions, Memoranda, Orders and Strength Returns as they applied to female soldiers.

At the outset of the doctoral study, the research design included a complete audit of all such written data as it applied to female personnel. In 1996, there were approximately 123 female personnel within the Defence Forces. The research design also incorporated a plan to conduct in-depth interviews with a maximum variation sample of approximately 60 of my female comrades. To place their conditions of service and their reported experiences into a wider context, I also conducted an exhaustive audit of secondary sources as it applied to the service and experiences of female soldiers within the British military, the US military and other NATO forces.

In addition to my military duties, I invested a great deal of time and energy into the research process. I was lucky in that I had access to most of the data I required within my own workplace. From the perspective of my research supervisor and Dublin City University, I was making good progress with the research. In 1997 and 1998 I reported my progress and gave comprehensive presentations at the postgraduate research committee's annual reviews within the university. It was after one such presentation – in May 1998 - that I encountered my first stumbling block with the research. I received an invitation in early June 1998 to attend a meeting with the Registrar of DCU. I attended as requested and he informed me that a copy of my research progress had been given to Dublin City University's solicitors. The university was concerned about the condition imposed by the military authorities '(a) Provided the work is not published' contained within the formal letter of permission to conduct the research. DCU's solicitors formed the view that to have the doctoral thesis examined by internal or external examiners or placed within the library as is normal custom and practice for a PhD, would constitute a form of publication. I was therefore advised by the Registrar that I needed to seek a 'letter of comfort' from the Chief of Staff in order to continue with the research and to have it examined, and in

due course, lodged on the academic record the library of Dublin City University.

I duly applied for a personal interview with the Chief of Staff of the Irish Defence Forces. On the 25th of June 1998, I met the Chief of Staff in his office at DFHQ. I outlined to him the progress of my research into the status and roles assigned female personnel within the Defence Forces and the impasse which had been created by the restrictions placed upon me by the Director of Training in his letter of permission. The Chief of Staff was very sympathetic and asked me about the preliminary findings of the study. I informed him that the Defence Forces standing operating procedures, along with DF policies and practices as they applied to female soldiers were explicitly discriminatory and contrary to domestic and European equality legislation.

The Chief of Staff expressed his concern at these findings and asked me to continue the research and bring it to a conclusion as 'comprehensively and as quickly as possible'. He expressed the view that the findings were very 'stark' and that with such serious implications, I must 'leave no stone unturned' and to thoroughly investigate matters by way of the PhD. He also directed that the final conclusions and recommendations be reported to the General Staff. The Chief of Staff also supplied me with a letter of comfort stating the following:

Permission to Conduct Research and Produce PhD Thesis – 0.9721 Captain T Clonan: Previous Correspondence CC/A/CS3/8 Refers. 1 In June of 1996 Captain Clonan sought and received permission to produce a PhD Thesis on Female Personnel within the PDF, 2 This permission was confirmed in writing in our letter of CC/A/CS3/8 of 1996, 3 The letter states at Para 2 (a) that permission was granted provided 'the work is not published', 4 This is to confirm that the Defence Forces have no objections to the publication of the Thesis for academic purposes, (5) The Thesis may be circulated to officers of the University and any internal and external examiners for the purposes of evaluation and examination, (6) The Thesis may also be held in the library of the University for reference purposes'.

A Copy of the Chief of Staff's letter was sent by registered post to the Registrar of DCU and on receipt of same I was informed by Dublin City University that I could continue with the research. In the Summer of 1998 I began the in-depth interviews of my female colleagues.

In parallel with this development, I was promoted to the rank of Captain and appointed to the Defence Forces Press Office – a long-standing ambition I had held. My career trajectory was in the ascendant and I was fully accepted by and valued by the organization – trusted to manage its public profile. Newly promoted, I found myself working directly for the Chief of Staff at the very heart of Oglagh na h-Eireann.

§ 6. HOPE/LOYALTY/FIDELITY (THE ORGANIZATION WILL WANT TO KNOW THIS AND DEAL WITH IT)

At this point in the research process, I was beginning to experience profound cognitive dissonance in relation to the recruitment, training, deployment and promotion policies of the Irish armed forces with regard to female soldiers. My identity, status and role as an army officer in the organization was now combined with that of doctoral researcher with Dublin City University. As the initial data gathering was underway, it was proving a moral and ethical struggle to reconcile the two roles. As a member of the 'psychological ingroup'⁴⁴ – a serving officer in the military organization which was the focus of my research, I had a direct reporting relationship with my superiors and the chain of command leading all the way to the General Staff. I duly reported my research progress at each stage of the PhD process – through my commanding officers – by way of annual confidential reports. These reports – termed Army Form 451 (AF451) – were part of the army's personnel management

⁴⁴ Anvari, F., Wenzel, M., Woodyat, L., Haslam, S. A., *The social psychology of whistleblowing: An integrated model* (Research Gate 10.31234/osf.io/3259b 2019) 14.

development system (PMDS). In each reporting year during the research period, I appraised my superiors of my progress in the PhD process – and of my concerns with regard to defence forces policies as they applied to female personnel. The policies as promulgated by the military authorities were illegal, discriminatory and out of step with best practice in the international military.

According to Todorov's (1975) narrative theory – it was in my role as researcher that I encountered the 'Disruption' to the equilibrium I had 'enjoyed' as a male officer to date. According to Todorov's narrative theories, this was the moment in my own life-narrative that I experienced 'apotheosis' and became 'hero'⁴⁵ or – in the context of the PhD research, a de-facto whistleblower.

Anvari *et al* observe that to be a de-facto whistleblower, the individual must be a member of a 'psychological ingroup' and that perceived wrong-doing is reported both internally – escalated if necessary to the senior leadership team at chief executive level – and eventually communicated to an 'external reporting agency (a person or group who receives the disclosure) that is psychologically external, an outgroup in relation to the offending ingroup'.⁴⁶

In my case, as serving officer and PhD researcher, I was simultaneously reporting wrongdoing internally – through the chain of command as part of the AF41 process – and externally to Dublin City University as part of the annual post graduate progress reports and presentations to the ethics committee and postgraduate research committee at the university. This was the moment of apotheosis. According to Anvari *et al*, the category

⁴⁵ Todorov, T., *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, (1st edn, Cornell University Press 1975).

⁴⁶ Anvari, F., Wenzel, M., Woodyat, L., Haslam, S. A., *The social psychology of whistleblowing: An integrated model* (Research Gate 10.31234/osf.io/3259b 2019) 9.

of whistleblower to which I therefore belonged was ‘role prescribed whistleblowing’.⁴⁷

We define whistleblowing as a voluntary disclosure of ingroup wrongdoing (including omissions) to a reporting agency, (person or group) outside of an offending group with a view to that agency taking action to curtail the wrongdoing.⁴⁸

In my case, I was acting in dual roles. As ethical researcher reporting to the university and as loyal officer reporting to the military authorities. In both cases, I was not acting as a ‘lone’ individual. I was – consistent with the theoretical models discussed here – acting as a member of different groups and organizations – consistent with their ethical standards, reporting procedures and legal requirements.

In the theoretical models on whistleblowing, there is an assumption that when the escalation or reporting of wrongdoing to the superordinate in-group (chief executive level) results in inaction or rebuttal, that the whistleblower then resorts to an external agency. In my case, I was reporting to both internal and external agencies simultaneously as a consequence of my dual roles as serving officer and PhD researcher. At this point, despite the negative findings, I had every confidence in my superiors that they would act on the findings and conclusions of the research when it was completed. This was positively reinforced by the actions of the Chief of Staff when he endorsed my research activities and gave me written permission – with the lawful force of orders under Irish military law - to continue with

⁴⁷ *Ibid*: 11.

⁴⁸ Anvari, F., Wenzel, M., Woodyat, L., Haslam, S. A., *The social psychology of whistleblowing: An integrated model* (Research Gate 10.31234/osf.io/3259b 2019) 11.

the research and publish it in DCU's library. Similarly, I had full confidence in the university to continue to support me in the PhD process.

§ 7. DISRUPTION AND SEVERE NORMATIVE CONFLICT

The preliminary research findings however were deeply disturbing. The audit of military documents that I had completed revealed that the Defense Forces in the 1990s had no equality mission statement and no equality policies. Nor did the organization have equality officers or any equality or diversity monitoring in place within the organization. This was completely at variance with the academic literature on equality in the workplace. The academic literature in the 1990s contained within it the assumption that such equality measures would automatically be in place – particularly in public service organizations or organizations funded by the taxpayer. The Irish Defense Forces were also at variance with the international military in this regard.

The audit of Defense Forces documents revealed a set of policies that were explicitly discriminatory as they applied to female personnel. Female personnel were routinely denied access to command appointments, to heavy weapons training, to appointments at force headquarters, intelligence positions and were denied command opportunities overseas. The research revealed an almost perfect gender division of labour contained within the Irish Defence Forces.

When I began the interview process, things took a far more sinister turn. Over the period of September 1998 to February 2000, I interviewed sixty female soldiers. I attempted to achieve a maximum variation sample and interviewed women who were superior to me along with peers and female personnel who were subordinate to me in rank. The interviews were conducted both in Ireland and on deployment with UNIFIL in south Lebanon. The findings were very dark.

The interviews were designed to explore the experiences of female soldiers in relation to the manner in which they were recruited, to the training environment, to their patterns of deployment and to their progression or promotion rates within the organization. In the first few interviews, when we

engaged in the discussion of the training environment, my female colleagues began to report experiences of bullying, harassment and explicitly sexual harassment. When I reported these initial findings to my research supervisor – which were unexpected and unanticipated - she advised me to incorporate the findings into the overall emergent research design. We both knew, on an ethical level that these matters would have to be fully reported. I also relayed these reports and my concerns – whilst preserving the confidentiality of the research participants – to my superiors.

I continued the research process and in the ongoing discussion of the training environment, my female colleagues reported experiences of bullying, harassment, sexual harassment, sexual violence, sexual assault up to and including allegations of rape. In total, 59 out of the 60 women that I interviewed for the research reported some form of bullying, sexual harassment or assault.

I was shocked and ashamed by the findings. I was also in awe of the women who disclosed these experiences to me. As survivors of these experiences, they were extremely angry at the perpetrators – and also the military authorities in whom they had little or no faith or confidence. The research would eventually show that only 2 of the 60 women interviewed expressed any confidence in the outdated reporting procedures as used by the Irish armed forces at that time.⁴⁹

I submitted the PhD thesis for examination in March 2000 and was examined in May 2000. I passed the Viva with minor revisions and clarifications. I lodged the finished thesis to DCU in October 2000 and I graduated with my PhD in November 2000.

In that same month, November 2000, I applied in writing for permission to present the findings and recommendations of the research to the general staff and to the Chief of Staff. I made this application through my line manager and commanding officer at DFHQ.

When I made the written application I was immediately rebuffed. I was informed by my senior officers that the incoming and newly appointed

⁴⁹ Clonan, T., *Women in Combat: The Status and Roles Assigned Female Personnel in the Irish Armed Forces* (PhD Thesis, 2000, Dublin, Dublin City University, DCU) 141.

Chief of Staff would be 'far too busy' to deal with the 'petty concerns' of female personnel. At this point in my professional development, I began to realise that my intellectual and ethical formation were no longer compatible with military service and the norms and values of the organisation as they applied to equality and public service. I applied for permission to retire to pursue an academic career.

In December 2000 my application to retire was granted by the Chief of Staff and I made renewed efforts to seek a meeting with him to brief him personally on the findings and conclusions of the doctoral thesis. My immediate superiors became more hostile and I was informed that I was 'full of shit'. I was also informed that I was a 'Rat'. The open hostility to me was very palpable.

I managed to secure an assistant lecturing position with the Institute of Technology in Dublin. I took a drop in salary and commenced my probationary year in January 2001. Throughout January and February of 2001, I made repeated attempts by phone and email to secure an interview with the Chief of Staff in order to fully appraise him of the findings and conclusions of the doctoral thesis. I also sent an executive summary of the research to several staff officers at DFHQ. (A full summary of the main findings, conclusions and recommendations of the research are available in the PhD Thesis.⁵⁰ The full text of the Thesis is available online.)⁵¹

My primary concern was for my female colleagues. I remained deeply shocked and appalled at the findings of my research and the whistleblower reprisal I was experiencing. I constantly repeated my demand to be allowed to brief the chief of staff on the findings and recommendations of the PhD Thesis. I was repeatedly told in no uncertain terms by former colleagues that I was to 'Fuck Off'.

In the summer of 2001, a female member of the Reserve Defence Forces was sexually assaulted whilst on a summer training camp in the Glen of Imaal, Co. Wicklow. She reported the assault to an Garda Síochána

⁵⁰ Clonan, T., *Women in Combat: The Status and Roles Assigned Female Personnel in the Irish Armed Forces* (PhD Thesis, 2000, Dublin, Dublin City University, DCU) 239-77.

⁵¹ http://doras.dcu.ie/20979/2/Thomas_Martin_Clonan_finished.pdf

and the matter was reported upon by the Sunday World newspaper. The freelance reporter who covered the story spoke to a number of other female soldiers who informed him that I had written a doctoral thesis on the equality environment of the Irish Armed Forces. The reporter contacted me to confirm if this was the case. The reporter in question, Declan Power, was completing an MPhil in DCU and accessed the doctoral thesis there. In August 2001, the Sunday World published the main findings of my research as it applied to sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape within the Irish Defence Forces.

The following week, there was saturation coverage of the findings in all of the main broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. The Defence Forces issues a press statement to the media in which they denied any knowledge of the research. The military authorities went on to state that I had concealed any such 'research' from them and that I had falsified the research and had fabricated the findings.

In radio and television interviews throughout the last week of August 2001, the Defence Forces through spokespersons and through statements briefed against me. It was repeatedly asserted that I had falsified the research and fabricated the findings. My reputation as an academic and a retired army officer was being systematically destroyed in public.

§ 8. RECOGNITION: SHOCK/DISBELIEF (UPON REJECTION OF REPORT/REFUSAL TO ACT/ACTIVE REPRISAL)

At this point in the PhD process, I had completely lost control of the narrative. As a 'hero' or 'whistle-blower' I was experiencing what narrative theorists such as Todorov (1975) would call a series of 'trials' or 'tests'.⁵² However, in the real world, I had no idea what was going to happen next. I felt frightened and powerless. I was experiencing the full force of

⁵² Todorov, T., *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, (1st edn, Cornell University Press 1975).

whistle-blower ‘retaliation’. I was not familiar with either of these terms at that time. I was naïve.

Anvari *et al*, hypothesise that the risk of whistle-blower retaliation may have a chilling effect on the decision of individuals to report wrongdoing within the psychological ingroup – including ‘retaliation, social ostracism, income loss, imprisonment and physical harm’.⁵³ However, they also hypothesise that when the normative conflict is sufficiently high – the whistle-blower will act irrespective of the risks involved.

The severity of such perceived normative conflict and people’s strength of identification with the offending ingroup are likely to influence whether they conform, leave the group or engage in intragroup change efforts ... However, under circumstances of high normative conflict, serious wrongdoing, the group’s behaviour may be seen as dangerous, harmful, or immoral, in which case strongly identified group members are more likely to try to change group behaviour.⁵⁴

In my case, the issues were so grave, so dark and presented such an appalling vista – sexual violence and rape - I had no choice but to persist and despite the campaign of denial and character assassination on the part of the military authorities, stick to my guns. Whilst relativistic ethical models can provide a moral justification or rationale for lying, stealing or even killing – there can be no moral justification for sexual assault or rape. The die was cast.

The whistleblower reprisal continued unabated.

⁵³ Anvari, F., Wenzel, M., Woodyat, L., Haslam, S. A., *The social psychology of whistleblowing: An integrated model* (Research Gate 10.31234/osf.io/3259b 2019) 19.

⁵⁴ Anvari, F., Wenzel, M., Woodyat, L., Haslam, S. A., *The social psychology of whistleblowing: An integrated model* (Research Gate 10.31234/osf.io/3259b 2019) 14.

In private, I was immediately sent to Coventry by my former colleagues and friends. I began to receive silent phone calls, threatening phone calls and obscene text messages and emails from former colleagues. I received a particularly threatening phone call from a staff officer at DFHQ who demanded that I go to the national broadcaster and ‘admit’ that I had falsified the research and fabricated its findings – or ‘face the consequences’. I was informed at that point that ‘I only had myself to blame, that every dirty trick in the book would be used against me’.

At this point I was also summoned to a meeting by a member of the senior management team in the Institute of Technology where I was working who informed me that my employment was to be reviewed. I was told that I had been employed as an assistant lecturer on the basis that I had a PhD. However, according to him, it was ‘clear’ from blanket media coverage and statements by the armed forces that I had ‘made up’ my PhD. I was informed that a HR process would commence to have my appointment as assistant lecturer revoked as per the conditions of my probationary period. In addition to my reputation being destroyed, I was now facing the prospect of losing my job and my ability to earn a living as an academic.

I contacted a former colleague – a senior officer with contacts at the very top level of the General Staff – in order to seek help and advice. He informed me that ‘when the organization is under attack, character assassination is a legitimate tactic in defense’. He concluded the call by telling me that ‘when you can’t go for the ball Thomas, you go for the man’. He also warned me that I might face a criminal prosecution for ‘breaching the Official Secrets Act’.

This was an extremely traumatic time for me – personally and professionally. I felt completely isolated and powerless to stop the juggernaut of state-sponsored state sponsored character assassination that was directed at me.

During this period, the silent phone calls continued along with threatening phone calls. At a particularly low point I was walking down through Grafton Street in the center of Dublin with my infant son in his buggy when I was confronted by and assaulted by a former colleague – an army officer – who shouted at me ‘Who the fuck do you think you are?’ and repeating threats of ‘guerilla warfare’ against me and my family.

Things finally came to a head in September 2001 when I got a phone call from the Security Editor of the Irish Times newspaper. He invited me to his home to view a document that had been circulated to him and other journalists by the Irish military authorities. The document contained a list of false allegations against me including the assertion that I had 'concealed' the research from the military authorities and that I had falsified the research and fabricated its findings'. The document also contained other serious false accusations against me.

It was at this point that I finally sought legal advice. When I gave the history of events to my solicitor, he advised me to furnish the formal letters of permission to conduct the research to the national broadcaster. This I did and they in good faith broadcast the fact that I had proof that the research was bone fide doctoral research and that it had been approved of in writing by the military authorities and by the Chief of Staff himself. We also issued libel and defamation proceedings against the Minister for Defense, the Attorney General and Ireland.

In response to these developments, the then Minister for Defense, Michael Smith TD contacted me personally and asked me how he could resolve matters. I asked him to launch a formal independent government enquiry to investigate the research and its findings. In September 2001 the Minister for Defense announced an independent investigation into my research and the equality environment of the Irish Defense Forces. The investigation was termed the 'Study Review Group'. The Study Review Group reported in 2003 and fully vindicated my findings and conclusions. The Study Review Group also found that male soldiers in the Irish Defense Forces were also subject to bullying, harassment, sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape.

My case for libel and defamation was finally heard in 2005. I settled the case and a small payment was made to me. I have never received an apology from the Defense Forces for the manner in which they treated me and my family. I have never received an acknowledgement from them for the positive contribution I made to the culture of the organization and the positive changes that flowed from my research that have benefitted thousands of soldiers, sailors and air crew in the Irish Defense Forces.

Following the report of the Study Review Group, the Defense Forces have adopted most of the recommendations of my PhD study and are now considered world leaders in terms of equality and diversity in the military workplace.

Throughout all of the whistleblower process, I conducted myself as an officer and as a researcher to the highest of ethical and professional standards. The reaction of the military authorities to the research was toxic. Their whistleblower reprisal was toxic to my reputation and caused an enormous amount of professional and personal upheaval, trauma and damage. As I write in 2018, I am still persona non grata with many of my former colleagues and with members of the General Staff. When I conducted the research as a young army officer, I had never heard of the word whistleblower. Nor had I heard the term Whistleblower Reprisal. I understand the value of the former in Irish society and remain intimately acquainted with the latter.

The military authorities behaved in an unethical manner. Their campaign of character assassination was designed to destroy my reputation and my ability to earn a living. Their campaign was designed to destroy me as an academic, as a citizen in good standing.

§ 9. REPAIR AND NEW EQUILIBRIUM

From the moment as researcher I lodged my PhD thesis to the library in Dublin City University in December 2000 (as ordered in writing by the Chief of Staff on the 25th June 1998) and from the moment, as army officer, I presented my findings and recommendations to the general staff of the Defense Forces in December 2000 – I was subjected to the full spectrum of whistleblower reprisal by the military authorities. Bjorkelo,⁵⁵ citing various authors, outlines the various ways in which

⁵⁵ Bjorkelo, B., *Whistleblowing at Work: Antecedents and Consequences*, (Dissertation for the Degree of Philosophiae Doctor, Bergen, University of Bergen 2010) 39.

whistleblower retaliation is carried out by powerful organizations.

According to Rehg and Colleagues⁵⁶, retaliation may be defined as “taking an undesirable action against a whistleblower – in direct response to the whistle-blowing”. Informal and unofficial types of retaliation may be such as ‘ostracism’,⁵⁷ being treated as ‘persona non grata’⁵⁸ as a ‘leper’,⁵⁹ and being Rehm ‘verbally threatened’⁶⁰. According to Williams,⁶¹ ‘silent treatment or ostracism happens when someone is being ignored and excluded ... retaliation may also be secondary, such as not being believed in court’.

In addition to this list, I was also physically assaulted. The campaign of whistleblower retaliation that was directed at me was comprehensive, sustained and ongoing to this day. As one of Ireland’s pre-eminent security analysts in print and broadcast media – at home and abroad – I remain excluded by the organization. During my tenure as Irish Times Security Analyst (2001-2016) I was informed by the Defense Forces Press Office that I ought not to attend a press briefing on the departure of Irish troops to Chad and Central African Republic as part of an EUFOR mission as ‘they could not guarantee my physical safety within the barracks’. As a member of the

⁵⁶ Rehg, M. T., Miceli, M. P., Near, J. P., & Van Scotter, J. R., ‘Antecedents and Outcomes of Retaliation Against Whistleblowers: Gender Differences and Power Relations’ (2008) *Organisation Science* (2008) 19(2) 221-40.

⁵⁷ Faulkner, S. L., *After The Whistle is Blown, The Aversive Impact of Ostracism* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Toledo, 1998).

⁵⁸ Tucker, D., ‘Whistleblowing Without Tears: The Exposure of Brisbane’s King George Square Car Park Fraud’ (1995) *Australian Journal of Public Administration* (1995) 54(4) 475-82.

⁵⁹ Peters, C., & Branch, T., *Blowing the Whistle: Dissent in the Public Interest* (1st edn Praeger Publishers 1971).

⁶⁰ Solano, F., & Kleiner B. H., ‘Understanding and Preventing Workplace Retaliation’ (2003) *Management Research News* (2003) 26(2-4), 206-11

⁶¹ Williams, K. D., ‘Ostracism’ (2007) *Annual Review of Psychology* (2007) 58 425-552.

National Union of Journalists, (NUJ) I reported this to the general secretary of the union who took appropriate action. Threats of violence are no longer offered, but I remain, as I write, uninvited and unwelcome at events and commemorations hosted by the Irish general staff.

This is despite the enormous service that I have done for the Irish state, the Irish armed forces and the thousands of soldiers, aircrew and sailors that have benefitted from – and continue to benefit from – the changes to the equality and diversity culture and dignity in the workplace practices of Ireland’s military as a direct consequence of my doctoral research.

The whistleblower retaliation directed at me has been deeply personal and has consisted in the main of character assassination and exclusion, ostracism and isolation. In Kenny’s work, *Whistleblowing: Toward a New Theory*, describes such retaliation in sociological and psychological terms. She observes that ‘People cannot exist, socially, without the categories that offer them a place in the world’.⁶² The Irish military authorities, in their campaign of character assassination sought to deny my identity as army officer, doctoral researcher and good citizen. They threatened me with criminal prosecution. In targeting me in this way, they almost deprived me of my livelihood, my liberty and my physical and mental wellbeing. As Kenny puts it, ‘In the absence of the possibility of recognition, we are denied a valid position in social life: we become impossible beings, non-existent and irrelevant’.⁶³ Kenny describes this particular process of retaliation as catastrophic. ‘To be threatened with the denial of recognition, of a valid ontological status, is catastrophic’.⁶⁴ Unlike Todorov’s ‘Hero’, contrary to his narrative model, in the

⁶² Kenny, K., *Whistleblowing: Toward a New Theory*, (1st edn, Harvard University Press 2019) 37.

⁶³ *Ibid*: 37.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*: 37.

‘real world’ there is no ‘Repair’ and ‘New Equilibrium’ for whistleblowers.⁶⁵ The Irish military and Irish society received the ‘boon’ as described in narrative theory – but I did not receive a reward. In the dysfunctional mythology of the whistleblower narrative – I was, and continue to be, punished.

According to Kenny this process is referred to as ‘subjection and exclusion’ where the whistleblower is ‘excrementally’ excluded by the organization, negating the person’s status and causing them pain.⁶⁶ The whistleblower is therefore not a ‘lone’ actor or individual but a person who strongly identifies with the group - as I did as a proud army officer – but a person who is excluded from the group after the act of whistleblowing takes place. In this toxic organizational dynamic, persons who take an ethical stand can be construed as ‘pollutants, or dirt’.⁶⁷

A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed over some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone ... (As per) ... Lacanian symbolic order ... these entities are relegated to a place of non-existence within the terms offered by the symbolic.⁶⁸

I have experienced this attempt at the annihilation of my identity and sense of self as a good person. It is excruciatingly painful. It damages every aspect of one’s life, personally, socially and professionally. It contaminates all relationships – with partner, children, family, community and co-workers – particularly when

⁶⁵ Todorov, T., *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, (1st edn, Cornell University Press 1975).

⁶⁶ Kenny, K., *Whistleblowing: Toward a New Theory*, (1st edn, Harvard University Press 2019) 40.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*: 40.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*: 40-1.

the whistleblower retaliation is conducted in the public sphere. Kenny describes how this process causes disbelief, shock, self-doubt and guilt among whistleblowers. It is a ‘death of the self’ that is difficult to survive.⁶⁹

I survived because I had no choice. I had four small children under the age of seven at this time. I lost one of my little girls, Liadain, during the retaliation phase. One of my sons developed a rare neuromuscular disease, Pelizaeus Merzbacher Disease (PMD) that left him partially sighted and confined to a wheelchair. Quite simply, life went on. And I had to go with it.

A key support throughout the process as an external, vicarious group was the media. The Irish media – particularly the State Broadcaster, RTE, performed an excellent public service task in vindicating my reputation at the lowest point in the retaliation process. RTE’s determination to get to the truth of my whistleblowing and research findings led directly to the independent government enquiry that ultimately vindicated me as a researcher, army officer in good standing and good Samaritan. I was lucky. My legal team were also a vital support. We sued the Minister for Defense and Ireland for libel and defamation arising from the accusations that I had falsified the research and fabricated its findings.⁷⁰

In summation, Kenny (2019) reaches this conclusion about whistleblowing:

Whistleblowing is commonly assumed to be a practice carried out by an autonomous individual acting alone. It is no such thing ... Viewing whistleblowing as an inherently social act in which we are all involved compels us as members of a society to accept responsibility for

⁶⁹ Kenny, K., *Whistleblowing: Toward a New Theory*, (1st edn, Harvard University Press 2019) 169-70.

⁷⁰ Tom Clonan *vs* Minister for Defence, Ireland and the Attorney General, Court Record Number: 2002/005222 31st May 2005.

what happens to these people ... Under current conditions, whistleblowers are effectively abandoned.⁷¹

In order for whistleblowers to survive the act and process of whistleblowing, we need to abandon the toxic fairy tale ‘mythology’ of constructing whistleblowers as ‘saints’ or heroes that require ‘crucifixion’ and prior to ‘beatification’. Personally, I’d prefer the ‘Reward’ and ‘Happy Ever After’ to ‘martyrdom’ for speaking truth to power – a service that has never been so vital as in our current international polity. I say, celebrate whistleblowers, recognize them, reward them and cherish them – for they do the state some considerable service.

⁷¹ Kenny, K., *Whistleblowing: Toward a New Theory*, (1st edn, Harvard University Press 2019) 211-12.

3. Post Script – Repair and New Equilibrium

I presented this paper at the EuroISME Annual Conference in Vienna in May 2019. Shortly after my return to Ireland, in June of 2019, I was contacted in person by the current Chief of Staff of the Irish Armed Forces, Vice Admiral Mark Mellett. In a completely unexpected – and most welcome – development, the Chief of Staff invited me to a personal face to face meeting, in order to have a ‘frank exchange of views’ and to resolve the difficulties between myself and the organization.

As a consequence of this meeting, on 28th of November 2019, I was formally invited to the Military College of the Irish Armed Forces for a public reconciliation with my former comrades. In a joint engagement with Dublin City University – my Alma Mater - I was greeted by the Chief of Staff, and formally thanked for the contribution that my work had made to the transformation of the Irish Armed Forces with regard to equality, diversity and dignity in the workplace. He also expressed regret at the manner in which I and my family had been treated by the military authorities at the time of the publication of my original research.⁷²

Thirty years after I joined the Army, my whistleblower journey has finally come full circle.⁷³ In military and mythical terms, I have come in from the cold.

⁷² <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/whistleblower-who-exposed-rape-in-defence-forces-thanked-20-years-on-1.4098190>

⁷³ <https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/tom-clonan-whistleblowing-4909558-Nov2019/>

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