



# Qualitative Sociology Review

Volume VII, Issue 1 – April 2011

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<https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.07.1.04>

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## Anti-establishment Armed Groups as Total Institutions: Exploring Transformations of the Self

### Abstract

Based on an empirical research on the Irish and Peruvian conflicts, this article uses Goffman's concept of total institution to analyse women's involvement in the armed struggle. It contends that organisations presenting themselves as the legitimate army of an embryonic state are in fact total institutions attempting to produce a particular self and identity on its members through the use of the physical environment and the framing of all social interactions that take place within their purview. However, members demonstrate agency and self efficacy by mobilizing the same physical space and framed interactions in order to either facilitate their own transformation or resist it, which results in the emergence of an alternative self and identity.

### Keywords

Total Institutions; Identity; Self; Armed Conflict; Terrorism

Despite remaining an equivocal figure (Manning 2010), Ervin Goffman's contribution to sociology and criminology is indisputable (Giddens 1988; Lemert 2010). Goffman's micro analysis of the routine and trivial matters of everyday life helped to develop interaction order as a new sociological field of study (Treviño 2003). Notwithstanding the overwhelming scientific production ensuing from Goffman's work, the concept of total institution has had a more modest success. This is partly due to the assumption that *Asylums* and the concept of total institution were an aside to his work and not essential to the development of his ideas. However, *Asylums*, along with Goffman's thesis and *The Presentation of Everyday Life*, represent the analytical stepping stones for his later work where he studies interaction order beyond physically enclosed systems (Weil 2001). *Asylum* focuses on the inevitable processes of social organisation and the self (Collins 1988). It examines interaction order in a unique context where the social dynamics at play are put under such an extreme strain that they unveil themselves in their rawest form (Giddens *Ibidem*). However, the purpose of *Asylums* is not to understand forms of

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domination that take place within total institutions but to explore how these particular settings participate in the structuring of the self (Quéré 2001).

Based on empirical research on the Irish and Peruvian conflicts, this article uses Goffman's concept of total institution to analyse women's involvement in the armed struggle.<sup>2</sup> It contends that organisations presenting themselves as the legitimate army of an embryonic state<sup>3</sup> are in fact total institutions working on the self of their members in an attempt to generate the identity of "ideal combatant" (a malleable entity whose body and mind are constantly at the disposal and command of the institution).

After presenting the conceptual framework and methodological approach, the article will draw upon Goffman's characteristics of total institutions to: show how the physical environment is mobilised by anti-establishment armed groups to structure the self of its members; explain how the organisation frames the social interactions taking place in order to constitute the self; and reveal how members exercise agency and self efficacy through their use of physical space and in their interactions with other social actors, which results in the emergence of an alternative self and identity.

## Conceptual Framework

*Asylums* explores how the self is produced and transformed through social interactions in a particular context. Contrary to traditional understanding, the self is not "a private, individual attribute but a public reality, created by and having its primary existence in public interaction" (Collins 1988: 48). The self is in fact a "stance taking entity, a something that takes up a position somewhere between identification with an organisation and opposition to it" (Goffman 1961). In other words, the self is actually the active element that performs, transforms and presents (Collins 1988) whereas identity is the product of the self's publicly validated performances and engagement with others, the sum of all the roles individuals play (Goffman 1959). As a result, the self is composed of two elements: an awareness of identity that provides the means to integrate the roles one plays to a personal biography; and "a set of dispositions for managing the transaction between motives and the expectations 'scripted' by particular roles" (Giddens 1988: 259). In fact, the self results from and depends on ritualised social interaction (Collins *Ibidem*). Therefore, the physical environment in which interaction takes place, the institutional setting structuring social interaction and the people in place<sup>4</sup> are key elements in the type of self produced. Changes in those elements will result in the production of a different self.

Total institutions are a type of social organisation whose role is to coercively transform the self in order to fulfill the "social function" it has adopted (Quéré 2001). They are "forcing houses for changing persons" (Goffman 1961: 22) through a "social reworking" (Goffman *Ibidem*: 121). This is achieved by disposing of the individuals'

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<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding the relevance of sex and gender to the understanding of any phenomenon (whether participants are male or female), this publication is not a gendered analysis of women's involvement (see Author, 2007 for a gendered analysis of the material). The article mobilises Goffman's *Asylum* and Coser's *Greedy Institutions* to make sense of the women's experiences. Although Goffman started to address gender in the later part of his career, *Asylums* is, just as *Greedy Institutions*, gender blind. The way in which gender is constructed and played out within total institutions needs to be explored as well, but that is not the purpose of this article.

<sup>3</sup> In such cases, the organisation presents itself as fighting for the constitution of a new state and operates as the military of already constituted states.

<sup>4</sup> This is an adaptation of Collin's (1988) "frames" determining conversational rituals.

social and personal identities when entering a total institution. These identities are supported by a “presenting culture” that needs to be dismantled through a process of disculturation or untraining known as mortification of the self. This process relies on four distinct mechanisms (personal defacement<sup>5</sup>, isolation<sup>6</sup>, an authority system<sup>7</sup> and a system of privilege<sup>8</sup>). The mechanisms and processes put in place by total institutions aim to create a situation where inmates<sup>9</sup> are physically, socially and emotionally disconnected from the outside world to ensure dependency on the institution for the constitution of the self. Total institutions “generate assumptions about identity” by expecting their members to “be” a certain way and live in a particular world created by the institution. By refusing to participate in the expected activities or by being involved in forbidden activities, the members refuse the “official self” and the “social world available to it”. Through the use of secondary adjustments<sup>10</sup> and adaptation alignments<sup>11</sup>, inmates are able to resist the effects of total institutions and to create an alternative self. Thus, the self actually results from a complex interplay between physical space, social interactions, and institutional arrangements; it is not simply the product of social organisation (Weil 2001).

Goffman explores how the overall features of the organisation influence the modes of interaction within specific settings (Giddens 1988). Those settings are characterised by the fact that people within the organisation have reduced control over their own self-images (Branaman 2010). Furthermore, a whole series of practices deployed by social actors to demonstrate their competence as agents to others and themselves are restricted or banned (Giddens *Ibidem*). This results in inmates being constrained to adapt to their social circumstances in order to “get by”, but most importantly, to develop a sense of who they are (Ytreberg 2010).

Total institution remains an equivocal concept mobilised in very different ways by researchers (Quéré *Ibidem*). The literature tends to focus on the characteristics of a total institution (a breakdown of barriers between the multiple spheres of life; a creation of barriers to social intercourse with the outside world; constant surveillance of large numbers of people by a few staff; staff-inmate split; and the transformation of the social role of work), rather than its essence: the transformation or working on the self of its members. Goffman’s description of total institutions has resulted in a general belief that the transformation of the self requires inmates to live and conduct all of their activities in an enclosed space under the control of the organisation. As a result, alternative concepts, such as “greedy institutions”, have emerged to describe institutions demanding exclusive loyalty from their members and

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<sup>5</sup> It destroys internal and external elements that give inmates a sense of individuality by: changing the inmates’ physical appearance; prohibiting any type of material ownership; taking away the possibility of making any decisions; forcing humiliating poses or manners of speech; producing physical and moral contamination by forcing inmates into undesirable, degrading and destructive physical or social interaction with people or things.

<sup>6</sup> It severs or limits the channels of communication with the outside world to prevent inmates from maintaining or reconstituting a sense of self based on the personal and social identities ascribed to them by the outside world.

<sup>7</sup> It places inmates in a childlike status where orders must be obeyed unquestioningly and a stringent code of conduct regulates every aspect of their lives, leaving them without any sense of self-efficacy.

<sup>8</sup> It keeps inmates in a perpetual state of uncertainty as good actions and infractions are not only rewarded or punished but constantly used to evaluate inmates in terms of successes or failures of their essence or being.

<sup>9</sup> People living within total institutions.

<sup>10</sup> Practices that do not directly challenge staff but allow inmates to obtain forbidden satisfactions or to obtain permitted ones through forbidden means.

<sup>11</sup> Refers to five different ways in which inmates adapt to their environment: situational withdrawal, conversion, colonisation, taking a rebellious line and playing it cool.

complete control over them (Coser 1974). Greedy institutions attempt to weaken the already existing social ties of their members and work to prevent the development of new ones through the use of four structural conditions: isolation<sup>12</sup>, elite status<sup>13</sup>, trials of worthiness<sup>14</sup> and pre-structured rituals<sup>15</sup>. These strategies aim to restrict members to a specific role-set in order to make their identity dependant on the symbolic universe offered by the institution, thus impeding alternative lines of action. Through this process, members lose what characterised them as individuals and are transformed from autonomous actors into subservient serfs at the disposal of an organisation that fashions them into entities that serve its needs.

This article contends that the concept of greedy institutions is complementary to that of total institutions, given that the underlying drive remains the transformation of the self. The divergence lies on the techniques or strategies mobilised to obtain the transformation of the self. Greedy institutions rely on non-physical mechanisms to create symbolic boundaries that allow members to be engaged in continuous social intercourse without risking the loss of the crucial insider/outsider split; they replace external coercion mechanisms with voluntary compliance based on loyalty and commitment; and maximise consent by presenting life inside the institution as highly desirable. However, the article argues that Coser's structural conditions are akin to Goffman's mortification of the self, with the former being better suited to open sites whereas the latter works best when deployed in closed sites where the institution has constant physical control over the bodies of its members. Given that anti-establishment armed groups operate within open and enclosed sites, both concepts are essential in the understanding of their members' experiences and will be thus called upon in the analysis.

## Methodological approach

This article is based on an empirical qualitative research conducted on women's involvement in the armed struggle in the Peruvian and Irish conflicts. This study represents a collective instrumental case analysis. Cases were chosen not for comparison but in order to gain a general understanding of the phenomenon given their unique characteristics as well as their commonalities (Stake 2003). Although each conflict had a distinct history, context, causes, development and conclusion, there were significant similarities. In both cases, colonisation has played an important role in the construction and maintenance of an ethnicising or racialising society which was partly the source of the conflict. Furthermore, the organisations studied have significant contingents of women in their ranks even though they operate in societies characterized by patriarchal relations and traditional views on women. Despite having different goals, the organisations share a socialist or communist perspective. The conflicts started in the same period of time and were, at the time of the fieldwork, in a pacification process with signed peace agreements. Finally, and most importantly,

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<sup>12</sup> It weakens existing social ties and prevents the development of new ones. Individuals are confined to a particular role-set with no alternative line of action. Therefore, the identity of the member becomes dependent solely on the symbolic universe and identity offered by the institution. Members lose what characterized them as individuals and are transformed from autonomous actors into subservient entities.

<sup>13</sup> It seeks voluntary compliance through feelings of exclusiveness and a divide between "us" and "them".

<sup>14</sup> They monitor, punish, and root out the weak while motivating others to invest in the organization.

<sup>15</sup> They boost emotional energy and intensify mutual focus and bonding (Puddephatt 2008).

in both cases the anti-establishment armed groups present their combatants as being part of the “legitimate” national army of an embryonic state.

The material analysed consisted of six interviews conducted in Peru in 2002 with women who had been involved in the Shining Path<sup>16</sup> and the MRTA<sup>17</sup>, and five interviews in 2003 with women who were involved in activities related to republican organisations in Ireland<sup>18</sup>. The interviewing technique consisted of life history interviews lasting from 6 to 10 hours each. This technique led to an in-depth and detailed discourse regarding the involvement of the women in the armed struggle starting from their initial awareness of the conflict up to the time when the interview was conducted. It allowed for the discourses to be contextualised not only in terms of the particular historical period and the development of the conflict but mainly in terms of their own biographies and the major events in their own lives. By opting for life history interviews, the project understood the interviewees’ involvement not as something static and disconnected, but dynamic and interconnected with central aspects of their lives. Notwithstanding the restriction in terms of the number of interviews it is possible to conduct with this technique, life history interviews produce rich and nuanced discourses and analysis by allowing the formation of an ongoing relationship between participants and researcher where trust can be established and developed (Bertaux 1997). The trust and the length of the relationship facilitate deep self-exploration on the part of the interviewee and a more comprehensive understanding for the interviewer.

Participants were identified through snowball sampling by mobilising multiple lines of referrals. This sampling technique generated diverse and contrasted discourses in terms of trajectories and experiences. The interviewees were linked to five organisations and their experience spanned from three to more than thirty years of involvement, having reached different hierarchical levels inside the organisations as well as playing multiple and different roles (combat, internal security, intelligence, transport, logistics, proselytising and health services). Some had been or were still imprisoned under sentences varying from three years to life imprisonment, while others had never been charged and remained, at the time of the interviews, involved in the armed struggle. Overall, the Peruvian interviewees had a nuanced view of the organisation and of their involvement in the armed conflict, thus refraining from participating in any political activity since their resignation. On the other hand, the Irish interviewees were proud of their involvement, held a good image of the organisations they had worked with and continued to strive toward their political project through the armed struggle, traditional politics or community work.

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<sup>16</sup>A Maoist organization that begun the armed struggle in 1980. The leadership was arrested in 1992 and 1997. Since then, membership dramatically declined but the organisation continues sporadic military actions. Verónica, Quela, Zenaida and Yolanda were members of this organisation.

<sup>17</sup>The Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement began the armed struggle in 1984. The leadership was arrested in 1992. The organization has dispersed since then. Ximena and Tina were members of the MRTA.

<sup>18</sup> Irish Republicans fight for an independent State or for the reunification with the Republic of Ireland. Membership to a “terrorist” organisation is considered a crime in Northern Ireland. None of the interviewees acknowledged belonging to an armed group. Brena and Fiona continue the armed struggle. Carey, Doreen and Alison have adopted the peace agreement.

## Physical Space: Structuring the Self

Total institutions provide, although not exclusively, the territories where interactions and encounters take place (Giddens *Ibidem*). The physical space is an important element for total institutions given that the self arises not only from interaction with significant others but from the physical arrangements and the location where inmates live. Therefore, the physical space creates the conditions under which particular types of self can emerge, given that it structures the types of interactions that can take place. The interviewees described living in four distinct sites while involved in the armed struggle: military camps<sup>19</sup>, prisons<sup>20</sup>, safe houses<sup>21</sup> and, for those active in the urban environment, their own homes<sup>22</sup>. The first two can be categorized as enclosed locations where the interviewees were physically confined to a specific site and were cut off from the outside world. In the other two cases, interviewees lived in the outside world.

### *Enclosed Locations*

Prisons housed prisoners according to the group they belonged to, thus granting the organisation direct control over its members and allowing it to function as a total institution. Contrary to prison, which is a fixed physical structure, military camps belonging to anti-establishment armed groups need to be moved periodically depending on the development of the conflict. According to Quela and Verónica the camps were made of tents and improvised shelters that could be easily disguised, dismantled and carried. The lack of an actual building meant that there were no permanent physical barriers and therefore, rivers and cliffs were frequently used to this effect and a guarded perimeter was set around the camp.

You couldn't run away. How could you if they had a security perimeter and you were in the middle of the jungle. The whole area was under control of the Shining Path. (...) You couldn't escape. (...) One time a guy tried to run away and he was shot.<sup>23</sup> (Verónica)

Despite the varying physical structures of prisons and military camps, both types of locations could ensure that combatants were either under constant supervision or at least under the impression that they could be observed unknowingly. The size and structure of prison pavilions allowed higher ranking members to scrutinise and assess other members of the organisation to ensure that their behaviour was in accordance to the tenets of the organisation. For instance, Alison describes how the prison Officer in Command would set up a tight schedule of their comrades' time to ensure the yard was being used constantly to prevent prison authorities' attempts to limit their access to it.

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<sup>19</sup> Verónica and Quela lived in military camps for long periods of time while Ximena Fiona and Brena mentioned going through a military training camp but did not expand on their experiences.

<sup>20</sup> All interviewees were imprisoned for more than a year except for Brena who was interned for six weeks and Fiona who has never been charged.

<sup>21</sup> Yolanda worked in safe houses but did not live in them, whereas Ximena did live in them at different points of her involvement.

<sup>22</sup> Except for Quela, at one point or another, all the interviewees lived in their own homes but came together for political and military training and to prepare or participate in military or support activities.

<sup>23</sup> The Peruvian quotes were originally in Spanish and have been translated by the author.

I hated walking around the yard, hated it, because to me you weren't going anywhere, you were just walking in a fucking square. But I went out every day. (Alison)

If at any point in time the yard was not being used, the OC would know who was at fault and that person would be reprimanded and ordered to the yard. In military camps, strategic vantage points were used in order to sustain the possibility of constant supervision, usually unseen by combatants. Quela recalls never complaining about the organisation out of fear of being overheard as she had witnessed comrades being severely chastised for doing so when they thought themselves alone. These locations granted anti-establishment armed groups continuous control over the bodies of the combatants generating upon them a panoptic effect where they believed their actions were under constant scrutiny by the organisation.

The physical constraints imposed by prisons and military camps facilitated a high level of seclusion<sup>24</sup>, although it varied according to the evolution of each conflict. Seclusion means that members do not have access to the outside world and therefore depend on the organisation for the provision of their physical needs (food, clothing, shelter and medical assistance). Quela reports that the Shining Path provided one pair of shoes, two t-shirts, one pair of pants and a sweater to combatants. Irish prisoners refused to wear prison uniform and wore their own clothes. However, if a member did not have enough clothing, the organisation ensured that other members gave from their own wardrobes. Emotional needs are also important and need to be provided by the organisation, as individuals are cut off from the outside world.

Despite the disagreements and the tensions, you're still in a very close relationship with your comrades. And I think that's why some people find it difficult when they do come out. You know, that's been their family, especially for people with really, really long sentences. (Doreen)

Total seclusion is impossible to attain; a certain level of contact with the outside world exists directly through visits, parcel delivery and interaction with those in contact with the outside, or indirectly through the recollection of life prior to seclusion. This partial exposure to the outside world, real or fictional, granted interviewees the possibility of taking on imagined roles and interacting with others assuming those roles, even without the acknowledgement of the other party. Despite being cut away from her children while in prison, Ximena would recall the social role of mother and interact with certain prisoners according to that role. Furthermore, the existence of personal relations within the organisation allowed members to be confronted to other social roles (that of a friend or partner, for example). However, this possibility was limited through the surveillance of member's interactions.

Seclusion facilitated obedience and compliance to the organisation by preventing members from being confronted to alternative demands from the outside world. It also ensured that inmates were at least "distanced" if not cut off from the outside world. In doing so, the organisation limited members' interactions with the outside, thus obtaining a monopoly on role attribution. The organization was able to

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<sup>24</sup> Inmates need to be severed from the place they occupy in the social world in order to begin to disassociate them from the vision and understanding they have of themselves and their role in the world (Goffman 1961).

ensure that its members were confronted solely to their social role of combatants, thus framing the form and content of social interactions. Military camps and prisons thus facilitated the emergence of a particular self characterized by being an obedient inmate dependent on the organisation for material and emotional needs.

### *Open Locations*

Safe houses and the homes of members present significant challenges to anti-establishment armed groups as the organisation has limited or no control over what goes on within those spaces. In some cases, safe houses are used for specific activities and are therefore intermittently inhabited by members, which only allows for partial direct physical control over their bodies. In other cases, when they are used on a permanent basis, the need to be discrete in order to remain inconspicuous forces the organisation to relinquish some of its power over those inhabiting them. When members live at home there is no actual physical space that can be delineated as the domain of the total institution. As underlined by Zenaida, the private residences are the explicit domain of the family and not of the organisation. The anti-establishment armed group has no direct prerogative inside the physical boundaries of the home. Hence, interviewees could not be under constant and direct supervision for security reasons. However, interviewees reported experiencing intermittent surveillance. The organisations had to rely on a clandestine network of surveillance that allowed them to intervene when members did not conform to expectations.

One time I went home and I decided not to go to my meeting point the next day, or the day after that. On the third day they came to get me. They knew where I lived and they came and they threatened to kill me if I didn't commit to continuing, so I did. (Yolanda)

Despite the challenges offered by the urban environment, the organisation was able to exercise a certain level of control over its members and to generate a panoptic effect. Zenaida recalls being told "the Party has ears and eyes everywhere" to explain how the organisation was aware of events and actions of its members in a city of more than 7 million inhabitants. It is irrelevant whether the organisation had attained that level of supervision or not. The important element is that the interviewees believed it did and thus behaved as they were expected to.

The clandestine nature of the locations made it impossible to attain seclusion. When the interviewees were living at home, their contact with the organisation and activities took place precisely in and through the outside world. When they lived in safe houses, mingling with the outside world and using daily routines was necessary to avoid suspicion from neighbours and hide their activities. Ximena described acting as a middle class wife in order to ensure the safety of the safe house.

In the urban environment, members are exposed to an outside world offering contradictory messages to those of the organization. For instance, for Zenaida and Alison, it was difficult to watch the news with her family and listen to all the negative comments regarding their organisations while secretly beaming from the success of their activities. Members are therefore faced with the challenge of finding ways to remain true to the organization in an environment where there are conflicting messages. However, when their environment supports the organisation, members see the messages provided by the organization reinforced by their surroundings.



Growing up in a very republican area and also growing up in a very republican family and friends and neighbours I would have had very strong republican attitudes and discipline to start with. (Carey)

The urban environment also exposed interviewees to multiple role play. They had to play the role of combatant plus the cover role, as well as multiple other social roles ascribed to them by the outside world. This created constant tension between the role of combatant and the other roles. Ximena fought with her husband over the lack of attention she paid to their son, Yolanda felt guilty for not being a “proper” wife, while Fiona was torn between being available to the armed struggle and raising her children. Alison had to deal with her parents’ expectations of her.

The lack of seclusion and the limited control over its members means that the organisation cannot be content with an obedient and dependent combatant. It needs to create an autonomous but reliable and obedient combatant capable of self-regulation.

Traditionally, total institutions have been conceptualised as only existing in enclosed locations. In this article we suggest that the transformation of the self can be achieved without direct and constant physical control over its members.<sup>25</sup> This means that different types of self will be generated depending on the location where members’ involvement takes place and that the self produced can be transformed due to a change in location. A significant element in the constitution of the self is the degree to which staff strives for self-regulating change by the inmate (Goffman 1961). This article shows that prisons and military camps require little self-regulating change given the level of physical control they are able to impose on their members. On the other hand, in the urban environment where members live in safe houses or their own homes, the total institution needs to succeed in producing self-regulating change given that members are constantly exposed to the outside world. Thus, two types of self are attempted to be produced by the total institution. This means that different techniques need to be mobilised by the total institutions drawing both from mortification of the self and structuring conditions in order to constitute each of those types of self.

### **Ritualised and Regulated interactions: Constituting the self**

The self is socially enacted through interaction rituals which allow individuals to maintain a consistent face while helping others maintain their own faces (Collins 1988). Interaction rituals recognise individuals as moral beings who respect norms of good and proper conduct (Kendon 1988). By imposing interaction rituals that go against those norms, the organisation is actually de-moralising its members, rendering them as a-moral individuals. Thus, total institutions have the power to constitute the self by “imposing particularly comprehensive forms of organisation affecting inmates’ subjectivity in particularly pervasive ways” (Ytreberg 2010: 300-301).

In total institutions, the organisation structures and regulates interactions in order to prevent members from creating and maintaining a consistent face. This is an important element in the transformation of the self as the individual’s face reinforces the particular self of members and produces an identity specific to that member. By

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<sup>25</sup> This idea has been previously explored by Dinu Gheorghiu (2001) in her study of Communist Schools of Management.

hindering the member's face, total institutions are dismantling the previous self of members. By imposing rituals and specific forms of interaction, they begin to constitute a particular and uniformed self for its members. Demonstrating that a particular self is constituted by anti-establishment armed groups is a challenging task; it requires proof that members of these organisations "are" a certain way as well as a stipulation of what that is. Though it was difficult for the interviewees to explain how they did it, they claimed to be able to tell who had been part of the armed struggle and which organization they had belonged to. They explained that there was something in the way they handled themselves, their posture, facial expressions, turns of phrases, mannerisms, etc. that allowed for mutual recognition.

At the end you know that pose. You hang out with those people, you associate with them and at the end just by the way they talk you can tell. It might be a word they use or whatever that gives it away. You can tell right away. It's like identifying who is a cop, you can tell. The moment you see them you know. (Zenaida)

In other words, they interacted with the world in a particular and specific way despite superficial differences. It is through that "stance taking entity", the self, that the underlying commonality of a precise organisation becomes recognisable to others. Mortification techniques and structuring conditions impose institutional constraints on the members which frame all modes of interaction and limit the possibility of producing a self and identity other than the one desired by the organisation.

As an instrumental formal organisation, the goal of anti-establishment armed groups is the creation of political change through the use of military strategies. Hence, political and military activities constitute the substance of life inside the armed struggle. It is through the role of combatant and through interactions based on this role that the self is constituted inside anti-establishment armed groups. All the techniques deployed by the organization aim to constitute a particular self, which in turn produces the identity of the "ideal combatant". However, anti-establishment armed groups cannot succeed on their own, they need the members' willingness and collaboration given that the self arises through social interaction and members are part of that interaction. In this regard, the form of recruitment has a significant impact on the success of the organisation in its attempts to constitute the self of the inmates. Recruits who enter total institutions voluntarily are committed to the organisation and what it represents. They have the "call", they want to be transformed by the institution and therefore the techniques deployed by the organisation have a higher chance of succeeding in this process. However, those same techniques are likely to be less effective on involuntary recruits who do not want to be transformed and who will therefore develop strategies to create an alternative self.<sup>26</sup>

The risks associated with being part of the armed struggle are added to the arduous requirements and restrictions of total institutions, rendering life within anti-establishment armed groups difficult and demanding. Not only were the interviewees aware of the high probability of having to live on the run, of being killed, tortured or imprisoned, they were also conscious of the self-sacrifice required by the organisation.

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<sup>26</sup> The Irish interviewees as well as Zenaida and Ximena joined the armed struggle voluntarily. Yolanda, Tina and Verónica came to be part of their respective organisations through other circumstances. Quela's recruitment was involuntary given that she became a member at the age of 9 when she was running away from an attack on her village by the Peruvian armed forces.

You don't join the republican movement and expect personal gain. You join this movement and all you're going to do is give. (Alison)

The time, energy and resources of the interviewees were expected to be continuously at the disposal of the armed struggle.

I could go one or two days without sleeping. (...) I had disappeared as an individual. I didn't care about the way I looked, nothing. I did not exist as a person I only existed as part of the ensemble, as a cog in the machine. They had sucked everything out of me. (...) I didn't exist because I couldn't decide things for myself. I had to be available 24 hours a day and they needed to know what I was doing every minute so that they could come get me if I were needed. (Yolanda)

Interviewees had limited time to invest in their families, friends, pastimes, education, career or employment, leading to a constant economic instability and a life with few material commodities or possessions. "You lose out to a certain degree, in certain things in life" (Brena). The overwhelming sacrifices and difficult living conditions imposed by anti-establishment armed groups reinforce the sense of an elite status and are used by the organisation as trials of worthiness, as well as to reinforce personal defacement. The living conditions thus serve a dual purpose in the constitution of the self: they instil on members a certain level of pride for sacrificing themselves for the cause while pressing upon them that they are expendable and that their lives are to be willed by the organization.

Due to the harsh living conditions, total institutions put in place institutionalized practices (Goffman *Ibidem*) or pre-structured rituals (Coser 1974; Puddephatt 2008) which allow interaction between members and the hierarchy outside of the normal channels. This facilitates bonding boosts morale and generates unity, solidarity and a joint commitment to the institution by allowing members to decompress. The interviewees evoked meetings and celebrations on special occasions. Because of security concerns, these events were rare, but they were cherished by the members as they reenergised them and helped them refocus. The celebrations were also useful for the total institution as they strengthened members' trust in their comrades, their belief in the organisation and their ideological conviction. In other words, they reinforced their willingness to be transformed by the organisation.

Anti-establishment armed groups create an "elite status" by portraying combatants as being part of a chosen few, capable of answering the call to defend their community and of sacrificing themselves for the cause. When the interviewees sought acceptance into the organization, their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the cause was used as a trial of worthiness. Once the interviewees were accepted, they went through a formal admission procedure which served to indicate a break from their past and symbolised their entrance to a new way of life by deploying different forms of personal defacement. This procedure was to be repeated at different points of their involvement and every time they entered a different site. For example, Verónica went through two different admission ceremonies: the first one when she became officially a member of the Shining Path and was given a "war name"; and the second when she was confined to a military camp. She recalls:

One guy comes to me and starts asking me questions about my family and everything. (...) They took us to someone who inspected us up and down and then sent me with a woman to bathe. While I bathed in the river she

looked through my possessions and took everything, my wallet, pictures that I had, a rosary... (Verónica)

Interviewees went through a double admission ceremony upon their arrival to prison; one conducted by prison authorities and the other by the wing OC who debriefed them, showed them around, introduced them to everyone, explained how things worked, assigned them a task, etc. The admission ceremony also served to present the code of conduct and the regulations of the organization, an essential element in the system of privilege.

Every moment and aspect of the interviewees' life was framed by a strict and specific code of conduct. The code of conduct states how the members must behave but, most importantly, it instructs them on how they should feel and think. In other words, it establishes who they should be and therefore embodies the image of the "ideal combatant". Respecting the code of conduct reinforces the elite status of its members. All of the interviewees at one point or another expressed pride of having "been" what was expected of them. However, breaches in the code of conduct also meant that interviewees lost that sense of elite status. Failures were reinterpreted by the organization, and in certain cases the members themselves, as a lacking in their essence. When Carey broke during her interrogation and signed a confession, she came to believe that she did not have what it took to be involved in the armed struggle. Having deemed herself "not worthy", she withdrew from it upon her release from prison.

Anti-establishment armed groups need to ensure that combatants follow the code of conduct and obey unquestioningly all orders given by the leadership. Any breach leads to different forms of punishment: deprivation of basic goods, exclusion from certain activities, appointment to degrading jobs or tasks, public humiliation, detention in makeshift prisons, physical punishment, and even death. The excessive punishment meted for minor infractions generated in certain interviewees an intense fear for their personal safety and guilt for having actively taken part in the punishment of others. An extreme case is described by Quela, who admitted to participating in the execution of a minor found guilty of stealing meat for a second time. The extensiveness of the code of conduct meant that members were in a permanent state of apprehension within certain organisations because there was a high risk of unintentionally contravening it.

The code of conduct also tested the interviewees through trials of worthiness. Ximena was considered "unworthy" when she did not fully obey orders to break up a meeting and beat up some of her friends, who were accused of sedition within the organisation. She was demoted from middle rank, responsible for important safe houses in the capital, to novice and charged with identifying walls where the organisation could paint its slogans. This example demonstrates that authority roles are assigned through the privilege system and therefore are not permanent; any misbehaviour can lead to a demotion, as was the case for Zenaida and Ximena.

Despite the existence of a strict and clear authority system, staff members are not recruited from a separate cluster of people than the inmates. Those in a position of authority are in fact recruited from within the inmate groups, just as in religious communities and the army. This means that the lines are not as clearly defined and interviewees find themselves simultaneously being under the authority of a comrade and having authority over other comrades. Furthermore, the cell structure of the organisation and the high level of attrition due to arrests, deaths and resignations, multiply exponentially the number of positions of authority available and the mobility within the hierarchy of the organisation. The permeability between "staff" and inmate,

or combatant and superior is in fact used by the organization following the logic of the “ward” system in mental hospitals. Rather than strengthening the self of the interviewees, this mobility leads to the weakening or slackening in the moral career of the combatant. Given the need for member’s self-regulation in the urban environment, political education and military training become crucial.

The education of recruits concerning the organisation’s ideology, analysis of the conflict, its causes and the necessary strategies to achieve an alternative society intensifies their commitment to the organisation and to the cause. In fact, interviewees considered military training and political education essential to being able to endure the strenuous demands and sacrifices required by anti-establishment armed groups. If members have the necessary ideological foundations and a solid political commitment to the cause, they work towards consolidating the self sought by the organization. Moreover, the capacity to self-regulate, to know what the organisation requires its members to do when it is not in a position to instruct their behaviour ensues from political education and military training. However, the timeframe allowed for this purpose was not as extensive as some interviewees would have liked, particularly when there was a high level of attrition and the organisation was in desperate need of combatants. Furthermore, while political education and military training were part of the daily routine in military camps and prison, it was rare for the organisation to pursue it in the urban environment, given that the time and energy of its combatants needed to be directed towards the planning, preparation and execution of military activities. Hence, these organisations found themselves balancing the quality of the members’ education and training with the more immediate needs of the armed struggle.

The time assigned to political and military training is particularly important for those active in the urban environment, given that the organisation needs to contend with the lack of role seclusion. In open locations, the organisation cannot solely impose the role of combatant to its members; contact with non-members is necessary in order to maintain their covers and to function in that environment. If members receive proper education and training, they are able to maintain the role of combatant as their core role with the alternative roles being played as part of the cover. This means that in the urban environment, members need to establish and maintain superficial relationships: “I wouldn’t have that many friends. It’s like living two lives really. There’s a side to you that these people don’t know at all” (Fiona). Furthermore, members are expected to use personal relations to serve the interests of the group or facilitate recruitment: “You couldn’t have a partner who wasn’t in the organisation. If you were seeing someone you had to get him to join” (Yolanda). Even relationships within members of the organisation need to be constantly at the service of the organisation. Members are required to monitor their comrades to ensure their behaviour is in accordance to the principles and code of conduct of the organisation.

The idea is camaraderie and not friendship. A comrade doesn’t cover for you. If you do something wrong he will inform your superior. That was the way to behave even between couples. (...) So if something needed to be said, it was said. It was part of forging ideologically solid combatants. (Zenaida)

The comrades are thus the “eyes and the ears of the Party”. It is through mutual supervision and denunciation that the organisation is able to ensure its panoptic gaze.

Total institutions attempt to produce the “ideal combatant” in order to accomplish their institutional functions in enclosed locations. When members live in the urban environment, the organisation needs them to be autonomous and self-regulating. This results in anti-establishment armed groups producing an alternative self and an alternative identity. “Vocational combatants” are voluntary members who have the “call” to take up arms for the cause and who, through political education and military training, have a strong ideological foundation that allows them to identify the proper code of conduct in situations not previously determined by the organisation.

I believed in the principles of the republican movement, and I couldn't change those principles, it just wasn't in me to do. They educated me that way. (Brena)

“Vocational combatants” are confronted to a paradox: on one hand, they have to become transformed from individuals to disciplined, obeying combatants; on the other hand, their motivation and vision of themselves is that of responsible, resourceful, enterprising and autonomous citizens who see the protection of their community as their right and duty.

My time in the army has been for the betterment of my country, and to deliver my country from its oppressors. (...) I believe that the only way that we're ever going to do it is through an armed struggle and I'm very proud to be part of it. (...) I really think that being in the army is my basic right. (Fiona)

The belief in the cause and ideological conviction can help members overcome the stringent living conditions, the risks and dangers entailed by being part of the armed struggle and the demands and restrictions imposed by the total institution. They see their trials and tribulations as the necessary efforts and sacrifices required of them, and their continuous involvement as proof of their worthiness as members of the organisation. This means that they accept the self and identity the total institution is attempting to create. However, those whose involvement is semi-voluntary or involuntary experience the same living conditions, risk, dangers, demands and restrictions as overwhelming and shattering. As a result, they refuse the self and identity imposed by the organisation and attempt to find means to resist the effects of the total institution by developing strategies that allow them to reconfigure or re-interpret the ritualised and ordered interactions in which they take part.

### **Agency and Self Efficacy: the production of alternative selves**

Inmates of total institutions are not broken beings; they are able to resist the impositions they are confronted to by deploying strategies that allow them to recover their integrity and create personal territories (Giddens 1988). This is regardless of whether members are voluntary, semi-voluntary or involuntary; the strain on the individual is such that even voluntary members need to develop coping mechanisms to maintain a certain sense of control over their life.

Interviewees demonstrate agency and self-efficacy through the use of secondary adjustments and personal lines of adaptation to counter the effects of the techniques used by anti-establishment armed groups. In some cases, they use secondary adjustments to cope with the highly strenuous and taxing life inside the

institution. In prison, Alison took advantage of being assigned by her OC to clean the kitchen to play pranks on her friends, while Verónica purposefully took on laundry duty in a military camp to unwind and learn how to swim. They also demonstrated agency by manipulating the institution's limits to obtain what they wanted. For example, Verónica successfully faked having a difficult pregnancy to be allowed to leave the military camp. The ultimate exercise of self-efficacy was when the Peruvian interviewees abandoned the organisation without its permission and despite the risks.

When I told him I was quitting he said "We are going to inform the Party and it will take the necessary action with you". So I said "Look, if you think that is necessary, I live in the same house, I always take the same route, study in the same university, so at any point if you want you can take the necessary action, no problem. The only thing I am going to ask is that you do it to my face". (Zenaida)

Notwithstanding the use of secondary adjustments as attempts to regain some control over their lives, members use different lines of adaptation as a more permanent approach to the overall attacks of the total institution to their selves. Despite representing a more long term strategy, members can change their lines of adaptation throughout their career within anti-establishment armed groups. The changes reflect the members' belief in the cause, the organisation and the use of the armed struggle as the means of achieving change. When these beliefs are strong, members accept the self imposed by the total institution; when weak, members attempt to resist it and through that process produce an alternative self. All interviewees but Verónica used "conversion" at some point and accepted the self associated with the "ideal combatant" in prisons and military camps:

I was ready to die for the Party. They had taught me that the Party was my family, I had no other family and I lived by it. I was proud of it. (Quela)

or the "vocational combatant" in the urban environment:

I love being a republican. (...) I think the best thing about me is being a republican. You know, that's my best quality. And I wouldn't change anything, even getting caught and going to jail. (Alison)

The Peruvian interviewees were not consistent with conversion and resorted to "colonisation", "playing it cool" and the "rebellious line" once they became disenchanted with the organisation and until they found a way to withdraw from it. By refusing the self and identity produced by the total institution, semi-voluntary and involuntary members were able to produce alternative selves and generate two alternative identities: the "wavering recruit" and the "reluctant conscript". The "wavering recruit" believes in the cause proclaimed by the organisation but lacks ideological training and a firm conviction about the armed struggle or about the organisation. These interviewees were only partially committed to the anti-establishment armed group and were highly influenced by external circumstances in their perception and experience of their own involvement.

I was sick and tired of being treated as an outsider. I was constantly trying to prove myself because I had started in another organisation and I said to myself "until when? How much longer is it going to take for them to trust me? It has been almost 10 years". And then there was the whole deal with

me not wanting to beat up one of my friends. I was pissed that I was punished for that and they were trying to blame me and my husband for other things too when they were the ones who had fucked up. So when I was demoted I started thinking about leaving. (...) It was just too much, always the same thing but on the other hand I still believed in the cause, I wanted to change things but I was risking so much and the leadership in the MRTA were just playing, they weren't taking things seriously. I was torn and didn't know what to do. (Ximena)

The "reluctant conscript" is a member whose beliefs in the cause, the organisation and the ideology are irrelevant as their involvement is coerced. These members are not committed to the organisation or to the cause and attempt to desert it when the opportunity presents itself.

My husband kept asking me when I was going to quit. And I kept telling him "I'll tell you when it is the right time" but he kept asking "but when?, when?" Until one day I came home and I said "ok we're leaving now" "Now?, we're running away now?" so I told him "Yes". "And the baby?" I told him we couldn't take him right away, we needed to go first and then, once we were settled and safe we would have someone drop him off. Because it was dangerous we were running away from the police and from the Shining Path. (Yolanda)

The type of self produced from the interaction between members and the total institution depends on the overall context in which their involvement takes place and the evolution of the conflict. However, it also depends on whether recruitment is voluntary, semi-voluntary or involuntary; the degree of self-regulating change required by the institution and the degree of permeability to the outside world. Voluntary members exposed to a high degree of permeability (urban environment) need a high degree of self-regulating change and will likely produce the "vocational combatant". Voluntary members in a context of low permeability (enclosed location) require a minimum level of self-regulating change and therefore will tend to generate the "ideal combatant". Semi-voluntary members in highly permeable situations and self-regulating change will probably result in the "wavering recruit". Finally, involuntary members in a low permeability and low self-regulating change situation will almost certainly produce the "reluctant conscript". The success or failure of anti-establishment armed groups in generating the "ideal combatant" or the "vocational combatant" may influence the longevity of a specific organisation. However, they do not challenge the idea that anti-establishment armed groups are total institutions given that the essence of those organisations is the transformation of the self through techniques based on the mortification of the self for instrumental purposes.

## Conclusion

Goffman's description of total institutions has resulted in a general belief that the transformation of the self requires inmates to live and conduct all of their activities in an enclosed space under the control of the organisation. In this article we suggest that the transformation of the self can be achieved without direct and constant physical control over its members. Furthermore, bearing in mind that the self does not exist on its own but is a product of social interactions taking place in and being moulded by a particular physical environment, we need to consider that it is the techniques deployed and not the physical location of the institution that result in the



transformation of the self. Thus, different physical spaces allow for the emergence of a range of selves, but, ultimately, the interactions between the institutions and their members will result in the constitution of a particular self. To this effect, the institution deploys certain types of tactics to generate a particular self and produce the “ideal combatant” identity or the “vocational combatant” identity, while members enact a series of strategies to either facilitate that self or generate an alternative self and alternative identities such as the “reluctant conscript” and the “wavering recruit”. In fact, success is not the determining factor on the qualification of an organisation as a total institution. We contend that what makes an organisation a total institution is the overall characteristics of the self that is attempted to be produced and the logic behind the techniques that are mobilized. This means that total institutions and inmates can adapt their techniques and strategies or develop new ones according to the physical environment available to them and the interactions produced between the different social actors involved. We suggest that transformation of the self is achieved through structural conditions when mortification of the self processes cannot be put in place. They allow total institutions to remain total while appearing otherwise. This notion therefore opens a whole new world of possibilities to the previously enclosed domain of total institutions.

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### **Citation**

Felices-Luna, Maritza (2011) "Anti-establishment Armed Groups as Total Institutions: Exploring Transformations of the Self" *Qualitative Sociology Review*, Vol. VII Issue 1.  
Retrieved Month, Year  
([http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive\\_eng.php](http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive_eng.php)).